

Excerpts from a speech given by Mikhail Gorbachev to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union

Comrades,

The 27th Party Congress vested in us, the members of the Central Committee, an immense responsibility—to implement the strategic course of accelerating the socio-economic development of the country. . . .

The main evaluations of the state of society and the conclusions drawn from them by the Political Bureau have already been presented to the 27th Party Congress and Plenary Meetings of the Central Committee. They have been fully corroborated. But today we know more, that is why there is a need to examine once again and in detail the sources of the obtaining situation and to sort out the reasons for what took place in the country in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

This analysis is necessary to prevent mistakes from recurring and to fulfill the resolutions of the Congress on which the future of our people and the destiny of socialism depend. It is all the more important since there is still some misunderstanding in society and in the Party of the complexity of the situation in which the country has found itself. Perhaps, this also explains questions from some comrades about the measures that are being taken by the Political Bureau and the government in the course of reorganization. We are often asked if we are not taking too sharp a turn. . . .

Our achievements are immense and indubitable and the Soviet people by right take pride in their successes. They constitute a firm base for the fulfillment of our current programs and our plans for the future. But the Party must see life in its entirety and complexity. No accomplishments, even the most impressive ones, should obscure either contradictions in social development or our mistakes and failings.

We talked about all that and must repeat again today that at some point the country began to lose momentum, difficulties and unresolved problems started to pile up, and there appeared elements of stagnation and other phenomena alien to socialism. All that had a most adverse effect on the economy and social, cultural and intellectual life.

Of course, Comrades, the country did not cease to develop. Tens of millions of Soviet people were working honestly and many Party organizations and our personnel were working actively in the interests of the people. All that held back the intensification of negative processes but could not avert them altogether.

A need for change was ripening in the economy and other fields—but it did not materialize in the political and practical work of the Party and the state. What was the reason for that complex and controversial situation?

The main cause—and the Political Bureau considers it necessary to say so with utmost frankness

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at the Plenary Meeting—was that the CPSU Central Committee and the leadership of the country failed, primarily for subjective reasons, to see in time and in full the need for change and the dangerous growth of crisis phenomena in society, and to formulate a clear-cut policy for overcoming them and making better use of the possibilities intrinsic to the socialist system. ...

Reorganization is a resolute overcoming of the processes of stagnation, destruction of the retarding mechanism, and the creation of dependable and efficient machinery for expediting the social and economic progress of Soviet society. The main purport of our strategy is to combine the achievements of the scientific and technological revolution with a plan-based economy and set the entire potential of socialism in motion. ...

The final aim of reorganization is, I believe, clear: it is to effect thorough-going changes in all aspects of public life, to give socialism the most advanced form of social organization, and bring out to the utmost the humane nature of our system in all decisive aspects—economic, social, political and moral.

We now understand better than before the profundity of Lenin's thought about the vital, inner link between socialism and democracy. The entire historical experience of our country has convincingly demonstrated that the socialist system has in practice ensured citizens' political and socio-economic rights, their personal freedoms, revealed the advantages of Soviet democracy and given each person confidence in the morrow.

It is only through the consistent development of the democratic forms inherent in socialism and more extensive self-government that our progress in production, science and technology, literature, culture and the arts, in all areas of social life is possible. It is only this way that ensures conscientious discipline. The reorganization itself is possible only through democracy and due to democracy. It is only this way that it is possible to open broad vistas for socialism's most powerful creative force—free labour and free thought in a free country. ...

Comrades, there isn't one single fundamental issue that we could resolve, now as in the past, without taking into account the fact that we live in a multinational country. There is no need to prove the importance of socialist principles in the development of relations between the nationalities. It is socialism that did away with national oppression, inequality, and infringements upon the rights of people on grounds of nationality. It ensured the economic and cultural progress of all nationalities and ethnic groups. In short, the successes of our Party's nationalities policy are beyond any doubt and we can justly take pride in them. ...