

# The Command-Administrative System in Russia

## *The Historical Legacy*

Nikolai V. Zlobin

During my stay in the United States, as a scholar at the Kennan Institute for Advanced Russian Studies at the Woodrow Wilson Center, I often came across (during conferences and discussions) people who commented that Russia was attempting to "re-invent the wheel," so to speak. They referred to the political and democratic reforms going on in the country. Many Americans, including several scientists and journalists, asked me why the Russians were attempting to "break down an open door"--constantly experimenting while they could simply tap into a huge pool of Western experience and know-how. An example sometimes given by them was the model of American democratic society. The Russians would only need to take it and adopt it, as much as it is possible, to their concrete conditions--to Russian soil. If this were to be done, things would immediately improve.

This is a small exaggeration, of course, but this idea was often heard. When it was not expressed directly and outright, it showed itself through the use of many reference points and comparisons for Russian democratization based on Western examples and models. On one hand, this opinion is just and fair in many ways. On the other, Russia's historical course (its history, traditions, culture, the mentality of its people, their value system, etc.) is very different from that of America and Europe.

As is well known, one of the main results of the events of August 1991 in Russia was the demolition of the previous administrative, social, political and economic system. That system had existed many years, and only during Gorbachev's perestroika was it recognized as a command-administrative, totalitarian and anti-democratic system whose liquidation was necessary to make democratization possible. Without a doubt, not all the problems associated with this system can be traced back to the latest "socialist" decades of Russian history, as is often

attempted in Russian and even in Western historiography.

If one looks into Russia's past, into previous attempts at solving the country's most acute problems, one can easily discover that the majority of these problems find their roots not in the recent but in the remote past. If we choose not to analyze these problems in this fashion and refuse to accept the principle of their deep historical roots, then we run the risk of investigating only the most apparent consequences: the superficial phenomena, not the origins or key elements of that phenomena. I am referring to the command-administrative system, which is intimately linked both with the birth and development of the Russian state system, and with society's evolution over several centuries.

### **The Birth of the System**

The peculiarity of the Russian administrative structure and the special role that the state institutions played in the regulation of social relations were always special and distinctive traits of Russia. The very history of its foundation as a centralized state contradicts the Marxist teachings over this very question--a fact that always made Soviet historians uncomfortable. The formation of that state in the 15th and 16th centuries was not the consequence of the country's particular level of development in social and economic relations--as Marx wrote--but the result of the struggle for national independence.

It was only after the formation of a centralized Russian state that Russia's social character emerged. For that reason, the Russian state, since the very beginning, resented the weakness of its own social base. It was concluded that a harsh centralist reinforcement of the administration and the development of punitive institutions was necessary. This type of situation endured throughout the following centuries. In this particular way, the reforms of Peter the Great intensely "Westernized" Russian society (which had neither been exposed to the Renaissance nor the Reformation) and provoked the secularization of the state and power. Furthermore, the population considered these reforms as something alien and artificial, as something that contradicted their traditions and way of life. This was worse because this model of small administrative units of western European countries fascinated Peter the Great and was the model he attempted to apply to Russia. This effort developed disastrously as the government attempted to place the entire Russian territory within the framework of a unified administration. It only provoked negative results: the complication of the mechanism of

power, the precipitous consolidation of its central institutions, greater social divisions, the creation of several intermediary levels (the grounds for the bureaucracy's prosperity), the weakening of real control over the peripheries by the center, the increase of administrative pressures, and serious violence throughout the land. It is precisely from these times--from the times of Ivan IV and Peter the Great, and not from the time of the Bolsheviks, of Lenin and Stalin--that the Russian state's traditional omnipotence began.

This system lacked moral and ethical limits. It did not take into consideration the value of human life, and thereby permitted cruel actions against the people. Stalin observed a few centuries after Peter that, "The welfare of the country comes above all else. The individual is only a means of obtaining this goal; a cog in the machine."

In other words, the Russian practice of "benefitting" the people by imposing the state's will 1) "from above," 2) by force, and 3) according to the whims of every tsar and his circle, has its roots in the many centuries of Russian history. A Croatian scientist and writer, Juraj Kiržanić, who lived in Russia in the 17th century, wrote that the Russians will want social well-being only when they are forced to have it. It can be said that this attitude still remains in place and is aggravated especially during the times of development called the "catching up" periods. These periods are very typical of the Russian experience. During the capitalist stage, from the end of the 19th century to the early 20th, firm state intervention was imposed to successfully introduce a strong industrial capital into the country. Moreover, the traditional Russian monopoly of large estates was extended to industry as well. Until 1913, Russia had 300 huge enterprises where the combined total of laborers exceeded one million; and 5% of these enterprises employed more than half of the laborers and produced more than 50% of the total output. Because of their sheer weight and importance, these enterprises were three times the size (proportional to the country's entire industrial base) of their equivalents in Germany and the United States, where industrial infrastructures were more advanced.

### **The Cultural Base**

Another of Russia's peculiarities was that the Orthodox church was a government institution, morbidly encrusted in its bureaucratic system. The church never had the privileges of nonconformity and free thought

which it enjoyed in other countries. The official religion (in 1718, a government State Religion Department was even established), the state ideology and the government ideology became specific traits of Russian society. Through the church, the government established a monopoly over the nation's ideology and culture, and affirmed its right of spiritual *diktat*. Any attempt to uproot its omnipotence (we can cite as an example the case of the "Rascal" or "the Heretic," Lev Tolstoy) was cruelly suppressed by the church, the government and public opinion. This peculiarity was even perceived by Napoleon, who said to Tsar Alexander: "You are emperor and pope in your country. That's not a bad idea." When the project, *On the Introduction of the Community of Ideas in Russia* by Kozma Prutkov emerged, it advocated "the necessity, especially in our vast nation, of establishing a common point over the national chores and government measures." This project was widely considered grotesque because it did not give enough time for a unified opinion to develop. In other words, the traditions of government ideology, the community of ideas, and the struggles bloodily fought against those who did not conform, were, and are still a main part of the Russian way of life.

It is also important to note that in Russia there was never overpopulation or a lack of land--factors that played such a large role in other European states. During all those centuries, there was never really any stimulus to evolve from the extensive form of production and administration into an intensive one. For this reason, in Russia there has always been a strong inclination towards political stability, caution, calm, fear of reform, conservatism in all the strata of society, and a respect for the remote past. In other words, Russia venerated all that was patriarchal. All this was combined with the people's high degree of passivity, patience and humility. Russia could make countless tumbles in its politics, but as Alexander Pushkin concluded in the final act of *Boris Godunov*, "the population is quiet, full of panic...and it keeps a deep silence."

At the same time, there were several conditions which provoked the formation of a specific social system. These were due mainly to the constant danger of war. This system was created by the necessity to rapidly mobilize material and human resources under harsh conditions: regional isolation, feeble economic relations and dispersion. Russia became a society where every class had a right to exist only because the state needed it and had a specific purpose assigned to it: "the tribute," as it was called. All classes were eternally subordinated to the

government interests, which always took precedence, and class functions were regulated in great detail by the central power. As a result, constant government interference was taken for granted in everyone's private and family life. An immense amount of these practices can be cited from different eras: during the time of Peter the Great, when beards were forbidden and coffee had to be consumed every morning, to the more recent persecution of people who wore pants that were either too wide or too narrow, fancied long hair, etc.

The Russian state system had another peculiarity: the need to govern a population that was, and still is, culturally, ethnically, and linguistically heterogenous. Russia included almost two hundred nations very different from one another in their way of life, thought, values, history and social and economic development. Moreover, according to the 1897 census, ethnic Russians constituted only 43% of their empire's population. The centralized military and the bureaucratic monarchy were in power. They were atrophied not only by the country's huge territorial expansion, but also by the need to adapt political methods in the country's diverse parts. The Baltics, Central Asia, the Volga region, Poland, Moldavia, and Finland, for example, entered the state's fabric with different traits and characteristics. Therefore, they required quite different methods of power execution, which only made the government apparatus more complex. The growing complexity increased the number of bureaucrats and "national intermediaries" (especially in the Muslim regions), and also augmented the impersonal quality of the center and of its blind administration. The heterogeneity and variety of nationalities and ethnic groups in the state, coupled with the disrespect of their national, ethnic and cultural traditions, are traits which have been inherited throughout many centuries of Russian history.

### **Society in Transition**

It is necessary to point out one of the main factors that influenced the country's social and political development: the process of liberalization in Russia. In the second half of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th, almost the whole social strata, albeit each in its own particular way, realized the urgent need for changes and reform. The Russian autocracy had the real opportunity to deliberately promote reforms, before a revolution "from below" would do so for them. However, they lost that opportunity. Lev Tolstoy wrote, "Our govern-

ment's blindness is incredible. It doesn't see, nor does it want to see, what it can do to disarm its enemies; it [the government] only augments its numbers and its power." But for the liberal elite, the problem consisted of something else. It was necessary to begin with the need to democratize by the way of evolution, and to emancipate the social consciousness. For them, changing the economic structures and the forms and mechanisms of state power required destabilizing the autocratic authority. This was accomplished through revolutionary cataclysms and by providing the social confrontation necessary to finally break that autocracy's political and administrative system.

In *Godliness and Humanity*, Tolstoy described the point of view of the new revolutionary groups, which considered the people as backward, a "clumsy bunch," "work cattle"; nothing could be done with them. It was necessary to educate the people and to instill a sense of solidarity. This would turn them into a socialism-orientated people--a people emerging from the repressive culture created by large industries. Therefore, it was considered better if there were many people being exploited in sweatshops and factories as well as capitalists owning more of the land. This was the only way to precipitate the destruction of despotism and the liquidation of capitalism. They argued that these important developments could only be achieved through the solidarity of the people. This solidarity could be attained through unions. The unions would coordinate the workers, but only after the masses ceased to be subjects of the land and became the proletariat. But in reality, there was a harsh replacement of this populist stage by the Marxist proletarian stage. However, this did not develop within the intended framework anyway. The Russian proletariat was patriarchal and predominantly lower middle class to poor. Capitalism was only at an early stage of development, and there were widespread anti-democratic customs. Therefore, Marxism from the beginning acquired certain deformities and traits distinct from the social-democratic traditions of Western Europe.

We can continue citing an infinity of factors of different scales which provided for the establishment of a special dominant place for the Russian government. This process reinforced the centralization of power into a profound military and bureaucratic structure. In this way, the Russian state was transformed into a strong command-administrative system and a new society developed which was not capitalist, but "socialist" after 1917. The development of the country was always carried out under the domain of the state and its institutions. During

many centuries, its influence was practically unlimited, lawless and without control. Individuals within Russian society resembled passive objects of the state rather than active subjects in the political and economic spheres.

The hierarchy of values was always established from top to bottom. First came the interests of the state, then the interests of the group and lastly, the interests of the classes. No one ever seriously took into consideration the individual human interests. Frankly, all this contradicted the principles of a society of citizens and their democratic traditions. For this reason, during the 1860's and afterwards in 1905, many opportunities arose to eliminate the feudal-patriarchal and authoritarian state (very attractive for all the ruling classes, from the reform monarchists like Stolypin to the social-democrats of the far left), but it was easy to thwart those opportunities. The Russia of that era, just as during the era of the *oprichina* (Ivan the Terrible's KGB prototype), had the people far away from the center of power. It applied economic and other pressures which tied the people to their place of residence, their small plot of land, and divided the people from their "class enemies," creating certain government privileges. Even though the Russian people defended their land during the bloodiest of wars, they never enjoyed the fruits of their triumphs. At the beginning of the 20th century, N.A. Berdiayev made a logical conclusion: "The Russian people lack that love towards historical greatness which the people of the West so much love. The people which possess the biggest state in the world hate that very state, their aspirations are others." In this political atmosphere, the Bolshevik Revolution occurred.

### **The System and the Revolution**

The father of Russian Marxism, G.V. Plekhanov, declared on the eve of October 1917 that he was not against the revolution which would probably take place. Plekhanov was worried that if this revolution *did* take place in the country where the working class was not the majority, it would provoke the establishment not of the dictatorship of the proletariat, but of the personality cult. In this way, Russia would sink into political obscurity for many years; it then would be shamefully emerging from this obscurity for many decades to follow. Vladimir Lenin, without contradicting Plekhanov's remarks, considered that the dictatorship of a personality was possible (something that he would sometimes emphasize). Nonetheless, he considered that it would be

able to be the spokesperson and the facilitator of the dictatorship of the revolutionary classes. This idea could have been true, especially in the case of Lenin himself, but ceased to be so after his death--when the hope of a world revolution vanished indefinitely.

The command-administrative system in its "socialist" variant supposedly began from the "war communism" stage. The Bolshevik party established the objective to pass directly to socialism on the basis of a primitive trade of agricultural commodities without any relation to their real monetary value. Nonetheless in 1921, as it is well known, this attempt turned into reality and into the national revolution of a new power. When Lenin realized that he could not utilize this method, he tried to establish the New Economic Policy (NEP). Now the fundamental strategy involved relative economic utility, the simplest administrative methods, and an attempt to unite personal and collective interests, even though this last attempt was a partial one. Notwithstanding, in the political field, Lenin did not make a single change. Furthermore, he did everything possible to reinforce the role of the Party and the power of its apparatus, thereby building the practical and political bases for the future tyranny of Stalin. At the same time, this new administrative model was not able to form itself completely, not even in the economic sphere. This happened because the country ran into serious economic and political problems, and into other circumstances such as a ruthless struggle for power.

At the end of the 1920s, a major economic crisis exploded in the capitalist countries which precipitated World War II, according to the Soviet government's view. The USSR was not prepared for this war. The country lacked a whole series of industrial branches that could have supplied a modern army; qualified workers and engineers were sorely lacking as well. The urgent need to industrialize the country arose as did the need to create new production methods, a modern system for education, etc. The country needed a great deal of foreign exchange to buy modern technology and machinery, which the USSR could only predominantly obtain by selling grain. The need to invite foreign engineers and technicians also arose. But other problems occurred. On one hand, the existing economic situation caused the price of wheat to fall by half in the world market. On the other hand, wheat within the country was very scarce. The idea of forceful collectivization emerged under these circumstances. This translated into grave economic and political consequences for the country and for millions of victims. At the same time, the process of the usurpation of political power by the



Party's bureaucracy was led by the man who ultimately replaced Lenin, Joseph Stalin.

### **Stalinism: Reinforcing the Trend**

Nature blessed Stalin with an ambitious, calculating and shrewd mind. He understood that he could never be an equal to Lenin, nor to other Party militants of Lenin's team in questions of theory, political thought, or in the art of oratory. That is why he made a gamble of assured success; he concentrated himself in his capacity as an organizer, at which he was indisputably a master. To confirm himself as a leader, he had to transform the Party and the whole country into a system where a new administrative and organizational subordination substituted the entire system of social, economic and political relations. This attempt turned out to be quite simple. Stalin was aided by several objective factors, such as the patriarchal character of society, the bastardization of Marxism, the "ardor" of the Civil War which legalized and even encouraged fratricide, and the overall tense international situation.

On one hand, Stalin united the rigid centralized power of the state and the military methods of the resolution of economic problems by severe administrative methods of control and punishment. This created the illusion of achievement and exciting results in short periods. On the other hand, there was a certain inclination towards: the culture of tsarism, the Russian custom of living under an "iron fist," the lack of culture, the illiteracy of the majority of the population and lastly, the people's enthusiasm and willingness to sacrifice themselves for the idea of a just society. In fewer words, a colossal command-administrative system was gradually formed, a system where subordination was achieved with a basic military principle. Each official possessed enormous power which he could apply downwards towards his subordinates, even though he was totally deprived of real power and was defenseless in relation to the "pinnacle" of power. Only Stalin, "the Boss," possessed real power and considered everyone as his eternal debtor who was condemned all their life to pay him, not only with their admiration, but also with their unconditional obedience. What is more, the situation of the average employee in this system depended completely on the caprice of his/her superior in the Party. This created a pyramid structure with the Boss at the top, and that structure completely reinforced the vast command qualifications of the system.

This peculiarity was brilliantly described by Alexander Bek in *New Appointment* where the main character, Minister Onisimov, lives like everyone according to the following theme: "Let us not deliberate! If we are given an order, it is proper to follow it."

The creation of a similar administrative system, although on a prepared soil, required a certain time frame during which the basic principles of the NEP were retained in the economic sphere. But in the late 1920s and in the 1930s, the political system was definitely reinforced, and the administrative system, under its aegis, swallowed up the economy. The NEP was overthrown in favor of a bureaucratic administration. This provoked the definitive liquidation of all the adversaries of the system who were not in accordance with Stalin's personal dictatorship. The adversaries included old members of the Party who knew Lenin's political testaments firsthand. Without them, there remained only a few ideas from the Civil War which were easily convertible by the new leaders into the model of "barracks communism." These new ideas coincided completely with the intentions of the Communist party's new *vlasti* (powers-that-be). Even in the summer of 1928, Stalin declared that the class struggle would become sharper as the successes of the socialist sphere grew. His idea served as a political and ideological basis for massive repression.

The time frame between the late 1920s and the 1930s represented the complete fruition of the command-administrative system of power that incorporated all the spheres of social life. But this same period witnessed an important limit to the system's internal evolution. Regarding the system's overall functioning, it did not matter anymore who was at the pinnacle of power. The idea and the politics behind the personality cult were transformed into an abstract cult--an impersonal cult. There is no doubt that if in Stalin's place there had been another leader--less cruel, distrustful and vengeful--the most hateful and criminal consequences of the personality cult mechanism could have been avoided. In any case, the cult itself could not have been avoided, because it became a central component of the administrative system. Leon Trotsky once wrote, "Stalin's removal at this point would be nothing more than a change for another *apparatchik* whom the Soviet press in an instant would transform into the brightest of all geniuses." In the meantime, Stalin found himself at the top of the pyramid, and gathered awesome power into his own hands. In his self-created administrative system, the professional core was adapted to him, and he decided everything alone. His words and whims, all became law for the

Party and for the society as a whole. More than that, the cult of the General Secretary bred smaller cults towards the hierarchy of the Party and the government, whereby every boss became a "little Stalin" for his subordinates.

In this way, the USSR's command-administrative system was created and crystallized. This system represented a specific method of organizing all social relations. It was adapted to all the countries that were seeking an egalitarian development and that had experienced proletarian revolutions. In other words, those countries adopted Marxism as their social and political doctrine. This rigid centralism of economic life was based on state property and the use of ideological and extra-economic methods. These methods were the instrument for massive repression and fear, for the segregation of the people, and for the polarization of all aspects of life. It was the regime of a bureaucratic dictatorship and a party-state without liberties or democracy. It was a totalitarian "barracks socialism" canonized with a strict military-like hierarchy. Nonetheless in my opinion, it would not be proper to talk about the personality cult *per se* in this era, because under a strict interpretation, this type of cult disappeared when Lenin died. Lenin's power did not derive from titles or from a formally occupied office. The political system which evolved during Stalin's era was a "cult of appointments," the cult of the chair--the seat within the hierarchal system of the *nomenklatura*.

This was a "party-state" where the only party, especially its apparatus and its monopoly on power, usurped all the state functions and controlled the life of society. The CPSU became the heart of the state around which all the "representative" organs of power and their positions were distributed, especially those of the soviets (state councils) which played nothing more than a fictitious role. It is difficult to believe that the Supreme Soviet of the USSR for example, during its entire history of more than a half of a century (up until 1988), had unanimously ratified all the decrees and edicts of the Central Committee and the CPSU. The Party monopolized all forms of media and communication, including all of the printing and publishing industries in the country. Moreover, it monopolized the management of the military industries, the armed forces, and the security organs. This made it impossible to uproot its absolute power by either ideological or violent methods. Stalin was correct when he declared in the 18th Communist Party Congress, "complete stability in the internal situation of the country and such secure authority which could inspire envy in any

other world government." The country found itself controlled by a party with absolute power over the economy and with an ultra-centralized administration. It controlled all the branches of production and distribution of goods on the basis of only one form of property. By 1937, the share of the socialist economy within the country's economy occupied 99% of the national income, 98.8% of industrial production, 98.5% of agricultural production and 100% of the retail sector. In the name of the people, "their property and fruits of their labor" were administered by the officials of the *apparat*, the Party and the government. As a result, the economy could never satisfy the needs of the country and it became completely insensitive to scientific and technical progress.

The USSR became a society where all the different strata of the population had a right to exist within a condition of absolute subordination to the system which was created and determined by political *diktat*. The intrusion in the private lives of the people reached horrendous levels. A sort of mixture of Marxism and Leninism was established and applied to all the spheres of private and public life. The citizens had to publicly accept all the rules of this theory, waste a lot of time learning it, and diffuse it according to the interpretation of the Party's upper officials. Within its framework, the criteria was established for the judgement of literary works, art, law; atheism was also imposed as well as the official interpretation of national and world history. In 1938, *The Compilation of the History of the Bolshevik Party* was written (with the personal input of Stalin) and eventually became the biblical base of all state ideology. In other words, a stereotype was forced upon the society. This stereotype divided society into "us versus them," promulgating a simple perception of the world into black and white camps and encouraging through hate propaganda the rejection of "opportunists" and heterodox people. "He who is not with us is against us" was the theme which dominated the people's minds since infancy. Those "enemies of the people" in the years 1937-1938 reached seven million--one million of which were members of the Communist party. Entire nationalities were subjugated to repression and even expelled from their historical lands. An enormous propaganda apparatus emerged, and thousands of writers, journalists and intellectuals were involved in the task of reinforcing the state ideology. Maxim Gorky, before the 1st Congress of Writers, declared the following:

Literature's guidance by the Party must be exempt from all meager

influences. The members of the Party must be not only the teachers of the ideology that will rally the energies of the world proletariat towards their final victory for liberty, but also have to demonstrate all their moral strength through their conduct, and have to instill in the writers the conscience of their collective responsibility for all that which happens around them. Soviet literature, which possesses a great variety of talents and which now enjoys an uninterrupted growth of new talented writers, must organize itself as a collective unity, as a powerful weapon of socialist culture...long live the strong and fraternal union of the workers and fighters of the written word, long live the red army of writers!

As is evident, entire "armies of writers, movie makers, scientists, pioneers" etc., functioned in the USSR, just as all of the nation was militarized. Therefore, an entire military discipline, a castrating justice, and a barracks atmosphere were all imposed upon the country.

It is important to add that the command-administrative system was readily absorbed as the only adequate political base in the new society. The Party and state *nomenklatura* gave itself the right to act on behalf of the people. Due to the tyranny of the professional bureaucracy, the system never adjusted itself. Nonetheless, this completely hardened system evolved considerably on the question of power after Stalin's death. This was the result of the de-Stalinization policies conducted by Stalin's successor to the Party's top position, Nikita Khrushchev.

### **Khrushchev's Contributions**

The new Party leader was aided by his few collaborators who partially realized that Soviet society was already different and therefore, could not be directed with the old methods. They also realized that the world had changed into a world where technological revolution had acquired an accelerated pace and where nuclear weapons had made it possible for an enemy to become one's grave-digger. This was also the first time in Soviet history when people stopped dying in the ideological struggle. Nonetheless, Khrushchev's attempts at reform could not finish the *mandat* system of solidified centralism. His problems were mainly ideological and practical. His main obstacles were the evident weaknesses and vulgarities of theoretical ideas on the essence of society and on the mechanism of state administration. The quest for the cultivation of reforms and for ways to nourish them was being developed within the narrow framework of the disorderly administrative and bureaucratic ideology of the time. Moreover, there was a lack of

personnel capable of correctly perceiving and developing efficient new forms and methods of administration. From where could this personnel emerge if the government apparatus was the creation of the centralized administrative system? For example, in the CPSU Central Committee formed by the 20th Party Congress (1956), there were still 93 people who had been selected by Stalin for the superior organs of the Party during the 19th Party Congress (1952).

There are serious doubts about the sincerity and congruence of Khrushchev himself. His speech at the 20th Party Congress was done at a very great personal risk--an act of political heroism. But next to him, there were no people on which he could rely. Moreover, the lack of criticism and the presence of abundant flattery obliged Khrushchev to act less against the opinion of the conservative majority. He, himself, let them guide him on a daily basis. But the main failure of his reforms consisted in the fact that these were not based on the development of democratization. The freedom of speech and information were completely lacking, thereby excluding the wider sectors of society from participating in the reformist struggle. Nonetheless, the impossibility of returning to classic Stalinism was evident; more than 20 million people were rehabilitated, most of them after their deaths. At the same time, a new model which acted as an alternative to the command-administrative system had not yet been formed, neither theoretically nor politically. This fact permitted the conservative forces to take advantage of the situation and prolong the supremacy of the old administrative system.

The failed reforms also became a good lesson for the conservative forces. Khrushchev's reforms attempted to break the established administrative mechanism but were stopped in their tracks. Even the most Stalinist conservatives finally realized that at the top of the power pyramid, new forces could emerge that could probably continue the politics of reform successfully--something which they had trouble admitting. In other words, Khrushchev's "thaw" had the role of a vaccine whose small dose was insufficient to cause the death or even a grave illness to the administrative system. What's worse, it reaffirmed and permitted it to generate immunity against any democratic movements. Having stumbled upon Khrushchev, the bureaucratic *apparat* became more intelligent. It understood that under these new conditions a lack of control on the bottom of the pyramid was not enough; anarchy was also needed at the top.

Left without guidance after March 1953 and after a decade of Khrushchev's administration, the command-administrative system

conceived the idea of the need to form a fictitious leader to dilute real power. His vigor and political force would be incorporated into the very *apparat*, and this one would impregnate every one of his parts with its influence. It also sought to convert power into something spiritual. Moreover, it could turn one head into many and achieve the system's invulnerability, just as the mythological Hydra replaces the heads that it has lost.

Notwithstanding, to achieve this, it was not enough to remove Khrushchev. It was necessary to find a person who would harmoniously coexist with the Party, be obedient to it, respect and carry out its interests without thinking of obtaining real power, and be content with only the attributes and superficial symbols. The person that they were looking for was Leonid Brezhnev.

### **Reversing the Pyramid**

It turned out that in the 1960s, a situation without any precedence in Russia's political history emerged. For the first time, the person who found himself at the top of the Party and government hierarchy realized that he was not the subject of absolute power. On the contrary, Brezhnev everyday found himself more as the object. Now, it was not the *apparat* which adapted itself to the fancy of the "boss." On the contrary, it was now the boss who had to adjust himself to the *apparat*. What is more, Brezhnev's non-government generated the non-governments of small and large bosses and their growing dependency on the inferior bureaucrats. Personal loyalty (which was typical for the era of Stalinism), was definitely substituted by the impersonal loyalty to the state apparatus. The pieces of the administrative system, being deprived of their orbit around the cult of personality, began to rotate in different directions without worrying about following the common goal. All these factors resulted in a very fertile soil for the consolidation of the bureaucratic cast, cover-ups, the growth of corruption, bribery, the abuse of power, the establishment of contacts between the directing *apparat* and the mafia, etc. It also served to reinforce the massive nostalgia for a "strong personality." The country found itself on the edge of the abyss: crisis scenarios emerged and contradictions became more acute.

Brezhnev died in 1982 but the collapse and the stagnation of the country did not cease. Step by step the national crisis matured. Yuri Andropov's attempts to stop it did not produce, nor could have

produced any effects. During the government of Konstantin Chernenko, this process accelerated even more. That was due to the momentum of power which was still concentrated in the impersonal state apparatus and which did not answer to anyone or anything. By this time, this apparatus had permanently turned itself into the main goal of the Soviet state. Its objectives became the national reference points. The goals of the Party's offices became the goals of the state. And now, the affiliation with a certain group and caste carried the most weight. This contradicted in part the era of Stalin, when at that time what mattered the most was a place within the *nomenklatura*; the state hierarchy and the possession of a certain title. In other words, the Russian political system entered a new era, whereby the cult of personality evolved into a cult of a corporation. And it was this very factor that turned out to be the largest obstacle to the reforms initiated by Mikhail Sergeevich Gorbachev in the spring of 1985--reforms called perestroika.