

OUR RELATION TO HISTORY REMAINS RETROSPECTIVE,
BUT ALSO ANTICIPATORY. IF IT IS THE PAST THAT
DETERMINES OUR PLACE IN HISTORY, THERE WE
ALSO FIND THE MATERIAL SUPPORT WITH WHICH TO
RECONSTITUTE OUR HISTORICAL PLACE. BUT IS IT
POSSIBLE TO RETROACTIVELY ANTICIPATE A DIFFERENT
TURN OF EVENTS IN AN ALREADY HISTORICIZED
PAST – TO ASSUME THE FATE OF PAST EVENTS AS STILL
UNDECIDABLE?

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RISE AND FALL OF SOCIALISM. 1945-1991

by **Chto Delat**, 2011

Research group: Ilya Budraitskis, Thomas Campbell,
Dmitry Vilensky, Nikolay Oleynikov

Graphics by Nikolay Oleynikov

featuring artworks by Learning Film Group and Dmitry Vilensky



February 4-11, 1945. The Yalta Conference.

Stalin, Roosevelt, and Churchill decide on the respective spheres of influence of the west and the USSR in post-war Europe. The western sphere includes countries with strong communist movements such as Italy and Greece. It is decided that the Allies and the Soviet Union will have equal influence in Yugoslavia.

The 1940s

1946. The Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia and the People's Republic of Bulgaria are established.

1948-49. Pro-Soviet regimes are established in Eastern Europe (Romania, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary, East Germany). The transition to the so-called people's republics is marked both by large-scale socioeconomic reforms that enjoy popular support and by the introduction of repressive Stalinist regimes that totally control public life.

February 20-25, 1948. The Czechoslovak Communist Party gains control of the country's government. This "bloodless" coup is supported by strikes

in which 2.5 million people take part.

June 28, 1948. Yugoslavia is expelled from the Cominform.

At the second meeting of this international association of communist parties, the other member countries accuse Yugoslavia of nationalism and exclude it from their ranks. In turn, Yugoslav leader Tito suppresses Yugoslav communists who support the Soviet position.

1949. Mao's partisan army achieves final victory in China. The People's Republic of China is declared.

January 1949. The Comecon (Council for Mutual Economic Assistance) is founded. Soviet leaders intend for the organization to act as a counterweight to western financial institutions such as the OECD. The new group's founding members are Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Czechoslovakia, and the USSR.

April 20-25, 1949. World Peace Congress in Paris. The Soviet-backed Congress adopts as its emblem a depiction of a white dove created by Pablo Picasso, a member of the French Communist Party.

June 21, 1948-May 11, 1949. The Berlin Blockade. The first serious conflict of the Cold War begins when Soviet forces block railroad and automobile access to the areas of Berlin controlled by the western powers. The US and British air forces successfully organize an airlift that keeps the city supplied with essentials. The crisis accelerates the establishment of the Federal Republic of Germany in the western occupied zones, in May 1949. In response, the German Democratic Republic is formed in the Soviet zone of occupation in October 1949.

August 29, 1949. The Soviet Union carries out its first nuclear weapons test.

The Cold War Begins

March 5, 1946. Ex-British prime minister Winston Churchill gives a speech in Fulton, Missouri, in which he argues that an "iron curtain" has descended across Europe.

March 12, 1947. President Truman sets forth what

will become known as the Truman Doctrine, a policy of “containment” towards Soviet expansion.

June 5, 1947. US Secretary of State George Marshall announces the Marshall Plan for reconstruction of post-war Europe in a speech at Harvard University.

October 1947. A new “Red Scare” begins in the US. Ten well-known Hollywood writers and directors are cited for contempt of Congress after refusing to give testimony to the House Committee on Un-American Activities on their affiliations with the Communist Party. In response, Hollywood institutes its first systematic “blacklist.” Bertolt Brecht is among those blacklisted. Brecht returns to East Berlin after controversially testifying before the committee.

April 4, 1949. NATO is formed when the North Atlantic Treaty is signed in Washington. The signatories included the countries of the Western European Union (UK, France, Belgium, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands), as well as the US, Canada, Denmark, Iceland, Norway, and Portugal.

1949. The US Export Control Act bans the export of technology and goods to the socialist countries. The US and its European allies agree to set up the Co-ordinating Committee on Multilateral Export Controls (CoCom) to ensure that the other capitalist countries observe the embargo.



The 1950s

1952. Paul Robeson is awarded the Stalin Peace Prize in Moscow. The first major concert star to popularize the performance of African-American spirituals, Robeson is just as famous for his political radicalism and activism in the civil rights movement.

*But I keeps laffin'
Instead of cryin'.
I must keep fightin'
Until I'm dyin',
And Ol' Man River,
He'll just keep rollin' along!*

June 17, 1953. A mass uprising by workers in East Berlin and other major East German cities. Their principal demand is an end to increases in production quotas. Around half a million workers go on strike, while over two million take part in demonstrations. The uprising is violently suppressed by Soviet troops and East German police.

March 5, 1953. Stalin dies.

1953. The Soviet Union conducts its first hydrogen bomb test.

1955. *The “socialist bloc,” stretching from Europe to Asia,*

is led by the USSR and the People's Republic of China. (Soviet Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Molotov, at a session of the Supreme Soviet)

1955. The Warsaw Pact, a military and political alliance of “socialist bloc” countries, is formed. The new organization comprises the USSR, Poland, Romania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Albania.

1955. Brecht receives the State Lenin Prize in Moscow.

1956. 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. The beginning of “de-Stalinization” (“The Thaw”). The idea of “peaceful coexistence” between the west and the Eastern Bloc is advanced for the first time, and Nikita Khrushchev gives a report, entitled “On the Personality Cult and Its Consequences,” in which he condemns the Stalinist period for its violation of “Leninist norms,” the conformity it encouraged in the Party, and mass repressions.

October 1956. The “Polish October.” Władysław Gomułka, who was arrested in 1951 and spent several years in prison, is elected the new First Secretary of the Polish United Workers’ Party (PZRP). Gomułka’s rise to power signals a democratization of political life in Poland.

October 4, 1957. The Soviet Union launches Sputnik 1, the first artificial satellite, into orbit.

October 23–November 8, 1956. The Hungarian Revolution. Students and workers in Budapest begin large-scale demonstrations in support of full rehabilitation for the victims of the mass repressions of 1948–1955. Imre Nagy, a veteran Communist Party member who fell out of favor during the Stalinist period, is appointed prime minister. The Soviet leadership reacts by dispatching troops to Budapest. After a week of bloody street battles, the rebels surrender. Nagy and his supporters (including Marxist philosopher Georg Lukács, who served as his minister of culture) are arrested.

1957. Boris Pasternak’s novel *Doctor Zhivago* is published in Russian and Italian in Milan by Italian publisher Giangiacomo Feltrinelli. A year later, Pasternak is awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature. Under intense pressure from Soviet authorities, Pasternak turns down the prize.

1957. The 6th World Festival of Youth and Students, Moscow. 34,000 people from 131 countries take part in the festival. The festival's atmosphere proves to be so informal that it defies the expectations of the leaders of the socialist delegations.

The Thaw introduced new principles: foreigners were divided into bad and good, and the latter were immeasurably greater in number. All workers were friends of the USSR, even if they weren't yet ready to build socialism. [...] A special term was coined: "people of good will." They weren't one hundred percent on our side, but they also weren't enemies. And it was they who came to Moscow [for the festival]. (Artyom Krechetnikov, BBC Russian Service)

1958. Beginning of the Great Leap Forward in China. The country, which has a primarily agrarian economy, launches a program of rapid industrialization and collectivization. The policy is blamed for millions of "excess deaths."

1958. The Cranes Are Flying, a film by Soviet director Mikhail Kalatozov, wins the Palme d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival.

1959. The Cuban Revolution. On January 8, a rebel army led by Fidel Castro and Ernesto "Che" Guevara marches into Havana. The new revolutionary government begins to nationalize industry and carry out radical land reform. Cuba becomes part of the "socialist bloc."

1959. The American National Exhibition is held in Moscow. This is the first encounter of Soviet citizens with American culture, technology, and lifestyles. The exhibition features a large show of American contemporary art (including works by Robert Rauschenberg and Claes Oldenburg) that influenced the emergence of the Soviet alternative art scene.

1959. The USSR achieves overall literacy of 98.5%, reaching the level of the advanced capitalist countries.

1950. Radio Free Europe begins broadcasting to Eastern Europe. Joined in 1953 by Radio Liberty (which broadcasts to the Soviet Union) and supported by the US government, RFE is intended to serve as a mouthpiece for anti-communist propaganda. In 1955, the Soviet Union begins using sophisticated jamming techniques to prevent these "voices from the west" from reaching its citizens.

1952. The US tests its first hydrogen bomb.

1957. *The New Class: An Analysis of the Communist System*, a book by Milovan Djilas, is published in the west. Djilas, a former ally of Tito and hero of the WWII Partisan movement, argues that the communist bureaucracy has become a new ruling class. The book becomes a cult favorite amongst Eastern European and Soviet dissidents.

1956. The Suez Crisis. With support from Britain and France, Israeli forces attack Egypt, whose government has nationalized the strategically vital Suez Canal and fostered new ties with Warsaw Pact countries. The conflict in the Middle East sparks an international crisis during which Khrushchev threatens military action against Israel and its allies.



The 1960s

1960. “The Year of Africa.” Decolonization reaches its peak when 16 African countries, (including Nigeria, Zaire, Cameroon, Mauritania, Senegal, and Mali) achieve independence from the European colonial powers. Many of the new nations openly declare their sympathy for the USSR and their desire to build socialist states.

1960. The Sino-Soviet Split. At the Romanian Party Congress in Bucharest, Soviet and Chinese leaders engage in fierce polemics.

Khrushchev labels Mao a “nationalist and adventurist,” while Mao accuses Khrushchev of being a “Marxist revisionist.” Nearly all Soviet technical specialists are quickly withdrawn from China.

April 12, 1961. Soviet cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin makes the first manned flight into outer space.

October 1961. 22nd Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Khrushchev promises delegates that “the present generation of Soviet people will be living under communism” by 1980. The Congress steps up official criticism of Stalin. After the congress, towns named after Stalin are renamed, monuments to him are dismantled, and his body is removed from the Mausoleum on Red Square.

1961. Albanian leader Enver Hoxha calls Khrushchev a “revisionist, an anti-Marxist, and a defeatist.” The Soviet Union and the other Warsaw Pact countries break off all relations with Albania.

1961. Encouraged by Soviet leaders, East German authorities build a wall between East and West Berlin. Relations between NATO and the Warsaw Pact reach a low point.

November 1962. With the approval of Khrushchev, the literary journal *Novy Mir* publishes Alexander Solzhenitsyn’s novella *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, the first literary witness to the victims of the Soviet Gulag.

June 1-2, 1962. The Novocherkassk Massacre. As prices for meat and butter are raised, minimum production quotas for workers at the Novocherkassk Electric Locomotive Factory (in southern Russia) are increased by a third. Factory workers and town residents march on town hall, shouting “*Butter, meat, give us a pay raise!*” and “*What are we to live on?*” The uprising is brutally put down by the army and police. 26 people are killed, 87 wounded, and 116 are arrested. Seven of them are given death sentences, while the rest are sentenced to long prison terms.

1964. Nikita Khrushchev is ousted from power and sent into retirement. This marks the end of the Thaw and the active policy of de-Stalinization in the USSR and Eastern Europe.

1965. The Fluxus movement goes global when artists and musicians from the Eastern Bloc help organize Fluxus festivals in Prague, Vilnius, and elsewhere.



1966. The Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) begins in China. *Although the bourgeoisie has been overthrown, it is still trying to use the old ideas, culture, customs, and habits of the exploiting classes to corrupt the masses, capture their minds, and endeavor to stage a comeback. The proletariat must do just the opposite: It must meet head-on every challenge of the bourgeoisie in the ideological field and use the new ideas, culture, customs, and habits of the proletariat to change the mental outlook of the whole of society.* (Central Committee of the CPC, “Decision Concerning the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution,” August 8, 1966)

June 1967. Fourth Congress of the Czechoslovak Writers Union. A small faction of writers, including Ivan Klima, Milan Kundera, and Ludvík Vaculík, openly criticizes the regime during the congress, thus presaging the Prague Spring of 1968.

I believe that the citizen is extinct in our country. We are joined by the most despicable of ties: a common frustration. I see a return to the bad old days as a permanent danger. Why can't we live where we want? What use is it that we have been given the publishing house and the journals? Behind all this is the threat that they will take it back if we are unruly. (Ludvík Vaculík, speech at the Fourth Congress of the Czechoslovak Writers Union)



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VYSOČANY CONGRESS, 2008
A film by the Learning Film Group (Nikolay Oleynikov, Yevgeny Fiks, and Ilya Budraitskis)
The Vysočany Secret Congress of the Czechoslovak Communist Party took place in August 1968, just two days after Soviet tanks invaded Prague. For this re-enactment, the artists found the actual place (the Vysočany Factory) where the congress took place. They interviewed the organizers of the event, workers who are still employed at the plant, and they invited artists, critics, historians, and leftist activists in the present-day Czech Republic to discuss the congress, its meaning and its impact.

1968

1968. The Prague Spring. Headed by Alexander Dubček, the new leadership of Czechoslovakia launches political reforms under the slogan socialism with a human face. Over the course of spring and summer, censorship and restrictions on freedom of assembly are practically abolished, and legal self-organized political groups emerge. On the night of August 20-21, Warsaw Pact forces invade the country and brutally suppress popular resistance. On the first day of the occupation, the **14th Czechoslovak Communist Party Congress**, meeting clandestinely in the outskirts of Prague, calls for a strike.

March 1968. Student protests in Poland. In response to tightening censorship and control over culture, anti-government demonstrations erupt in Warsaw and other cities. The protesters are attacked by “worker squads” and arrested by police.

1968. The Chronicle of Current Events, a samizdat human rights informational bulletin, is launched. Published until 1983 and distributed clandestinely, it is practically the only source of information on political repression in the Soviet Union.

August 25, 1968. Eight Soviet dissidents sit in Red Square holding banners protesting the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia. Within minutes, KGB operatives arrest the protestors. The other protesters convince a young woman in the group to claim she was there by chance, and she is soon released. The protest thus becomes known as the “demonstration of the seven.”

It's true: the people do not support us – today. Ten or fifteen years from now everything might change: self-consciousness doesn't come suddenly or to everyone at once. Our goal was to show the rest of the world that not everyone supports this invasion. Maybe it's only seven people, but those seven people think differently. Or rather, hundreds of thousands of people think differently, but seven people expressed their opinion for them. (from V. Pshizov [Viktor Fainberg], Closed Space Syndrome: Notes of a Forensic Psychiatrist, Saint Petersburg, 2002)

1968. Andrei Sakharov (the inventor of the Soviet hydrogen bomb) writes the pamphlet Reflections on Progress, Peaceful Coexistence, and Intellectual Freedom. Published in many countries, it becomes a key text of the dissident movement.

In 1968, Jews in Poland are officially declared a “fifth column” and encouraged to leave the country.

1960. A CIA analysis concludes that it is difficult to determine how the USSR compares to the US in terms of GDP, capital investment, defense spending, and consumption, but that this hardly matters because it is devoting its resources with all the power of a determined dictatorship to a long-run aim declared in Khrushchev's promise, *“We will bury you.”*

1962. The Cuban Missile Crisis. When Soviet nuclear missiles are deployed in Cuba, humanity finds itself on the brink of self-destruction for the first time in history.

1961. President Kennedy begins sending military advisors to South Vietnam to assist the army of dictator Ngo Dinh Diem in its war against pro-communist Viet Cong guerillas. By November

1963, the number of US military advisors has increased to 16,000.

August 1964. The Gulf of Tonkin Incident involves two clashes (one disputed) between North Vietnamese patrol boats and US naval vessels off the North Vietnamese coast. President Johnson orders a retaliatory bombing of North Vietnamese targets, and Congress passes the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, giving the president a free hand and paving the way to full-scale war.

October 1965-March 1966. Mass killings of communists in Indonesia. After a failed coup by members of the military, an anti-communist purge, supported by the US and other western countries, leads to the slaughter of as many as a million Indonesian communists.

June 1967. The Six-Day War is fought between Israel (backed by the US) and a coalition of Arab states (backed by the USSR). Israel's quick victory results in its occupation of Egyptian, Palestinian, and Syrian lands, and an explosion of anti-Israeli sentiment in the Arab world.

The USSR severs diplomatic relations with Israel, and an aggressive "anti-Zionist" campaign (often openly anti-Semitic) is launched in the socialist bloc.

October 1967. Ernesto "Che" Guevara is captured and executed by the Bolivian Army.

July 21, 1969. Neil Armstrong, an American astronaut, becomes the first man to walk on the Moon.





The 1970s

1972. Poet Joseph Brodsky is forcibly exiled from the Soviet Union.

1973. Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago* is first published in the west (by the émigré YMCA Press). In February 1974, Solzhenitsyn (who was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1970) is stripped of his Soviet citizenship and deported to the west.

September 1974. The Bulldozer Exhibition. "Unofficial" Moscow artists organize an open-air exhibition in a vacant lot. The exhibition is broken up by a large police force assisted by bulldozers and water cannons.

1975. Andrei Sakharov is awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

1977. Charter 77 is a manifesto that forms the basis for an eponymous Czechoslovak dissident movement that exists from 1976 to 1992. Many of its founders (Vaclav Havel, Jiří Dienstbier, Zdeněk Mlynář, Jiří Hájek, Pavel Kohout) become prominent public and political figures after the Velvet Revolution of 1989. Motivated in part by the arrest of the underground band Plastic People of the Universe, the text of the charter was composed in 1976, and the first signatures were collected in December 1976. It is published on January 6, 1977, along with the names of the first 242 signatories. This leads to arrests and confiscation of the original document. However, copies of the document continue to circulate, and on January 7 the text is published in several major European and US newspapers. Charter 77 later inspires similar movements in Britain, Belarus, and China.

December 1979. Soviet troops invade Afghanistan.

1973. A US-backed military coup in Chile ousts the socialist government of Salvador Allende. The new regime of General Augusto Pinochet deals harshly with its foes: 1,200–3,200 people are killed, up to 80,000 were imprisoned, and up to 30,000 are tortured.

July 3, 1973-August 1, 1975. Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (Helsinki Accords). The talks are held at the suggestion of the socialist Warsaw Pact countries. All European states (with the exception of Albania) take part in

the talks, along with the US and Canada. The conference's final "Declaration on Principles Guiding Relations between Participating States" contains ten basic points, including "refraining from the threat or use of force," "inviolability of frontiers," "non-intervention in internal affairs," "respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief," and "equal rights and self-determination of peoples." The accords become the basis for the struggle mounted by Soviet dissidents to force their country's government to honor its commitment to human rights.

1974. The US Congress passes the so-called Jackson-Vanik amendment, intended to affect U.S. trade relations with countries with non-market economies that restrict freedom of emigration and other human rights. From 1975, more than 500,000 refugees, many of them Jews from the former Soviet Union, resettle in the United States. An estimated one million Soviet Jews immigrate to Israel during this same period.

1974. The Carnation Revolution in Portugal. Officers from the Armed Forces Movement, many of whom hold socialist views, oust the country's fascist dictatorship.

September 9, 1976. Mao Zedong dies.

1977. Dissident Venice Biennale. The most significant contemporary art forum is for the first time devoted to unofficial and banned art from Eastern Europe and the USSR. Many of the invited artists are pressured into refusing to participate in the biennale.

April 1978. The Saur Revolution in Afghanistan. The pro-Soviet People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan, led by Nur Muhammad Taraki, takes power. The new government begins rapid modernization of the country. It also engages in wide-scale repressions that provoke armed resistance by the mujahideen, defenders of the Muslim faith.

December 1978. "To get rich is glorious." Under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping, China launches a program of wide-ranging economic reforms.

1978. The USSR passes the US and Saudi Arabia to become the world's largest oil producer, pumping about 11 million

barrels a day. A third of this oil is exported, mainly to capitalist countries.

July 1979. The socialist Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) overthrows the regime of dictator Anastasio Somoza in Nicaragua. The so-called contras – right-wing rebel groups who receive heavy material and political backing from the US – emerge almost immediately to undermine the new government.

The hatred that was elicited by the Sandinistas for trying to direct resources to the poor (and even succeeding at it) was truly wondrous to behold. Just about all US policymakers shared it, and it reached virtual frenzy. [...] A State Department insider boasted that we would “turn Nicaragua into the Albania of Central America” – that is, poor, isolated and politically radical – so that the Sandinista dream of creating a new, more exemplary political model for Latin America would be in ruins. (Noam Chomsky, What Uncle Sam Really Wants, 1992)



The 1980s

1980. Boycott of the Moscow Summer Olympics. Athletes from 64 countries boycott the games in protest of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.

1980. The Solidarity trade union is founded in Poland. Solidarity makes both economic and political demands. The trade union includes people representing a variety of political views, from nationalists to advocates of socialist self-management.

1981. A military coup in Poland. The country's new leader, General Wojciech Jaruzelski, bans the Solidarity trade union movement and introduces martial law.

During the Eleventh Five-Year Plan (**1981-1985**), the USSR imports 42 million tons of grain annually, almost twice as much as during the Tenth Five-Year Plan and three times as much as during the Ninth Five-Year Plan (1971-75). The bulk of this grain is sold by the west.

1982. Soviet General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev dies. He ruled the Soviet Union for 18 years.

1983. A wave of product rationing begins in the Soviet Union.

1984. The Los Angeles Summer Olympics boycott involves 14 Eastern Bloc countries and allies, led by the Soviet Union.

1985. Mikhail Gorbachev is appointed General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party.

1985. START (Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty) talks begin between the Soviet Union and the US. The Soviet Union declares peacemaking, disarmament, and dialogue with the west the priorities of its foreign policy.

1986. Gorbachev formulates the new Party line: perestroika, democratization, and glasnost. He declares: The expansion of glasnost [openness] is a fundamentally important issue for us. It is a political issue. Without glasnost there can be no democratism, political creativity on the part of the masses, and their participation in governance.

April 26, 1986. An explosion at the Chernobyl nuclear plant in the Soviet Union sparks a massive environmental catastrophe and becomes a symbol of the era.

1986. Soviet émigré filmmaker Andrei Tarkovsky dies in Paris. Previously banned, the films he made while abroad are shown for the first time in the Soviet Union.

1987. The 17th Youth Exhibition in Moscow, an official event, presents the works of conceptualists and other unofficial artists to the greater public for the first time.

May 1987. Pamyat, a Russian ultranationalist anti-Semitic organization, holds its first (unauthorized) demonstration in Moscow.

1987. Joseph Brodsky is awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature. This event leads to a lifting of the ban on publication of his poems in Russia as well as the publication of a huge number of works by other émigré writers.

1987. The film ASSA, the first depiction of the alternative “anti-Soviet” bohemian community, is released. The final scene shows the Leningrad band Kino performing the song “We Want Change!” The song becomes the era’s anthem.

March 25, 1988. A candlelight demonstration in Bratislava is the first mass anti-communist demonstration of the eighties in Czechoslovakia.

May 1988. Pasternak’s Doctor Zhivago is published for the first time in the Soviet Union.

1988. Crisis erupts in Nagorno-Karabakh, an Armenian enclave formally part of Soviet Azerbaijan. Many Armenians inside and outside the enclave demand its “reunification” with Armenia. In response, Azeris carry out a pogrom against Armenians in the town of Sumgait, which is the first incident of massive ethnic violence in recent Soviet history. Demonstrations and riots break out in both republics, and thousands of refugees on both sides flee their homes. This is the first sign of the Soviet Union’s imminent collapse.

September 4, 1988. Serbs and Montenegrins demonstrate in Yugoslavia, demanding the declaration of a state of emergency in Kosovo to protect residents from ethnic Albanian separatists.

Spring-Summer 1988. A wave of strikes and demonstrations in Poland forces the Jaruzelski government to enter into negotiations with the Solidarity movement and other opposition groups.

1988. Most Soviet cities are hit by severe food shortages.

November 29, 1988. Soviet authorities cease jamming broadcasts of Radio Liberty and Radio Free Europe.

The 1980s “oil glut” causes the price of oil to fall to below \$10 per barrel in 1986, from a previous peak of \$35 per barrel in 1980. (In today’s terms, this represents a fall from \$93 per barrel to \$20.)

In its **June/July 1981** issue, The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists reports that, despite claims made by US leaders, NATO consistently outspent the Warsaw Pact militarily throughout the 1970s.

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* **PERESTROIKA CHRONICLES**, 2008, A film by **Dmitry Vilensky** Music: **Mikhail Krutik**
The film is a montage of documentary footage taken at different demonstrations during perestroika (1987-1991) in Leningrad. The 16mm footage was generously provided by the Saint Petersburg Studio of Documentary Films and digitalized for the first time especially for this film. Special thanks to all the cameramen who preserved these unique historical moments, and to Sergey Gelfer, the outstanding custodian of these precious archives.

March 26. The first free, contested parliamentary elections in Soviet history. Opposition candidates elected to the Congress of People's Deputies include Boris Yeltsin and Andrei Sakharov.

April 1. The Federation of Socialist Trade Unions of the USSR (SOTSPROF), an initially left-leaning trade union association, is founded. It is intended as an alternative to the official All-Union Central Council of Trade Unions (VTsSPS).

April 21. Protests on Tiananmen Square in Beijing. On the eve of Chinese reformist leader Hu Yaobang's funeral, 100,000 students march on the square. Protests continue there and in other parts of the country until June 4, when the army moves into the square to restore order. Hundreds of protestors are killed in the ensuing violence around the city.

June. The Solidarity trade union movement takes part in parliamentary elections in Poland, winning 35% of the seats in the Sejm and 99 of the 100 seats in the Senate. In September 1989, the country's first post-war non-communist government, headed by Solidarity leader Tadeusz Mazowiecki, is formed. It abolishes state control of food prices, leading to price increases of over 500%.

June 13. In Bonn, Mikhail Gorbachev and West German chancellor Helmut Kohl sign a document acknowledging the right of the Eastern European states to political self-determination.

June 16. 250,000 people in Budapest attend the reinterment of Imre Nagy, the Hungarian prime minister who was executed in 1958 for his role in the 1956 Hungarian Revolution.

July 11. Miners in the Kuznetsk Basin (Western Siberia) go out on strike. The strikes spread to the entire country. These are the first large-scale strikes in the Soviet Union.

August 23. The "Baltic Way" protest. Around two million people in Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia form a 600-kilometer-long human chain to mark the 50th anniversary of signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union.

October 25. The “Sinatra Doctrine” – a rejection of the previous Brezhnev Doctrine (under which the Warsaw Pact accorded itself the right to intervene militarily in the internal affairs of other member countries and allies) – is the new Soviet foreign policy. Soviet Foreign Ministry spokesman Gennady Gerasimov coins the term during an interview on Good Morning America:

We now have the Frank Sinatra doctrine. He has a song, I Did It My Way. So every country decides on its own which road to take.

November 9. Fall of the Berlin Wall. The border between East and West Germany is opened.

November 17. The Velvet Revolution begins in Czechoslovakia. A peaceful student demonstration in Prague is dispersed by police. This sets off a wave of mass protests that by November 20 grows to an estimated half-million in Prague alone. On December 29, dissident playwright, essayist, and activist Václav Havel is elected president by a unanimous vote of the Federal Assembly.

December 14. Andrei Sakharov dies in Moscow.

December 17. Revolution in Romania. Soldiers fire on demonstrators in Timișoara, apparently on orders from President Nicolae Ceaușescu. A few days later, mass protests erupt in Bucharest during a public speech by Ceaușescu. He flees the capital, but local police in the town of Târgoviște soon arrest him and his wife Elena. On **December 25**, they are sentenced to death by a military tribunal and executed on the spot.



January. Gorbachev's visit to Vilnius sparks a 250,000-strong demonstration by supporters of the Lithuanian independence movement.

January 12. The Communist Party is banned in Romania. It is the first Warsaw Pact country to take this step.

January 19-20. "Black January" in Baku. A state of emergency is declared in Baku, the capital of Soviet Azerbaijan. Soviet troops are brought in to prevent ethnic cleansing of Armenians by Azeris. During three days of street fighting more than 130 people are killed and 700 wounded.

Proclaiming the state of emergency in Baku and sending army to the city was the biggest mistake of my political life. (Mikhail Gorbachev, from a speech in Istanbul, April 27, 1995)

January 28. The Polish United Workers' Party is dissolved.

January 31. The first McDonald's in the Soviet Union opens in downtown Moscow.

February 7. The Communist monopoly on political power in the Soviet Union is abolished. The CPSU Central Committee votes to rescind Article 6 of the Soviet Constitution, which established the "leading role of the CPSU."

March 11. Soviet army divisions begin to withdraw from Hungary.

March 11. Lithuania declares independence. The Supreme Soviet of the Lithuanian SSR changes its name to the Supreme Council of the Republic of Lithuania and formally declares the country's independence from the Soviet Union. Moscow responds by initiating an economic blockade and sending in tank units "to secure the rights of ethnic Russians."

May-September. Young unofficial artists represent the Soviet Union at the Venice Biennale.

May 29. Boris Yeltsin is elected chairman of the Supreme Soviet of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR).

June 4-6. The Osh Riots, ethnic clashes between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in the Kyrgyz city of Osh. According to official figures, 300 people are killed, but unofficial sources estimate the number of deaths as many times higher.

June 12. A new Soviet law forbidding censorship and guaranteeing freedom for the mass media is passed.

August 13. Gorbachev signs a decree formally exonerating all the victims of Stalin's repressions.

August 15. Gorbachev signs a decree restoring the citizenship of a number of exiled Soviet dissidents, writers, and artists, including Alexander Solzhenitsyn.

August 15. Viktor Tsoi, lead singer for the band Kino and the embodiment of freedom for millions of young people throughout the Soviet Union, dies in a car crash at the age of 28.

October 3. East and West Germany are reunited in a single Federal German Republic.

October 16. Mikhail Gorbachev is awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

October 24. Operation Gladio. In testimony before an Italian parliamentary committee investigating terrorism, Prime Minister Giulio Andreotti reveals the existence of a secret army, codenamed Operation Gladio, which was set up in the fifties as part of a NATO network of "stay-behind" armies in Western European countries in case of an invasion by the Warsaw Pact. Investigations into right-wing terrorist bombings that occurred in Italy during the so-called Years of Lead (late sixties-early eighties) reveal that many were organized by Gladio operatives with links to US intelligence.

They interfered to prevent the Communist Party from achieving power by democratic means. The communist threat no longer exists and it would be appropriate if the Americans themselves helped us to clarify what happened in the past. During the Cold War the east was under communist domination, but the west too had become, in a certain sense, an American colony. (Valter Bielli, Italian MP)

November 2. Conflict in Transnistria. Armed clashes take place between Moldovan police and Transnistrian separatists in Dubăsari. The majority of Transnistrians are Russian speakers.

November 14. The number of unemployed in the Soviet Union is around two million. This is the country's first official report of unemployment.

December 9. Solidarity leader Lech Wałęsa wins the Polish presidential elections.

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**PARTISAN
SONGSPIEL:
A BELGRADE
STORY**, 2009,
Produced by:
Vladan Jeremić,
Rena Rädle,
Dmitry Vilensky,
and Olga Egorova
(director)
Music: **Mikhail
Krutik**

Costume Design:
Natalya Pershina
(Gluklya)

Choreography:
Nina Gasteva

The film presents an analysis of a concrete situation: it begins with a representation of the forced evictions of the Roma people who inhabit the shantytown of Belleville, in preparation for the Belgrade 2009 Summer Universiade. It also contains a more universal political message about the conditions of post-socialist society, with its gross inequality, civil wars, corruption, and brutality.



January 6. The South Ossetia War (1991-1992) begins.

Georgian interior ministry troops enter Tskhinvali, the South Ossetian capital. Armed clashes between the Georgian troops and South Ossetian militias occur. The Georgians are forced to retreat from the city on January 26: Georgia has practically lost control of the province.

January 13, 1991. Soviet troops and counter terrorist units storm the TV tower in Vilnius. 13 unarmed civilians are killed during the siege and hundreds more are injured. Loudspeakers on Soviet tanks broadcast the following message during the attack:

*Brother Lithuanians! The nationalist and separatist government which confronted the people has been overthrown!
Go [home] to your parents and children!*

January 13. At a meeting in Tallinn, RSFSR Supreme Soviet chair Boris Yeltsin and leaders of the three Baltic republics sign an agreement mutually recognizing each other's sovereignty and establishing international relationships amongst the four countries.

January 21. Czechoslovakia becomes a member of the Council of Europe.

March 17. Union-wide referendum on preservation of the USSR. 76.4% of voters say yes to Gorbachev's proposal to retain the Soviet Union as a renewed federation of equal sovereign republics in which the rights and freedoms of any individual of any nationality will be fully guaranteed. The vote is boycotted by authorities in Armenia, Georgia, the Baltic republics, and Moldova, but produces an 80% voter turnout in the other nine Soviet republics.

May 20. The Soviet Union passes a law allowing free travel out of the country.

June 12. Boris Yeltsin is elected the first president of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic with 57% of the popular vote.

June 25. Slovenia and Croatia declare independence. This is followed by an attempt to block Yugoslav People's Army (JNA) soldiers in their barracks in Slovenian and Croatian cities. The Yugoslavian presidency sends JNA units to occupy the border and break the blockade. A conflict between the JNA and the Slovenian Territorial Defense, the so-called Ten-Day War, ensues. Several dozens of people are killed, most of them JNA soldiers.

July 1. The Soviet Union passes a law "On the Basic Principles of De-Nationalization and Privatization of Enterprises."

July 1. The Warsaw Pact is officially dissolved at a meeting in Prague. At a summit meeting the same month, George Bush and Mikhail Gorbachev announce a Soviet-American strategic partnership.

Gorbachev later claims he consented to the reunification of Germany on the condition that NATO would not expand into Eastern Europe. Western leaders deny that they made this promise.

Fourth NATO enlargement (March 12, 1999): Poland, Hungary, Czech Republic

Fifth NATO enlargement (March 29, 2004): Bulgaria, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia

Sixth NATO enlargement (April 1, 2009): Albania, Croatia
Fifth EU enlargement (May 1, 2004): Malta, Cyprus, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia, Hungary

Sixth EU enlargement (May 1, 2007): Bulgaria, Romania

August 20-21. August coup d'état against Gorbachev. Hardliners attempt a coup d'état against reform policies while the Soviet president is on vacation in the Crimea. The conspirators declare a state of emergency and send tank divisions into Moscow.

Gorbachev demands that a session of the Congress of People's Deputies be called. Massive popular resistance against the coup in Moscow and elsewhere leads to troops and army commanders refusing to fire on protesters. During street skirmishes in Moscow, only three protesters are killed. Yeltsin, who leads the resistance in Moscow, emerges victorious after the coup fails.

August 29. The USSR Supreme Soviet bans the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

September 6. Armed militants of the National Congress

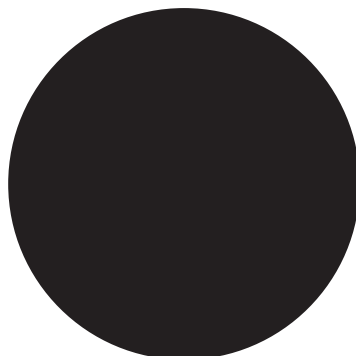
of the Chechen People, led by Soviet air force general Dzhokhar Dudayev, storm the Chechen-Ingush ASSR Supreme Soviet in Grozny, declaring it dissolved. In late October, Dudayev is elected president of the Chechen Republic, and a few days later he declares the republic's independence from Russia. Moscow's bungled attempts to stop the breakaway republic – including half-hearted military intervention – only aggravate the situation. The ensuing chaos, economic crisis, and threats and physical violence against them force the republic's non-Chechen, Russian-speaking population, concentrated in Grozny, to exit the country in the tens of thousands over the next three years leading up to the First Chechen War (December 1994-August 1996).

November 18. JNA units, supported by Serbian paramilitary forces, occupy Vukovar (Croatia) after an 82-day siege. The city is completely destroyed; the dead, wounded, and ethnically cleansed number in the thousands. The Vukovar Hospital Massacre – the first major war crime during the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia – occurs on November 21:

December 1. Ukrainian independence referendum. With a turnout of 84%, 90% of voters say yes to independence.

December 8. The Belavezha Accords. The leaders of Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus sign an agreement declaring the Soviet Union dissolved and replacing it with the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). Gorbachev calls this an unconstitutional coup.

December 26. The Soviet Union ceases to exist. The dissolution of the Soviet Union is officially declared at the final session of the USSR Supreme Soviet.



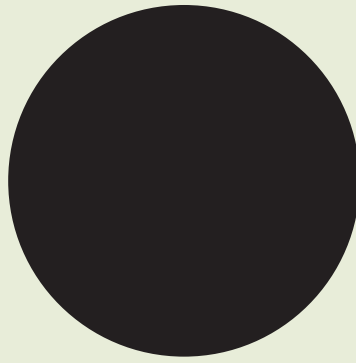
IT WAS THIS WILL TO MODERNIZE AND UNIFY
THE SPECTACLE, WHICH IS TIED TO ALL THE
OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIMPLIFICATION
OF SOCIETY, THAT IN 1989 LED THE RUSSIAN
BUREAUCRACY, AS IF IT WERE A SINGLE PERSON,
TO SUDDENLY CONVERT TO THE CURRENT
IDEOLOGY OF DEMOCRACY: THAT IS TO SAY,
THE DICTATORIAL LIBERTY OF THE MARKET,
TEMPERED BY THE RECOGNITION OF THE
RIGHTS OF THE SPECTATOR.

[...]

IN 1991, THE FIRST EFFECTS OF THIS
MODERNIZATION APPEARED WITH THE
COMPLETE DISSOLUTION OF RUSSIA. HERE THE
DISASTROUS RESULTS OF THE
GENERAL EVOLUTION OF THE ECONOMY
APPEAR EVEN MORE FRANKLY THAN IN THE
WEST. DISORDER IS ONLY THE CONSEQUENCE.
EVERYWHERE IS POSED THE SAME REDOUBTABLE
QUESTION THAT HAS HAUNTED THE WORLD
FOR THE LAST TWO CENTURIES: HOW TO
MAKE THE POOR WORK, WHERE ILLUSION HAS
PROVED DISAPPOINTING AND FORCE HAS BEEN
DEFEATED?

GUY-ERNEST DEBORD





February 1988. Pogrom in Sumgait, Azerbaijan.

Gangs, ranging in size from about a dozen to more than fifty, roamed around, smashing windows, burning cars, but above all looking for Armenians to attack. Several blocks of Sumgait turned into a war zone. [...] Ordinary inhabitants were terrified. Natevan Tagieva, a doctor's wife, related how she had come back to the city from her dacha to find the mob in complete control of the streets: "When I saw the crowd I realized that the syndrome of the crowd really does exist. You look at their eyes and you see that they are absolutely switched off from everything, like zombies." [...] The roving gangs committed acts of horrific savagery. Several victims were so badly mutilated by axes that their bodies could not be identified. Women were stripped naked and set on fire. Several were raped repeatedly. (Thomas de Waal, Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan through Peace and War)

April 21–June 5, 1989. Protests on Tiananmen Square in Beijing.

Estimates of deaths:

10,000 (including soldiers) – Soviet intelligence

7,000 – NATO intelligence

4,000–6,000 – Edward Timperlake, author of Red Dragon Rising

Over 3,700 – PLA defector

2,600 – Chinese Red Cross

Closer to 1,000 – Amnesty International

300–1,000 – a Western diplomat who compiled estimates

400–800 – Nicholas Kristof, New York Times

180–500 – declassified NSA document

241 (including soldiers) – Chinese government

186 – Prof. Ding Zilin, Tiananmen Mothers pressure group

December 1989. Revolution in Romania.

“I could hear everything through the door,” Mr. Cirlan said, “and I knew then that there was something wrong with the trial. Elena was complaining, refusing to recognise the court. The so-called defence lawyers were acting like prosecutors. But I was a soldier obeying orders. It was only later that I realised what a mockery it all was.” The verdict was read out after a few hours. The Ceauşescus were sentenced to death. [...] “Take them to the wall,” General Stanculescu said. “First him, then her.” But the Ceauşescus did not know what was happening until they were led past the helicopters to an outbuilding. “He looked in my eyes and realised that he was going to die now, not at some time in the future, and he started to cry,” Mr Cirlan said. “It was very important to me, that moment. I still have nightmares about it. That look.” (The Times, December 24, 2009)

January 19-20. “Black January” in Baku.

We took cover behind some trees. At that moment four young Azeris ran past. Three of them were immediately gunned down by machine-gun fire. The fourth man fell, tried to stand up, and then began crawling. An armored personnel carrier stopped beside him, and two men in helmets and camouflage uniforms jumped out of it. One of them stabbed the young wounded man in the chest with the bayonet on his automatic rifle. And then he placed the gun on the young man’s chest. They photographed this (using a flash), grabbed the gun, and staggered back to their vehicle. While all this was happening, we held Sara’s mouth shut so she wouldn’t scream. Later there were pictures like this in the newspapers: we were meant to think that the Azeris had been armed. (Anatoly Fedorenko, engineer from Zaporozhets, Ukraine)

January 13, 1991. Soviet Troops Storm TV Tower in Vilnius.

A sound truck moved through the city telling residents that power was being assumed by the National Committee for Salvation, a group formed by the small pro-Soviet faction of the Lithuanian Communist Party, three days ago. “Lithuanians, do not resist,» the military said. “Your government has deceived you. Go home to your families and children.” Many of the Lithuanians refused to retreat under the attacks and sporadic gunfire continued for at least 90 minutes. (BBC News, “1991: Bloodshed at Lithuanian TV station”)

November 21, 1991. The Vukovar Hospital Massacre.

On or about November 21, 1991, Serb forces removed approximately 255 Croats and other non-Serbs from Vukovar Hospital in the aftermath of the Serb take-over of the city. The victims were transported to the Ovcara farm located about 5 kilometers south of Vukovar. There, members of the Serb forces beat and tortured the victims for hours. During the evening of November 21, 1991, the soldiers transported the victims in groups of 10-20 to a remote execution site between the Ovcara farm and Grabovo, where they shot and killed them. Their bodies were buried in a mass grave. (Text of indictment, International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia)

May 1987. Pamyat, a Russian ultranationalist anti-Semitic organization, holds its first (unauthorized) demonstration in Moscow.

Countrymen! It's time to live the Russian way! Join the real Russian cause! [...] We are Russians! What a joy it is! We are Russians! God is with us! Pray to God: our victory comes from Him! God leads us: He is our general! For a strong state with a Russian heart! For Holy Russia! For a strong government with a Russian heart! For Holy Russia! (Pamyat, "Time to Live the Russian Way: An Appeal to the Peoples of Russia")

April 26, 1986. Explosion at the Chernobyl nuclear plant.

The nervous and physical tension people were experiencing went off the scale along with the radiation. Since we weren't getting even the slightest bit of reliable information, we couldn't take any decisive measures. It was incredibly depressing. And then, almost a week after the explosion, on May 1, we got orders to evacuate children, pregnant women, and patients from the 30-kilometer zone. The columns of buses from our motor depot, which had been waiting and ready the whole time, set off to the locales. (Dmitry Demichev, First Secretary, Khoyniki District Party Committee, Belarus)

July 1989. Miners in the Kuznetsk Basin go on strike.

July 14, 1989.

...Another woman barges up to the microphone. She screams that anyone can buy sausage: yesterday she bought a three-kilo round of luncheon sausage without any problem. "Now we're going to have buy sausage on coupons for the rest of our lives. I demand that coupons for sausage be abolished and that we vote on this." The moderator of the demonstration puts her demand up for a vote. Around five thousand people vote to abolish coupons for sausage. Around three hundred vote against abolishing the coupons. (Teimuraz Avaliani, chairman of the Kuznetsk Basin Strike Committee, July 17, 1989–January 27, 1990)

A Repeat of the Osh Riots Twenty Years Later (2010)

A woman's body was burning in the middle of the market. A rib protruded from the charred flesh, and a coal-black leg stuck up absurdly. The light breeze carried nauseating clouds of smoke over the trading stalls. "Those animals doused a Kyrgyz woman with gasoline and burned her," said Bakhyt, turning in the direction of the Uzbek neighborhoods. Half an hour later, when I managed to get into that part of town, the locals asked if I had seen the body of the Uzbek woman burning at the market.

As is usually the case in such conflicts, the explanations offered by the various parties are primitively simple. If you listen to the Kyrgyz, it was Uzbeks armed to the teeth who started the whole thing: they had looted, killed, raped, and cut off women's breasts. The Uzbeks say exactly the same thing, but about the Kyrgyz. The explanation offered by the authorities is not much more complicated: it is all a conspiracy by a "third force." (Yuri Shvetsov, *Russkii Newsweek*, June 11, 2010)

Chto Delat

THE RISE AND FALL OF SOCIALISM, 1945-1991

project realized in frameworks of the
show OSTALGIA on display
in the NEW MUSEUM, NEW YORK
July 13, 2011 - September 25, 2011



to watch as a slide show

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