

# **The London School of Economics and Political Science**

The Extremes it Takes to Survive: Tajikistan and the Collapse  
of the Soviet Union, 1985-1992

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A thesis submitted to the Department of International History  
of the London School of Economics and Political Science for  
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## **Declaration**

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## **Abstract**

This dissertation reevaluates the collapse of the USSR and the reform project of “perestroika” that preceded it from the perspective of Tajikistan. As one of the most peripheral republics in the Soviet Union, Tajikistan found its economy and society shaken to the core by the economic and political reforms passed between 1985 and 1991. Tracking the development of Soviet reform legislation in Moscow and its implementation in Tajikistan, this dissertation shows how perestroika was intimately linked to the breakdown of economic order and social ties that occurred during the final years of the USSR. Rejecting narratives focused on rising nationalism and long-suppressed regional frustrations, this dissertation outlines how Moscow-designed marketizing reforms were the main driver of strife in the Tajik SSR. As the economy disintegrated, so did the fabric of society: by February 1990 Tajikistan’s capital was subsumed by riot, and by May 1992 the entire country was aflame with civil war.

By reorienting the history of the Soviet collapse to a peripheral republic that was engulfed by economic disorder and sectarian war, moreover, this dissertation problematizes the established historical discourse about the end of the USSR. Rather than the wave of democratization and free speech seen from the perspective of Moscow and Eastern Europe, for many millions of Soviet citizens the collapse of the USSR was a deeply frightening and violent event. Crime rates rose across the former USSR; local conflicts sprung up; wars flared in more than one republic. Much more than an outlier, Tajikistan was simply one extreme along this spectrum, and its experience of economic collapse leading to civil war complicates simple arguments about how glasnost led to the peaceful end of the USSR. This dissertation demonstrates that economics remained at the heart of the Soviet collapse and the violence that followed.

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## Note on Spelling and Names

Names and foreign words in this dissertation are transliterated from (primarily) two languages: Russian and Tajik, both of which are written in Cyrillic characters. In the case of Russian words and names, the standard US Library of Congress transliteration scheme is used, with the exception of proper names with established English spellings (for example “Yeltsin,” not “El’tsin”). For Tajik, which lacks an agreed upon standard for transliteration into Latin characters, a slightly modified version of the Library of Congress scheme has been chosen to balance between the phonetics of the language and ease of reading in English. For those characters in Tajik not covered by the Library of Congress Russian standard, the following table has been employed:

Cyrillic	Latin
Ғ	gh
Ӣ	y
Қ	q
Ӯ	u
Ҳ	h
Ҷ	j
Ъ	"

The spellings of toponyms and proper names have also changed extensively in Tajikistan since the collapse of the USSR. For example, the southern Tajik city of Kulyab has since 1991 become “Kulob,” and many politicians and others have dropped the Soviet –ov ending from their last names (“Usmonov,” for example, becoming “Usmon”). For the sake of consistency, this dissertation has chosen to use the place and proper names employed by individuals and government bodies during the period of study. For this reason the city in the south of Tajikistan is consistently spelled “Kulyab” in the dissertation, and names are listed as per their contemporary, rather than later, spelling. Where multiple versions of one name are contemporaneously used, such as in the case of the opposition politician Tohir Abdujabbor, who during perestroika interchangeably signed his last name “Abdujabbor,” “Abdujabborov,” and “Abdudzhabborov,” the most common usage has been chosen as the standard for this dissertation.



## List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

**AvtoVAZ** – Volga Automobile Factory  
**CC CPSU** – Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union  
**CIA** – Central Intelligence Agency of the United States  
**CIS** – Commonwealth of Independent States  
**CPSU** – Communist Party of the Soviet Union  
**CPT** – Communist Party of Tajikistan  
**DPT** – Democratic Party of Tajikistan  
**GBAO** – Gorno-Badakhson Autonomous Oblast  
**GDP** – Gross Domestic Product  
**Genprokuratura** – General Prosecutor’s Office  
**Glavlit** – Central Administration for the Protection of State Secrets in Publication  
**GNP** – Gross National Product  
**Gosagroprom** - State Agricultural-Industrial Committee  
**Goskomstat** – State Statistics Committee  
**Goskomtrud** – State Labor Committee  
**Goskomtsen** – State Price Committee  
**Gosplan** – State Planning Committee  
**Gospriemka** – State Approval standards  
**Gossnab** – State Provisioning Committee  
**Goszakaz** – State Orders  
**IMF** – International Monetary Fund  
**KGB** – Committee for State Security  
**Khozraschet** – Self-Financing  
**KNB** – Committee for National Security  
**Kolkhoz** – Collective Farm  
**IEiOPP** - Institute of Economics and Organization of Industrial Production  
**IRPT** – Islamic Revival Party of Tajikistan  
**MIA** – Ministry of Internal Affairs  
**Minsredmash** – Ministry of Medium Engineering  
**NIP** – National Income Produced  
**NIU** – National Income Used  
**NMP** – National Material Product  
**NPO** - Scientific-Productive Association  
**Orgbiuro** – Organizational Bureau of the CC CPSU  
**Politburo** – Political Bureau of the CC CPSU; its highest body  
**RSFSR** – Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic  
**SADUM** – Religious Administration of Muslims of Central Asia and Kazakhstan  
**SOFE** - System of Optimally Functioning Socialist Economy  
**SOPS** – Council for the Study of Productive Powers of the USSR’s Gosplan  
**Sovkhoz** – State Farm  
**Tajik SSR** – Tajik Soviet Socialist Republic  
**TseMI** - Central Mathematical Economics Institute  
**TsSU** – Central Statistics Administration  
**Uralmash** – Urals Machinery Factory  
**USSR** – Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

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## **Chapter One**

### **Introduction**

This is not a complicated story. At least, it is not as complicated a story as it has often been rendered. In 1985, Mikhail Gorbachev assumed the leadership of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). Still the second of the world's two superpowers, the Soviet Union of which Gorbachev took leadership was facing slow but steady declines in economic growth rates and an increasingly ambivalent populace. Faith in the Soviet project was ebbing, and Gorbachev set about to reform the system economically and politically. Initially these reforms were focused on the economy: Gorbachev believed that by increasing incentives for Soviet enterprises and individuals to pursue market-like competitive behavior both the production of consumer goods and the overall economy would increase significantly. When his reforms failed bring about the desired outcomes, and instead led to dissatisfaction within the CPSU, Gorbachev turned his attention to the Party, initiating reforms that ultimately broke the Communist Party's 70-year grip on power. Together, the economic and political reforms led the Soviet economy to decline precipitously and Soviet society to fracture. By the end of 1991 the entire USSR had disintegrated, collapsing into 15 independent republics. Violence began to spark and fester around its edges, such as in Tajikistan, where a five-year civil war (1992-1997) would subsequently explode.

While this is something of an oversimplification, it remains a clear outline of the history of "perestroika," as Gorbachev's reforms and the period of his leadership have come to be known. In the years since 1991, however, this clarity has in many ways been lost. The link between Gorbachev's economic reforms and the immediate collapse of the Soviet economy has been questioned, and the decline of the Soviet economy has been characterized as "inevitable." Rather than see the political reforms of perestroika leading to social upheaval and societal collapse, many authors have sought the sources of Soviet collapse in earlier periods of history, whether the national delimitation of Soviet republics in the 1920s, the long "stagnation" of the Brezhnev era, or the overstretch of the USSR in the developing world. This has had the consequence of obscuring the period immediately prior to the Soviet collapse – that is, perestroika itself. As a result, Gorbachev's failed

attempt to reform the economy and polity of the USSR is judged not on its own terms and for the results, good and ill, that it brought about. Instead perestroika becomes a failed attempt to overcome the long-term baggage of Soviet history. In this reading of history, when the inexorable collapse came, it was at least a triumph for the West (and thus democracy and freedom), and a peaceful end to the era of superpower rivalry.

This narrative, however, obscures a great deal of what the collapse of the USSR meant for millions of its citizens. For a great many, this was the end of all things: the loss of employment, a regular income, and the basic ability to feed one's family. It also quickly became a period of extremes and violence, as economic downturn bled into social upheaval and disorder. This, moreover, is a story that the simpler narrative can tell. As more and more of the Soviet economy stopped functioning as the result of Gorbachev's reforms, Soviet citizens became increasingly frustrated with their standard of living. Political reforms subsequently opened up space for demonstrations and public protest, and across the USSR, groups came together to demand change. This was often interpreted by Gorbachev and those who supported him as demands for more reform, and in fact sometimes they were. But the impetus for these demands remained the disintegrating state of the Soviet economy and its underlying social fabric. As much as protests were against the old Soviet order, they were against the new reformed order as well.

This dissertation represents an attempt to return to a clearer narrative of perestroika and the collapse of the USSR. It does so, somewhat counterintuitively, by refocusing attention away from Moscow and towards the far periphery of the USSR in Dushanbe, Tajikistan. Rather than focus only on the processes by which reforms were developed and passed within a small circle of economists and politicians in Moscow, it also considers how these reforms were implemented on the ground far away. By investigating the practical implementation of reforms in Tajikistan, moreover, it demonstrates how the application of reform differed in many ways from both Moscow's initial intention and its later assumptions about how the reforms were being implemented.

Working with the case study of the Tajik Soviet Socialist Republic (Tajik SSR), this dissertation argues that the social disorder and violence that erupted around the margins of the USSR were directly linked to the period of reform that preceded them. Economic data from the Tajik SSR clearly shows that economic reforms were being applied as early as 1987, and that these reforms quickly led to a sharp downturn in production. At the same time, they allowed Soviet enterprises to slowly siphon off funds into the growing cooperative business sector, export painfully needed consumer goods, and make a very small number of nascent entrepreneurs very rich. The majority of the population, however, found over the same period that their earnings and chances of holding a job decreased while the cost of living and inflation increased. On this backdrop, Moscow continued to aggressively push for political reforms, which initially found little traction in Tajikistan. Once the economy had largely collapsed in 1990 and 1991, however, the CPSU's contradictory attack on its own legitimacy finally found a foothold, with new political parties, movements, and popular anger all gushing forth in a wave of unexpected and unchecked disorder and violence. This included riots in February 1990 and a final descent into civil war in April-May 1992. Much as elsewhere in the former USSR, perestroika found its final apogee not in peaceful slogans but in the crack of rifle shots.

x                      x  
x

This dissertation offers a challenge to much of the existing literature on both perestroika and the causes of the Tajik Civil War. Since the final collapse of the Soviet Union in December 1991, many academic and popular works have evaluated the causes and effects of its ultimate failure as a state. This has included a slate of new histories of the USSR from its inception to inglorious end over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The majority of post-collapse surveys of Soviet history have tended to treat perestroika and the end of the USSR as a natural – and perhaps inevitable – conclusion to a back-and-forth pull between authoritarianism and reform that ultimately exposed unsolvable flaws in the underlying Soviet bulwark.<sup>1</sup> This “structuralist” perspective has also found some reflection in the

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<sup>1</sup> Geoffrey Hosking, *A History of the Soviet Union, 1917-1991* (Glasgow: Fontana, 1992); Mary McAuley, *Soviet Politics: 1917-1991* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992); Martin McCauley, *The Rise and Fall of the Soviet Union* (London: Pearson Education, 2008); Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Soviet*

literature on the Soviet collapse itself. Especially in the years immediately following 1991, many works were written highlighting one or another “inherent” flaw in the Soviet system, whether the impossibility of sustaining a command economy,<sup>2</sup> the incoherence of reforming an autocratic political system,<sup>3</sup> or the incongruity of the USSR’s place in a democratizing (and increasingly marketized) world.<sup>4</sup> While these works dealt with the political and economic reforms implemented by Mikhail Gorbachev and the Soviet leadership in the late 1980s, they tended to view any particular changes as secondary to the underlying structural causes of the state’s collapse.

In subsequent years, however, this structuralist explanation of the Soviet collapse has been subject to two major lines of criticism. As Valerie Bunce has shown, for example, the structuralist argument is essentially underdetermined: the long and successful development of the USSR over the 20<sup>th</sup> century gives the lie to any claim about its “inherent” flaws.<sup>5</sup> Mark Beissinger, moreover, has effectively argued that claims about the “inevitability” of the Soviet collapse are not only teleological but also “meaningless, since any judgment concerning the inability of the Soviet state to survive cannot be extracted from the very events which caused the Soviet state to disintegrate in the first place.”<sup>6</sup> While structural flaws in the Soviet state can clearly be tracked over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, assuming their central place in the collapse of that state, as these and other critics have pointed out, makes an

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*Experiment: Russia, the USSR, and the Successor States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); Orlando Figes, *Revolutionary Russia: 1891-1991* (Metropolitan: London, 2014). Some post-Soviet perspectives include: Rudol’f Pikhoia, *Sovetskii soiuz – istoriia vlasti, 1945-1991* (Moscow: Nauchnaia kniga, 2000); Dmitrii Travin, *Ocherki noveishei istorii Rossii, kniga pervaiia, 1985-1991* (St. Petersburg: Norma, 2010); Sergei Kara-Murza, *Sovetskaia tsivilizatsiia: Ot nachala do nashikh dnei* (Moscow: Eksmo, 2008).

<sup>2</sup> G.I. Khanin, *Dinamika ekonomicheskogo razvitiia SSSR* (Novosibirsk: Nauka, 1991); David Pryce-Jones, *The War that Never Was: The Fall of the Soviet Empire, 1985-1991* (London: Phoenix Giant, 1995); Andrzej Brzeski, “The End of Communist Economics,” in *The Collapse of Communism*, ed. Lee Edwards (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1999).

<sup>3</sup> Graeme Gill, *The Collapse of a Single-Party System: The Disintegration of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); D.A. Volkogonov, *Sem’ Vozhdei* (Moscow: Novosti, 1995), vol. 2, 282; Jack F. Matlock, *Autopsy on an Empire: The American Ambassador’s Account of the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (New York: Random House, 1995).

<sup>4</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991); Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: The Free Press, 1992); S. Shakhrai, “Tri kita dlia novoi Rossii,” *Nezavisimaia Gazeta*, March 05, 1994; A.S. Akhiezer, “Samobytnost’ Rossii kak nauchnaia problema,” *Otechestvennaia istoriia*, 1994.

<sup>5</sup> Valerie Bunce, *Subversive Institutions: The Design and the Destruction of Socialism and the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

<sup>6</sup> Mark Beissinger, *Nationalist Mobilization and the Collapse of the Soviet State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 5.

essentially circular argument in which the failure of the state proves itself – and the immediate determining causes of any collapse are left aside.

More contemporary research has considered the Soviet collapse within the context of perestroika and the consequences of its failed reforms. This has engendered a new standard narrative, whereby perestroika's political reforms – primarily "glasnost" (openness) and political freedoms – are taken to be the determinant cause of the Soviet collapse, insofar as they exposed or otherwise revealed the latent structural flaws in the Soviet system. The purest form of this argument (and also its most popular) has been presented, perhaps unsurprisingly, by journalists stationed in Moscow during the collapse of the USSR, who saw the slow disintegration of the former Union as the result of freedom of information simply overwhelming loyalty to the state.<sup>7</sup> More academic variations of this narrative can differ in terms of their particular focus – whether on the Communist Party's loss of internal authority and control;<sup>8</sup> the willingness of Soviet officials and bureaucrats to turn on the system that nurtured them;<sup>9</sup> the growth of "long simmering" nationalism and inter-ethnic conflict;<sup>10</sup> the national-republican structure of the USSR and its structural fostering of pro-independence movements;<sup>11</sup> or certain republics' drive for sovereignty<sup>12</sup> – but the crux remains the same. Perestroika and glasnost opened up an opportunity for free expression and political mobilization,

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<sup>7</sup> Scott Shane, *Dismantling Utopia: How Information Ended the Soviet Union* (Chicago: Ivan R Dee, 1994); David Remnick, *Lenin's Tomb: The Last Days of the Soviet Empire* (New York: Vintage, 1994).

<sup>8</sup> Martin Malia, "Leninist Endgame," *Daedalus*, 121, no. 2 (1992); Z.A. Stankevich, "Sootnoshenie natsional'nogo i politicheskogo faktorov," in *Tragediia velikoi derzhavoi: natsional'noi vopros i raspad Sovetskogo soiuza*, ed. G.N. Sevost'ianov (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo "Sotsial'no-politicheskaya mysl", 2005); Stephen Kotkin, *Armageddon Averted: The Soviet Collapse, 1970-2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Sydney Ploss, *The Roots of Perestroika: The Soviet Breakdown in Historical Context* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co, 2010).

<sup>9</sup> Stephen Handelman, *Comrade Criminal: the Theft of the Second Russian Revolution* (London: Michael Joseph, 1994), esp. 81-92; David M. Kotz and Fred Weir, *Revolution from above: The demise of the Soviet System* (London: Routledge, 1997); Stephen Solnick, *Stealing the State: Control and Collapse in Soviet Institutions* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998); Bunce, *Subversive Institutions*.

<sup>10</sup> Beissinger, *Nationalist Mobilization*; Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Revenge of the Past: Nationalism, Revolution, and the Collapse of the USSR* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993).

<sup>11</sup> Victor Zaslavsky, "Nationalism and Democratic Transition in Postcommunist Societies," *Daedalus*, 121, no. 2 (1992); Edward W. Walker, *Dissolution: Sovereignty and the Breakup of the Soviet Union* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. 2003).

<sup>12</sup> John B. Dunlop, *The Rise of Russia and the Fall of the Soviet Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); Kristian Gerner and Stefan Hudlund, *The Baltic States and the End of the Soviet Empire* (London: Routledge, 1993); Sergey Plokhyy, *The Last Empire: The Final Days of the Soviet Union* (New York: Basic Books, 2014).

which led to a collapse of centralized control and ultimately guaranteed the system's failure.

This body of literature has greatly expanded the study of perestroika, and it is inarguable that the USSR "spluttered in the face of freedom's light wind" as Soviet citizens began to mobilize as part of political, nationalist and other movements.<sup>13</sup> At the same time, however, this remains a partial explanation. As Mark Harrison has argued, "The actions of [Soviet] self-interested agents were critically important in tearing the state apart once the collapse had begun, but they do not explain why the collapse began."<sup>14</sup> To understand why the collapse began, then, it becomes necessary to identify more clearly what changed in the USSR immediately prior. To posit glasnost as the only causal mechanism leads back to structuralist territory: Soviet citizens' motivations are assumed to be static and inherently opposed to the Soviet state. When the USSR collapsed, it was not that anything had changed: instead it was only that people simply became capable of speaking their mind.

While it may be appealing to assume that all Soviet citizens were opposed to their authoritarian government, available evidence is in fact far more mixed. As this dissertation will show, many Soviet citizens, especially outside of Moscow, continued to strongly believe in the Soviet project well into the late 1980s. Glasnost-driven arguments, moreover, tend to overlook the fact that structurally a great deal did in fact change during perestroika, most especially in the Soviet economy. Building upon leading research into the economic history of the Gorbachev era, this dissertation helps to show how the economic reforms of perestroika ultimately broke the existing planned economy of the USSR.<sup>15</sup> By 1990 and 1991, changes in tax law and economic regulations, along with the legalization of private business, had effectively turned the Soviet economy upside down and left many millions of Soviet citizens without access to resources in the new system.

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<sup>13</sup> V.V. Sogrin, "Perestroika: itogy i uroki," *Obshchestvennye nauki i sovremennost'*, 16, no. 1 (1992), 136.

<sup>14</sup> Mark Harrison, "Are Command Economies Unstable? Why Did the Soviet Economy Collapse?" Paper to the second Oxford-Houston conference on "Initial Conditions and Russia's Transitional Economy," University of Houston, 2001, 6.

<sup>15</sup> See Yakov Feygin. "The Making of an Economics Internationale: The Internationalization of Soviet Economics, Interdependence and the Political Economy of Détente." Paper presented to the conference "Talking about economics in the socialist world," University of Geneva, 2015; R.G. Pikhov. "Pochemu raspal'sia Sovetskii soiuz?" in *Tragediia velikoi derzhavoi: natsional'noi vopros i raspad Sovetskogo soiuz*, ed. G.N. Sevost'ianov (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo "Sotsial'no-politicheskaia mysl", 2005).



When the light wind of freedom did blow through, it picked up the frustrations of those whose fortunes had just rapidly declined, and knocked down an economic edifice far weaker than it had been in 1985. Properly evaluating the development of popular anger and societal collapse during perestroika, this dissertation posits, demands moving outside of Moscow and the elite circles that developed reforms.<sup>16</sup> It just as equally requires an investigation of the ways in which reforms were both implemented and perceived on the ground by average Soviet citizens. One particularly illuminating environment for this investigation, this dissertation also argues, is the far Soviet periphery of Dushanbe, Tajikistan.

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Today, Tajikistan is a small landlocked nation located just to the north of Afghanistan. While bordering many countries, including Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and China, it remains largely cut off and inaccessible due to the high mountain ranges that occupy more than 90% of its territory. During the Soviet period, the Tajik SSR was at once one of the Union's most southern and least developed republics, often falling at the very bottom of Soviet socio-economic surveys together with Turkmenistan. Given its outlying status, it featured infrequently in both Sovietology and central Soviet policy analyses, a position it has retained in post-Soviet research. Like the rest of the Soviet republics in Central Asia, Tajikistan figures with rarity in the literature on the Soviet collapse, most frequently arising as the site of nationalist uprising or unrest.<sup>17</sup> Comment has been made at times about the inconsistency of nationalist movements in the region, or the states' "accidental" independence, acquired after large majorities of their populations voted to stay in the USSR in 1991 and the republican governments themselves made little move towards sovereignty until essentially forced to do

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<sup>16</sup> Moscow-based elites, including Gorbachev and his advisors, are central to many accounts of perestroika and the Soviet collapse; see *The Gorbachev Factor* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); Robert English, *Russia and the Idea of the West: Gorbachev, Intellectuals, and the End of the Cold War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000).

<sup>17</sup> For perfunctory references to the region, see: V.A. Tishkov, "Soiuz do i posle piati let perestroika," in *Natsional'nie protsessy v SSSR*, ed. M.N. Guboglo (Moscow: Nauka, 1991); Jack Snyder, "Introduction: Reconstructing politics amidst the wreckage of empire," in *Post-Soviet Political Order: Conflict and State Building*, eds. Barnett R. Rubin and Jack Snyder (London: Routledge, 1998); Leslie Holmes, "Perestroika: A Reassessment," *Europe-Asia Studies*, 65, no. 2 (2013).

so.<sup>18</sup> Historical surveys of Central Asian nations, for their part, tend to skim over the period of perestroika, focusing instead on the development of the region's Soviet institutions in the 1920s and 1930s and the later contradictions created by these structures.<sup>19</sup>

When the end of the USSR is dealt with directly in the region, moreover, the standard narrative of glasnost's "light wind of freedom" shaking down the curtains and exposing long dormant structural problems tends to be applied. This has led to historical and political science investigations into the structuralist causes of late-Soviet ethnic violence in the region, the influence of poorly designed and demarcated borders on post-Soviet interregional conflict,<sup>20</sup> and the causes of the Tajik civil war. Throughout the region, it is argued, Moscow's agenda of political reform led to increased dissatisfaction with the Soviet government, as forgotten feuds and old iniquities were remembered with renewed fervor.<sup>21</sup> Yet by simply extending the Moscow-centric narrative to Central Asia the actual content of perestroika in the region is left aside: little to no reference is made in the literature to the actual implementation of late-Soviet reforms or their impact on the Central Asian republics. Glasnost and its historical determinism are assumed without solid foundation.

By providing a grounded micro-history of the ways in which perestroika-era political and economic reforms were implemented and understood in the Tajik SSR, this dissertation challenges the assumed dominance of glasnost, pointing

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<sup>18</sup> Nazif Shahrani, "Central Asia and the Challenge of the Soviet Legacy," *Central Asian Survey*, 12, no. 2 (1993); Gregory Gleason, *The Central Asian States: Discovering Independence* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1997), 72-77.

<sup>19</sup> For some examples, see: Shoshanna Keller, *To Moscow, Not Mecca: The Soviet Campaign Against Islam in Central Asia, 1917-1941* (Westport: Praeger, 2001); Pauline Jones Luong, *Institutional Change and Political Continuity in Post-Soviet Central Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Francine Hirsch, "Toward an Empire of Nations: Border-making and the formation of Soviet national identities," *The Russian Review* 59, no. 1 (2005); Adrienne Edgar, *Tribal Nation: The Making of Soviet Turkmenistan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

<sup>20</sup> Rahim Masov, *Istoriia c grifom 'sovershenno sekretno'* (Dushanbe: Paivand:1995); Rajan Menon and Hendrick Spruyt, "Possibilities for Conflict in and Conflict Resolution in Post-Soviet Central Asia," in *Post-Soviet Political Order: Conflict and State Building*, eds. Barnett R. Rubin and Jack Snyder (London: Routledge, 1998).

<sup>21</sup> Yaacov Ro'i, "Central Asian Riots and Disturbances, 1989-1990: Causes and Context," *Central Asian Survey* 10, no. 3 (1991); Shirin Akiner, "Melting Pot, Salad Bowl – Cauldron? Manipulation of Ethnic and Religious Identities in Central Asia," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 20, no. 2 (1997); Ian Bremmer, "Post-Soviet nationalities theory: past, present, and future," in *New States, New Politics: Building the Post-Soviet Nations*, eds. Ian Bremmer and Ray Taras (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 9-12; John Glenn, *The Soviet Legacy in Central Asia* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1999).

instead to the central role of economic change behind much of the later social strife. In doing so, it also intends to complicate and problematize existing narratives about the causes and start of the Tajik Civil War (1992-1997). One of the longest and bloodiest conflicts to arise from the ashes of the USSR, the Tajik civil war is an obvious counterexample to the common account of the “bloodless” collapse of the USSR.<sup>22</sup> It also presents a counterfactual difficulty for the monolithic account of perestroika and glasnost’s development and application across the whole of the Soviet Union: if the same structures and reforms were applied across the USSR – or at least all of Central Asia – why did civil war arise in only Tajikistan? Since the end of the civil war in 1997 an increasing number of works have attempted to explain the Tajik counterfactual and its place along the spectrum of post-Soviet eventualities.

While subtle in its variation, the majority of this literature can be divided into three broad schools of thought. First are the French scholars Stephane Dudoignon and Olivier Roy and their supporters, who posit that the civil war started through a combination of regional animosity, frustration with Soviet development projects, and long-suppressed religious fervour. Following an earlier generation of French Sovietologists, including Helene Carrerre d’Encausse and Alexandre Benningson, this version of events argues that Tajiks, much like other Soviet muslims, were for generations waiting and hoping for the Soviet Union to collapse, retaining and strengthening their pre-Soviet identities behind a facade of Sovietness.<sup>23</sup> Once it was possible to shake off the Soviet yoke, Tajiks did so happily and violently, returning to their unforgotten conflicts and regional (or “clan-based”) loyalties of 70 years prior. Not only had the Soviet experiment failed, it had only made things worse by trying to encourage Sovietization, including through the forced migration of entire villages from mountainous to lowland regions. As Roy has written, “Collective transfers of populations of different origins within one same zone of development do not in fact lead to intermixing of peoples. They lead to identities becoming fixed in a communitarian mode.”<sup>24</sup> In Roy and others’ view, these

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<sup>22</sup> Cf. Kotkin, *Armageddon Averted*; Bunce, *Subversive Institutions*.

<sup>23</sup> Helene Carrere d’Encausse, *Decline of an Empire: The Soviet Socialist Republics in Revolt* (New York: Newsweek Books, 1979); Alexandre Benningsen and Marie Broxup, *The Islamic Threat to the Soviet State* (London: Croom Helm, 1983).

<sup>24</sup> Olivier Roy, *The New Central Asia: The Creation of Nations* (New York: IB Taurus, 2000), 95. For accounts supporting and drawing upon Roy, see Stephane A. Dudoignon with Sayyid Ahmad

relocations had entrenched intergroup violence in Tajik history; only the equivalent threat of state violence had kept Tajiks from each others' throats.

In contrast to this argument, which traces the roots of the Tajik Civil War to the structure of the USSR and unresolved issues dating back to the 1920s, a second group of authors have focused their attention on the immediate outbreak of war and the political conflict that preceded it. Arguing that the civil war in Tajikistan was essentially a bargaining failure between competing factions, these works emphasize the incentives for "non-cooperation" in a collapsing system,<sup>25</sup> the difficulty in sharing rents from stationery and investment heavy goods,<sup>26</sup> such as cotton, and the destructive power of nascent nationalism.<sup>27</sup> While many of these works also link their arguments back to the underlying structure of Tajikistan's economy and society, they often gloss over the period of perestroika as a final few years of collapse that did little to change the longer-term trends in the republic. In this way these arguments also bear some resemblance to the first school: as long as the USSR kept Tajikistan running, its local "strongmen" had enough in the way of rents and other goods to keep their supporters happy. Once the economic functions of the USSR broke down and glasnost opened up space for debate, it was only a matter of time until incentives for violence overcame any remaining social pressure keeping them in line.

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Qalandar, "They Were All from the Country," in *Allah's Kolkhozes: Migration, De-Stalinization, Privatisation and the New Muslim Congregations in the Soviet Realm (1950s-2000s)*, eds. Stephane A. Dudoignon and Christian Noack (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 2014); Aziz Niyazi, "Islam and Tajikistan's Human and Ecological Crisis," in *Civil Society in Central Asia*, eds. M. Holt Ruffin and Daniel Waugh (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999); Alexander Sodiqov, "From resettlement to conflict: development-induced involuntary displacement and violence in Tajikistan," in *The Transformation of Tajikistan: The Sources of Statehood*, eds. John Heathershaw and Edmund Herzig (London: Routledge, 2013); Gavhar Juraeva, "Ethnic Conflict in Tajikistan," in *Ethnic Conflict in the Post-Soviet World: Case Studies and Analysis*, eds. Leokadia Drobizheva, Rose Gottemoeller, Catherine McArdle Kelleher and Lee Walker (London: ME Sharpe, 1996); Barnett R. Rubin, "Russian Hegemony and State Breakdown in the Periphery: Causes and consequences of the civil war in Tajikistan," in *Post-Soviet Political Order: Conflict and State Building*, eds. Barnett R. Rubin and Jack Snyder (London: Routledge, 1998); Kathleen Collins, *Clan Politics and Regime Transition in Central Asia*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

<sup>25</sup> Jesse Driscoll, *Warlords and Coalition Politics in Post-Soviet States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Idil Tuncer-Kilavuz, "Understanding Civil War: A Comparison of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan," *Europe-Asia Studies* 63, no. 2 (2011).

<sup>26</sup> Lawrence Markowitz, *State Erosion: Unlootable Resources and Unruly Elites in Central Asia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013).

<sup>27</sup> Shahram Akbarzadeh, "Why did nationalism fail in Tajikistan?" *Europe-Asia Studies* 48, no. 7 (1996); P. Foroughi, "Tajikistan: Nationalism, Ethnicity, Conflict, and Socio-Economic Disparities," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 22, no. 1 (2002); Lawrence P. Markowitz, "How Master Frames Mislead: The Division and Eclipse of Nationalist Movements in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 32, no. 4 (2009).

As Sergei Abashin has convincingly argued, however, both of these broad arguments about the Tajik Civil War make the anachronistic fallacy of analyzing the war's causes through its ultimate resolution.<sup>28</sup> Regionalism, violent non-cooperation, lost opportunities for national consolidation, and problems sharing "rents" were all representative elements of the Tajik Civil War once it began, rather than its root causes. The impact of forced migrations in the republic in earlier decades was equally mixed, with some researchers emphasizing its integrative as well as disruptive effects.<sup>29</sup> Reacting to the first two schools' lack of attention to the period of perestroika immediately prior to the Tajik Civil War, a smaller body of literature has attempted to more effectively tie the late Soviet period to the explosion of violence in independent Tajikistan. In his recent history of the Tajik Civil War, for example, Tim Epkenhans has emphasized that regionalism was at most "an ordering device...and not causative for the conflict." Instead Epkenhans emphasizes the role of local actors and ideologies, as well as localized reactions to glasnost during perestroika.<sup>30</sup> While seeing some role for regionalism in starting the conflict, Kirill Nourzhanov and Christian Bleuer have also demonstrated the multitude of causal factors underlining the Tajik Civil War, pointing to formal and informal political networks and the mobilization of non-state movements in the final years of Gorbachev's rule.<sup>31</sup>

While drawing upon these bodies of literature, this dissertation problematizes their overwhelming emphasis on the political at the expense of the economic. It also relies upon a smaller group of authors, including Abashin and Martha Brill Olcott, who have linked the economic downturn observed during perestroika to

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<sup>28</sup> S.N. Abashin, *Natsionalizmy v Srednei Azii – v poiskakh identichnosti* (St. Petersburg: Alateiya, 2007), 235-238; for similar criticisms, see John Schoeberlein, "Conflict in Tajikistan and Central Asia: The Myth of Ethnic Animosity," *Harvard Middle Eastern and Islamic Review* 1, no. 2 (1994): 4; Collette Harris, "Coping with daily life in post-Soviet Tajikistan: the Gharmsi villages of Khatlon Province," *Central Asian Survey* 17, no. 4 (1998): 656-657; Barnett R. Rubin, "The Fragmentation of Tajikistan," *Survival* 35, no. 4 (1993): 71.

<sup>29</sup> Olivier Ferrando, "Soviet Population Transfers and Interethnic Relations in Tajikistan: Assessing the Concept of Ethnicity," *Central Asian Survey* 30, no. 1 (2011). Soviet-era research also echoed a largely mixed impact; see Sh. I. Kurbanova, *Pereselenie: Kak eto bylo* (Dushanbe: Irfon, 1993).

<sup>30</sup> Tim Epkenhans, *The Origins of the Civil War in Tajikistan: Nationalism, Islamism, and Violent Conflict in Post-Soviet Space* (Lexington Books: Lanham, 2016), 8-11; quote on 8. Also see Muriel Atkin, "Tajikistan: reform, reaction, and civil war," in *New States, New Politics: Building the Post-Soviet Nation*, eds. Ian Bremmer and Ray Taras (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

<sup>31</sup> Kirill Nourzhanov and Christian Bleuer, *Tajikistan: A Political and Social History* (Canberra: ANU E-Press, 2013).

the later violence of the civil war.<sup>32</sup> As in the case of the USSR as a whole, glasnost and democratization are in Tajikistan just as equally partial explanations: they fail to consider the immediate causes of people's anger – anger sufficient to lead them into the street and worse. Instead of glasnost and democratization opening up space for long-suppressed anger over Soviet economic development or social policy, this dissertation argues, when Tajik Soviet citizens' frustration finally spilled into the streets it was the product of rapid change leading to economic disintegration. The citizens of Tajikistan were angry – and ultimately desperate enough to go to war – not because of the Soviet state's long-term policies in their republic. As the anthropologist Gillian Tett, who spent 1991 in Dushanbe, later observed, "By the end of the Soviet era many of the Tajiks appeared not only reluctant to dismantle this Soviet state - but rather more reluctant than the populations in many other parts of the former Soviet Union."<sup>33</sup> Instead, they were angry because as the Soviet Union had been slowly collapsing over the previous few years, so too had their salaries, access to consumer goods, and basic standard of living. War came to Tajikistan on the back of reforms that had unequivocally broken its piece of the Soviet economy.<sup>34</sup>

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This dissertation provides a detailed history of the implementation and local understanding of perestroika's economic and political reforms in the Tajik SSR between 1985 and 1991, as well as the later impact of these reforms into 1992. Drawing upon a wide variety of primary sources, including central and local party records, Soviet government archives in Moscow and Dushanbe, Tajik and Russian language memoirs, newspapers, and personal interviews, it offers a meticulous micro-history of the ways in which centrally designed Soviet reforms came to change and undermine the economic and social order in Tajikistan. In doing so, it

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<sup>32</sup> Martha Brill Olcott, "Ethnic Violence in Central Asia: Perceptions and Misperceptions," in *Central Asia: Conflict Resolution, and Change*, eds. Roald Z. Sagdeev and Susan Eisenhower (Chevy Chase: CPSS Press, 1995); V.I. Bushkov and V.D. Mikul'skii, *'Tadzhikskaiia revoliutsiia' i grazhdanskaia voia (1989-1994 gg.)* (Moscow: TsIMO, 1995), esp. 14-15; S. N. Abashin and V.I Bushkov, *Tadzhikistan: nekotorie posledstviia tragicheskikh let* (Moscow: Institut etnologii i antropologii Ran, 1998), 10.

<sup>33</sup> Gillian Romaine Tett, "Ambiguous Alliances: Marriage and Identity in a Muslim Village in Soviet Tajikistan" (PhD diss., Cambridge University, 1996), 190.

<sup>34</sup> For a longer version of this critique, see Isaac Scarborough, "(Over)determining social disorder: Tajikistan and the economic collapse of perestroika," *Central Asian Survey* 35, no. 3 (2016).

returns the period of perestroika that immediately preceded the Tajik Civil War to its proper centrality in this history. Instead of pre-Soviet loyalties, Soviet-era border delimitations, or suppressed nationalism, it argues that the changes wrought to social order by the collective reforms of perestroika were the most immediate and visceral cause of the violence that began to spark during riots in Dushanbe in February 1990 and eventually ignited into the civil war thereafter. In addition, by returning perestroika to the forefront of this history, this dissertation also brings forward extensive evidence highlighting the role of economics and economic downturn in causing this strife. The mobilization of new political movements, activists, and personal anger in the Tajik SSR, the evidence shows, was first and foremost connected to the radical change in economic fortunes felt in Tajikistan during perestroika. Economics was on the minds of individual protestors and politicians alike during the period; it drove people into the streets and activists to populist slogans and promises. Only by considering the importance of economic collapse can the history of Tajikistan's late Soviet and post-Soviet collapse be told accurately.

More broadly, this dissertation also contends that the history of perestroika in Tajikistan has much to say about the history of perestroika *in toto*. Rather than a simple outlier, Tajikistan represents one extreme along a wide spectrum of violent outcomes that occurred as the USSR collapsed. Some nascent states experienced violence that approximated civil wars (such as in Georgia or Moldova); others underwent wars with their neighbors (Armenia, Azerbaijan, or Chechnya); others experienced low-level outburst of protest, violence, and uprising. Tajikistan is closer to the norm than is often claimed, although still remaining on one end of this spectrum. As a particularly peripheral piece of the larger puzzle of Soviet collapse, moreover, Tajikistan's path through Gorbachev's reform project can in fact help to clarify many issues related to the period. Far from Moscow and its attentions, Tajikistan underwent reform and collapse with limited political pressure from the outside, making Moscow's interventions, when they came, clearer and more obvious. In this context, center-periphery relations between Moscow and its outlying republican capitals gain sharpness and definition, speaking to their importance in defining the course of perestroika across the USSR. In the years since the Soviet collapse, moreover, Tajikistan has remained peripheral to many of

the geopolitical debates over Soviet heritage, leaving evidence about the 1980s far less politicized or part of larger discussions about the “colonial” or otherwise negative impact of the USSR as a whole. The local ambiguity about the Soviet past in Tajikistan, surprisingly enough, has meant that it becomes easier to peel away the layers of post-Soviet discourse and arrive at a clearer understanding of life such as it was lived by Soviet citizens through the collapse of the late 1980s and early 1990s.

By reconsidering the story of the Soviet Union’s collapse from the perspective of its peripheral Tajik Republic, an alternative narrative emerges about this collapse. Rather than a story of increased democratic participation and glasnost, it is instead a history dominated by increasing unemployment, economic downturn, lost productive capacity, inflation, and sharply lowered standards of living. It is also a story of confusion: economic reforms were passed in Moscow and were discussed little, if at all, on the ground in Tajikistan. When Soviet enterprises began to hold back production and the cooperative business sector began to siphon off funds from the economy, local actors in Tajikistan were left to refer to official government statements about the need for marketization that bore little resemblance to the reality they faced. The economy was collapsing, and yet “from real facts Gorbachev made for himself mollifying conclusions,” as his advisor Anatolii Cherniaev later admitted.<sup>35</sup> Armed with only these “mollifying conclusions,” the Tajik leadership was largely unable to convince the population of Tajikistan that it had a clear grasp of their condition or of the state of the republic. This gap grew as the economy continued to spiral downwards. By the end of 1991 the majority of the population in Dushanbe and across Tajikistan had lost faith in the capacity of the local political class to improve their lives. Desperate for change, they emerged on the streets of Dushanbe, embracing a new class of populist politicians who promised a new path forward. While this narrative is particular to Tajikistan, it is built upon conditions that were, to one extent or another, constant across the whole of the USSR. Everywhere Moscow looked in the final years of the USSR, the economy was collapsing, enterprises were lowering production, and private businesses were getting rich while the population was getting poorer. This experience was not unique to Tajikistan, and its path through perestroika and the

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<sup>35</sup> A.S. Cherniaev, *Shest’ let s Gorbachevym: po dnevnikovym zapisiam* (Moscow: Progress, 1993), 387.



end of the USSR, this dissertation argues, should cause a significant reevaluation of the ways in which the history of perestroika has been told as a whole.

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As a work of history, this dissertation attempts to sift through a multitude of sources and provide as clear a narrative of events as may be possible. In recent years, as many scholars have noted, the study of the Soviet Union has undergone a radical shift from a field with a meager source base to one in which sources are simply preponderous.<sup>36</sup> With the collapse of the USSR and the opening of archives, historians are faced with more paper than it can be conceivable to analyze. The publication of innumerable memoirs, along with the proliferation of local newspaper sources, oral histories, and other primary materials, has collectively made Soviet history a field requiring particularly critical and close analysis of sources. This dissertation has attempted to utilize as wide a selection of sources as possible, assuming that all of them, whether government records and statistics, personal memoirs, second-hand accounts, or interviews, are all in their own ways flawed. This dissertation does rely in part on Soviet-produced government statistics, and follows Caroline Humphrey in treating these documents as no worse, if no better, than any statistics produced by other governments. As all bureaucrats, Soviet civil servants were in the business of representing reality in paper; theirs was not an empty performative function, but instead one that linked the reality they saw to the reality they wanted to explain.<sup>37</sup> This is not to say that Soviet-produced statistics are “true” or perfect: they, like all statistics, are essentially approximations. But they can be employed and extrapolated from, as with many other sources. Whenever possible, material from one source has been verified against other independent sources.

In the case of Tajikistan, moreover, there may be surprisingly even more reason to treat Soviet statistics as relatively reliable. In contrast to Uzbekistan, where local bureaucrats did engage in large-scale misrepresentation (*pripiski*) of cotton

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<sup>36</sup> For example, Sheila Fitzpatrick, “Impact of the Opening of Soviet Archives on Western Scholarship on Soviet Social History,” *The Russian Review* 74 (July 2015).

<sup>37</sup> Caroline Humphrey, “The ‘Creative Bureaucrat’: Conflicts in the Production of Soviet Communist Party Discourse,” *Inner Asia* 10, no. 1 (2008); Andrea Graziosi, “The New Soviet Archives: Hypothesis for a Critical Assessment,” *Cahiers du monde russe* 40, nos. 1-2, 1993: 13-64.

figures, Tajikistan was never shown to have lied on any large scale about its production figures.<sup>38</sup> In fact, although investigators were dispatched to Tajikistan in the mid 1980s as part of Uzbekistan's "cotton affair," they only managed to arrest one oblast chairman on charges that ultimately failed to stick.<sup>39</sup> Even Gorbachev's advisor Aleksandr Yakovlev, no great friend to Tajikistan, went out of his way in 1987 to highlight the fact that the Tajik SSR was "the only [Soviet] republic in Asia that was clean, and where there was order in the economy."<sup>40</sup>

This plurality of sources has also required some inevitable restriction of content. The astute reader will note that this dissertation avoids extensive discussion of many events that are often otherwise at the center of perestroika narratives. Most immediately, this thesis deals very little, if at all, with the Soviet invasion and occupation of Afghanistan (1979-1989), although this violent conflict was raging throughout most of perestroika just on the other side of Tajikistan's border. This lack of discussion, however, is not a matter of oversight, but instead a calculated choice. The Soviet-Afghan war has been extensively covered in excellent scholarship, as has its impact on Soviet politics in general.<sup>41</sup> More immediately, moreover, the Afghan conflict played a surprisingly limited role in Tajikistan during the 1980s. There was no increase in instability in border areas, and although the "muhajedin" and their Pakistani backers, the ISI, tried to move people and subversive literature across the border, the KGB was very effective at holding this off until at least 1991. The contingent of Soviet soldiers from Tajikistan who served in Afghanistan was limited in number, and although some research has linked Tajik experiences in Afghanistan to political radicalisation, the evidence is

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<sup>38</sup> Kirill Nourzhanov has claimed otherwise (Nourzhanov and Bleuer, *Tajikistan*, 137), but his reading of the sources is mistaken. The analysis he cites comes from a passage in a 1989 article by Vasilii Seliunin, in which Seliunin is clearly discussing Uzbekistan, not Tajikistan (Vasilii Seliunin, "Bremia deistvii," *Novyi Mir* 5 (1989): 225-226). Evidence about similar schemes in Tajikistan is simply absent.

<sup>39</sup> Salohiddin Hasanov, the first secretary of the Kulyab Oblast Party Committee was arrested in March 1988 and ultimately released in July 1991. See RGASPI f. 17, op. 157, d. 1912, l. 133-136; "O rezul'tatakh proverki faktov, ukazannykh v stat'iakh "Kolokola nadezhdy", "Dushanbe: god spustia...", i "Genotsid – sputnik perestroiki?" *Kommunist Tadzhikistana*, July 3, 1991; Ne"mat Bobodzhon, "Krakh 'tadzhikskogo dela'," *Biznes i politika*, December 25-31, 1993.

<sup>40</sup> RGASPI f. 17, op. 157, d. 1912, l. 148.

<sup>41</sup> Rodric Braithwaite, *Afgantsy: The Russians in Afghanistan 1979-89* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Artemy Kalinovsky, *A Long Goodbye: The Soviet Withdrawal from Afghanistan* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011).

mixed.<sup>42</sup> In addition, any organized mobilization of former Soviet veterans of the Afghan conflict took place only in mid-1992, and was in fact in support of the conservative, nominally still pro-Soviet government.<sup>43</sup> The financial costs of the Afghan conflict were for the Soviet budget limited: they represented no more than a 0.5-1% annual increase in budget expenditure.<sup>44</sup> Thus both socially and economically it is difficult to pinpoint the impact of the Afghan war on perestroika-era Tajikistan. The war raged on; life in Tajikistan continued apace.

Similarly, this dissertation devotes little space to an extended discussion of Islam's role in the political sphere in Soviet-era Tajikistan. While contrary to many accounts of the period, political Islam remains in this dissertation's narrative essentially inert: religion is not a mobilizing factor in Tajikistan until at least early 1992. Following leading scholarship on the question, this dissertation contends that for the majority of Tajikistan's citizens, Islam was, until the collapse of the USSR, a non-issue.<sup>45</sup> They comfortably identified as both "Muslim" and "Soviet," and were, in fact, sincere in both beliefs.<sup>46</sup> For a small minority of believers, including those who founded the Islamic Revival Party of Tajikistan (IRPT), this was not true – but until the very end of the USSR these individuals' influence outside of restricted circles remained extremely limited. As this dissertation will discuss, it was only after economic collapse delegitimized the previous Soviet order that alternative structures of political power, including the more religious one promoted by the IRPT, began to garner support.

For the same reasons of limited local influence and marginal impact on the ground, numerous other "key" events from perestroika are given limited treatment in this dissertation. This includes the "Nina Andreeva" affair, Gorbachev's agricultural reforms, the backroom politicking in Gorbachev's Politburo, the Russian miners'

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<sup>42</sup> Markus Görransson, "A Fragile Movement: Afghan War Veterans and the Soviet Collapse in Tajikistan, 1979-1992," *Journal of Soviet and Post-Soviet Politics and Society* 1, no. 2 (2015).

<sup>43</sup> Khaidar Shodiev, "300 'Afgantsev' i narodnyi front," *Asia-Plus*, June 1, 2017; Khaidar Shodiev, "'Afgantsy' Tadjikistana: Ne zabyvaite nas!" *Asia-Plus*, February 16, 2017.

<sup>44</sup> A.A. Liakhovskii, *Tragediia i doblest' Afgana* (Moscow: Eksmo, 2009), 758.

<sup>45</sup> Muriel Atkin, *The Subtlest Battle: Islam in Soviet Tajikistan* (Philadelphia: Foreign Policy Research Institute, 1989); Paolo Sartori, "The Secular that Never Was: Untangling the Meaning of Islam in Soviet Central Asia," Keynote speech given at the Central Eurasian Studies Society's Regional Conference, Bishkek, 2016; Edward James Lemon, "Governing Islam and Security in Tajikistan and Beyond: The Emergence of Transnational Authoritarian Security Governance" (PhD diss., University of Exeter, 2016), 111-137.

<sup>46</sup> Tett, "Ambiguous Alliances."

strikes, the end of the Cold War with the West, and other moments too numerous to list here. Many of these events have been dealt with at length in other research. More importantly to this dissertation, they simply cannot be shown to have influenced either local politics or the state of the economy and society in perestroika-era Tajikistan. From the perspective of Dushanbe, these were not the most important factors influencing final outcomes. Instead of unnecessarily proving this negative, this thesis has instead attempted to demonstrate which other events and trends ultimately led to outcomes of economic collapse, political paralysis, and civil war in Tajikistan.

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This dissertation can be roughly divided into three unequal sections. First, two chapters analyze the state of the pre-perestroika Soviet Union and differing perspectives on the need for reform. Chapter Two introduces the Tajik SSR before perestroika, outlining its economic growth, participation in the broader Soviet modernization project, and development of a local political sphere. This chapter points to a fragile balance in the Tajik SSR, whereby the continued implementation of centralized policies of “equalization” helped to guarantee the growth of the Tajik economy and local standards of living. The chapter also points to generally high levels of satisfaction amongst Soviet Tajik citizens with the Soviet state and their place therein. Finally, this chapter will point to the fractures that began to show in this balance after 1985, especially after the removal of Rahmon Nabiev following Gorbachev’s ascension to power in Moscow.

Chapter Three shifts focus to Moscow, where the mood in 1985 is altogether far more pessimistic. Considering the position taken by Mikhail Gorbachev and his advisors, it will analyze the three arguments they used to justify reform: statistics about economic growth were false, dissatisfaction was growing in the European metropolises of the USSR, such as Moscow and Leningrad, and mathematical econometric models showed ruin without radical change. Demonstrating how the reform proposals developed over the course of decades by a small cohort of mathematically-minded economists came to align with Gorbachev’s personal views on reform and the demands of European Soviet consumers, this chapter will

provide and outline of Moscow's explanation for reform. In contrast to Dushanbe, as of 1985 Moscow's faith in the Soviet project was fading rapidly.

The second section of this dissertation (Chapters Four, Five, Six, and Seven) details the content of Gorbachev's economic and political reform program and its consequences. Chapter Four focuses on the economic reforms developed and implemented by Gorbachev and his advisors in Moscow between 1985 and 1988, including the early "uskorenie" campaign and the later, more significant, Laws on Enterprises and Cooperatives (1987). The chapter will consider the content and intent of these reforms, as well as their basis in, and contrast to, earlier reform programs. In addition, it will demonstrate the initial and immediate consequences of the economic reforms, which were evident in Tajikistan as early as 1988. As this chapter shows, the impact of the reforms was overwhelmingly negative, leading to economic downturn and increased unemployment within a very short period of time. Yet Moscow seemed unable to see this connection, creating, as this chapter highlights, a widening gap between the actual content of perestroika and Moscow's attempts to control it.

Chapter Five shifts gears to look at the political reforms initiated under Mikhail Gorbachev, most immediately the contradictory program of "glasnost." Frustrated by the economic downturn and apparent lack of progress on his economic reforms, Gorbachev had turned his attention to mobilizing the Soviet people in support of reform. This came to involve a program of "democratization," changes to the structure and functions of the Central Committee Apparatus in Moscow, the creation of an alternative state legislature, and "glasnost." Rather than the freedom of speech that it has often been understood as in the West, however, here glasnost is best understood as a program of Party-directed criticism against the Party, meant to open up space for non-Party politics. In Tajikistan, as this chapter shows, this program initially met with local opposition and confusion, but following Moscow's direct intervention, led to the creation of the republic's first independent political movement – "Rastokhez."

Chapter Six continues the narrative begun in Chapter Five, showing how Rastokhez and other early political movements in Dushanbe became caught up in the

February 1990 riots that raged in the Tajik capital over February 11-18. Initially begun over rumours related to the arrival of a group of Armenian refugees from Baku, the riots eventually grew into a political confrontation over the course taken by Tajikistan's leadership. This chapter will analyze this confrontation, including its leading actors, including Kahhor Mahkamov, Buri Karimov, and Boris Pugo. The chapter will also consider the consequences of the riots for Tajikistan, including their effect on the elections to the Supreme Soviet of the Tajik SSR that occurred only a week afterwards. In many ways, the riots would serve as a beacon for future violence, showing how economic downturn was beginning to bring the masses into the streets.

Chapter Seven completes the second section of the dissertation and ties together the consequences of Gorbachev's political and economic reform programs. Covering the period between the February 1990 riots and August 1991, this chapter demonstrates how ongoing political changes in Moscow, including negotiations over a new "Union Treaty" came to affect politics in Dushanbe. It will also emphasize ongoing interventions on Moscow's part into Dushanbe politics, showing how this influence helped to pave the way for a slate of new political parties and activism. At the same time, the economic reforms were now in full force and supplemented by an additional set of changes that only further undermined the economy. In Tajikistan, 1990 and 1991 were years of collapse: production plummeted, while inflation and unemployment rose. The population was growing increasingly frustrated, but Dushanbe remained under a state of emergency until July 1991, keeping the growing levels of social anger boiling under an artificial lid.

The final section of this dissertation is covered in Chapters Eight and Nine. Chapter Eight describes the failed putsch of August 1991 from the perspective of Tajikistan, highlighting how local ambiguities about reform led many to tacitly support those conspiring against Gorbachev. When the attempted putsch failed, this made the president of Tajikistan, Kahhor Mahkamov, a political liability, and he was summarily pushed out of all positions of power. Arriving at a political vacuum, the Tajik leadership was essentially unprepared and unsure of how to act, continuing for months to hang on to any and all aspects of Soviet rule. As the USSR

collapsed, the Tajik state declared independence and then pretended as though independence meant something else than sovereignty, trying to retain close links to Moscow and appealing to the latter for economic support and the resolution of its political problems. Having made no preparations for independent rule, the Tajik state found itself adrift after the formal dissolution of the USSR in December 1991, with little sense of how to stay financially afloat or to keep its nascent state from collapsing.

Concluding this dissertation's final section, Chapter Nine describes the surprising and sudden collapse of the Tajik state into civil war. Following Tajikistan's attempt to stay functional and solvent in the spring of 1992, it highlights the impossibility of the situation faced by President Nabiev and the republic's other leaders. Tajikistan essentially had no resources and few raw materials; by 1992 its economy was in shambles, and its already limited productive capacity destroyed. With jobs scarce and a small minority of businessmen siphoning off goods and profits, the majority of the population was growing poorer and poorer. On this backdrop, politicians from the government and opposition parties alike began making populist claims, blaming their political opponents for the economic degradation and mobilizing supporters into the streets. With time, and given the Tajik state's lack of any reliable military force (a joint product of Russia's strategic interest in Tajikistan and the latter's unwillingness to challenge Moscow), political protests grew into street fights, which grew in turn into mass violence and the start of the civil war. This final chapter is then followed by a brief concluding section, which briefly describes the destruction of the Tajik Civil War (1992-1997) and reaffirms the dissertation's main arguments.

## Chapter Two

### Tajikistan's Peripheral View of Soviet Prosperity

Arriving in Dushanbe in 1985, a visitor would have found a teeming city of more than half a million people, full of “people bustling and arriving at bus stations,” hurrying about their business, and urbanely hardly even stopping to say hello to one another. To the residents of the Tajik Soviet Socialist Republic (Tajik SSR), their capital was a “great city,” impressive for its wide avenues and the tall and leafy oriental plane trees (*chinar*) that lined the roads and provided shade from the harsh summer sun.<sup>1</sup> Home to both the republican government of the Tajik SSR and its central industries, including a major refrigerator factory, steel mill, and textile plant, Dushanbe was a heterogeneous Soviet city of many peoples and languages. Tajiks represented at best half of the population, with thousands of Russians, Ukrainians, Germans, Uzbeks, Caucasians, Tatars, and many others filling out the population and the city streets. It was also as calm a provincial backwater as could be found in the Soviet Union: Tajikistan rightly had the reputation in the USSR as a place where even political changes in Moscow could hardly shake the quiet and undisturbed course of local events.

The capital – much as the entire Tajik SSR – had also grown enormously since the founding of the USSR in the 1920s. Little more than a village with a large Monday bazaar in 1924 (hence the name: “Dushanbe” means Monday in Tajik), the city had become a fitting capital for Tajikistan, one of the USSR’s fifteen union republics. Initially folded into the USSR as part of the former “Turkestan region” during the Russian Civil War, Tajikistan was later made an “Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic” in 1924, and ultimately a full Soviet Socialist Republic in 1929.<sup>2</sup> Incorporating parts of both the relatively more developed Ferghana and Zeravshon valleys in the north as well as the completely undeveloped South (“Eastern Bukhara,” as it was then called), the Tajik SSR was quickly singled out by Soviet planners as a region deeply in need of investment and modernization. From the 1930s on, massive projects, such as the Vakhshstroi, a giant irrigation and agricultural project in the Tajik SSR’s southern Khatlon region, were put in place to

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<sup>1</sup> Abror Zohir, *Dushanbe* (Dushanbe: Adib, 2007), 9-10.

<sup>2</sup> Paul Bergne, *The Birth of Tajikistan: National Identity and the Origins of the Republic* (London: I.B. Taurus, 2007); Botakoz Kassymbekova, *Despite Cultures: Early Soviet Rule in Tajikistan* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2016); Masov, *Tadzhiki*.



build up the Tajik economy and bind it tightly to the rest of the Soviet superstructure.<sup>3</sup> By the 1980s this project had proven very successful: Tajikistan was closely linked to Moscow and the rest of the Soviet economy through a thousand strands of finance and production. Most notably, the republic produced hundreds of thousands of tons of cotton each year; in exchange, the Soviet center was generous in its development funds, and both Dushanbe and the republic grew accordingly.

While histories of the Tajik SSR have since the collapse of the USSR touched upon the republic's long-term economic and social development, the emphasis has generally remained on the excesses and difficulties on this path: the extremes of collectivization and the terror of the 1930s, the forced transfers of populations, or the structural imbalances seen in the semi-colonial cotton monoculture in the republic. These structural imbalances and experiences of violence are then linked to the breakdown of order in the final years of the USSR and the subsequent explosion of the Tajik Civil War.<sup>4</sup> All of these factors are indubitably important, and clearly reflect real and deeply felt events in Tajik Soviet history. And yet to link the earlier decades of Soviet history to the collapse of political and social order in Tajikistan with little reference to the actual years of the 1970s and 1980s – often brusquely waved off as a period of “stagnation” and growing subsidies – seems both arbitrary and misleading. The response to perestroika and its reforms in the Tajik SSR would have been predicated not only on a reading of early Soviet history, but also just as much upon life as it was lived in the republic on the eve of perestroika.

Elaborating on the economic and social conditions in the Tajik SSR in the early to mid-1980s, this chapter attempts to return the experiences of daily life, work, and pay to the historical record, thus setting the stage for perestroika and economic reform later in the decade. Working with both published sources and previously

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<sup>3</sup> On Soviet development in Tajikistan, see: Artemy Kalinovsky, *Laboratory of Socialist Development: Cold War Politics and Decolonization in Soviet Tajikistan* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018); on Vakhstroi, Patryk Reid, “Tajikistan’s Turksib’: Infrastructure and Improvisation in Economic Growth of the Vakhsh River Valley,” *Central Asian Survey* 36, no. 1 (2017). On regional development, see Zikriyo Akramov, *Natsional’nye osobennosti rosta rabocheho klassa Tadzhikistana (60-80-e gg.)* (Dushanbe: Irfon, 1999).

<sup>4</sup> For representative examples, see Roy, *The New Central Asia*; Markowitz, *State Erosion*. For a more detailed discussion, see the Introduction.

unused archival data, this analysis focuses on both the underlying successes of Soviet development in the Tajik SSR, as well as the structural imbalances that accompanied its long-term growth. This chapter also challenges the established view that Tajikistan remained, notwithstanding Soviet modernization attempts, fundamentally undeveloped. Rather than a republic singularly dependent upon subsidies and outside funding, this chapter argues that the Tajik SSR was by the 1980s an integral part of the Soviet economy, providing to the federal budget at least as much revenue as it received in return. In fact, the Tajik SSR was a highly representative Soviet republic: while its economy may have been especially interlinked with other republics and the Soviet center, this made it an outlier only in terms of degree, not of form. All of the pieces of the Soviet economy were inherently inter-reliant, a fact brought into the open, this chapter shows, by the particular fragility of Soviet stability in Tajikistan. This fragile but stable balance also conditioned Tajik elites' initial response to the ideas of reform proposed by Mikhail Gorbachev. Grounded in long experiences of late Soviet development and growth, they had little conception of what reform would mean – or even how Moscow had gone about deciding that it was necessary.

## **I. Economic Growth**

On the surface, Tajikistan's economic prospects could hardly have been better in 1985. The republican economy had been growing by more than 3% a year, outpacing both the Soviet average and many other countries stuck in the global recession of the early 1980s. Industrial production was doing even better: new factories were opening, older factories, such as the enormous Tajik Aluminum Factory, were expanding, and hydroelectric dams were being built up and down the Vakhsh River. By the mid-1980s industrial growth had reached 5% per year, with the ambitious Rogun hydroelectric dam, built to be one of the tallest and most powerful in the world, taking the lead in both scope and investment.<sup>5</sup>

Economic growth also led to improvements in Tajik Soviet citizens' daily lives. By the middle of the 1980s both the production of consumer goods in the Tajik SSR

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<sup>5</sup> For Tajikistan's economic development during the early 1980s, see *XX S'ezd Kommunisticheskoi partii Tadzhikistana, 24-25 ianvaria 1986 g. Stenograficheskii otchet* (Dushanbe: Ifron, 1987), 19. On industrial growth over the same period, see Doklad "Ob itogakh vypolneniia Gosudarstvennogo plana ekonomicheskogo i sotsial'nogo razvitiia Tadzhikskoi SSR za ianvar'-sentiabr' 1985 god," GARF f. 5446, op. 145, d. 361, ll. 25-26. For a supporting view, see: Masaaki Kuboniwa, "National Income in Postwar Central Asia," *Hitotsubashi Journal of Economics* 39, no. 2 (1998), 69.

and the import of similar goods from other Soviet republics was growing noticeably – in 1985, for example, consumers in Tajikistan had access to and purchased 5.5% more goods than the year before.<sup>6</sup> Access to income was also increasing. Per capita income reached nearly 1000 rubles per year in 1985, and salaries continued to increase each year, whether in absolute terms or if adjusted for inflation.<sup>7</sup> While salaries in the Tajik SSR remained lower than in other Soviet republics – Tajik wages in the mid 1980s were approximately 83% of the Soviet average – they were rising almost twice as fast as salaries across the whole of the USSR. In 1987, for example, the average monthly salary in Tajikistan reached 169.5 rubles, a 6% increase over 1986.<sup>8</sup> Jobs were also increasingly available, as factories and localized industry grew and expanded. Across the republic Tajik Soviet citizens could increasingly see the signs of economic development, just as they could feel them in their pocketbooks.<sup>9</sup> As a visiting anthropologist later noted, even for the Tajik villages this was a time of “political stability and rapid economic growth.”<sup>10</sup>

Nor were the visible effects of economic development and Soviet modernization in Tajikistan restricted to monetary benefits. Crime remained exceedingly low in the years before perestroika. Recorded thefts of both private and state property (always a significant worry in the state-dominated Soviet economy) were relatively low and even decreased in the early 1980s; the majority of all such crimes, moreover, were essentially misdemeanors, leading to little more than fines.<sup>11</sup> Even in Dushanbe, where the urban environment statistically leaned towards higher crime, Tajik citizens enjoyed exceptionally low rates of murder (<1

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<sup>6</sup> Pis'mo Soveta Ministrov Tadzhikskoi v Sovet Ministrov SSSR ot 12.09.1985 “O khode vypolneniia plana roznichnogo tovarooborota za 8 mesiatsev 1985 g.” GARF f. 5446, op. 147, d. 967, l. 14; also d. 358, l. 21.

<sup>7</sup> Per capita income calculated from the reported figure of 4.6 billion rubles of “national income” for the Tajik SSR in 1985 (*XX S'ezd*, 19), divided by the 4.65 million population of the republic in 1985 (TsGART f. 18, op. 8, d. 3643, l. 181). On salary growth, see: Mukhabat Zaidovna Abdunazarova, “Sotsial'no-ekonomicheskie problemy sootnosheniia proizvoditel'nosti i oplaty truda v promyshlennosti (na materialakh promyshlennykh predpriatii Tadzhikskoi SSR)” (Dissertatsiia na soiskanie uchenoi stepeni kandidata ekonomicheskikh nauk. Akademiia nauk TSSR, 1986), 42.

<sup>8</sup> In the early to mid-1980s average salaries in the USSR grew by approximately 2.7% per year; see RGAE f. 4372, op. 67, d. 7950, l. 11. For salaries in the TSSR over the same period, see G.F. Morozova, “Trudoizbytochna li Sredniaia Aziia?” *Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniia* 15, no. 1 (1989), 76; RGAE, f. 4372, op. 67, d. 7950, l. 15.

<sup>9</sup> N. Khonaliev, and I. Gurshumov, “Razvitie promyshlennostiy i problmy zaniatosti trudovuykh resursov v Tadzhikistane,” *Izvestiia Akademii nauk Tadzhikskoi SSR, Otdelenie obshchestvennykh nauk*, 4, no. 122, (1985), 59.

<sup>10</sup> Tett, “Ambiguous Alliances,” 51.

<sup>11</sup> TsGART f. 18, op. 8, d. 3636, l. 138; d. 3642, l. 112.

per 100,000 citizens), assault (<4 per 100,000) and other violent crimes.<sup>12</sup> At the same time, the Tajik SSR's residents' access to non-material goods also increased. Each year, more and more students attended the republic's universities and other institutions of higher education.<sup>13</sup> Hospitals were opened and doctors from across the USSR were sent to work in Tajikistan. (By the 1980s the Tajik State Medical Institute named for Abuali ibn Sino was in fact considered one of the leading medical universities in the country.)<sup>14</sup> Even given Tajikistan's difficult and mountainous terrain, new roads were constantly being built in the republic; according to one set of calculations, by the mid-1980s the Tajik SSR actually had more roads per square kilometer of territory than the Soviet average.<sup>15</sup> Life was improving each year, slowly but noticeably, and resources were clearly being spent to modernize and develop the Tajik economy. As Pyotr Luchinskii, then the Second Secretary of the Tajik Communist Party, argued in the mid-1980s: "There is no republic in the USSR with more ideal conditions for industrial growth than our own."<sup>16</sup>

It was no accident, moreover, that Tajik economy found itself in this position. As one of the USSR's less developed republics, the Tajik SSR was privy to the Soviet policy of "equalization" (*vyravnivanie*), which was meant to help bring the levels of economic development in less advanced republics up to the standard of Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic (RSFSR), the Baltic republics, and other more economically advanced regions of the USSR. Rather than an empty statement of policy, equalization led to significant investments in those republics – primarily those in Central Asia – deemed to be economically behind.<sup>17</sup> In the 1970s and

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<sup>12</sup> Calculated from internal Tajik government statistics. See: Informatsionnaia zapiska Prokuratury Tadjzhikskoi SSR No. 16/5-8949 ot 23.11.1989, TsGART f. 297, op. 41, d. 389, l. 35; Pis'mo Polkovnika militsii Rakhmanova v Gosudarstvenno-pravovoi otdel TsK KP TSSR, tov. Khuvaidullaevu, N.Kh., No. 10/-3195 ot 02.11.1989, TsGART f. 297, op. 41, d. 389, l. 41.

<sup>13</sup> N.M. Nazarshoev, *Intelligentsiia Tadjzhikistana v 1961-1985 gg.* (Dushanbe: Donish, 1989), 22.

<sup>14</sup> Interviews with former and current employees of the Tajik medical system, Dushanbe, August 2014; February 2015; London, July 2015.

<sup>15</sup> Shukhrat Vakhidovich Asrorov, "Proizvodstvennaia infrastruktura i ee vliianie na regional'noe razvitie i razmeshchenie proizvodstva (na materialakh Tadjzhikskoi SSR)" (Dissertatsiia na soiskanie uchenoi stepeni kandidata ekonomicheskikh nauk, AN TSSR, 1987), 91.

<sup>16</sup> Stenogramma Zasedaniia Soveta Ministrov Tadjzhikistana 31.09.1987, TsGART f. 18, op. 8, d. 3647, l. 44.

<sup>17</sup> Western literature has often suggested that equalization was little more than lip service to the less developed regions of the USSR or a policy that failed to have much impact. Such arguments, however, tend to avoid consideration of economic data showing equalization's real impact on economic outcomes in Central Asia, focusing instead on the fact that the region remained relatively less developed up to the collapse of the USSR. While it is clearly true that the USSR *could have done*

1980s, rates of fixed capital investment in Central Asia were much higher than in the country's developed republics. Rates of capital investment per capita in the region, for example, were 2 to 4 times higher than in the RSFSR.<sup>18</sup> Republics such as Tajikistan also had the right to hold on to nearly 100% of the revenue collected locally through the "turnover tax" (*nalog s oborota*) and other similar taxes.<sup>19</sup> Long ingrained in Soviet policy, moreover, equalization frequently found support on the highest levels of Soviet government in the decade before 1985. Brezhnev mentioned the need to promote the equalization of Soviet republics on multiple occasions, and the principle remained embedded in the 1981 Communist Party platform.<sup>20</sup> Equalization was considered so important, in fact, that one of Chernenko's closest advisors later recalled conversations in the early 1980s about the need to promote policies of "zero overall growth" in the USSR as a whole to guarantee funds for the development of less advanced republics.<sup>21</sup>

In Tajikistan, equalization was directly linked to the higher than average rates of economic growth and industrial development enjoyed in the republic. Rates of industrial growth from 1975-1985 were clearly higher in Tajikistan than the Soviet average.<sup>22</sup> The agricultural sector, which through the 1980s still formed the backbone of the Tajik economy, also benefitted from Soviet policies of economic equalization. From 1965 on, the "bulk prices" (*zakupochnie tseny*) paid to kolkhozes and agricultural enterprises for raw produce rose consistently while retail prices remained stagnant. Since the state eventually paid more to farmers for meat, milk, and many other food products than consumers paid in stores, this represented a state transfer to the agricultural sector, providing support for increased and increasingly standardized wages for farmers. By the late 1970s and

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more to equalize, this does not prove that no efforts – or monies – were spent to equalize. There is in fact strong evidence for equalization's real and important impact in republics such as Tajikistan. Cf. Boris Z. Rumer, *Soviet Central Asia – A Tragic Experiment* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 20; G. Gleason, "The Political Economy of Dependency under Socialism: The Asian Republics in the USSR," *Studies in Comparative Communism* 24, no. 4 (1991); Walker, *Dissolution*, 43.

<sup>18</sup> Rumer, *Soviet Central Asia*, 31-33; on the RSFSR, see Pikhoia, "Pochemu raspa'sia," 409.

<sup>19</sup> Donna Bahry, *Outside Moscow: Power, Politics, and Budgetary Policy in the Soviet Republics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 55.

<sup>20</sup> "Doklad L.I. Brezhnev XXVI S'ezdu KP SSSR, 23 fevrial'ia 1981 g." In *Materialy XXVI S'ezda KPSS* (Moscow: Politizdat, 1982), 54; also, Gleason, "The Political Economy of Dependency," 336.

<sup>21</sup> Vadim Pechenev, *Gorbachev: k veršinam vlasti* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo "Gospodin Narod", 1991), 50.

<sup>22</sup> Doklad ekonomicheskogo otdela TsK KPSS "Osnovnie itogy ekonomicheskogo i sotsial'nogo razvitiia SSSR za 1976–1985 gg.," RGASPI, f. 653, op. 1, d. 41, l. 19. Also: Kuboniwa, "National Income," 69, 85-87.

early 1980s agricultural wages had reached nearly 90% of industrial wages and were rising at faster rates than the latter; the state spent nearly 19 billion rubles a year keeping the system afloat.<sup>23</sup> Insofar as many of the USSR's least developed regions, such as Tajikistan, were also its most agricultural, efforts to raise agricultural salaries were also understood as part of the broader push for equalization. "Categories of workers receiving low and middle levels of pay," which overwhelmingly meant agricultural workers, were over the course of the decades before 1985 provided with consistent and centralized pay raises, part of a broader plan to even out (*vyravnit'*) Soviet citizens' (and regions') purchasing power.<sup>24</sup> By the mid-1980s, equalization's value for Tajikistan was inarguable. As Izatullo Khayoev, the Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the Tajik SSR, summarized: "In our republic alone great sums have been invested – during the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> five year plans [1976-1986] 2.3 billion rubles were invested." This was more than equal to the republic's entire annual budget, and a sum that was clearly linked to the Tajik SSR's booming "productive capacity."<sup>25</sup>

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Nor were the Tajik SSR's elites alone in their optimism. In the mid-1980s, many residents of Dushanbe and Tajikistan's other towns and villages were equivalently positive and hopeful about the growth of the local economy and the societal benefits it entailed. Basic standards of living were on the rise throughout the republic, a tendency remarked upon by local and Western economists alike.<sup>26</sup> Importantly, moreover, the Tajik SSR was managing to balance wage increases against production and productivity growth, which guaranteed that for every additional ruble earned in the republic more than one additional ruble's worth of material product would be produced. For the eight months of January-August

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<sup>23</sup> On the "agricultural subsidy" and the cost of promoting equalization in agricultural regions, see Valentin Litvin, *The Soviet Agro-Industrial Complex – Structure and Performance* (Westview Press: Boulder, 1987), 5; Hosking, *A History of the Soviet Union*, 393. On relative levels of salary growth, see *Spravka o dotatsiakh iz biudzheta na produktsiiu sel'skogo khoziaistva*, GARF, f. 5446, op. 147, d. 116, l. 167; RGAE f. 4372, op. 67, d. 7950, l. 11.

<sup>24</sup> L.S. Bliakhman and T.S. Zlotinskaia, "Differentsiatsiia zarabotnoi platy kak faktor stimulirovaniia truda," *Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniia* 10, no. 1 (1984), 39.

<sup>25</sup> Stenogramma Zasedaniia Soveta Ministrov Tadzhikskoi SSR ot 26.05.1987, TsGART f. 18, op. 8, d. 3647, l. 162.

<sup>26</sup> A. Gazibekov, "Sotsial'no-ekonomicheskie preobrazovaniia na sele i razvitie kooperativnoi torgovle v tadzhikskoi SSR," *Izvestiia Akademii nauk tadzhikskoi SSR, otdelenie obshchestvennykh nauk* 1, no. 95 (1979), 80; Donna Bahry and Carol Nechemias, "Half Full or Half Empty? The Debate over Soviet Regional Equality," *Slavic Review* 40, no. 3 (1981), 370-371.

1985, for example, the average worker in the Tajik SSR produced 1.72 rubles of value for every 1 ruble he received in salary. For the year as a whole, it was later reported, per capita consumption in the republic had come to 927 rubles compared to per capita production of 971 rubles.<sup>27</sup> As a result, there was no large “overhang” of unspent rubles in Soviet Tajik consumers’ pockets or bank accounts, which could have led to deficits.<sup>28</sup> In fact, evidence indicates that deficits and shortages of consumer goods became increasingly rare in the early to mid-1980s in Tajikistan.<sup>29</sup>

As a result, the citizens of the Tajik SSR would have seen definite and concrete improvements to their lives each year. Rather than making horizontal comparisons to life in other Soviet republics or foreign countries where standards of living may have been higher, they made temporal comparisons to the past. At worst, they would have made comparisons to close neighbors such as Afghanistan, where things were clearly worse in the 1970s and 1980s. In the novel *Dushanbe*, for example, one of the characters says, “Lenin is pointing in the direction of Afghanistan. He is saying: ‘we have taken all the lands, but Afghanistan is left.’”<sup>30</sup> This characterization of Afghanistan as the “backwards” neighbor was in fact very common in Soviet Tajikistan. In either case, Tajikistan came out looking better – compared to decades past, life in the republic was clearly and inarguably improving. Sitting in his idyllic garden in a village outside of Khujand in 1984, the local village chairman Kh. Kenjaev would have had no doubts about his cause for sanguinity. A veteran of the war with Germany and Hero of the USSR, Kenjaev had watched his republic grow exponentially in the past forty years. Sitting and

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<sup>27</sup> For the USSR as a whole, however, the average citizen in 1985 produced goods and services valued at approximately 600 rubles more than he or she consumed. In the most developed parts of the country, this gap was as high as 900. See Rustam Narzikulov, “Dvulikii Ianus v serdtse Azii: nekotore itogy 70-letnogo razvitiia sredneaziatskikh respublik v sostave SSSR,” *Vostok* 5, 1991, 123.

<sup>28</sup> In a command economy such as the USSR, deficits are best understood as “passive inflation,” resulting from consumers’ access to more money than the total value of available goods. Because prices do not rise dynamically in response to increased monetary levels, consumers tend to increase their purchases in the absence of any further systemic changes.

<sup>29</sup> Interviews with Georgii Koshlakov, Dushanbe, July 2016; Zaragul Mirrasanova, Dushanbe, September 2014.

<sup>30</sup> Abror, *Dushanbe*, 6.

reading a book to his laughing grandchildren, it would have been impossible to convince him that life was doing anything but getting better.<sup>31</sup>

Perspectives such as Kenjaev's would have been common throughout the Tajik SSR, much as they were in many less developed Soviet republics during the USSR. While Soviet sociological surveys tended to skip over the Tajik SSR, instead treating Uzbekistan as a sample representative of the entire region, the surveys conducted did frequently demonstrate particularly high levels of social satisfaction and optimism amongst the citizens of Central Asian republics.<sup>32</sup> In Tajikistan, the idea that life was getting better was shared across a variety of social groups and geographic regions: even those politicians who complained about geographical imbalances in development pointed to the republic's increasing capacity to build factories and create jobs.<sup>33</sup> For many, moreover, there was little doubt that things were going to improve: as one local engineer recalled, there was a "feeling of being part of a great development project," and Tajik Soviet citizens were proud of their growing republic and its increasing economic potential.<sup>34</sup> "We felt lucky," the former Tajik Gosplan worker Rahmat Khakulov later summed up, "to have been living during the dawn of Soviet development."<sup>35</sup>

## **II. Under the Surface: the Fragility of the Tajik Economy**

Unfortunately, not everything was developing as smoothly as it may have seemed to the residents of Dushanbe in the mid-1980s. Tajikistan's growing economy hid many structural imbalances and growing inequalities under its calm surface of societal aplomb, held in check only by the greater superstructure of the USSR and the support provided to Tajikistan from the central Soviet authorities. Most immediately obvious was the Tajik SSR's unchanging position as the USSR's most agrarian republic. Even as equalization brought increased investment and productive capacity to the republic, the absolute majority of its citizens continued to live in rural areas and work in agriculture. By the middle of the 1980s, for example, 67% of the population of the Tajik SSR lived outside of cities, making the

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<sup>31</sup> GAKRT, k.ia. "Iu-7.2", no. 0-93335. Predsedatel' ilpolkoma Kistakuzskogo kishlachnogo soveta Khodzentskogo raiona veteran Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voyny, geroi SSSR, Kh. Kendzhaev so svoimi vnukami. M. Babadzhonov, 1984.

<sup>32</sup> See Iu. V. Arutiunian and L.M. Drobizheva, "Natsional'nye osobennosti kul'tury i nekotorye aspekty sotsial'noi zhizni sovetskogo obshchestva," *Voprosy istorii* 61, no. 7 (1987), 26.

<sup>33</sup> For example: Hikmatullo Nasreddinov, *Tarkish* (Dushanbe: Afsona, 1995), 22.

<sup>34</sup> Interview with a Tajik Soviet engineer and cooperative founder, Dushanbe, September 2016.

<sup>35</sup> Interview with Rahmat Khakulov, Dushanbe, February 2015.



republic the least urbanized in the Soviet Union.<sup>36</sup> Agriculture also dominated the economy, with more than 40% of the entire population of the TSSR employed in the sector, also amongst the highest rates in the USSR.<sup>37</sup> Worse, and uniquely amongst all Soviet republics, Tajikistan had actually deurbanized over the past decade – the republic was becoming more rural over time, rather than less.<sup>38</sup>

Deurbanization and an unending emphasis on agricultural output went against all Soviet principles of development and modernization, yet no matter how much money was spent on equalization, opening factory “outlets” in rural areas or exhorting the Tajik population to move to cities, the Tajik SSR proved unable to change the rural distribution of its population. A number of factors proved to exacerbate the situation, but the central culprit for this structural intransigence was unavoidable: cotton. While long-term economic projections called for economic equalization in the USSR, short-term plans and the constant struggle to meet growing output targets meant that the Soviet Union relied upon a “division of labor” (*razdelenie truda*) amongst its various regions to boost production through economies of scale. When cotton had been incorporated into the Soviet economy in the 1920s, there seemed little cause for argument about the place Tajikistan should take in this division: with an almost complete lack of industry in the republic, agriculture was the economic sphere that offered the most reward. Expanding on the Tsarist heritage in the region, moreover, the early Soviet government expanded cotton production across Tajikistan, filling in swamps and building irrigation canals in order to fill local fields with a cash crop in high demand by Soviet enterprises and on the world market as a source of hard currency.<sup>39</sup> Thus Tajikistan had been long assigned the role of producing agricultural goods, and, more than anything else, cotton. As this chapter will show, moreover, the emphasis on cotton created strong incentives for workers to remain in villages – which in turn drove the growth of the rural sector and the statistical deurbanization worried over by Soviet economists.

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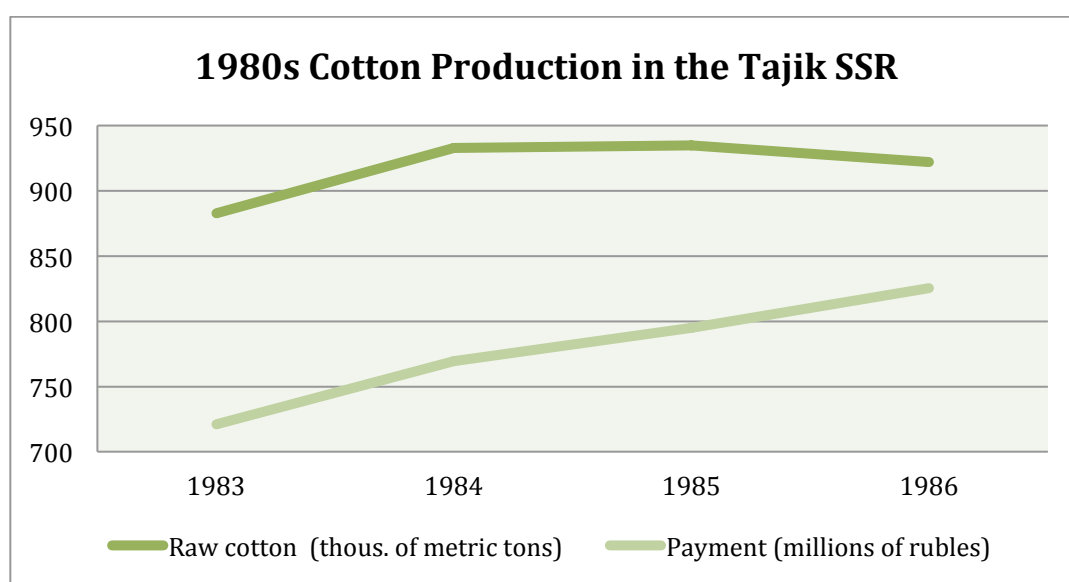
<sup>36</sup> V.I. Mukomel', "Vremia otvetstvennykh reshenii," *Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniia* 15, no. 1 (1989), 10.

<sup>37</sup> Narzikulov, "Dvulikii Ianus v serdtse Azii," 121-122.

<sup>38</sup> Kh. Umarov and N. Matkupov, "Migratsionnye protsessy: motivy i otsenki," *Kommunist Tadzhikistan*, November 17, 1989.

<sup>39</sup> On cotton farming in Tajikistan in the 1920s, see: Bergne, *The Birth of Tajikistan*.

By the mid-1980s cotton absolutely dominated the Tajik economy. Each year cotton was planted on kolkhozes and sovkhoses throughout Tajikistan, where nearly half of the republic's total farmed acreage was seeded with cotton.<sup>40</sup> Nearly 1,200,000 agricultural workers toiled on specialized cotton-producing farms that generated 75% of the republic's cotton output.<sup>41</sup> In total, the Tajik SSR produced approximately 900,000 metric tons of raw cotton each year during the early to mid-1980s, for which its farms and enterprises were paid more than 800 million rubles annually. This was equivalent to 20-25% of the total revenues generated in the republic each year, and in terms of both monetary value and total weight, more than the rest of the republic's agricultural production combined.<sup>42</sup> No other single product or even productive sector could compete with cotton in the Tajik SSR.



**Figure 1: Cotton Production in the Tajik SSR, 1983-1986<sup>43</sup>**

<sup>40</sup> Yuri G. Alexandrov, "Central Asia: specific case of economic underdevelopment," in *State, Religion and Society in Central Asia: A Post-Soviet Critique*, ed. Vitaly Naumkin (Reading: Ithaca Press, 1993), 108.

<sup>41</sup> Calculated from "Svodnyi plan ekonomicheskogo i sotsial'nogo razvitiia kolkhozov, sovkhov, i mezhkhoziaistvennykh predpriatii na 1984 god," TsGART f. 288, op. 14, d. 5293, ll. 15, 44, 46.

<sup>42</sup> In 1986, for example, payments of 825.2 million rubles were provided to Tajik kolkhozes and sovkhoses for 922,187 tons of cotton, while the total revenue produced in and distributed to the republic that year was according to various estimates approximately 4 billion rubles. See RGAE f. 1562, op. 68, d. 2104, ll. 26-28, 59; d. 1773, l. 1-3; Misha V. Belkindas and Matthew J. Sagers, "A Preliminary Analysis of Economic Relations Among Union Republics of the USSR: 1970s-1988," *Soviet Geography* 31, no. 9 (1990): 635. On the value of other agricultural products, see Spravka TsSU Tadjikskoi SSR "O srednikh zakupochnykh tsenakh, vyplatakh i doplatakh za sel'skokhoziaistvennuiu produkciiu za gody desiatoi i 3 goda odinnadtsatoi piatiletki v kolkhozakh, sovkhovakh i goskhoziaistvakh Tadjikskoi SSR," TsGART f. 288, op. 14, d. 5299, l. 47.

<sup>43</sup> Goskomstat Tadjikskoi SSR, *Narodnoe khoziaistvo Tadjikskoi SSR v 1984 godu* (Dushanbe, 1985); GARF f. 5446, op. 147, d. 791, l. 1; RGAE f. 1562, op. 68, d. 2104, l. 59; TsGART f. 288, op. 14, d. 5299, l. 47.

While cotton may have helped to guarantee a steady stream of rubles to the Tajik SSR during the 1980s, the exclusive emphasis on its production had over the decades led to a number of seemingly insurmountable economic contradictions. First and foremost, cotton kept the republic agrarian, insofar as the greatest proportion of funding was directed to the farming, tending, and harvesting of cotton in rural areas. Notwithstanding frequent demands to change the situation, moreover, even the primary processing of raw seed cotton (*khlopok-syrets*) into cotton lint (*khlopok-volokno*) occurred outside of the republic: in the 1980s only a third of local seed cotton was processed in the Tajik SSR, with the majority going for processing to Russia and Ukraine.<sup>44</sup> Cotton processing could have boosted employment and economic growth in regional cities, but the shipment of the majority of the republic's raw cotton to other regions for processing blocked this opportunity. This meant that jobs remained outside of cities, helping to guarantee the population's limited incentive to move.

In addition, cotton helped to keep salaries particularly low in the Tajik SSR. While agricultural salaries had increased significantly in comparison to industrial and service workers' pay since the 1960s, they continued to lag noticeably behind. As noted above, by the mid 1980s they were on average only 83% of the Soviet standard. In Tajikistan, salaries were often even lower. Agricultural production in the USSR was divided between *kolkhozes*, "collective" farms where the workers were "members" and received a mix of set salaries and performance-related pay, and *sovkhozes*, "state" farms where the workers received standardized salaries. Considered more efficient by Soviet economic planners, *sovkhozes* were incentivized by higher payments for agricultural products, and were able to pay higher salaries to their workers.<sup>45</sup> In practice, *kolkhoz* workers in the mid 1980s received approximately 15% less than *sovkhoz* workers – as little as 150 rubles

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<sup>44</sup> In 1985 the Tajik SSR processed 91,700 metric tons of cotton lint. As a rough guideline, three kilograms of seed (raw) cotton can be processed into one kilogram of cotton lint, meaning that this production represented 275,100 metric tons of seed cotton, or 29% of the total produced in the republic. For seed cotton and cotton lint production in 1985, see GARF f. 5446, op. 147, d. 358, l. 11; d. 791, l. 1 and GARF f. 5446, op. 145, d. 361, l. 28, respectively. On the relationship between seed cotton and cotton lint production, see John Baffes, "Cotton-Dependent Countries in the Global Context," in *The Cotton Sector in Central Asia: Economic Policy and Development Challenges*, ed. Deniz Kandiyoti (London: SOAS, 2007), 45.

<sup>45</sup> In Tajikistan payments to *sovkhozes* for one kilogram of cotton fiber were approximately 5% higher in the mid-1980s than equivalent payments to *kolkhozes* (TsGART f. 288, op. 14, d. 5299, l. 48).

per month.<sup>46</sup> While this was enough to provide for the basic needs of one or two people, it was hardly sufficient for a family with children. Unfortunately, moreover, many kolkhoz workers in Tajikistan earned far less than even this minimum. For the whole of 1986, for example, it was reported that in the village of Shamtuchi in Aini district “the husband and wife Sultan Kurbonov and Zebi Sultonova...earned 910 rubles.” The journalist writing about their lives was aghast: “Is this really enough for a family of 7 people? Can this suffice for [their] yearly earnings?”<sup>47</sup>

Even attempts to improve the lives of agricultural workers had only seemed to complicate matters. Considering the lower efficiency and “labor productivity” (*proizvoditel'nost' truda*) of kolkhozes in comparison to sovkhoses – as well as the long-term ideological goal of uniting cooperative and state property – the Soviet state had since the 1960s engaged in a Union-wide policy of merging kolkhozes into sovkhoses.<sup>48</sup> Combined into larger sovkhoses, former kolkhozes became more efficient by taking advantage of economies of scale, as well as by shedding workers, which increased productivity rates. In Tajikistan, for example, in 1965 there were 419 kolkhozes and 55 sovkhoses; by 1984 this ratio had shifted to 158 kolkhozes and 175 sovkhoses. On average, however, each sovkhos employed only around 3,000 workers, far less than the equivalent figure of 8,250 on the average kolkhoz.<sup>49</sup> As the Soviet ethnographer Sergei Poliakov first pointed out in the late 1980s, this emphasis on sovkhoses and improving agricultural productivity had the effect of pushing a notable part of the rural population out of employment.<sup>50</sup> While the statistics are unclear, numbers produced by the Soviet Central Statistics Agency in 1985 appear to show that up to 200,000 “possible” kolkhoz members in the Tajik SSR had ended up unemployed.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> GARF, f. 5446, op. 147, d. 116, l. 167.

<sup>47</sup> Mukhiddin Olimpur, “Zdorov'ia za den'gi ne kupish,” *Pamir* 39, no. 7 (1988), 164.

<sup>48</sup> A.S. Tsipko, “Vozmozhnosti i rezervy kooperatsii,” *Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniia* 12, no.2 (1986), 48.

<sup>49</sup> For 1965, see N.N. Shatskikh and A.G. Khadzhibaev, *Ispol'zovanie trudovykh resursov v sel'skov khoziastve Tadzhikistana* (Donish: Dushanbe, 1969), 18, 32. On the figures from 1984 and average number of workers, see *Svodnyi plan ekonomicheskogo i sotsial'nogo razvitiia...*, TsGART f. 288, op. 14, d. 5293. For supporting evidence, see Tett, “Ambiguous Alliances,” 52-53.

<sup>50</sup> S.P. Poliakov, *Traditsionalizm v sovremennom sredneaziatskom obshchestve* (Moscow: obshchestvo “Znanie”, 1989), 100.

<sup>51</sup> RGAE f. 1562, op. 68, d. 2368, l. 22, 57.

Unemployment was the unavoidable risk that lurked behind all attempts to improve agricultural salaries and the lives of rural workers in the Tajik SSR. While the phenomenon of unemployment was always hidden in official Soviet discourse behind code-words such as “labor over-availability” (*trudoizbytochnost'*) or the “population unengaged in social production” (*ne zaniatoe v obshchestvennom proizvodstve naselenie*), as early as the late 1960s it was clear to everyone involved that the Tajik SSR was not “engaging” the whole its population in work.<sup>52</sup> By 1985 figures varied, but it was calculated that between 120,000 and 270,000 workers in Tajikistan were “outside of work collectives.”<sup>53</sup> As resources had been shifted to improving agricultural outputs and productivity – as well as workers’ salaries – an increasing number of workers were being left behind. This was the same riddle the state faced in its struggle to increase the use of cotton-picking machines. On the one hand, mechanized cotton-harvesting improved per-acre yields, boosted both productivity and salaries, and appeased the central planners in Moscow and Dushanbe who were always advocating for more and more combines. On the other hand, mechanizing the harvest further reduced the need for laborers. As A. Maksumov, the chairman of Tajikistan’s State Agricultural-Industrial Committee (Gosagroprom), later mused, “There was a strong feeling that harvesting cotton by hand provided the possibility of engaging free labor resources from the rural population.”<sup>54</sup> As a result, the cotton harvest was a constant struggle between central planners pushing for mechanization and local harvesters both trying to save money (hand-picking was also cheaper) and keep their local kolkhoz members employed.<sup>55</sup> Mechanization grew, but slowly – paralleling the slow rise of unemployment in Tajikistan’s rural areas.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Shatskikh and Khadzhibaev, *Ispol'zovanie trudovykh resursov*, 38, table 23.

<sup>53</sup> For the higher figure, see: Protokol tret'ego plenuma TsK Kompartii Tadjikistana ot 14.12.1985, RGASPI, f. 17, op. 154, d. 2375, l. 11; for the lower – Rasporiazhenie Gosplana SSSR no. 1645-P ot 27.09.1985, GARF, f. 5446, op. 147, d. 647 l. 8-9.

<sup>54</sup> A. Maksumov, “Bez pomoshchnikov,” *Kommunist Tadjikistana*, February 18, 1987.

<sup>55</sup> For the relatively low cost of non-mechanized harvesting, see: Artemy M. Kalinovsky, “Tractors, Power Lines, and the Welfare State: The Contradictions of Soviet Development in Post-World War II Tajikistan,” *Asiatische Studien* 69, no. 3 (2015).

<sup>56</sup> The percentage of the cotton harvest collected by machine in the TSSR rose from 22% in 1970 to around 40% in the early to mid 1980s. See: Khairula Abduzhaborov, “Industrializatsiia sel'skokhoziaistvennogo proizvodstva Tadjikistana i izmenenie kul'turno-tekhicheskogo urovnia truzhenikov sela” (Dissertatsiia na soiskanie uchenoi stepeni kandidata istoricheskikh nauk, AN TSSR, 1990), 22, 30, 45.

Ultimately, the Tajik SSR's contradictory attempts to concurrently improve agricultural outputs and livelihoods while also guaranteeing rural employment and retain the necessary population to produce massive quantities of cotton cheaply only proved to exacerbate the situation. As the sociologist Vladimir Mukomel' argued during the final years of the USSR, republics such as the Tajik SSR had created a status quo in which rural citizens were provided with many of the benefits of Soviet modernity without its attendant social change. Promoting equalization and modernization, the Soviet state had built roads, phone lines, electricity poles, running water and pumps, schools and many other accoutrements of modern society in villages and kolkhozes, such as those tasked with producing thousands of tons of cotton a year. At the same time, even as many of the kolkhoz workers might have been factually or partially pushed out of work, opportunities and incentives were not created for them to urbanize or leave the village. Job creation in urban areas was spotty, inconsistent, and concentrated in a few large cities that were often relatively geographically inaccessible. In addition, Soviet restrictions on movement, built around the institution of "*propiska*" or registration, meant that rural workers would be denied access to resources if they were to move to cities without official sanction. Thus, the very guarantees and strictures of the Soviet system stopped rural Tajik workers from organically overcoming the localized unemployment they faced in their villages and moving to the republic's cities.<sup>57</sup> Of the options available, remaining in rural areas was often the most comfortable.

As Mukomel pointed out, by avoiding urbanization, the rural citizens of the Tajik SSR also had little reason to embrace many of the norms of Soviet society. This tended only to further exacerbate the same social contradictions the republican leaders in Dushanbe had been long trying to address. Limited in their access to Russian speakers and Russian-language education, but still structurally encouraged to pursue higher education, rural citizens of the Tajik SSR overwhelmingly chose to study language, literature, and other humanities, which privileged their Tajik-language schooling (technical subjects and the sciences were almost exclusively taught in Russian).<sup>58</sup> In the early 1980s, for example, 41% of

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<sup>57</sup> Mukomel', "Vremia otvetstvennykh reshenii."

<sup>58</sup> On the complications caused by encouraging non-Russian enrollment in higher education, see S.V. Chesko, "Rol' ethnonatsionalizma v raspade SSSR," in *Tragediia velikoi derzhavoi: natsional'noi*

surveyed 10<sup>th</sup>-form students in Tajikistan expressed a plan to pursue a humanities degree, while only 10% were interested in technical or science degrees.<sup>59</sup> As a result, fewer students applied to technical schools each year than to universities, even though the republic was constantly in need of welders, tractor drivers, factory workers, and other blue-collar specialists.<sup>60</sup> This further slowed down the mechanization of agriculture: by the mid-1980s the state had plenty of tractors and combines, but simply could not produce enough properly trained drivers.<sup>61</sup> Literature specialists and translators, on the other hand, were unable to find jobs. As the recent graduate B.S. Avezova complained at a meeting with Tajik Communist Party leaders in 1986:

*"Four of us graduated from TGU [Tajik State University] with degrees in Eastern languages, but after receiving our degree we don't know what to do with ourselves...some have even left. When we studied, we thought that we would work as Hindi literature translators, but, as it turns out, our profession isn't needed."*<sup>62</sup>

The factor that made all of these difficulties logarithmically worse, moreover, was the unrelentingly high birth rate in Tajikistan's villages. Across the USSR urbanization and its attendant social changes had long been linked to lowered birth rates; in Tajikistan, the opposite trend towards deurbanization had helped to guarantee rates that remained amongst the USSR's highest. While these rates had dropped since decades past, they still remained at around 5.7 children born to each rural Tajik family in the mid 1980s – far more than enough to guarantee a rapidly growing population.<sup>63</sup> The population, moreover, was growing at a rate

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*vopros i raspad Sovetskogo soiuza*, ed. G.N. Sevost'ianov (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo "Sotsial'no-politicheskaia mysl", 2005), 448; Narzikulov, "Dvulikii Yanus v serdtse Azii."

<sup>59</sup> B. Orazmuradov and D.I. Ziuzin, *Molodezh' respublik Srednei Azii: trud, obrazovanie, professiia, byt* (Askhabad: Ylym, 1987), 84.

<sup>60</sup> In 1985 there were 58,900 undergraduate students studying at the Tajik SSR's 10 universities, and only 41,900 students at its many technical schools and colleges. See: Makhmud Abdulloev, "Narodnoe obrazovanie Respubliki Tadzhikistan v 60-80 gody XX veka: istoriia i problemy razvitiia" (Dissertatsiia na soiskanie uchenoi stepeni doktora istoricheskikh nauk, AN RT, 2012), 115, 122.

<sup>61</sup> In the mid-1980s it was reported that the cotton sector in the Tajik SSR had 81% of the cotton-picking machines needed to fully mechanize the harvest, but was missing 5,000 machine operators to drive these machines (perhaps half of the total needed work force). See: TsGART f. 18, op. 8, d. 3634, l. 175; f. 288, op. 14, d. 5544, l. 59.

<sup>62</sup> Kriticheskie zamechaniia i predlozheniia, vyskazannye molodymimi spetsialistami na vstreche s chlenami biuro TsK Kompartii Tadzhikistana v dekabre 1986 goda. TsGART f. 18, op. 8, d. 3635, l. 229.

<sup>63</sup> Calculated from Morozova, "Trudoizbytochna li." Rather than focus on urbanization, actions taken by the Tajik SSR during the 1980s tended to emphasize family planning in rural environments, with limited effect. See TsGART f. 18, op 8, d. 3634, l.15-16; d. 3941, l. 94.

faster than the Tajik SSR's economy as a whole, meaning that attempts to increase rural employment and pay, labor productivity, or even simple school construction kept running into the dead end of more and more mouths to feed. "It is impossible not to see," the Chairman of the Soviet Council of Ministers Izatullo Khayoev noted in the mid-1980s, "that GNP per capita figures are worsening in connection with the high rates of population growth" in the republic. As a result, he concluded, overall "standard of living growth" was also coming to a standstill, unable to keep up with the growing population's demand for resources.<sup>64</sup> By the mid-1980s, resources were stretched increasingly thin across the whole of the Tajik SSR as high birth rates, growing unemployment and workers' low salaries all dampened the republic's long-term prospects for growth and development.

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X

As the leaders of the Tajik SSR struggled each year to find funds to pay for new kindergartens, increased salaries, and the occasional village outlet factory (*filial*), they also found themselves bound by the underlying structure of Soviet budget policy. As a provider of agricultural goods within the Soviet "division of labor," the Tajik SSR's access to budget funds was inherently restricted. Although the USSR had a well-deserved reputation for economic centralization, its budgetary structure was in fact hierarchically divergent and locally focused. In addition to the federal Soviet budget, which controlled the lion's share of the state's resources and financed federal programs and centrally-directed industries, each individual republic was provided with its own budget, which was nominally meant to be drawn from locally collected tax revenues. For the majority of Central Asian republics, including Tajikistan, the main sources of revenue for the republican budget were the profits from "locally controlled" (*mestnogo podchineniia*) enterprises (15-20% in the decade before 1985) – and, more importantly, the so-called "turnover tax" (*nalog s oborota*), which constituted around 50% of Tajikistan's annual budget throughout the early 1980s (see Figure 2, below). While different republics were allowed to retain different percentages of the turnover tax collected on their territories, by the 1980s the USSR was placing increased emphasis on localized development funding, and had shifted the majority of

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<sup>64</sup> Stenogramma Zasedaniia Prezidiuma Soveta Ministrov Tadzhikskoi SSR ot 05.03.1987, TsGART f. 18, op. 8, d. 3636, l. 16.



turnover tax revenue to republican budgets. As one of the least developed republics, the Tajik SSR was allowed to keep 91% of these tax revenues.<sup>65</sup>

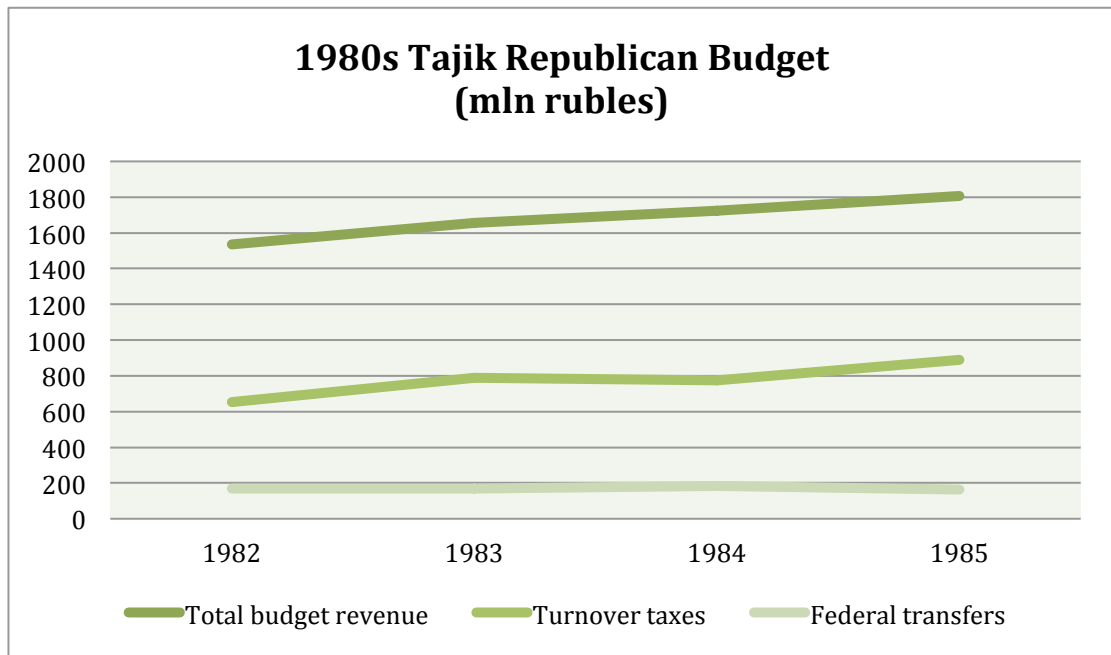
Unfortunately for Tajikistan, this high percentage hid the fact that turnover taxes were only levied on finished consumer goods. Representing the difference between a product's retail price and the combined cost of the product's bulk price and established retail profit margin, turnover taxes were generally collected by an enterprise at the point when they transferred goods to retail stores. The "Pamir" refrigerators produced by Dushanbe's Refrigerator Factory, for example, had a set retail price of 250 rubles. This price included a 7% profit markup for the retail store where it was sold; of the remaining 232.5 rubles paid by the store for a refrigerator, 220.39 rubles were kept by the factory and 12.11 rubles were split between the Tajik republican and Soviet federal budgets.<sup>66</sup> Turnover tax rates were individually established for different sectors and goods, with rates ranging as high as 15-20%; the 5% mark-up on "Pamir" refrigerators was actually quite low.<sup>67</sup> In Tajikistan, however, enterprises such as the Dushanbe Refrigerator Factory represented only a small percentage of the republican economy, and factories that could provide turnover taxes were very sparsely represented. Instead, cotton remained king – but a poor monarch who brought no turnover tax to the Tajik SSR's budget.

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<sup>65</sup> Bahry, *Outside Moscow*, 55.

<sup>66</sup> The majority (91%) went to the republican budget. TsGART f. 1935, op. 2, d. 65, l. 13.

<sup>67</sup> As regulated by the Postanovlenie Sovmina SSSR ot 30.06.1975 (#522) "Ob utverzhdenii polozheniia o naloge s oborota." For average 1980 rates, see: Dokladnaia zapiska Ministra finansov SSSR ot 12.05.1986 "O stabil'nosti stavok naloga s oborota," GARF f. 5446, op. 147, d. 121, l. 1.



**Figure 2: Tajik SSR's Republican Budget, 1982-1985<sup>68</sup>**

The problem was that raw materials, including cotton, were excluded from the turnover tax structure, which was meant to tax the “added value” applied to goods through labor.<sup>69</sup> When cotton was harvested, cleaned, or even processed on Tajik soil, no taxes were collected; when cotton lint or fiber was sent to primarily Ukrainian and Russian factories, these enterprises also paid no taxes to Tajikistan. When the latter factories produced cotton cloth or clothing and sold it to consumers, however, they did collect turnover taxes - but only for the Russian, Ukrainian, or other more developed republics' budgets.<sup>70</sup> Given the limited level of industrial development in the Tajik SSR, moreover – and with both agricultural salaries and the cost of raw materials depressed, thus further lowering local profit margins – the republican budget was constantly starved for funds.<sup>71</sup> As a result, by the early 1980s around 10% of the Tajik SSR's annual budget had to be made up through direct transfers from the federal budget in Moscow (see Figure 2, above).

<sup>68</sup> See *Gosudarstvennyi biudzheth SSSR i biudzhety soiuznykh respublik 1976-1980. Statisticheskii sbornik* (Moscow: Finansy i statistika, 1982); *Gosudarstvennyi biudzheth SSSR 1981-1985, statisticheskii sbornik* (Moscow: Finansy i statistika, 1987); *Gosudarstvennyi biudzheth SSSR 1990, kratkii statisticheskii sbornik* (Moscow: Finansy i statistika, 1990).

<sup>69</sup> For an overview, see: A.N. Anchishkin, *Nalog s oborota – konkretnaia forma pribavochnogo produkta sotsialisticheskogo proizvodstva* (Moscow: Vysshiaia shkola, 1962).

<sup>70</sup> RGAE f. 4372, op. 67, d. 9340, l. 253. For the distribution of tax revenues and profits, see GARF f. 5446, op. 147, d. 116, l. 168.

<sup>71</sup> While the USSR had for decades increased payments for agricultural goods, many – including cotton – remained undervalued. By 1986 average payments for one kilogram of raw cotton to the Tajik SSR's kolkhozes and sovkhoses had only risen to 90 kopeks. See RGAE f. 1562, op. 68, d. 2104, l. 59.

Nor was it only the budget: if the entire republican national material product (NMP) is considered, then the figures are even larger. Statistics from the late 1980s show that between 15-20% (between 800 million and 1200 million rubles) of the Tajik SSR's NMP had originated in other republics.<sup>72</sup> In practice, these figures represented both the Soviet government's ongoing investiture in the republic, as well as constant claims on extra-budgetary funds. The archives are full of requests for additional monies: for roads, for reconstruction after an earthquake, for new factories, and even for expansions to government buildings. Many new initiatives had to be approved in Moscow. As the former head of Tajikistan's Gosplan later complained, "We came to Moscow literally every month – everything had to be decided through the center."<sup>73</sup>

In the decades since the Soviet collapse, this system of centralized investments and the delineation of extra-budgetary funds has earned Tajikistan the epithet of "subsidized" (*dotatsionyi*), as both Western and Russian commentators have decried the apparent largesse. At the time, however, the practice of directing central budget funds to Tajikistan was seen as neither irrational largesse nor unjustified subsidies. Instead, it was an integral part of the Soviet "division of labor," in which Tajikistan's role was to produce raw materials (cotton) for other republics, the role of which was to process these materials and turn them into consumer goods. In contrast to the capitalist empires of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and their colonial subject states, however, the Soviet Union explicitly intended not simply to pull out raw goods – but also to spend money to develop the regions from which the materials were taken.<sup>74</sup> Internal statistical analyses also demonstrated an understanding of this relationship. As the Soviet Central Statistics Agency (TsSU) reflected in a late 1980s report:

*"The geographical location of the extraction and processing of raw materials and energy resources, or, alternatively, the manufacture of final products from these materials, has a notable impact on the relationship between the volume of gross national product produced*

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<sup>72</sup> GARF f. 5446, op. 162, d. 176, l. 27. Also see [Appendix I: Cotton Taxes and "Subsidies."](#)

<sup>73</sup> Interview with Buri Karimov, Moscow, March 2015.

<sup>74</sup> On the Soviet dedication to spending money in its periphery in direct contrast to colonial empires, see Adeeb Khalid, "The Soviet Union as an Imperial Formation: A View from Central Asia," in *Imperial Formations*, eds. Ann Laura Stoler, Carole McGranahan and Peter C. Perdue (Santa Fe: School for Advanced Research Press, 2007); Adrienne Edgar, "Bolshevism, patriarchy and the nation: The Soviet 'emancipation' of Muslim women in pan-Islamic perspective," *Slavic Review* 65, no. 2 (2006).

*and spent in one or another republic. This is due to the significant gap between prices on the world market and internal bulk prices for inter-republic (mezhrespublikanskii) exchanges (raw material prices are lower than world prices, while finished consumer products are more expensive). The geographic location of agricultural production or industrial processing on the territory of one or another republic is also notable, insofar as turnover taxes from agricultural products are realized in the final retail prices set for industrially produced consumer goods. As a result, the defining feature...is a republic's place in the USSR's division of labor."*<sup>75</sup>

As the TsSU argued, the Soviet Union's historical underpricing of raw materials and foodstuffs, as well as the exclusion of these goods from the tax structure, meant that certain republics simply had access to less revenue than others. This was not to suggest immediate changes to the system, as it also provided advantages in terms of cheap foodstuffs for consumers and industrial inputs for factories. Instead, the TsSU meant simply to highlight the "relationship between the volume of gross national product produced and spent in one or another republic" and point out that certain republics, such as Tajikistan, required direct and indirect payments to make up the noted gap.

The TsSU's sanguinity over the hundreds of millions of rubles sent each year from Moscow to Dushanbe may also have been due to the internal understanding among planning bodies that the exchange was actually close to even. The value of cotton to the USSR was far greater than the amount the state paid to the kolkhozes and sovkhozes that farmed it: if utilized in the USSR to produce cloth and clothing, it derived notable turnover taxes, and if exported abroad, it provided the state with not insignificant hard currency. Beginning in 1987, moreover, various Gosplan bodies began running the numbers, developing statistics that showed that the total value of annual payments to all republics to indirectly "make up the cost of raw cotton" was around 3 billion rubles – almost exactly the same amount earned by other republics in turnover taxes on cotton clothes.<sup>76</sup> In the case of Tajikistan, the republican Gosplan calculated in the late 1980s that if provided with a conservative portion of the turnover taxes collected on clothing produced from Tajik cotton, Tajik budget revenues could have been increased by 25% annually.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Doklad Goskomstata "O proizvodstve i ispol'zovanii valovogo obshchestvennogo produkta po soiuznym respublikam za 1989 god". GARF f. 5446, op. 162, d. 176, ll. 28-29.

<sup>76</sup> RGAE f. 7733, op. 65, d. 5443, l. 13.

<sup>77</sup> Spravka svodnogo otdela gosbiudzhetrov Gosplana TSSR, TSGART f. 306, op. 27, d. 1130, l. 79.

This would have been more than enough to cover the budget deficits filled in each year from federal Soviet coffers. While this still left part of the 15% of Tajik NMP produced outside of the republic unaccounted for, statistics indicate that together with the value of Tajik cotton exported abroad, the calculation also came close to even. Each year the Tajik SSR produced an amount of cotton that was ultimately worth more or less the same amount as the financial transfers it received.<sup>78</sup> This engendered an exchange that was more or less equal: Tajik production was systematically undervalued, but financial infusions from Moscow kept the final balance sheets fair. Rather than strictly “subsidized” by the rest of the Soviet economy, Tajikistan was instead bound by a thousand financial threads to the Soviet center, along which cotton and raw materials were exchanged for financial support and economic development.

### **III. Perestroika’s First Stirrings**

Surveying the state of Tajikistan’s social and economic development in 1985, the leaders of the Tajik SSR would have faced a fragile but stable status quo. On the one hand, Tajikistan’s place within the Soviet “division of labor” as a producer of cotton had led to serious challenges. By the mid-1980s, Tajikistan was the USSR’s most agrarian republic, and one that boasted some of the lowest rates of labor productivity. The consistently high birth rate in the republic, moreover, meant that more and more people were added to the waiting lists for housing, schools, and even kindergartens each year.<sup>79</sup> (As one minister sighed in the late 1980s, “We’ll never get ahead of kindergartens or schools unless we do something decisive.”)<sup>80</sup> Yet it would have been equally clear to the leaders of the Tajik SSR that the calculations showing Tajikistan’s birth rate to be higher than its economic growth rate were artificially kept down by the undervaluing of cotton and the lack of tax revenues sent to the republic. In practice, things were often much better than the statistics showed. Each year life was improving: schools and kindergartens were expanded, housing was built, and industrial jobs were expanded. It was inarguable that problems remained, most notably the growing unemployment in rural areas and the lack of local Tajik technical workers available to fill the republic’s available jobs, but these were not taken as a sign that the

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<sup>78</sup> For a full explanation of these calculations, see [Appendix I: Cotton Taxes and “Subsidies.”](#)

<sup>79</sup> On housing, see Kalinovsky, *Laboratory of Socialist Development*, ch. 5.

<sup>80</sup> Stenogramma Zasedaniia Soveta Ministrov Tadzhikskoi SSR, 08.01.1987. TsGART f. 18, op. 8, d. 3634, ll. 15-16.

system itself was broken. On the contrary, they were seen as eminently solvable *within* the Soviet system. On balance, the Soviet Union was seen as providing more than it took away: why buck a system that, warts and all, had managed to modernize much of Tajikistan in as little as 70 years?

In addition to the factual benefits Soviet society provided for the residents of the Tajik SSR, however, the makeup and experience of the Tajik leadership just as equally inclined them to support the existing Soviet order. The leaders of the Communist Party of Tajikistan (CPT) and the Tajik Soviet government were drawn from a small and established circle of urbane Party members. Once reaching the upper echelons of power, moreover, they had a tendency to remain established for decades. Amongst the leaders of the republic in the mid 1980s, for example, CPT Bureau member Guljakhon Bobosadykova had held the same position since 1961;<sup>81</sup> other Bureau members, such as Ivan Dedov and Hikmatullo Nasreddinov, had also worked for the CPT Central Committee for more than a decade.<sup>82</sup> In addition, the republican Finance Minister, Jonobiddin Lafizov, had been in his post since 1973; the deputy chairperson of the Presidium of the Tajik Supreme Soviet, Nizoramoh Zarifova, had held her position since 1966;<sup>83</sup> and Mahmudullo Kholov, the Chairman of the Presidium, had just calmly retired in 1984 after 21 years in his post.<sup>84</sup> While Rahmon Nabiev had just been elected as First Secretary of the Communist Party of Tajikistan in 1982, he had previously spent a comfortable decade as Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the Tajik SSR, and could have expected a long run at the top of the political pyramid: his predecessor, Jabbor Rasulov, had been First Secretary for 18 years before passing away at his desk.

Their lengthy stays in power helped to solidify the Tajik elite's loyalty to the Soviet political and economic system. This link was further strengthened by the benefits this group could claim as a result of their connections to the ultimate sources of power and finance in Moscow. This is not to say that the leaders of the Tajik SSR were drawn from one group of families or that political power was passed

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<sup>81</sup> RGASPI f. 17, op. 156, d. 1957, ll. 130-131.

<sup>82</sup> Nasreddinov, *Tarkish*, 22-23.

<sup>83</sup> On Lafizov, see TsGART f. 297, op. 40, d. 1246. On Zarifova - "Zarifova, Nizoramoh," *Entsiklopediiai sovetii tojik* (Dushanbe: Akademiiai fanhoi RSS Tojikiston, 1980), v. 2, 469.

<sup>84</sup> "Kholov, Mahmudullo," *Entsiklopediiai sovetii tojik* (Dushanbe: Akademiiai fanhoi RSS Tojikiston, 1988), v. 8, 557.

hereditarily from one generation to another. Far from it: much as in the highest echelons of Soviet politics, the Tajik elite actually allowed for a good deal of social movement, and the Tajik political system constantly generated new cadres through the Komsomol and Party structures.<sup>85</sup> Born in many regions of Tajikistan, the leaders of the Republic often came from working class or even poor backgrounds.<sup>86</sup> Having arrived at university, however, they would spend the majority of their lives in the relative privilege of Dushanbe, completing university there and only leaving for brief periods of further study in Moscow or Tashkent or practical work in the regions of Tajikistan. While it has often been claimed that Tajik Soviet politics was dominated by a unified “Leninabad” clan, this is not entirely supported by available evidence. Archival records show that ministerial and Party roles were filled by cadres from around Tajikistan, and political networks often had as much to do with shared work experience as with geographic belonging.<sup>87</sup>

In addition, although the First Secretaries of the Tajik Communist Party were traditionally representatives of the Tajik north, all of them had spent decades in the South and Dushanbe before taking on leadership roles. In contrast to some other republics, as well as a body of literature that has often emphasized the “clan-based” nature of political networks in Central Asia, these politicians’ lives demonstrate the effectiveness of Soviet internationalist and transregional acculturation in Tajikistan.<sup>88</sup> “I moved to Dushanbe when I was 17,” a former Tajik Bureau member, now around 80 years old, asked sardonically – “Does this make

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<sup>85</sup> Much as in Moscow, there was no recorded case in the Tajik SSR in which the child of a Party of state leader later also became a Party or state leader.

<sup>86</sup> Of the leaders mentioned above, one was from Garm (Kholov), one from Kulyab (Nasreddinov), one from Vose in the south (Zarifova), one from Isfara (Lafizov), and two from the Khujand area (Bobosadykova and Nabiev).

<sup>87</sup> In the mid to late 1980s, for example, the First Secretary of the CPT was from a village near Leninabad, but the Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet was from Pamir, and the Chairman of the Council of Ministers from the south. The Council of Ministers had members from Kulyab in the south, Isfara in the north, Pamir, Garm in the East, Dushanbe, and many other regions (see TsGART f. 297, op. 40, d. 1246, ll. 43-89). On personal networks, Hikmatullo Nasreddinov, a southerner, was brought to Dushanbe and promoted by Rahmon Nabiev, a northerner. Once he was removed from the Tajik Communist Party’s Bureau in 1986, Nasreddinov’s successor, Vahhob Vohidov (a northerner) promoted Qadriddin Aslonov, a politician from Garm in the East (see Nasreddinov, *Tarkish*, 36; Nurali Davlat, “Qadriddin Aslonov: Sarnavishti imzoguzori e”lomiyai istiqlo”l,” *Ozodagon*, October 26, 2016).

<sup>88</sup> On Uzbekistan as a political sphere dominated by clans, see Riccardo Mario Cucciolla, “The Crisis of Soviet Power in Central Asia: The ‘Uzbek cotton affair’ (1975-1991)” (PhD diss., IMT School for Advanced Studies, Lucca, Italy, 2017). Nourzhanov and Bleuer have attempted to demonstrate the “clan-based” nature of Tajik politics, but their argument relies upon a series of unconvincing and confusing charts (Nourzhanov and Bleuer, *Tajikistan*, 132, 136).

me a northerner? Or a Dushanbe resident?”<sup>89</sup> Given their socialization into Soviet politics, the leaders of the Tajik SSR should be best understood as loyal not to their individual places of birth – but instead to the Soviet system as a whole.

When Mikhail Gorbachev became General Secretary of the Communist Party of the USSR in March 1985, Tajikistan’s top echelon of state and Party posts was filled with individuals who exemplified these principles of conservative loyalty to the Soviet state and ideology. Rahmon Nabiev, the first secretary of the CPT, had been born in 1930 in a northern village. An engineer by training, he had entered “Party work” in the 1960s, and had since worked in the CPT and Tajik SSR’s Ministry of Agriculture before becoming the Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the Tajik SSR in 1973. Nabiev’s factual deputy, Kakhhor Mahkamov, had held the position of Chairman of the Council of Minister’s since 1982. Also an engineer from a northern village like Nabiev, Mahkamov had been educated in Leningrad and had the reputation of being especially Russified. The Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Tajik SSR, Ghoibnazar Pallaev, had just replaced his predecessor Kholov in 1984. A contemporary of Nabiev and Mahkamov’s, Pallaev was from the Pamir region of eastern Tajikistan, although he had worked in Party positions across much of the republic. All three figures, along with many of their subordinates, shared many of the same characteristics: technical educations, practical experience in collective farms, and long government careers. While growing up in poverty (Pallaev had been partially raised in an orphanage), they had all benefitted greatly from the Soviet system and were dedicated civil servants.<sup>90</sup>

Given this Party makeup, it was unsurprising that Gorbachev’s calls for change and economic reform were initially met with skepticism by the local elites in Dushanbe. It seemed, the newly appointed Tajik Minister of Higher Education Shukur Sultonov later wrote, that “the new leadership didn’t have a particularly clear plan or perspective on the restructuring of society.”<sup>91</sup> For Sultonov and other members of the Tajik Soviet elite, moreover, Gorbachev’s early reform efforts were hardly

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<sup>89</sup> Interview with a former member of the CPT Bureau, Dushanbe, July 2016.

<sup>90</sup> For Nabiev’s biography, see *Nomzad ba Raisi Jumhirii Tojikiston Rahmon Nabievich Nabiev* (Dushanbe: Goskomiteta Tadzhiqistana po pechati, 1991); for Mahkamov’s – RGAPSI f. 17, op. 154, d. 2375, l. 3; for Pallaev’s – TsGART f. 297, op. 40, d. 1287, l. 95.

<sup>91</sup> Shukur Sultonov, *Yoddoshthoi ziyoi Shuravy* (Khujand: Khoroson, 2015), 441.



seen as a challenge to the established economic and political order. At worst, it seemed, they might be an empty show campaign – and at best, an opportunity to boost existing industrialization efforts. The highly publicized anti-alcohol campaign, for example, which by the end of 1985 had led to lines for vodka and increasing dissatisfaction in Moscow, caused barely a ripple in Tajikistan. Although alcohol sales in 1985 decreased by up to 55% in some parts of the republic, no one seemed disturbed; there was still plenty of vodka on the shelves to bring as gifts when visiting Moscow.<sup>92</sup> Gorbachev's public discussion of the need for "speeding up" (*uskorenie*) in the economy and increased funding for machine building, moreover, seemed to the leaders of the Tajik SSR as a standard Soviet approach to economic growth, and one, moreover, that would help their own plans to open new factories in the republic. Speeding up economic growth, it was suggested, would mean expanding new "labor-intensive" work projects, such as the building of hydroelectric stations in outlying regions of the republic.<sup>93</sup> Gorbachev, it seemed, had found a solution to Tajikistan's central problem: "The focus should be on the complete use of the working-age population in local areas."<sup>94</sup> And yet before the leadership of the Tajik SSR could get started on any new development projects, the political rug was suddenly pulled out from under their feet: Rahmon Nabiev was unexpectedly removed from his position as First Secretary of the Communist Party of Tajikistan after just three years in December 1985.

Nor had there been any notice of the changes to come. On December 12, 1985 Georgii Razumovskii, the head of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union's (CPSU) Department for Organizational and Party Work, arrived in Dushanbe. A career Central Committee employee, Razumovskii owed his rise to department head to Gorbachev, who had appointed him as deputy to Egor Ligachev, the Politbureau member and head of the Central Committee's Organizational Bureau (*Orgbiuro*). Both his official position and allegiance to Gorbachev essentially made him the latter's proxy when it came to overseeing

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<sup>92</sup> RGASPI f. 17, op. 154, d. 2431, l. 80. On trips to Moscow, see: Interview with Alisher Yarbabaev, Dushanbe, February 2015.

<sup>93</sup> Tohir Kalandarov, *Shugnantsy* (Moscow: Institut etnologii i antropologii RAN, 2004), 115.

<sup>94</sup> D.I. Ziuzin, "Varianty sotsial'no-ekonomicheskogo razvitiia sredneaziatskogo regiona," *Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniia* 12, no. 4 (1986), 18.

republican Party apparatuses, including Tajikistan's.<sup>95</sup> His unexpected arrival in Dushanbe clearly heralded some concern. A CPT Bureau meeting was called, where it was decided to hold a full Plenum of the Tajik Communist Party's Central Committee on December 14.<sup>96</sup> At this Plenum Nabiev made an official request to retire from his post as First Secretary "for health reasons," and the Central Committee of the CPSU, in the person of Razumovskii, "granted his request."<sup>97</sup> Of course, few in the Tajik elite believed the official statement issued by the Party. It was well known in Dushanbe that Nabiev had been set up. Taking advantage of the new leadership in Moscow and its focus on both reform and "sobriety" (*trezvost'*), someone had been both encouraging and documenting Nabiev's habit of "organizing lush banquets with large amounts of alcohol consumption," as Razumovskii put it during closed discussions following Nabiev's resignation.<sup>98</sup> This information had then been passed on to Ligachev and Gorbachev in the Central Committee, who judged it hardly proper behavior for the Party's leadership in Dushanbe. The new course of reform, Razumovskii emphasized, required a different sort of leader.

In and of itself, the fact that the members of the political elite in Dushanbe had been scheming against each other was hardly cause for particular worry: internal conflicts and political backstabbing were as common in the Tajik SSR as anywhere else. Instead, what took elite and intellectual circles by surprise was Moscow's quick and decisive reaction. In the past, conflicts in Dushanbe were rarely, if ever, cause for intervention from the center; as long as the economic bargain of raw resources in exchange for development funding held, the leaders of the CPSU had

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<sup>95</sup> See: "Razumovskii, Georgii Petrovich," *Ivestiia TsK KPSS*, 1 (1989), 26.

<sup>96</sup> Protokol no. 156 zasedaniia biuro TsK Kompartii Tadzhikistana ot 12.12.1985, RGASPI f. 17, op. 154, d. 2382, l. 198.

<sup>97</sup> Protokol dvadtsat' tret'ego plenuma TsK Kompartii, 14.12.1985, RGASPI f. 17, op. 154, d. 2375, l. 3.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, l. 14. This account has been confirmed by a number of contemporary witnesses, and it is undeniable that Nabiev had a well-documented drinking problem. See Nasreddinov, *Tarkish*, 27-28; interview with Firuza Yarbabaeva (a close family friend of Nabiev's), Dushanbe, February 2015; interview with an anonymous member of the Tajik Communist Party's Bureau. On Nabiev's drinking, see Ibrohim Usmonov, *Soli Nabiev* (Dushanbe: Matbaai bayni donishkadhoi oli, 1995), 15-16. Different individuals are accused of feeding information to Moscow, but fingers are most often pointed at Ghoibnazar Pallaev. While Nourzhanov and Bleuer argue that Nabiev's drinking was just a proxy for a deeper conflict over his opposition to Moscow-directed personnel changes, this is not supported by available evidence. Changes in the Tajik Communist Party were implemented by Mahkamov and were related to his own internal preferences; there is no evidence of these changes having been planned before 1986. Cf. Nourzhanov and Bleuer, *Tajikistan*, 160 (following Nazrullo Dustov, *Zahm bar jismi vatan* (Dushanbe: Irfon, 1994), 132).

been willing to leave Dushanbe well enough alone. Gorbachev's aggressive response to Nabiev's improprieties suggested that the terms of the bargain had now been radically changed. From now on, it seemed, Tajikistan would be expected to do more than just produce cotton and build hydroelectric dams: no matter its relative level of development, it would be expected to live up to the same standards as the rest of the republics. This was driven home by comments made by Razumovskii, who berated the Tajik leadership for its "formalism, paper-pushing (*bumagotvorchestvo*) and other faults." He argued that in the conditions of reform promoted by Gorbachev the Tajik leaders' "inappropriate and outdated methods of leadership" and emphasis on "protecting Soviet and economic institutions" would have to be changed. Worse of all, he made it clear that the established policy of equalization that had helped to develop the Tajik economy was on its way out:

*"It seems that you wish in the future to direct your hopes to subsidies from the federal budget. To consider this your eternal right is to accept the stagnation in your own development...The Central Committee of the CPSU expects better from you."*<sup>99</sup>

Returning to Moscow shortly thereafter, Razumovskii left a befuddled Tajik leadership in his wake in Dushanbe. While Nabiev was quickly replaced by Kahhor Mahkamov, many other questions remained unanswered – and highly worrying.<sup>100</sup> Moscow's willingness to intervene in the party politics of the Tajik Communist Party and to imply that the underlying economic bargain between the Tajik SSR and the center was now void was anything but positive. It was also unclear how Moscow planned to address the fundamental – and growing – problems in the republic, such as unemployment and a lack of industrial workers, without increased levels of investiture. It was all well and good to talk about promoting "rationalization" and improved levels of productivity, but Tajikistan all the same remained amongst the least developed corners of the USSR. This hardly seemed an opportune moment to abandon equalization, especially, as the leadership of the Tajik SSR believed, given how successful it had been over the previous decades. Members of the Tajik Council of Ministers and Communist Party began to wonder if "Moscow had any idea at all about what was going on in

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<sup>99</sup> RGASPI f. 17, op. 154, d. 2375, l. 10.

<sup>100</sup> RGASPI, f. 17, op. 154, d. 2375, l. 3.

Tajikistan.”<sup>101</sup> As the years passed and perestroika built up steam the answer in Dushanbe increasingly appeared to be no – whatever reasoning Gorbachev might be following in his drive for reform, it seemed to have nothing at all to do with life in the Tajik SSR.

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<sup>101</sup> Interview with Georgii Koshlakov, Dushanbe, July 2016.

### **Chapter Three**

## **The Statistics Must be Lying: Moscow's Case for Structural Reform**

While the peripheral Soviet elite in places like Dushanbe remained deeply skeptical about the need for reform, by the mid-to-late 1980s the central leadership of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) had far more mixed feelings. For many, including Mikhail Gorbachev and his advisors, there was something deeply and perniciously wrong with Soviet society. “We simply can’t keep living like this,” Gorbachev never tired of saying in private after taking over as First Secretary of the CPSU.<sup>1</sup> His pick for Foreign Minister, the Georgian Eduard Shevardnadze, would put it even stronger: “Everything has rotten. It must be changed.”<sup>2</sup> While the exact source of malaise was often amorphous and frequently disagreed upon, Gorbachev and his supporters agreed that the Soviet Union, and first and foremost its economy, was at a crossroads. If significant efforts were not made to fix the economy, the whole of Soviet society would be under threat: the state would no longer be able to provide for the growing demands of its increasingly educated and modern population. Over time, moreover, Gorbachev and his team came to accept the arguments of a reform-minded wing of Soviet economics, which had for decades been advocating a shift to capitalist-style markets as the only solution to what they saw as the USSR’s increasing woes. By the time he set about reforming the economy in late 1986 and 1987, Gorbachev had largely accepted these arguments for change, finding in them theoretical backing for his own personal sense that something needed to be changed in the Soviet economy.

While Gorbachev’s push for economic reform is inarguable, the reasons for his belief in its inevitability are not as obvious as they are often presented. These reasons, complicated as they were, moreover, would help to determine the course of reform taken. Although popular memory and many histories of perestroika suggest that by 1985 the Soviet economy was close to collapsing, brought to the edge by decades of ‘stagnation’ (*zastoi*), this is not supported by economic evidence.<sup>3</sup> Both official Soviet statistics and independently modeled figures

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<sup>1</sup> M.S. Gorbachev, *Naedine s soboi* (Moscow: Grin-Strit, 2012), 386.

<sup>2</sup> Eduard Shvardnadze, *Moi vybor. V zashchitu demokratii i svobody* (Moscow: Novosti, 1991), 79.

<sup>3</sup> Amongst many other sources highlighting the “impending” economic collapse of the Soviet economy, see Abel Aganbegian, *Moving the Mountain: Inside the Perestroika Revolution*, trans. Helen

produced by the CIA demonstrated actual economic growth throughout the late 1970s and early 1980s, even as rates of growth diminished. While the figures produced by the CIA tended to assume a lower baseline for Soviet economic growth, they essentially paralleled the trajectories shown in official Soviet statistics, pointing to the underlying strength of the Soviet economy up to and through 1985.<sup>4</sup> Even the most critical analyses of the Soviet economy during this period, such as those produced by G.I. Khanin, a harsh critic of Soviet statistics, generally aligned with official picture.<sup>5</sup> There were, of course, reasons for concern. Nearly all official, Western, and independent Soviet analyses agreed that rates of economic growth had continuously decreased from an average of 6-8% in the mid 1960s to 2-3% by the mid 1980s.<sup>6</sup> Labor productivity rates had equally tapered off beginning around 1975.<sup>7</sup> A series of related factors had even led to an actual, if short, recession in 1979, when output may have contracted by up to 0.5% before rebounding in 1980 and rising in the early 1980s.<sup>8</sup> Yet even in the face of these declines, these same sources all pointed to the economy's continued growth and predicted resilience into the 1980s. Rates of growth might have been down, but

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Szamuely (London: Bantam Press, 1989); Aron Katsenelinboigin, *The Soviet Union: Empire, Nation, and System* (London: Transaction Publishers, 1990), 5-6; Khanin, *Dinamika ekonomicheskogo*; Pryce-Jones, *The War that Never Was*; Brzeski, "The End of Communist Economics"; McCauley, *The Rise and Fall*; Yegor Gaidar, *Collapse of an Empire: Lessons for Modern Russia* (Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 2007).

<sup>4</sup> US Congress Joint Economic Committee, *USSR: Measures of Economic Growth and Development, 1950-1980* (Washington: US Gov. Printing Office, 1982). The CIA's estimates of Soviet economics have been heavily criticized, insofar as they predicted Soviet growth. As Angus Maddison has argued, however, this criticism was "not well founded" and circular: the USSR collapsed, so any calculations showing economic stability cannot be correct, because the USSR collapsed. See: Angus Maddison, "Measuring the Performance of a Communist Command Economy: An Assessment of the CIA Estimates for the USSR," *Review of Income and Wealth* 44, no. 3 (1998): 309-313; also Mark Harrison, "Postwar Russian Growth: Not a Riddle," *Europe-Asia Studies* 55, no. 8 (2003).

<sup>5</sup> Mark Harrison, "Soviet Economic Growth Since 1928: The Alternative Statistics of G.I. Khanin," *Europe-Asia Studies* 45, no. 1 (1993); also: Khanin, *Dinamika ekonomicheskogo*; V. Kudrov, *Soviet Economic Performance in Retrospect: A Critical Re-Examination* (Goringen: INTAS, 1998), 63.

<sup>6</sup> Estimates of annual Soviet growth from 1965 to 1985 diverge based upon the data under analysis, but all calculations show the same trajectory. Soviet Gosplan figures for "national income" indicate that annual growth dropped from an average of 7.1% in 1966 to 3.9% in 1980 (L.B. Vid and E.A. Ivanov, *Novaia filosofiia planirovaniia* (Moscow: Ekonomika, 1990), 23, 33, tables 1 and 2). In 1990, the IMF calculated that over the same period, the USSR's "net material product" growth rates had decreased from 8% to 3% (International Monetary Fund, The World Bank, Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development, and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, *The Economy of the USSR: Summary and Recommendations*. Washington: World Bank, 1990), 3-4). Robert C. Allen has also argued that Soviet GDP growth decreased from 5.2% in the 1960s to 2% in the 1980s (Robert C. Allen, *From Farm to Factory: A Reinterpretation of the Soviet Industrial Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 190).

<sup>7</sup> Labour productivity growth rates track the annual rise in workers' average productivity levels. In the USSR, these rates reached a peak of 6.8% in the 1960s. By 1982, they had fallen to 2.9%. See Doklad TsK KPSS Ministra finansov SSSR t. Garbuzova i zamestitelia nachal'nika TsSU SSSR t. Koroleva "O tempakh rosta natsional'nogo dokhoda SSSR," RGASPI, f. 653, op. 1, d. 46, l. 30.

<sup>8</sup> Kudrov, *Soviet Economic Performance*, 55.

the economy was after all still growing.

The information available to the leaders of the USSR in the early to mid 1980s was at best ambiguous: while it may have indicated a need for reform, this reform could have legitimately taken a variety of forms, including the most mild. Reports about the structural decline in Soviet economic performance were balanced against information showing overall economic stability and even improving markers of economic performance. The leaders of the USSR were privy to both Soviet and Western estimates showing Soviet economic growth; archival records show, for example, that Nikolai Ryzhkov, the Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the USSR from 1985 to 1990, read translated articles by Western economists that cited CIA figures and other contemporary research.<sup>9</sup> Ryzhkov and others were also receiving increasingly positive internal reports about both macroeconomic growth and the rising standard of living enjoyed by Soviet citizens: “the abundance of household electronics (*kul’turno-bytovaia tekhnika*),” as one report sent to Ryzhkov in 1984 declared, “has notably intensified.”<sup>10</sup> Another report from that year, written by the Chairman of Gosplan’s Council for the Study of Productive Powers (SOPS), Vladimir Mozhin, was more triumphant. “The aim of satisfying workers’ basic needs has been fulfilled across the whole of the country.”<sup>11</sup> More than simple propaganda, these were reflections of economic reality, as shortages grew infrequent and standards of living rose throughout the first half of the 1980s.<sup>12</sup>

In the face of this ambiguous evidence, however, Gorbachev continued to advocate a course of fundamental reform, emphasizing the “rotten” nature of the Soviet economy and the need for structural change. Although many historical accounts

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<sup>9</sup> In 1985, for example, Ryzhkov read and initialed two articles by the Western academics Rumer and Schroeder citing CIA data. See: RGASPI, f. 653, op. 1, d. 59, ll. 31-59.

<sup>10</sup> Iu.V. Iaromenko, “Problemy formirovaniia otraslevoi struktury ekonomiki v dolgosrochnoi perspektive,” sent to Ryzhkov on 03.09.1984. RGASPI, f. 653, op. 1, d. 39, l. 382.

<sup>11</sup> Doklad Mozhina ot 02.08.1984 “Voprosy sotsial’nogo regional’nogo razvitiia i ratsional’nogo ispol’zovaniia trudovykh resursov,” RGASPI, f. 653, op. 1, d. 39, l. 419.

<sup>12</sup> While deficit – the imbalance arising from purchasing power outweighing the worth of available goods – was an endemic part of Soviet life, actual shortages of basic consumer goods were uncommon in the latter decades of the USSR. Concrete data about shortages, however, remain scarce. See: Michael Aleexev, “Are Soviet Consumers Forced to Save?” *Comparative Economic Studies* 30, no. 4 (1988); Byung-Yeon Kim, “Causes of repressed inflation in the Soviet consumer market, 1965-1989: retail price subsidies, the siphoning effect, and the budget deficit,” *Economic History Review* 55, no. 1 (2002): 105-106.

have supported Gorbachev's assertion that this was the only plausible response to the USSR's long-term economic decline, the objective state of the Soviet economy (and the information Gorbachev was receiving) calls this version of events into question.<sup>13</sup> It is also doubtful that Gorbachev's turn towards markets was the inevitable consequence of contact with Western ideas of capitalism and democracy<sup>14</sup> or the unavoidable conclusion of certain pro-market economic ideas' rise in Soviet science,<sup>15</sup> as has been argued by other authors. Western triumphalism aside, particular ideas about society (even capitalism) are not inherently stronger than others or gain political credence on their own – they are instead promoted and popularized by politicians and political factions. Gorbachev, as this chapter will argue, chose to promote a course of structural and marketizing reform as the consequence of three interrelated factors. First, he rejected the legitimacy of Soviet statistics, arguing instead in favor of his and his advisors' subjective feelings about the state of the Soviet economy. Second, Gorbachev worked in and was influenced by an urban environment that was especially frustrated by the state of the Soviet economy as the result of growing consumer demand in the face of limited growth. And finally, the leadership of the USSR increasingly came to rely on the advice of a particular group of Soviet economists, which aligned with and provided scientific support for their own broader worldview. Importantly, however, there was nothing inevitable about the choice that was made in favor of more radical economic reform. There were many paths available to Gorbachev in 1985. That he chose one that would eventually lead to profound reform of the Soviet economy and eventually even marketization was reflective of both the forces on which he relied and the broader social and intellectual milieu of Moscow in the mid 1980s.

### **I. False Statistics**

When Mikhail Gorbachev took office in 1985, Soviet statistics were relatively upbeat. Economic returns were rising after the hiccup of the late 1970s and early 1980s, and most ministries and planning agencies seemed relatively positive. Amongst the new leadership of the USSR, however, the feeling remained that

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. Chris Miller, *The Struggle to Save the Soviet Economy: Mikhail Gorbachev and the Collapse of the USSR* (Durham: University North Carolina Press, 2016); Gaidar, *Collapse of an Empire*; Brown, *The Gorbachev Factor*.

<sup>14</sup> English, *Russia and the Idea*; Fukuyama, "The End of History?"; Huntington, *The Third Wave*.

<sup>15</sup> Egle Rindzeviciute, "A Struggle for the Soviet Future: The Birth of Scientific Forecasting in the Soviet Union," *Slavic Review* 75, no. 1 (2016); Feygin, "The Making of an Economics Internationale."



something just wasn't right with the data they were receiving. From the early 1980s on arguments had resounded in Moscow about just how much – or perhaps how little – the country's political leaders were in touch with the populace and the average demands of daily life in the USSR. Andropov had famously declared upon his election to the post of General Secretary of the Communist Party that "We still do not adequately understand the society in which we live and work,"<sup>16</sup> and in the years that followed debates raged in the Communist Party Secretariat about this level of understanding. Initially these arguments took on something of a theoretical character – could the current state of the USSR truly be called "developed socialism" or was a new formulation necessary to encompass the many remaining shortcomings?<sup>17</sup> – but upon Gorbachev's ascension to power they began to be applied to the realities of the Soviet economy. As the debates heightened, that economy began to appear worse and worse.

As Aleksandr Yakovlev, one of Gorbachev's closest advisors, later argued, the statistics the Politburo had access to simply did not comport with the "general structural collapse of the social order" that he and others sensed around him. Yakovlev chose to believe his feelings about social collapse and reject the statistics: it was the endemic Soviet overstatement of achievements, he argued, that had led the leadership away from a true understanding of the Soviet economy.<sup>18</sup> Both Gorbachev and Nikolai Ryzhkov have also recorded similar feelings: as Ryzhkov put it, they "did not believe" the official statistics and instead trusted their instincts, which told them that the economy had actually been contracting during the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> five year plans (1976-1985).<sup>19</sup> Gorbachev was more succinct: "Our statistics simply do not know how much we produce."<sup>20</sup> As the Soviet economist and Politburo member Vadim Medvedev put it, after 1985 the Soviet leadership "proceeded from the assumption that in the beginning of the 1980s the growth of industrial production had stopped, and the real income of the population had actually declined, even though this was not confirmed by the data of the

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<sup>16</sup> "Rech' general'nogo sekretaria Tsentral'nogo komiteta KPSS tovarishcha Yu. V. Andropova na Plenum TsK KPSS 15 iunია 1983 goda," *Pravda*, June 16, 1983.

<sup>17</sup> See: Pechenev, *Gorbachev*.

<sup>18</sup> A. Yakovlev, *Predislovie. Obval. Posleslovie* (Moscow: Novosti, 1992), 139.

<sup>19</sup> Nikolai Ryzhkov, *Perestroika: Istoriia predatel'stv* (Moscow: Novosti, 1992), 33.

<sup>20</sup> A. Cherniaev, A. Veber, and V. Medvedev, eds., *V Politbiuro TsK KPSS...Po zapisiam Anatolii Cherniava, Vadima Medvedeva, Georgiia Shakhnazarova (1985-1991). Izdanie vtoroe*. (Moscow: Gorbachev-Fond, 2008), 159; also see M.S. Gorbachev, *Zhizn' i reformy* (Moscow: Novosti, 1995), 142-143.

Central Statistical Agency (TsSU).”<sup>21</sup> In the higher echelons of Moscow politics, this proved to be a relatively common point of view: economists suggested that “contrary to reports from the central government, industrial output and the availability of goods was falling,”<sup>22</sup> or highlighted the “frailty” of the Soviet economy that “had been only masked for a time by the extensive overuse of human and natural resources.”<sup>23</sup> Journalists, such as the editor of *Kommunist*, Otto Latsis, held back even less, arguing that “By the 1970s the economy had stopped developing...by 1979 it was obvious that the economy was disintegrating.”<sup>24</sup> Ultimately, no matter the data available from both Western and Soviet sources that pointed to ongoing but slow growth in the USSR and room for debate about the overall strength of the Soviet planned economy, the answer voiced in Moscow to Andropov’s question was singular and negative: no, we don’t know our own country or economy, and what we are learning about it now is deeply disturbing.

It is unlikely that Gorbachev and other members of the Soviet government came to this conclusion solely on the basis of intuition or simple feeling. And although Gorbachev, Yakovlev, Ryzhkov, and many of their advisors had grown up in Russian villages and continued on occasion to visit less developed rural areas of the USSR, individual comparisons of life “on-the-ground” to relatively rosy statistics can only partially explain their rejection of official Soviet economic analyses.<sup>25</sup> Having spent decades living and working in the highest echelons of Soviet power in Moscow, Gorbachev and the other leaders of the USSR were in fact most strongly influenced by the environment in which they lived and operated. While alternative statistics were also not available to the Soviet leadership – as Philip Hanson and others have shown, “Soviet officials did not operate with a secret set of numbers,” and were only as informed as official statistics would

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<sup>21</sup> Michael Ellman and Vladimir Kontorovich, eds., *The Destruction of the Soviet Economic System: An Insider’s History* (London: Routledge, 1998), 14.

<sup>22</sup> Interview with Tatiana Zaslavskaya, 27.06.1990, 2RR 1/3/6 69, 2-3; also Aganbegyan, *Moving the Mountain*, 155.

<sup>23</sup> Proekt programmy stabilizatsii ekonomiki i perekhoda k rynku [signed by Shatalin and Aganbegyan, 11.09.1990], RGAE f. 4372, op. 67, d. 9320, l. 322; for similar statements, also see: S. Shatalin and E.T. Gaidar, *Ekonomicheskaya reforma: prichiny, napravleniia, problemy* (Moscow: Ekonomika, 1989), 13.

<sup>24</sup> Interview with Otto Rudol’fovich Latsis, April 1990, 2RR 1/3/9, 76, 2; also Victor Afanas’ev, *Chetyryortaia vlast’ i chetyre genseka: ot Brezhneva do Gorbacheva v ‘Pravde’* (Moscow: KEDR, 1994), 71.

<sup>25</sup> On Gorbachev’s base in a Stavropol’ village, see A.A. Korobeinikov, *Gorbachev: drugoe litso* (Moscow: Respublika, 1996), 13. Yakovlev, who was from a village near Yaroslavl, also frequently visited; see RGASPI f. 653, op. 1, d. 147, l. 5.

allow<sup>26</sup> – other sources of information remained. In part, from their position of Party leadership, Gorbachev and those around him were now privy to greater information about plan fulfillment – and equally, about plan falsifications. As Gorbachev emphasized during the 27<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in 1986, significant plan fulfillment figures had been overstated and falsified during the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> five-year plans: strong indication, he felt, that the Soviet economy was hardly living up to the level shown in official statistics.<sup>27</sup> From 1985 on, moreover, the tendency for five year plans to have been “somewhat unfulfilled” was increasingly emphasized in internal party documents.<sup>28</sup>

Given their many years living and working in Moscow, moreover, Gorbachev and other Communist Party leaders were also strongly influenced by the views and opinions of their urban and cosmopolitan environment. Increasingly, this environment was growing dissatisfied with the demands and rewards of Soviet life: the growth of standards of living appeared to be leveling out, calling into question the USSR’s forward progress to communism. Salaries had grown faster than the production of consumer goods, leaving metropolitan Soviet citizens with excess cash and unfulfilled demand for durable and prestige goods. While this perspective was not shared in all parts of the USSR – as Chapter II has shown, it was largely absent on the periphery, such as in the Tajik SSR – it was the dominant view that surrounded Gorbachev and his advisors throughout the early and mid-1980s. When Gorbachev suggested that the statistics were lying, he was both drawing on this bubble of social frustration and finding support for his own belief that something serious had to be done to reform the economy.

## **II. The Origins of Urban Elite Dissatisfaction in the USSR**

By the middle of the 1980s, residents of Moscow, Leningrad, and other large urban cities in the European regions of the USSR were more and more likely to express dissatisfaction with their overall standard of living. While access to material

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<sup>26</sup> Philip Hanson, *The Rise and Fall of the Soviet Economy: An Economic History of the USSR from 1945* (London: Pearson, 2003), 3-4. As the Soviet economist Valentin Kudrov later noted, this did come as a surprise to many Soviet public servants, who had been long convinced that the leadership was privy to an alternative set of numbers (Kudrov, *Soviet Economic Performance*, 35).

<sup>27</sup> *Materialy XXVII s’ezda Kommunisticheskoi partii Sovetskogo Soiuza* (Moscow, 1986), 22, 101. This same point was made in an internal document distributed by Ryzhkov in 1983; see: RGASPI, f. 653, op. 1, d. 38, l. 6.

<sup>28</sup> See, for example, “O poriadke otsenki rezul’tatov khoziaistvennoi deiatel’nosti v 1981-1985,” GARF, f. 5446, op. 145, d. 59, l. 1.

goods, education, healthcare, and many of the other benefits of Soviet modernization was generally smoother and more widespread in such urban environments, their residents had begun to doubt the overall positive trajectory of the Soviet economy. In this view, based on both internal and external observations, the benefits of the Soviet economy for the average citizen had stagnated, and since the early 1980s most likely even had shrunk. It was as if they literally lived on the pages of Vladimir Sorokin's brilliant satirical novel, *Ochered'* (The Queue): "there was a line for oranges, and no cabbage" and in the end no one was quite sure where the whole process was leading.<sup>29</sup>

While discontent amongst urban Soviet citizens seems to have grown rapidly in the 1980s, its roots can be traced back at least to the mid-1950s. Following Stalin's death in 1953, increasing emphasis was placed by the Soviet state on increasing citizen's overall standard of living. Efforts were taken to boost the volume and quality of goods and services available to Soviet workers, while at the same time increasing wages and pensions and retaining artificially low and subsidized prices on foodstuffs and many other goods. This changing emphasis on citizens' material wellbeing and their access to consumer goods reflected both theoretical and more immediate political concerns. For Stalin's successors, including Nikita Khrushchev, the USSR's increasing steps towards "developed socialism" dictated an equivalent increase in citizens' standards of living to reflect this progression. At the same time, moreover, the post-Stalin drive to dismantle previously dominant structures of physical repression dictated the creation of alternative ways to guarantee citizens' loyalty.<sup>30</sup> Finally, by the 1950s it had become clear that earlier policies of excluding certain "undesirable elements" (former aristocrats, "kulaks," etc.) from social support and providing real guarantees only to the most economically valuable industrial workers was in fact retarding overall growth by tamping down consumer demand.<sup>31</sup> Increasing access to consumer goods was seen as a solution to many of the social issues the Soviet government faced in the early 1950s. As

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<sup>29</sup> Vladimir Sorokin, *Ochered'* (Paris: Sintaxis, 1985), 7.

<sup>30</sup> Mark Harrison, "Coercion, Compliance, and the Collapse of the Soviet Command Economy," *The Economic History Review* 55, no. 3 (2002).

<sup>31</sup> G.M. Ivanova, *Na poroge 'gosudarstva vseobshchego blagosostoianiia': Sotsial'naiia politika v SSSR (seredina 1950-kh – nachalo 1970-kh godov)* (Moscow: Institut rossiiskoi istorii RAN, 2011), 8-13. At the 26<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in 1971, Brezhnev went as far as to argue that "increasing workers' standard of living has become...one of the most important economic conditions for swift industrial growth" ("Otchetnyi doklad General'nogo sekretaria L.I. Brezhneva na 26-om s'ezde KPSS," *Pravda*, March, 31, 1971).

Peter Hauslohner has phrased it, the Soviet state chose enact to a “social contract”: in exchange for participation in and acceptance of the political order, Soviet citizens were provided with guarantees of increasing material welfare and economic growth.<sup>32</sup>

By the mid-1960s these changes had already led to structural changes in the Soviet economy: in the eighth five-year plan (1966-1970), the growth rate of consumer goods production was for the first time greater than that of industrial goods.<sup>33</sup> Enterprise reforms enacted in 1965 further emphasized the need to increase the production of consumer goods.<sup>34</sup> Wages also continued to rise for many categories of workers, as well as for pensioners.<sup>35</sup> Soviet consumers were now privy to an increasingly widening assortment of durable goods (refrigerators, gas stoves, televisions, cars, etc.), foodstuffs, clothing, furniture and the other many accoutrements of modern urban living. “The result,” as Nataliya Chernyshova has written, “was a consumer boom which kicked up all sorts of contradictions and problems for the regime and left it dealing with citizens who had very different aspirations than their predecessors.”<sup>36</sup> In contrast to the previous generation of Soviet citizens, those who came of age during the height of the Soviet social contract in the 1960s and 1970s understood their relation to the state at least in part as one revolving around the latter’s guarantees of increasing material welfare.<sup>37</sup>

From the perspective of urban Soviet citizens in Moscow or other major cities, the social contract developed in the 1950s held firm through at least the mid-1970s. Average per-capita expenditures on consumer goods grew rapidly during these decades, rising 39% from 1964 to 1970, and another 27% between 1970 and 1975.<sup>38</sup> Material goods, whether produced in the USSR or imported, were increasingly available and accessible; shortages of basic goods were less and less observable and by the late 1970s an infrequent aspect of daily life. Around the end

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<sup>32</sup> Peter Hauslohner, “Gorbachev’s Social Contract,” *Soviet Economy* 3, no. 1 (1987), 58.

<sup>33</sup> Vid and Ivanov, *Novaia filosofiia*, 34-36.

<sup>34</sup> For more detail on the 1965 reforms, see Chapter Four.

<sup>35</sup> Between 1960 and 1980, for example, industrial workers’ monthly salaries rose by 106%, from 89.9 to 185.5 rubles (RGASPI f. 653, op. 1, d. 59, l. 7). Also see: Ivanova, *Na poroge*, 14.

<sup>36</sup> Natalya Chernyshova, *Soviet Consumer Culture in the Brezhnev Era* (London: Routledge, 2013), 3.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, 17-19.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, 28.

of the 1970s, however, a rapid change occurred in Soviet urban residents' perceptions: satisfaction with economic growth and the material goods it provided was quickly replaced with growing dissatisfaction and frustration. More and more Western and Soviet studies began to show urban citizens' worries over economic performance and growth, as well as their basic access to goods, services, and the social benefits of the Soviet system.<sup>39</sup> The social contract appeared to be fraying at the edges.

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A number of related factors help to explain the rapid decline in satisfaction expressed by Soviet citizens in Moscow and other urban environments around 1980. First, overall growth rates decreased in the late 1970s, which had a corresponding effect on rates of consumption. Numerous studies have found that Soviet per-capita consumption expenditures continued to grow in the late 1970s and early 1980s, but at a rate half as fast as in the preceding decade.<sup>40</sup> While peoples' material well-being continued to improve, the decreasing speed of improvements in contrast with the past two decades' booming changes led Soviet citizens to doubt the promises made in the Social contract. It appeared increasingly plausible that something might be awry with the broader Soviet economic apparatus.

Two important structural imbalances helped to make these concerns particularly immediate to the residents of major Soviet cities. First and foremost, by the mid-1980s Soviet citizens' wages were notably outpacing the production and sale of consumer goods. In other words, there was increasing imbalance between Soviet

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<sup>39</sup> On Soviet citizens' growing dissatisfaction from the late 1970s, see: Iu. F. Vorob'ev, N.D. Leliukhina and A.A. Skorbov, eds., *Ocherki ekonomicheskikh reform* (Moscow: Rossiskaia akademiia nauk, 1993), 231; Hosking, *A History of the Soviet Union*, 378, 382; Mervyn Matthews, *Patterns of Deprivation in the Soviet Union Under Brezhnev and Gorbachev* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1989). Although Matthews and others present their data as representative of dissatisfaction amongst all Soviet citizens, their samples are largely drawn from residents of major Soviet cities (Moscow, Leningrad, et cetera).

<sup>40</sup> For example, the Muscovite family whose per-capita spending had risen by 27% between 1970-1975 would have seen an approximately 13-14% rise in spending between 1975-1980. This general trend has been confirmed by a number of sources; see: Central Intelligence Agency, *Measures of Soviet Gross National Product in 1982 Prices* (Washington: US Government Printing Office, 1990), 6; Hanson, *Rise and Fall*, 99; Shatalin and Gaidar, *Ekonomicheskaiia reforma*, 13; Gertrude E. Schroeder, "Soviet Living Standards in Comparative Perspective," in *Quality of Life in the Soviet Union*, ed. Horst Herlemann (Boulder: Westview Press, 1987), 21.

wages and consumption: citizens simply had access to more cash than there were goods on which to spend it. While this problem did not affect everyone, an increasing number of relatively well-off Soviet families were reaching ruble saturation, having bought all of the available durable goods and retaining unspendable rubles in their pockets. In some ways, this problem had accompanied the command economy since its inception in the late 1920s. David Woodruff has shown that from the beginning the Soviet Union was presented with “an unresolved tension between facilitating production and monetary stability,” which was expressed through the twin demands of making sure workers were paid enough – and enterprises rewarded enough – to incentivize production, while at the same time producing enough goods to fulfill workers’ spending capacity.<sup>41</sup> The efforts of the 1960s and 1970s to increase the production of consumer goods were also meant to target this imbalance, and the leaders of the Soviet Union frequently made explicit reference to the need for “balance between the quantity of produced consumer goods and the population’s ability to spend.”<sup>42</sup> By the 1980s, however, the state’s attempts to balance workers’ wages with a sufficient volume of goods began to sputter.

By historically focusing on the production of consumer goods, Soviet planning bodies had tended to overlook the other half of the equation: the growth of salaries provided to workers to incentivize increasing production. Since the 1960s, as a result, when enterprises were given greater leeway in assigning and increasing worker salaries, the spending capacity of Soviet workers had grown rapidly, and often at rates greater than increases in production or labour productivity.<sup>43</sup> By the mid 1980s wages were growing a rate much faster than any increases in production.<sup>44</sup> Reforms under Brezhnev and Andropov had aimed at restricting the growth of salaries and other wages, but their effect was generally muted. Continuing to emphasize increases in production over restrictions on salaries,

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<sup>41</sup> David Woodruff, *Money Unmade: Barter and the Fate of Russian Capitalism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), 23; also Vladimir Mau, *The Political History of Economic Reform in Russia, 1985-1994* (London: The Center for Research into Communist Economies, 1996), 14.

<sup>42</sup> A.N. Kosygin, “Ob ulushchenii upravleniia promyshlennost’iu, sovershenstvovaniia planirovaniia i usilenii ekonomicheskogo stimulirovaniia promyshlennogo proizvodstva. Doklad na Plenum TsK KPSS, 27.09.1965,” in *K velikoi tseli. Izbrannye rechi i stat’i* (Moscow: Politizdat, 1979), 329. Andropov was also focused on this wage-goods imbalance. See E.K. Ligachev, *Zagadka Gorbacheva* (Novosibirsk: Interbuk, 1992), 24.

<sup>43</sup> Hanson, *Rise and Fall*, 88-90.

<sup>44</sup> RGASPI, f. 653, op. 1, d. 38, l. 3.

moreover, these early reforms had the unintended result of actually heightening the imbalance.<sup>45</sup> As Nikolai Ryzhkov, then head of the Economics Division (*ekonomicheskii otдел*) of the CPSU Central Committee argued in 1983, “The growth in current retail sales is only enough to cover the ongoing growth of monetary wages; it is not enough to lower the level of previously built up unfulfilled demand.”<sup>46</sup> In fact, as the Central Committee of the Communist Party reported that same year, retail sales growth was actually falling behind wage increases. Between 1980 and 1983 average wages in the USSR had grown by 14% in comparison to a 13% growth in average consumption. As a result, the average percentage of Soviet workers’ wages that were spent on ‘goods and services’ dropped over the same period from the already worrying 86% to 84%.<sup>47</sup> Each year, more and more rubles were going unspent. As Ryzhkov more succinctly put it in his memoirs, “There was money, but nothing to spend it on.”<sup>48</sup>

Unsurprisingly, this led to a spike in both deficits and consumer dissatisfaction as more and more salaries ended up unspent and left in savings accounts. By 1983, the total value of Soviet citizens’ unspent savings had reached 187 billion rubles, more than half the value of the total Soviet government budget that year.<sup>49</sup> Worse, savings had been increasing by a consistent 5-6% per year since 1981, demonstrating a growing proportion of Soviet wages that were “uncaptured” by the economy, neither spent nor invested in any productive activity.<sup>50</sup> While unspent wages and the excessive liquidity they engender can lead to inflation and economic overheating in capitalist economies, under the conditions of strict price controls in the Soviet economy their consequences, primarily expressed through goods deficits, were all the harsher and more obvious.<sup>51</sup> By the early 1980s these

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<sup>45</sup> A commission chaired by Ryzhkov and involving Gorbachev was appointed by Andropov in the early 1980s to develop economic reforms. The reforms passed in 1983 largely built upon Kosygin’s 1965 attempt. See N.I. Ryzhkov, *Desiat’ let velikikh potriasenii* (Moscow: Assotsiatsiia ‘Kniga. Prosveshchenie. Miloserdie’, 1995), 48-49; Vladislav Zubok, “The Soviet Union and China in the 1980s: reconciliation and divorce,” *Cold War History* 17, no.2 (2017): 132.

<sup>46</sup> RGASPI, f. 653, on. 1, d. 38, l. 6

<sup>47</sup> Spravka o dokhodakh i raskhodakh naseleniia v 1983 godu. RGASPI, f. 653, op. 1, d. 38, l. 29. Also see Kim, “Causes of repressed inflation.”

<sup>48</sup> Ryzhkov, *Perestroika*, 239.

<sup>49</sup> RGASPI f. 653, op. 1, d. 38, l. 27.

<sup>50</sup> For 1981-1982, see Spravka ot Gosbanka SSSR ot 17.12.1982, RGASPI f. 653, op. 1, d. 38, l. 21. For later years, see the IMF data presented in Woodruff, *Money Unmade*, 65; Ryzhkov, *Perestroika*, 239; RGAE f. 4372, op. 67, d. 8404, l. 5.

<sup>51</sup> Deficits in a command system can be understood as a form of passive inflation, caused by consumers’ access to more money than the equivalent monetary value of all available goods. In a capitalist economy, when consumers have more money, producers raise prices, leading to inflation.



unspent wages were making themselves known through increasingly unfulfilled consumer demand for all types of goods, leading to the growing return of deficits for even basic goods and foodstuffs.<sup>52</sup>

This growing wage-goods imbalance was structured, moreover, in a way that made its negative consequences most obvious to well-off citizens in the economically developed cities of the Soviet west. The 1965 enterprise reforms, which had been meant in part to increase the production of consumer goods, but which had come to more notably increase workers' salaries, gave especial preference to industrial workers. In theory, the reformers posited, it was industrial workers who were producing the consumer goods the state needed the most: their greater productivity (and thus salaries) should be prioritized.<sup>53</sup> While later reforms also increased salary rates for kolkhoz members and non-industrial workers, these latter categories continued to lag behind industrial workers. In 1980, for example, industrial workers in the USSR earned on average between 149 and 185 rubles per month, which was 20-35% more than agricultural workers.<sup>54</sup> Given the imbalanced Soviet "distribution of labour" described in Chapter Two, in accordance with which certain regions (Siberia, Central Asia) provided raw goods to be industrially processed in other regions (Russia, Ukraine, other European territories), this meant that wages increased with particular speed in the urban centers of the USSR, such as Moscow, Leningrad, and other large cities. Statistical tables produced by the Soviet State Statistics Committee in the mid-1980s, for example, showed wages particularly outstripping expenditures in republics with major cities, such as Russian or Ukraine.<sup>55</sup> The only categories of workers whose earnings outpaced industrial wages, moreover, were academics and government

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In a command economy, prices cannot be dynamically raised, and so consumers purchase a greater volume of goods, leading to deficits. Alternatively, they can choose *not* to purchase more goods, leaving both unwanted goods on the shelf and money in circulation. See: N. Petrakov, "Potrebelenie i effektivnost' proizvodstva. Rost blagosostoianii – predposylka rosta proizvodstva," *Novii Mir* 47, no.6 (1971): 192.

<sup>52</sup> Vladislav Zubok, *A Failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev* (Durham: UNC Press, 2009), 269; Chris Miller, "Gorbachev's Agricultural Agenda: Decollectivization and the Politics of Perestroika," *Kritika* 17, no.1 (2016): 101.

<sup>53</sup> G. Popov, *Reformirovanie nereformiruemogo. Popytka Alekseia Kosygina* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnii universitet v Moskve, 2009), 317-330; Nikolai G. Egorychev, "On shyol svoim putyom," in *Kosygin – vyzov prem'era*, ed. N.K. Baibakov (Moscow: Algoritm, 2012), 46.

<sup>54</sup> GARF, f. 5446, op. 147, d. 116, l. 167.

<sup>55</sup> RGAE, f. 1562, op. 68, d. 1773, ll. 1-3; d. 2565, ll. 2, 4.

and party functionaries.<sup>56</sup> By the 1980s senior academic researchers could earn between 300 and 450 rubles per month – up to twice as much as industrial workers and three times as much as kolkhoz members.<sup>57</sup> Government and party workers were paid even more, with average salaries ranging between 500 and 700 rubles per month and some even receiving more than 1000.<sup>58</sup> Since these bureaucrats and intellectuals were also concentrated in Moscow and a few other European cities, this only served to further accentuate the imbalance between purchasing power and available goods in these cities, most especially in the capital.

As a result, it was actually the most well-off and well-paid workers – those working in the central government in Moscow or laboring in industrial factories in the USSR's European cities – who, by the early 1980s, were the most affected and most dissatisfied by the burgeoning wage-product imbalance. As Jerry Hough has argued, “the educated elite (the bureaucrats) even more than the masses yearned for...transition to a consumer-oriented economy.”<sup>59</sup> This was also noticed by Gorbachev's advisors and ministers, who found that it was “society's leading edge” (*peredovaia chast' obshchestva*) that had been pushing for reform in the 1980s. Given the Soviet elite's higher salaries and greater than average access to free and subsidized state services, the gap between their excess income and the availability of spending opportunities had led by the late 1970s led to high levels of dissatisfaction.<sup>60</sup> The greater their level of material wealth, it seemed, the lower Soviet citizens had come to rank the benefits and prospects of developed socialism.

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X

The negative relationship between relative material wealth and overall satisfaction with life in the Soviet Union was more than just speculation. The trend had in fact been well documented by Soviet sociologists throughout the 1970s and 1980s.

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<sup>56</sup> Zemstov, Il'ya, *Chastnaia zhizn' sovetskoi elity* (London: Overseas Publications Interchange Ltd., 1986), 25.

<sup>57</sup> RGASPI, f. 653, op. 1, d. 59, l. 7.

<sup>58</sup> Yurii Churbanov, for example, received a monthly salary of around 1100 rubles as the Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs of the USSR in the early 1980s. See Iu. Churbanov, *Ya rasskazhu vsyu, shto bylo...* (Moscow: Nezavisimaia gazeta, 1991), 41. For average government salaries in the 1980s, see RGAE, f. 4372, op. 67, d. 9340, ll. 109-167; TsGART f. 18, op. 8, d. 3660, l. 182.

<sup>59</sup> Jerry F. Hough, *Democratization and Revolution in the USSR, 1985-1991* (Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 1997), 59.

<sup>60</sup> Valerii Boldin, *Krushenie p'edestala: Shtrikhi k portretu M.S. Gorbachevu* (Moscow: Respublika, 1995), 99; Valentin Pavlov, *Upushchen li shans? Finansovyi kliuch k rynku* (Moscow: Terra, 1995), 37.

According to numerous studies conducted during these decades, sharp divergences in opinion had opened up between the less developed Soviet periphery and the more developed and urbanized European regions. The latter increasingly felt the Soviet state was stagnating, while the former continued to see economic improvements and a bright future. One multiyear study conducted around 1979-1980, for example, found that 80% of surveyed Soviet citizens in Uzbekistan thought that "life was getting better" with time, whereas only 60% of those surveyed in Estonia felt the same.<sup>61</sup> Another study from around the same time confirmed this trend, emphasizing that Azerbaijani respondents were more "satisfied" with their lives than the Soviet average – and that agricultural workers across the USSR were more satisfied than better paid industrial or service workers.<sup>62</sup> These and other studies clearly demonstrated that the most developed regions of the USSR – whether tracked in terms of average salaries, material welfare, or even education levels – were the least satisfied with the conditions of work and life provided by the USSR.<sup>63</sup>

These tendencies continued to grow worse throughout the 1980s. As the years passed, there seemed an especially large and growing gap not only between social satisfaction in different regions of the USSR – but most notably between the Soviet metropole and the rest of the country. A particularly extensive study conducted by the Institute of Social and Economic Problems at the Academy of Sciences of the USSR in the early 1980s, for example, demonstrated that residents of Moscow and Leningrad were the least satisfied of all Soviet citizens. Across all categories of questions asked, whether about work, home life, material welfare, or pay, these respondents were at least 5-10% less satisfied than the Soviet average, notwithstanding the absolute advantage they enjoyed in terms of their actual standard of living.<sup>64</sup> Moscow in particular showed uncharacteristic levels of dissatisfaction: a meta-study of Soviet sociological surveys later found that

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<sup>61</sup> Arutiunian and Drobizheva, "Natsional'nye osobennosti kul'tury," 26.

<sup>62</sup> V.Kh. Bigulov, A.O. Kryshtanovskii and A.S. Michurin, "Material'noe blagosostoianie i sotsial'noe blagopoluchie: opyt postroeniia indeksov i analiz vzaimosviasi," *Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniia* 10, no. 4 (1984): 91-92.

<sup>63</sup> On education levels, see Gerhard Simon, *Nationalism and Policy Toward the Nationalities in the Soviet Union: From Totalitarian Dictatorship to Post-Stalinist Society* (Boulder: Westview, 1991), 267, 271.

<sup>64</sup> O.B. Bozhkov and V.B. Golofast, "Otsenka naseleniem uslovii zhizni v krupnykh gorodakh," *Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniia* 11, no. 3 (1985): 97-100.

together with the Baltic republics, residents of Moscow were throughout the 1980s the least satisfied amongst all Soviet citizens.<sup>65</sup>

The link between increased material wealth and Soviet citizens' dissatisfaction grew increasingly clear to researchers in the 1980s. In 1984, for example, one sociologist calculated that after a certain increase in wages each additional ruble was actually more likely to cause frustration than incentive to work. In fact, he argued, the cutoff was as low as 90 rubles per person per month: any greater overall income would statistically only lead to a greater sense of unfulfilled social demands.<sup>66</sup> Commenting on this and other trends in 1984, moreover, the Central Committee of the Communist Party admitted that they were faced with a fundamentally new set of challenges. "The manifold growth of the population's material wealth, education, and cultural level has called forth a completely new series of demands on the part of both society and each of its individual members. We were not ready for these changes."<sup>67</sup> Soviet citizens were no longer satisfied with the provision of basic goods and services: given the level of development they had achieved, they began to ask for more. As a group of Soviet sociologists suggested in 1984, "contemporary tendencies in the way of life amongst Soviet individuals have led to evaluations of social wellbeing that are increasingly based on a desired situation."<sup>68</sup> Rather than judge social and economic developments on the basis of relative improvements with the past, Soviet citizens were choosing to compare them to a desired level of development – not to what they were, but to what they would have wanted them to be.

In many ways, what the dissatisfied Soviet citizens in Moscow and other urban environments wanted were "prestige goods," durables (better apartments, cars, et cetera) and specialized services that they felt ought to be available and which their paychecks would have allowed them to enjoy.<sup>69</sup> "Today qualified workers, technical cadres, engineers, scientists, and civil servants have found that their

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<sup>65</sup> Matthews, *Patterns of Deprivation*, 45-46.

<sup>66</sup> A.A. Ovsiannikov, "Vzaimosviaz' truda i potrebleniia: opyt tipologicheskogo analiza," *Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniia* 10, no. 1 (1984): 86.

<sup>67</sup> Internal CC CPSU report, "Sostoianie sovetskogo obshchestva k seredine 80-kh godov i mery po uskoreniiu sotsial'no-ekonomicheskogo razvitiia strany," RGASPI, f. 653, op. 1, d. 62, l. 117.

<sup>68</sup> V.Kh. Bigulov, A.O. Kryshchanovskii and A.S. Michurin, "Material'noe blagosostoianie," 89.

<sup>69</sup> As the chairman of Gosplan, N.V. Talyzin, put it in a 1985 letter, as Soviet citizens' paychecks rose, so did their demand for "especially fashionable" (*osobenno modnye*) goods. GARF, f. 5446, op. 147, d. 960, l. 6.

unfulfilled needs are for better housing, proper entertainment facilities, qualified medical services, and so forth,” the economist Rem Belousov wrote in 1984 to Nikolai Ryzhkov. While these services were to some degree available, they were “distributed for free or on a discounted basis through social funds (*obshchestvennye fondy*),” meaning that additional access to earnings did not equate greater access to better goods. Expressing the frustration of the intelligentsia, Belousov noted that in “developed capitalist countries” the population spent on average between 30 and 40% of its wages on comparable services.<sup>70</sup> In the USSR, earning power was at best indirectly connected to citizens’ standard of living – while in the West wages were directly connected to the volume and quality of material wealth to which workers had access. By the mid-1980s complaints such as Belousov’s, moreover, were growing in number and volume. For the Soviet urban elite, who had “money to spend” but “did worse than they might otherwise have expected to,”<sup>71</sup> the capitalist West had become central to comparative arguments about everything that was wrong with the USSR.

Comparisons with the West were nothing new in the USSR: from the Soviet Union’s famous call to “catch up and overtake America” to the press’ frequent comments on social ills and unemployment under capitalism, the West had long served as a counterpoise to socialism. In the 1980s, however, the Soviet elite’s comparison of the USSR against the West took on a qualitatively new character, whereby the Soviet Union came out looking badly. Increasing access to Western goods meant that Soviet analogues came out looking sloppy, poorly engineered, or simply ugly; increasing travel to Europe and the West meant Soviet housing, in comparison, began to look gray and flat, and overall living standards lower.<sup>72</sup> Rather than making the temporally vertical comparisons of the past, in which Soviet living standards were contextualized in the history of World War II’s destruction and the subsequent economic growth, the new elite in Moscow chose to compare its lot horizontally with the lives of contemporary Europeans. Visiting Europe as tourists or on business, Soviet elites would return home laden down with consumer goods,

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<sup>70</sup> R. Belousov, “Materialy k razrabotke programmy kompleksnogo sovershenstvovaniia sistemy upravleniia ekonomikai”, sent to Ryzhkov on 09.04.1984, RGASPI, f. 653, op. 1, d. 39, l. 125.

<sup>71</sup> Hauslohner, “Gorbachev’s Social Contract,” 59.

<sup>72</sup> Kotkin, *Armageddon Averted*, 28-29; V. Trushkov, “‘Perestroika’-zafasadnyi analiz,” *Obozrevatel’* 12 (1995).

humiliated by the lack of similar goods for sale in Moscow shops.<sup>73</sup> Ultimately, in this “shop-window” comparison the USSR could hardly compete: consumer goods were simply available in the West in greater quantities and varieties.<sup>74</sup> Even the leaders of the USSR were not immune to the charms of the West. In his memoirs, Gorbachev reports that after visiting Europe as a tourist his overwhelming feeling was one of frustration: “Why do we live worse than in other developed countries?”<sup>75</sup>

While consumerism and its attendant negative comparisons of Soviet life vis-a-vis the West spread through the upper echelons of the Soviet elite as the result of Western travel, the idea that life was just better in the capitalist West was also disseminated amongst those urban Soviet citizens who remained in Moscow, Leningrad, and other large cities. As Vladimir Kriuchkov, the KGB chief who would help to lead the failed putsch against Gorbachev, later recalled, by the mid-1980s ideas were being spread throughout Moscow about the benefits of the Western path and the failings of socialism.<sup>76</sup> Partly these ideas were spread by those who travelled abroad and returned bearing consumer goods for families and friends; partly they were spread by the apparent wealth of the Western tourists who increasingly visited Moscow and the European USSR. In the mid-1980s nearly 800,000 tourists from Western (“developed capitalist”) countries visited the USSR each year, the vast majority of whose time was spent in Moscow, Leningrad, and a few other European Soviet cities, including the resorts of Sochi and Yalta.<sup>77</sup> These middle-to-upper class Western tourists, with access to foreign clothing, currency, and goods – not to mention stories of life in the West – would have presented a picture of relative wealth and prosperity to the Soviet citizens with whom they interacted.

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<sup>73</sup> John Bushnell, “The ‘New Soviet Man’ Turns Pessimist,” in *The Soviet Union Since Stalin*, eds. Stephen F. Cohen, Alexander Rabinowitch, and Robert Sharlet (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980), 191-192; Vladislav Zubok, *Zhivago’s Children* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 90.

<sup>74</sup> S.V. Chesko, *Ideologiia raspada* (Moscow: Rossiskaia akademiia nauk, 1993), 36.

<sup>75</sup> Gorbachev, *Zhizn’ i reformy*, 169. Andrei Grachev also attributes a similar complaint to Gorbachev’s wife, Raisa Gorbacheva. See Andrei Grachev, *Gorbachev* (Moscow: Vagrius, 2001), 56.

<sup>76</sup> Vladimir Kriuchkov, *Lichnoe delo* (Moscow: Olimp, 1996), v. 1, 256.

<sup>77</sup> In 1985, for example, approximately 775,500 Western tourists visited the USSR. Of the days they spent in the USSR, 76% was in Moscow, Leningrad, Sochi, Yalta, and Kiev. Calculated from figures compiled by Intourist in 1985 and interviews with a former Soviet tour guide (Moscow, August 2015). For the Intourist figures, see: RGAE f. 1562, op. 68, d. 1604, ll. 3-6, 20-21. Also see English, *Russia and the Idea*, 62.

No matter the exact source of disaffection, by the middle of the 1980s negative comparisons of the USSR to the West had become a common element of elite discourse throughout Moscow. This was true of both private conversations and public pronouncements. As Philip Hanson has written, in the 1980s the idea of the USSR's relative decline against the West was a major concern in Moscow, insofar as it "undermined the self-confidence of Soviet elites and their belief that their system could deliver."<sup>78</sup> Following Gorbachev's ascension to power in 1985, this concern began to be voiced by Soviet economists, who frequently phrased the need for economic reform in terms of the West's relative advantage against socialism.<sup>79</sup> Such comparisons, moreover, came to form an important element of internal economic planning. In an internal report distributed by the State Price Committee (Goskomtsen) in 1987, for example, it was explicitly argued that the overall standard of living in the USSR was 60% lower on average than in developed capitalist nations, a calculation based on the USSR's lower wages and rates of consumer goods production. This claim was used to further argue for increasing the production of goods in the USSR, increasing salaries, and bringing Soviet standards of living in line with Western levels.<sup>80</sup>

What this report made particularly clear was that the USSR was being more than just compared to the West: it was being compared to the West on the West's terms. (Standards of living in the report were calculated in ways that failed to take into consideration the relative advantages socialism provided in terms of education, healthcare, or the cost of basic goods.) It reflected the perspective voiced by urban European Soviet citizens in private conversations, sociological surveys, and in print: the Soviet state was failing to provide enough material goods, standards of living had stagnated, and life in the West was simply better. For those living in the relative privilege of Moscow, Leningrad, or other major Soviet cities, moreover, this was in fact true. Salaries had mildly but systematically outpaced the production of consumer goods, there were more rubles in workers' pockets than they could use, and life truly did not seem to be getting any better. It is worth

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<sup>78</sup> Hanson, *The Rise and Fall*, 5.

<sup>79</sup> See, for example, Abel Aganbegian, "Odin iz ekonomicheskikh urokov perestroika," in *Etot trudnyi, trudnyi put'*, eds. L.I. Abalkin and P.M. Bunich (Moscow: Mysl', 1989), 159; "Kuda my idem? Dialog Raira Simoniana i Anatoliiia Druzenko," *Ogonyok*, September 9-16, 1989, 1.

<sup>80</sup> This report was authored by Valenitin Pavlov. See: Doklad Goskomtsena "Ob urovne tsen i zarabotnoi platy v Mosckve i krupneishikh gorodakh kapitalisticheskikh stran," GARF, f. 5446, op. 148, d. 362, L. 17.

emphasizing, however, that this remained the perspective of a relatively small elite minority: the best paid industrial workers, engineers and technical workers, party functionaries, academics, and the other small percentage of Soviet citizens whose individual earnings were significantly higher than the nationwide average. It was this minority that most fervently supported the call for reform made by Gorbachev and his economic advisors in the mid-1980s, agreeing that the official statistics just couldn't reflect reality: on the streets of Moscow the economy really wasn't getting any better.

### **III. Econometrics and Perestroika's Theoretical Backing**

While the growing dissatisfaction of Muscovites and other urban Soviet citizens provided clear political support for Gorbachev's own feelings about the Soviet economy and the need for significant reform, this growing pessimism continued to contradict the data provided by the Soviet government. It also left unclear the necessary path of reform. Fortunately for Gorbachev and his advisors, there existed an alternative school of Soviet economics that for decades had been pointing to the structural failings of the Soviet economy and suggesting possible solutions. Based on complicated mathematical models of the planned economy, these alternative figures showed decade-on-decade economic regression, serious and worsening drops in productivity rates, and impending collapse if market reforms were not soon implemented. While paralleling a Western economics discourse that similarly highlighted the structural flaws of central planning, the statistical models underlying such claims were an essentially Soviet initiative, produced largely without reference to similar Western works.<sup>81</sup> While often marginalized, moreover, proponents of mathematical economic modeling had remained an established part of Soviet economics since at least the 1950s. Only after Gorbachev became party leader in 1985, however, did its advocates attain positions of influence sufficient to make these models an important part of Soviet economic planning.

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<sup>81</sup> See Arthur W. Wright, "Soviet economic planning and performance," in *The Soviet Union Since Stalin*, eds. Stephen F. Cohen, Alexander Rabinowitch and Robert Sharlet (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980), 118; cf. Miller, *The Struggle to Save*, 93, 95.



Initially, there seemed nothing radical about the mathematical economic models developed by Soviet economists in the 1950s.<sup>82</sup> Drawing upon earlier work by Stanislav Strumlin in the 1920s and the pioneering methods of “linear programming” developed by L.V. Kantorovich in the 1930s and 1940s, Soviet economic modeling was at first directed at improving plan fulfillment and attempting to find “optimal” solutions to the constant issues of bottlenecks and input shortages.<sup>83</sup> From the beginning of the command economy, Soviet enterprises had been plagued by relative shortages of inputs and the constant need to produce the most possible goods with the least possible input mix (much as any capitalist enterprise would also want to minimize costs and maximize output, although for a different series of reasons). The linear programming models developed by Kantorovich demonstrated that an enterprise’s “optimal” mix of inputs could be determined ahead of time through mathematical modeling, rather than through the standard process of trial and error, whereby enterprises incrementally modified their input mix to cut down on costs. For example, Kantorovich demonstrated, an enterprise that was assigned to cut out an exact number of two different sized boards from a set of larger sheets of wood could, on the basis of a series of mathematical regressions, determine ahead of time which sizes to cut from which sheets and in which number. All that was required from a theoretical perspective was the definition of an “optimal” input mix, which Kantorovich worked out to be the set of inputs with the minimal overall cost.

On the level of individual enterprises, modeling appeared to hold great promise for the planned economy: using such mathematical models ought to lead, it was argued, to increased efficiency and a decrease in bottlenecks caused by input misallocation and shortage. As models began to be applied to inter-enterprise

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<sup>82</sup> Soviet economists involved in the body of analysis termed here “mathematical economic modeling” had no one label for their work. At different times such efforts were entitled “mathematical programming” (*matematicheskoe programmirovanie*); “mathematical methods” of analysis (*matematicheskie metody*); “cybernetics” (*kibernetika*); “optimal planning” (*optimal’noe planirovanie*); et cetera. The term “mathematical economic modeling” has been chosen here as a generally descriptive (if perhaps overly unifying) terminology. This follows the general definition provided by L.V. Kantorovich, who argued that the key element of mathematical methodology was the use of “mathematical models of one or another set of [economic] conditions.” See L.V. Kantorovich and A.B. Gorstko, *Optimal’nye resheniia v ekonomike* (Moscow: Nauka, 1972), 8.

<sup>83</sup> L.V. Kantorovich remained convinced that his work would be best used as part of the planned economy (Kantorovich and Gorstko, *Optimal’nye resheniya*, 9-14). Reviewing “optimizing” mathematical models, Michael Ellman also concluded that their implementation did not present any threat to a planned economic system. See: Michael Ellman, *Soviet Planning Today: Proposals for an Optimally Functioning Economic System* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 59.

exchanges and the analysis of entire economic sectors, however, it became more and more difficult to align the models' demands for "optimality" with the constraints of the planned economy. As Kantorovich and many others demonstrated, for large-scale mathematic economic modeling to work, values of some sort had to be assigned to inputs; without exchangeable values there was no way of comparing or calculating possible optimal solutions for multiple enterprises or sectors. Since the actual prices paid by enterprises for material inputs in the USSR were dictated from above by Goskomtsen and for the most part failed to represent relative value or scarcity, Kantorovich and similar economists began to assign "objectively conditioned values" (*ob'ektivno uslovnye otsenki*, often translated as "shadow prices" in English) to the inputs and output products they were working with. On the level of a single enterprise, this remained unproblematic: the shadow prices of inputs and goods simply represented relative value for the enterprise and did not compete at all with the legally established prices that were assigned to the goods once they left the enterprise. On the regional or sectorial level the situation was entirely different. Here enterprises traded amongst themselves on the basis of static prices dictated by Goskomtsen, whereas the mathematical models dictated that they trade more efficiently ("optimally") on the basis of dynamic "shadow prices" worked out in the models.

Over time, the conflict between the economic models and the realities of the Soviet planned economy became impossible to bridge: rather than predict the activities of the command economy, mathematical modeling began to be used to advocate for the implementation of market reforms, such as the use of "decentralized decision making" on the basis of dynamically shifting shadow prices. While government institutions would still set real retail prices and plan targets, such arguments went, an alternative set of market-like prices ought to be used to find "optimal" product mixes and direct that very planning.<sup>84</sup> Other proposals went further, arguing that the clash between the models and the Soviet economy could not be overcome without changes being made to the latter: as academic economists such as V.S. Nemchinov, V.A. Volkonsky, N. Petrakov and others argued, modern mathematical models clearly indicated a need to incorporate market structures, including

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<sup>84</sup> Kantorovich and Gorstko, *Optimal'nie resheniia*, 30. On Soviet economic modeling's shift from prediction to prescription, see Pekka Sutela, *Socialism, Planning, and Optimality: A Study in Soviet Economic Thought* (Helsinki: Finnish Soviet of Sciences and Letters, 1984).

decentralized decision making, profit incentives, and even dynamic prices for marketed goods.<sup>85</sup> As Petrakov put it in 1970, “The proper balance of supply and demand,” as brought about by market prices, “is the best medicine for queues.”<sup>86</sup>

Any middle ground, the advocates of economic mathematical modeling came to argue, was essentially doomed to failure. As Nemchinov wrote in 1959, Kantorovich’s “shadow prices” were an unstable half measure: an attempt to make the exchange theory of value apply in a system based on the Marxist labour theory of value.<sup>87</sup> While in capitalist economies the “real price” of any good is the market (exchange) value established by buyers and sellers, socialist economies such as the USSR held that a good’s “real price” was based on the scientifically determinable value of the labour that had gone into creating the good. This calculation could later be translated into an exchange value (price), depending on the demands of the economy and consideration of the good’s social use value. Planning bodies balanced various exchange values to make sure that workers received a wage equivalent to the value of their labour – and to guarantee that goods were distributed to enterprises and workers on an equitable basis. Ultimately, the price listed for any good in rubles was essentially a convenient method of accommodating the allocation and exchange of goods – and it remained abstract from the “real” (labour-based) value of that good. In concrete terms, if a factory purchased a shipment of boards for 10 rubles each, the price of 10 rubles represented the cost of labour involved in the board’s production, as well as the calculation of the social value of the boards to the economy as a whole. The figure of 10 rubles, however, represented neither the “market value” of the boards, based on relative scarcity and demand, nor the “optimal” value of the boards; nor was it useful as a figure with which to calculate the costs of optimal input mixes.<sup>88</sup> As a result, Nemchinov argued, econometrics required the use of market prices, which in turn implied shifting to something similar to the exchange theory of value

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<sup>85</sup> V.S. Nemchinov, *O dal’neishem sovershenstvovanii planirovaniia i upravleniia khoziaistvom* (Moscow: Ekonomika, 1965); V.A. Volkonsky, *Model’ optimal’nogo planirovaniia i vzaimosviazi ekonomicheskikh pokazatelei* (Moscow: TsEMI, 1967); N. Federenko, “Nauchno-tekhnicheskaiia revoliutsiia i upravlenie,” *Novii Mir* 46, no. 10 (1970): esp. 168; A. I Katsenelinboigen, I.L. Lakhman, Yu.V. Ovsienko, *Optimal’nost’ i tovaro-denezhnie otnosheniya* (Moscow: TsEMI, 1969,) esp. 82-123.

<sup>86</sup> N. Petrakov, “Upravlenie ekonomiki i ekonomicheskie interesy,” *Novii Mir* 46, no. 8 (1970): 179.

<sup>87</sup> V.S. Nemchinov, “Introduction,” in L.V. Kantorovich, *The Best Use of Economic Resources*, trans. P.F. Knightsfield (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1965), xiv-xv.

<sup>88</sup> For a theoretical discussion of the labor theory of value, see G. Dumenil, “Beyond the Transformation Riddle: A Labor Theory of Value,” *Science & Society* 47, no. 4 (1983/1984).

employed by Western economists, whereby prices were both dynamically assigned by the market and representative of a good's "real" value. As the Hungarian economist Janos Kornai later concluded, "No computational price system designed to provide a basis for long-term decisions will, however, substitute for an adequate system of actual prices."<sup>89</sup>

Although some ideas promoted by the mathematical modelers were incorporated into 1960s-era economic reforms, this implied attack on the labour theory of value led to their general isolation after the early 1960s.<sup>90</sup> As Pekka Sutela has shown, however, these ideas survived at the Institute of Economics and Organization of Industrial Production (IEiOPP) in Novosibirsk and the Moscow-based Central Mathematical Economics Institute (TsEMI), both of which employed economists under the auspices of the Soviet Academy of Sciences.<sup>91</sup> Having been founded by Nemchinov in 1963 and under the direction of its long-serving director, N.P. Federenko, TsEMI systematized much of the Soviet pro-reform modeling tradition into what was termed the "System of Optimally Functioning Socialist Economy" (SOFE), a theoretical platform that was subsequently applied to arguing for increasingly market-based reforms to the Soviet economy.<sup>92</sup> At both IEiOPP and TsEMI, moreover, modeling practices and methods were professionalized and grew into a sophisticated body of Soviet econometrics, in which complicated statistical tests were applied to the conditions of the socialist economy.

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s the economists working at TsEMI and IEiOPP continued to call for radical change to the structure of the planned economy.<sup>93</sup> Although their hopes were raised when Leonid Brezhnev explicitly mentioned "mathematical economic models" during his speech to the 24<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in

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<sup>89</sup> Jonas Kornai, *Mathematical Planning of Structural Decisions* (Amsterdam: North-Holland Publishing Company, 1975), 315. Masaaki Kuboniwa, while arguing for the ultimate compatibility of the labour theory of value with a dynamic pricing system, has also highlighted a number of practical and theoretical problems associated with the efforts to bind the two together. See: Masaaki Kuboniwa, *Quantitative Economics of Socialism: Input-Output Approaches* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 37-43.

<sup>90</sup> Michael Ellman, *Soviet Planning Today*, 4.

<sup>91</sup> Pekka Sutela, *Economic Thought and Economic Reform in the Soviet Union* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 3, 23.

<sup>92</sup> The content of SOFE has been dealt with at length in Sutela, *Economic Thought and Economic Reform* and Ellman, *Soviet Planning Today*. For the purposes of this dissertation, the ways in which different versions of Soviet econometrics diverged is less important than the overall focus on marketization.

<sup>93</sup> Sutela, *Economic Thought and Economic Reform*, 19-20.

1971, calls for market reforms continued to fall on largely deaf ears. The director of IEiOPP, A.G. Aganbegian, who would in the 1980s become one of Gorbachev's close economic advisors, later recalled presenting evidence in the early 1970s from "dynamic inter-sectorial models," which predicted a drop in long-term growth rates across the USSR if marketization was not implemented. Although his recommendations were given to commissions headed by Brezhnev and Aleksei Kosygin, the Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the USSR, Aganbegian's calls for change, including the introduction of dynamic pricing structures, he reported, went unheeded.<sup>94</sup> Other economists sympathetic to econometrics and market reforms have reported similar experiences.<sup>95</sup>

Continuing to work with econometric models, these economists increasingly came to the conclusion that the overall structure of the Soviet economy itself was at fault, rather than any particular decision-making structure or planning decisions. Their models, which tended to include assumptive criteria about the inefficiency and limitations of the planned economy, failed to work in the context of the USSR, or at best demanded revolutionary change.<sup>96</sup> In this form, econometrics was simply incompatible with the planned economy: its application to the problems of Soviet planning "worked only on paper."<sup>97</sup> Rather than modify their criteria or models, however, the econometricians chose instead to lobby the USSR's leadership in Moscow to change the Soviet economy to accord with the models. Yet econometrics' inapplicability to Soviet conditions had made it "remarkably unproductive," and over time the Soviet economic establishment turned away from the approach, notwithstanding its apparent early promise.<sup>98</sup> By the end of the 1970s, moreover, many of the leading Soviet econometricians had come under pressure for their ideological heterodoxy and links to foreign economic

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<sup>94</sup> Aganbegian, *Moving the Mountain*, 152, 155.

<sup>95</sup> Kudrov, *Soviet Economic Performance*, 36; Albina Tretyakova and Igor Birman, "Input-Output Analysis in the USSR," *Soviet Studies* 28 (2), 1976, note 82; Andrei Kolesnikov, "Sovetskii flirt s profitom: istoriia voprosom," *Forbes Rossiia*, October 2009.

<sup>96</sup> Hanson, *Rise and Fall*, 69, footnote 2. Also see English, *Russia and the Idea*, 97; 142. Built on assumptions about market efficiency and the need for "real" prices, econometric models inevitably led to pessimistic conclusions about the Soviet economy. See Vladimir Kontorovich, "Soviet Growth Slowdown: Econometric vs. Direct Evidence," *American Economic Review* 76, no. 2 (1986): 181; "1987 Panel on the Soviet Economic Outlook: Perceptions on a Confusing Set of Statistics," *Soviet Economy* 3, no. 1 (1987).

<sup>97</sup> Slava Gerovitch, *From Newspeak to Cyberspeak: A History of Soviet Cybernetics* (Boston: MIT Press, 2006), 278.

<sup>98</sup> Hanson, *Rise and Fall*, 96.

institutions.<sup>99</sup> This also tended to stymie the careers of its advocates: Aganbegian and the sociologist Tatiana Zaslavskaya were isolated in Novosibirsk's IEiOPP, while Federenko and Petrakov found their influence largely limited outside of TsEMI.

This situation changed abruptly in 1982, when Gorbachev, already a full member of the CPSU Politburo and Central Committee Secretary for Agriculture, invited Zaslavskaya and Federenko to the Kremlin to discuss the USSR's economy. This initial meeting developed into frequent informal consultations with Zaslavskaya, Federenko, and other econometricians, including Petrakov and Aganbegian, on the "agricultural mechanism" and "economic development" of the USSR.<sup>100</sup> Gorbachev was impressed, later writing in his memoirs that Aganbegian and those like him were the only ones who really understood the Soviet economy before perestroika.<sup>101</sup> When Gorbachev became General Secretary of the CPSU, he also made notable effort to include these economists more formally in his reform efforts. As a result, Gorbachev's ascension to power in 1985 opened the Kremlin's doors to many previously marginalized econometricians, including those, such as Aganbegian, Petrakov and Shatalin, who ultimately came to hold official posts and directly affect state policy.<sup>102</sup> For Gorbachev and his political allies, this form of econometric modeling provided a scientific explanation for the general malaise they had observed: models provided the necessary proof that official statistics had been falsified. Not only did the econometric models support Gorbachev's drive for reform, moreover, they represented "real" mathematical economics, free from Marxist ideology and the Soviet "whitewashing" (*ochkovtiratel'stvo*) that was said to have warped the study of economics in the USSR. Gorbachev went as far as to

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<sup>99</sup> Feygin, "The Making of an Economics Internationale."

<sup>100</sup> On the initial meeting with Gorbachev, see Interview with Tatiana Zaslavskaya, 27.06.1990, Moscow. 2RR 1/3/6 69. On later consultations, see Interview with Nikolai Petrakov, 14.07.1990, 2RR 1/215, 54a; "Predlozheniia uchenykh-ekonomistov po voprosam sovershenstvovaniia upravleniia narodnym khoziaistvom," 01.07.1982, RGASPI, f. 653, op. 1, d. 43, ll. 4-16; also Interview with Abel Aganbegian, 04.11.2012. Conducted by the Yeltsin Center, Moscow. Online at <http://www.yeltsincenter.ru/decryption/intervyu-s-abelom-aganbegyanom?page=0,0>.

<sup>101</sup> Gorbachev, *Zhizn' i reformy*, 335.

<sup>102</sup> Anders Aslund, "Gorbachev's Economic Advisors," *Soviet Economy* 3, no. 3 (1987); Pekka Sutela, "The Views of Gorbachev's Advisors: Leonid Abalkin, Nikolai Petrakov and Stanislav Shatalin," *Communist Economies and Economic Transformation* 3, no. 1 (1991). Other econometrics-associated economists who attained positions of political influence during perestroika include the future Politburo member Vadim Medvedev and the academics Yegor Gaidar, Evgenii Yasin, and Zaslavskaya.

explicitly cite one of Nemchinov's articles during a 1987 speech to a Central Committee plenum: perestroika, it seemed, had found its theoretical footing.<sup>103</sup>

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When Mikhail Gorbachev became General Secretary of the Communist Party of the USSR in March 1985, three important elements aligned to dictate the structural economic reforms that would be implemented under the heading of “perestroika.” First, the General Secretary and his advisors’ underlying belief that the Soviet economy and society had “stagnated” and that official statistics were false led them to seek out alternative sources of information and support. Moreover, Gorbachev found political support for his economic reforms amongst the relative elite of Moscow and other major urban centers in the USSR. In these cities many sophisticated urbanite Soviet citizens had also come to doubt the official statistics and pronouncements made by the state – and also felt that significant change was necessary to improve the standard of living with which they were no longer satisfied. Finally, the Soviet school of econometrics, which had developed within Soviet economics since the 1950s, provided an alternative model of Soviet decline – one that overlapped with the new leadership’s views and provided the necessary theoretical support for the chosen direction of reform. Facing the economic slowdown of the early 1980s, all three of these groups pushed for a new approach: not the limited and incremental reforms of the past, but a new and far more radical series of reforms.

By choosing to believe the econometrists’ predictions of doom and urbane Soviet consumers’ gloomy disposition, Gorbachev and his advisors were also aligning with the growing tendency to compare the USSR to the West on the West’s terms. Having satisfied Soviet consumers demands for basic goods and services, the USSR now faced the challenge of fulfilling their demands for prestige goods, reliable durables, and the Western lifestyle that was increasingly visible to many Soviet citizens. Travel to both Eastern Europe and the West was increasingly available to many well-off Soviets, and the influences of global consumerism were increasingly

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<sup>103</sup> “O zadachakh partii po korennoi perestroiki upravleniia ekonomikoi. Doklad General'nogo sekretaria TsK KPSS M.S. Gorbacheva na Plenum TsK KPSS, 25 iunია 1987 goda,” *Kommunist* 10 (1987): 28.

felt at home. For those living relatively comfortable lives in Moscow, Leningrad, Kiev, or even Novosibirsk, the temptations of Western models were clear. In the West, there were more, and better quality goods; in the West, increased salaries actually meant increased access to consumer goods. This broad wave of dissatisfaction with the relative benefits of the Soviet economic system supported Gorbachev and the econometrists' shared feeling that ideas from the West – and primarily, some sort of market distribution – was the real solution to the USSR's woes.

This was, however, a perspective that almost exclusively focused on the experiences and perspective of the USSR's relative elite to the exclusion of vast swaths of Soviet territory and population.<sup>104</sup> Developed on the basis of urban dissatisfaction and academic theories in a small number of large (and largely European) Soviet cities, Gorbachev's push for radical reform took no account of peripheral views. The perspective of local elites or workers in places such as Dushanbe, Tajikistan – where the majority saw no need for change and was largely satisfied with the Soviet system – were not taken into account whatsoever. In fact, Gorbachev and his group of close advisors were surprisingly uninterested and uninformed about the periphery of the USSR, demonstrating limited knowledge of Central Asia and much of the outlying and less developed republics. At one point, Gorbachev confused the Aral and Caspian seas during a Politburo discussion in early 1986;<sup>105</sup> later, he mistakenly referred to Tajikistan as "Tajikia."<sup>106</sup> His advisor Georgii Shakhnazarov mixed up the names of Tajik newspapers he was nominally in charge of overseeing.<sup>107</sup> Another advisor, Anatolii Cherniaev, was simply dismissive of the USSR's Muslim republics. In 1988 he advised Gorbachev that "Islamic values don't really fit with universal human values," and thus Central Asia was unlikely to support "the moral perestroika of Soviet society."<sup>108</sup> When representatives from the Central Committee would arrive in Dushanbe, moreover, it often seemed "like they did not know anything beyond MKAD [the edge of

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<sup>104</sup> For a supporting view, see Irina Morozova, "Perestroika v sovetskoi Tsentral'noi Azii i sotsiologicheskoi Mongolii: novye formy neravenstva skvoz' prizmu obshchestvennykh diskussii," in *The Legacy of Perestroika Discourses in Knowledge Production on Central Asia* (Ulaanbaatar: Sayombo printing, 2013).

<sup>105</sup> Cherniaev, Veber, and Medvedev, *V Politbiuro TsK KPSS*, 25.

<sup>106</sup> Avaz Yuldashev, "Kak on liubil Tadzhikistan: Tri epizoda iz zhizni Georgiia Koshlakova," *Asia-Plus*, July 10, 2017.

<sup>107</sup> Dokladnaia zapiska M.S. Gorbachevu, 20.12.1988, AGF f. 5, op. 1, d. 18195, l. 1.

<sup>108</sup> Dokladnaia zapiska A.S. Cherniaeva o religii v SSSR, 29.01.1988, AGF f. 2, op. 1, d. 963, l. 1.



Moscow],” and they were generally unaware of local conditions.<sup>109</sup> The region was hardly at the top of the reformers’ agenda. Thus the leaders of the Tajik Soviet government were quite right to wonder in 1985 about the reasoning behind the reform movement: it seemed eminently true that plans for reform had not taken the historical experience of the Tajik SSR or many other republics into account.

The lack of attention paid to Tajikistan, moreover, underlines an important contradiction between the reform program’s development and its ultimate implementation. While based on dissatisfaction and theoretical models developed in relatively well-off cities and elite circles, the push to add market-like structures to the Soviet economy would require an overhaul of the entire system. This would mean change across 15 republics spread between Europe and the Pacific Ocean and between the Arctic Circle and the Afghan border. The USSR was far greater than a handful of unsatisfied cosmopolitan cities: as Chapter II has shown, it was also full of disparate corners of agricultural production, raw materials development, and entire republics where the Soviet model was still celebrated and supported. These “peripheral” areas, moreover, were often where many industries and significant economic spheres were located. This meant that any change to the Soviet superstructure was likely to have particularly immediate impact on areas far outside of Moscow. As Gorbachev’s push for radical reform began to coalesce into the concrete marketizing reforms of “perestroika” over the next few years, changes were felt across the entirety of the USSR – both where those changes had been awaited, such as Moscow, and where they came as an unwanted awakening, such as the Tajik SSR. As the following chapters will demonstrate, in action the reform program served to create an economic crisis, promote destructive socio-political forces, and heighten the divide between Soviet center and periphery.

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<sup>109</sup> Interview with Georgii Koshlakov, Dushanbe, July 2016; “Georgii Koshlakov – sovetskii vol’nodumets,” *Asia-Plus* 15 February 2007.

## **Chapter Four**

### **Building a “Socialist” Market: Gorbachev’s Economic Reforms**

Settling into the office of the First Secretary of the Communist Party of the USSR on Moscow’s Old Square in March 1985, Mikhail Gorbachev was ready for change – even for structural reform. This included political change: Gorbachev, with the help of allies like Yegor Ligachev, quickly went about removing the members of the Politburo who had opposed his election, as well as updating the Party leadership of various republics and oblasts, much as any new First Secretary was likely to do.<sup>1</sup> More pressingly, however, it meant economic reform. Having spent years developing ideas in the Moscow circles of econometrists, intellectuals, politicians, and other Soviet urbanites all increasingly disappointed with Soviet production and stagnant living standards, Gorbachev had come to share the belief that something had to be changed. While the form of this change seemed initially unclear, both Gorbachev’s own experience with the West and the influence of Muscovite intellectual opinion pointed in a single direction: the Soviet economy could only be saved by the introduction of market-like practices.

Over the course of 1986-1988, as this chapter will show, Gorbachev and his supporters in the Soviet government passed a series of economic reforms that taken as a whole introduced significant market-style practices to the planned Soviet economy. In particular, the 1987 Soviet Law on State Enterprises (Conglomerates) and the 1988 Law on Cooperatives created internal conditions for the functioning of private and semi-private businesses within the USSR. In many ways, together with perestroika’s numerous secondary reforms, these laws significantly undermined the Soviet state’s control over the productive sector, providing ripe conditions for Soviet enterprises to hoard profits, stop producing affordable consumer goods, and embezzle funds through cooperative businesses. The impact of these reforms was visible as early as 1988, the first year the full reform package went into effect: deficits increased and the production of important consumer goods began to wobble. By 1989 the situation was growing out of hand, with unemployment growing, the gap between earned wages and

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<sup>1</sup> Members of the Politburo opposed to Gorbachev’s selection included Grigorii Romanov (retired in July 1985), Nikolai Tikhonov (retired in October 1985), Viktor Grishin (retired in February 1986), Dinmukhamad Kunaev (retired in December 1986) and Vladimir Shcherbitskii (retired in 1989). See Ryzhkov, *Desiat’ let*, 76; M.S. Solomentsev, *Zachistka v Politbiuro. Kak Gorbachev ubiral ‘vragov perestroiki’* (Moscow: Algoritm, 2011).

available products increasing, and modest economic growth turning into an economic recession. Market practices were making a great deal of money for the directors of individual enterprises and cooperatives' new owners – but certainly not for the Soviet economy or population as a whole.

While Gorbachev's economic reform program has unavoidably received attention as a central element of perestroika, the clear links between these reforms and the economic disintegration of the USSR have been left surprisingly understudied.<sup>2</sup> Instead, historiographical research has generally circled around the idea that the reform program essentially failed and was secondary to other causes of collapse, economic or political. Some scholars have emphasized alternative explanations, such as the simple "loss of faith" in the Soviet System, as Stephen Solnick has put it. In this view, the reform program was essentially irrelevant: the Soviet state collapsed under the weight of its own inefficiencies and the history of violence that Gorbachev revealed through glasnost.<sup>3</sup> Other authors, however, have argued that the reform program held real promise for the Soviet economy – but was unable to overcome entrenched bureaucratic interests, conservative politicians, or simple worker intransigence.<sup>4</sup> In either case, reform failed to have any real impact, leaving the USSR to flounder towards its downwards spiral in 1990-1991.

Based for the most part on memoirs written by Gorbachev and many of his supporters (as well as notes from Politburo and other central Party meetings), these accounts tend to paint the leadership of the USSR in a relatively positive light. While the Soviet Union's economy may have taken a spectacular nosedive in the years immediately after Gorbachev's reform program, they imply, this had little to do with the actual reforms. Yet this overlooks the great deal of historical evidence pointing to the contrary. By turning to the actual content of Gorbachev's economic reform program and its consequences for the Soviet economy, this chapter argues, it is possible to establish clear and inarguable links between the introduction of the so-called "socialist market" reforms of 1986-88 and the

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<sup>2</sup> Exceptions include Donald Filtzer, *Soviet Workers and the Collapse of Perestroika* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Terry Cox, *From Perestroika to Privatisation: The Politics of Property Change in Russian Society, 1985-1991* (Avebury: Aldershot, 1996).

<sup>3</sup> Solnick, *Stealing the State*; also Ellman and Kontorovich, *The Destruction of the Soviet*; Brown, *Gorbachev Factor*; McCauley, *The Rise and Fall*.

<sup>4</sup> Miller, *The Struggle to Save*; Kotkin, *Armageddon Averted*; Filtzer, *Soviet Workers*; Cox, *From Perestroika to Privatisation*.

subsequent downturn in the Soviet planned economy. These reforms were in fact one of the central causes of the Soviet economy's collapse: as this thesis argues, their impact was visible across the whole of the USSR within a few years of their implementation. Although Soviet leaders in both Dushanbe and Moscow observed the economic decline, however, it was only in the periphery that problems were explicitly connected to the reforms. In the offices of the Central Committee on the Old Square, Gorbachev and his advisors saw a different picture, one in which reforms had failed, blocked by "entrenched interests" and "conservative bureaucrats." Blind to the ways in which his own reforms had torpedoed the economy, Gorbachev for years continued to assert their overall "failure." This stance would help to define the fate of the USSR in its final years, as economic chaos was compounded by further political innovation meant to overcome this bureaucratic "intransigence" – but which would serve to only further undermine the fabric of Soviet society.

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One of the first indications of Gorbachev's focus on reform could be seen in his choice of Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the USSR. Replacing the aging Nikolai Tikhonov in October 1985 with Nikolai Ryzhkov, Gorbachev selected a candidate with whom he had previously worked on economic reform, albeit on a smaller scale. Long associated with Gosplan and the Ministry of Medium Engineering (*Minsredmash*), Ryzhkov also had a notable history of overseeing economic change. As the head engineer and then director of the giant tractor factory "Uralsmash" in the late 1960s, Ryzhkov had been in charge of one of the first enterprises to implement the famous "Kosygin reforms" of 1965, the first time the USSR had toyed with the idea of market incentives. As a Central Committee secretary in the early 1980s, moreover, he had been tasked by Andropov to work with Gorbachev on a program of economic revitalization, which had ultimately resulted in a series of limited reform laws passed in 1983.<sup>5</sup> A less brash personality than Gorbachev, Ryzhkov's long experience in the economic apparatus made him an effective choice as a partner to help work out the details of the coming reform program.

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<sup>5</sup> Ryzhkov. *Desiat' let*, 48-49; Gorbachev, *Zhizny i reformy*, 244-245.

Given their joint experience developing reforms under Andropov, Gorbachev and Ryzhkov's initial ideas tended to adhere to the general reform program the former had proposed during his short tenure as First Secretary. In part, this meant an emphasis on workplace discipline: cutting work-hours lost due to laziness, inattentiveness, absentness, or simple drunkenness. It also, more immediately than anything else, was focused on productivity. The challenge of increasing productivity growth had been a major concern for Andropov, and it remained central for Gorbachev, Ryzhkov, and their advisors.<sup>6</sup> Soviet economic planners were obsessed with productivity. Factories, ministries, and whole republics were constantly under pressure to increase productivity rates: in 1984, for example, the Soviet Council of Ministers berated the Tajik SSR for its "tendency towards salary growth rates that are higher than productivity growth rates."<sup>7</sup> Yet these exhortations seemed to have little immediate effect: for years productivity growth rates had been dropping. New methods of calculating productivity introduced in the late 1970s, moreover, increasingly showed that Soviet output growth was essentially "extensive" – predicated on increased inputs (materials, workers, or salaries) rather than boosts in labour organization or technology.<sup>8</sup>

These low rates of real productivity growth threatened the whole of the economy for two main reasons. First, the total number of workers in the USSR was objectively limited – and in the European parts of the country, already largely at its limit. Adding workers *ad nasueam* was not a long-term solution. Second, and even more problematic, providing monetary incentives to boost productivity growth ran afoul of the already growing imbalance between wages and available goods in the USSR. As discussed in Chapter Three, salaries had been growing in the USSR for decades, at rates that frequently outstripped increases in productivity. By the early 1980s salaries were increasing by around 4-5% a year while consumers' access to goods – predicated on increasing productivity rates – was stuck at 3.5% growth. As a result, "over a long period of time the population has built up large

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<sup>6</sup> For Andropov's views on productivity growth, see Ligachev. *Zagadka Gorbacheva*, 24.

<sup>7</sup> TsGART f. 288, op. 14, d. 5299, l. 121.

<sup>8</sup> See Postanovlenie TsK KPSS i SM SSSR ot 12.07.1979 g. "Ob uluchshenii planirovaniia i usilenii vozdviizhiiia khosiasstvennogo mekhanizma na povysenie effektivnosti proizvodstva i kachestva raboty," reprinted in Abdunazarova, "Sotsial'no-ekonomicheskie problemy," 19.

cash reserves. At the moment they are greater than 273 billion rubles.”<sup>9</sup> This massive reserve of unspent wages, equivalent to 75% of the annual Soviet budget, threatened the state with a potential wave of consumer dissatisfaction, deficits, or even monetary collapse. Productivity had to be increased – and somehow without increasing total salary output.

Initially, Gorbachev and Ryzhkov turned to traditional methods of increasing productivity that emphasized the role of state as regulator and economic planner. New standards for consumer products were passed under the heading of “State Approval” (*Gospriemka*), and enterprises were increasingly fined for failing to produce at least a percentage of goods that met these standards. The USSR also passed its unpopular “dry law” (*sukhoi zakon*) in May 1985, which was meant to boost output by lowering alcohol consumption and drunkenness in the workplace.<sup>10</sup> While not banning alcohol outright, it dictated significant decreases of its production: factories were shut, vineyards chopped down, and whole industries cut back. One of the most controversial elements of perestroika, this law quickly led to deficits of both vodka and sugar, as Soviet citizens turned to brewing their own alcohol at home.<sup>11</sup> Finally, the Soviet government declared that it would be making significant investments in the machine-building industry (*mashinostroenie*) in order to increase the use of technology in many sectors. Some research had begun to point to a structural over-focus on “final goods” instead of capital goods or the means of production, and it was felt that a lack of focused financing was also to blame for the woeful state of the Soviet computer industry.<sup>12</sup> As Gorbachev noted at a Politburo meeting in mid-1985, funding for the machine industry and capital goods was “a broad frontal attack on solving the issues of speeding up the country’s social and economic development.”<sup>13</sup> Brought together under the heading of “speeding up” (*uskorenie*), these early steps were largely in line with earlier Soviet reform efforts: the conditions for increased productivity were dictated from above, rather than incentivized from below.

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<sup>9</sup> Spravka o dokhodakh i raskhodakh naseleniia v 1983 godu. RGASPI f. 653, op. 1, d. 38, l. 29.

<sup>10</sup> While the “dry law” was championed by Ligachev, whom Gorbachev had brought from Tomsk to head the Central Committee’s Personnel Division, it remained an element of the broader program of economic improvements pushed by Gorbachev. See Ryzhkov, *Desiat’ let*, 84-86.

<sup>11</sup> Ryzhkov, *Perestroika*, 95.

<sup>12</sup> On the historical production of capital goods see Vid and Ivanov, *Novaia filosofiia*. For the general state of the Soviet computer industry, see Cherniaev, Veber, and Medvedev, *V Politbiuro TsK KPSS*, 295-296.

<sup>13</sup> Cherniaev, Veber, and Medvedev, *V Politbiuro TsK KPSS*, 17.

At the same time, even *uskorenie* began to include certain provisions that went beyond the standard mode of Soviet reform. Facing both a deficit of industrial workers and rates of salary growth that outpaced productivity increases, the Soviet government made an attempt to both incentivize factories to operate with fewer workers and incentivize the remaining workers to work harder. After all, Gorbachev argued at a Politburo meeting in June 1986, Soviet factories were lousy with unneeded workers: “The Japanese have developed a undergarment factory – it’s an automated factory. 600 workers have an output of 600 million items. It takes 900,000 of our workers to create the same output.”<sup>14</sup> Statisticians calculated in the mid-1980s that between 5-10 million Soviet workers were occupying “unneeded” positions and should be “freed” (*vysvobozhdeni*) to work in other industries.<sup>15</sup> In addition, it was believed that the long-term “flattening” (*uravnilovka*) or standardization of wages in the USSR had disincetivized workers and factory directors alike from focusing on output. As Gosplan argued in 1986, this had the effect of rewarding those who worked less – while failing to boost the standing of those who actually increased productivity.<sup>16</sup>

With this in mind, the Central Committee of the CPSU, the Soviet Government, and the All-Union Central Soviet of Trade Unions passed a series of resolutions starting in September 1986 intended to “free up” workers and create imbalances in pay.<sup>17</sup> While Soviet labor law made it extremely difficult to fire workers outright, natural turnover at most enterprises was quite high.<sup>18</sup> As the new resolutions emphasized, enterprise directors had the right to annually set the number of workers at their factories and could simply choose to rehire fewer workers than the number who

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>15</sup> For the lower figure of “unneeded” positions, see “Predlozheniia po povysheniiu effektivnosti proizvodstvennogo apparata i ispol'zovaniia ekonomicheskogo potentsiala,” RGASPI f. 653, op. 1, d. 39, l. 61; for the higher, “O zadachakh partii po korennoi perestroike upravleniia ekonomiki,” Doklad General'nogo sekretaria TsK KPSS M.S. Gorbachev na Plenum TsK KPSS, 25.06.1987, *Kommunist* 10, 1987, 9.

<sup>16</sup> Pis'mo Gosplana SSSR Sovetu Ministrov SSSR ot imeni Zampreda Gosplana Sitariana, 03.01.1986, GARF f. 5446, op. 162, d. 153, ll. 1-2.

<sup>17</sup> See Postanovlenie TsK KPSS, Soveta Ministrov SSSR i VTsSPS ot 17.09.1986 no. 1115 and Postanovlenie TsK KPSS, Soveta Ministrov SSSR i VTsSPS ot 22.12.1987 no. 1457 “Ob obespechenii effektivnosti zaniatosti naseleniia, sovershenstvovanii sistemy trudoustroistva i usilenii sotsial'nykh garantii dlia trudiashchikhsia,” cited in TsGART f. 18, op. 8, d. 3656, l. 112.

<sup>18</sup> Annual labor turnover rates were close to 20%. See David E. Powell, “Labor Turnover in the Soviet Union,” *Slavic Review* 36, no. 2 (1977); David Granick, *Job Rights in the Soviet Union: Their Consequences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 15.

had left. The resolutions incentivized this effective “freeing up” of workers by pointing out how savings on salaries (kept in the factory’s “Salary Fund”) could be moved around to meet other needs.<sup>19</sup> The resolutions also encouraged enterprises to increase salaries and bonuses for those workers who over-fulfilled work norms and otherwise boosted rates of productivity. The math was simple: as long as salary increases were lower than the percentage of workers cut, savings would be significant even without any increase in productivity. For example, if a bakery in Dushanbe reduced its staff by 10% and then increased average salaries for the remaining bakers by 3%, total savings would still be more than 7%. Overall, this was seen as benefiting both individual enterprises, which would save money on salary expenditures, and the Soviet economy as a whole, which would gain needed industrial workers, more consumer goods, and a lowered salary burden.

While these resolutions explicitly avoided the language of capitalism – workers were “freed,” not fired, and the word “unemployment” was never mentioned – there was already a hint of the market about them. Workers were to be incentivized through both increased salaries for higher output and possible fines for low-quality production (“*brak*”). Moreover, enterprises were now supposed to compete for a pool of “freed up” workers. This in particular was seen as central in the search for “reserves” of untapped productivity.<sup>20</sup> As Donald Filtzer has pointed out, elements of Gosplan and Goskomtrud had been quite interested in creating frictional unemployment in the USSR, which would in turn engender a more fluid labour market.<sup>21</sup> This contradicted socialist principles of a guaranteed right to labor – but did promise increased economic growth. It was still early to speak of the market, but those involved in the reforms understood very well what they were promoting. “The word “market” was forbidden then,” Gorbachev’s close economic advisor Abel Aganbegian later recalled, “so I wrote about the activation of monetary-goods exchange (*tovaro-denezhnie otnosheniia*).”<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Technically, enterprises had held this right since 1983, but it seems to have been infrequently invoked before 1986. See Ryzkhov, *Perestroika*, 47-48; Zemstov, *Chastnaia zhizn'*, 31-32.

<sup>20</sup> L.I. Abalkin, *Kurs uskoreniia* (Moscow: Izadetel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1986), 66.

<sup>21</sup> Filtzer, *Soviet Workers*, 16.

<sup>22</sup> Interview with Abel Aganbegian, 04.11.2012. Conducted by the Yelstin Center, Moscow. Online at <http://www.yeltsincenter.ru/decryption/intervyu-s-abelom-aganbegyanom?page=0,0>.



While its name may have been taboo, the market continued to creep into the reform program the Soviet government was developing. Throughout 1986 Gorbachev never stopped repeating the need for “economic methods,” “economic mechanisms,” or the “mechanism of economic management,” all code-words for market-like economic relationships.<sup>23</sup> As early as July 1986 he was ready to speak openly, declaring at a Politburo meeting:

*“Our ideological approach is now based on the idea that the people should live better. [We need] to open up the question of the market. To say that we are in favor of healthy competition, of the development of cooperative business, that we intend to develop people’s productive energies.”<sup>24</sup>*

In short, Gorbachev argued, the traditional Soviet methods of centrally directed planning had failed to overcome the weight of falling growth rates and the growing gap between the USSR and the West. As the econometrists had long been arguing, it was time to try incorporating market practices into socialism.

This approach quickly began to find reflection in reform legislation, first of all in the Law on Individual Labor Activity, which was passed in November 1986. Contradictorily countering previous reforms – including a spring 1986 campaign against “non-labor (*netrudovye*) incomes” – this law not only factually legalized but also encouraged what had long remained a legal gray zone: personal entrepreneurship. While private business had long remained illegal in the USSR, part-time individual work was technically legal, as affirmed by Article 17 of the 1977 Soviet Constitution. As long as they did not hire other individuals or sell their labor power, workers had the right to engage in private paid activities, such as shoe repair, house remodeling, taxi services, and so forth – and in fact, many did. According to some estimates, nearly 20 million Soviet workers spent at least part of their time engaged in “individual service activity.” Insofar as it was almost impossible, although legally required, to register this activity, the vast majority of individuals operated in a tolerated, but legally unclear gray area.<sup>25</sup> At the same time, while the widespread existence of individual business-like activity was an ideological challenge to the planned economy, the state recognized that these

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<sup>23</sup> Cherniaev, Veber, and Medvedev, *V Politbiuro TsK KPSS*, 62-63, 99.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>25</sup> Cox, *From Perestroika to Privatisation*, 4, 23-24, 32.

individuals “fulfilled important social functions” and had little incentive to interfere.<sup>26</sup> Court cases from the early 1980s made it clear that as long as entrepreneurs remained employed by the state and kept their personal business activities limited, they would be left alone.<sup>27</sup>

The Law on Individual Labor Activity converted previous practices of tolerance into ones of promotion. Entrepreneurs were encouraged to bring their personal businesses out into the open: they were even legally allowed to dedicate themselves full-time to their individual activity, as long as they paid the appropriate taxes.<sup>28</sup> While it was still forbidden to open large business enterprises with more than 4-5 employees, individuals were given the right to hire a limited number of family members, which, it was hoped, would promote small-scale food production. A family of bakers in Dushanbe, for example, quickly took up the call, producing bread that was both cheaper and (according to a newspaper correspondent) better than the state standard.<sup>29</sup> As the reform economist Gelii Shmelov argued in 1986, the Law on Labor Activity was meant to bring this sort of family business (“*chastniki*”) into the legal and taxable sphere – and to help solve the state’s production and distribution problems in the meantime.<sup>30</sup> Rather than through *diktat* from the top, it was argued, local markets and producers would more effectively distribute goods and services.

## I. 1987 Law on Enterprises

Having encouraged individual Soviet citizens to embrace entrepreneurial activity, the Soviet state turned its reformist attentions to the lynchpin of the planned economy – state enterprises (*predpriiatiia*). Encompassing everything from small meat-pie (*sambusa*) stands in rural Tajik bazaars to the massive Uralmash factory Ryzhkov had once managed, Soviet “enterprises” encompassed all of the country’s

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<sup>26</sup> Ivar Khel'mutovich Raig, “Shto mozhnet individual'noe khoziaistvo?” *Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniia* 12, no.1 (1986): 34.

<sup>27</sup> Roostam Sadri, “A Debate on Profitable “Hobbies” in Kazakhstan,” *Radio Liberty Research Bulletin* 1 (3206), RL 1/83, January 05, 1983.

<sup>28</sup> Tax rates for individual entrepreneurs were established at rates similar to the tax burden on state-employed workers: 11-13% up to 3000 rubles per year, and then between 20-65% on the amount earned over 3000 rubles. See Ukaz Prezidiuma Verkhovnogo Soveta ot 23.04.1987 (no. 6881-X1) “O vnesenii izmenenii i dopolnenii v nekotorye zakonodatel'nye akty po voprosam nalogooblazheniia grazhdan,” GARF f. 5446, op. 148, d. 173, ll. 24-27.

<sup>29</sup> “U semeinogo tandyra,” *Kommunist Tadzhikistana*, April 30, 1987.

<sup>30</sup> L. Telen, “Kustari protiv shabashnikov,” *Sotsialisticheskaia industriia*, August 24, 1986. Also: Matthews, *Patterns of Deprivation*, 17.

productive organizations. Enterprises represented the vast majority of all Soviet economic output, and the leaders of the USSR had long considered them central to any reform effort. This had been true of the 1965 Kosygin reforms, which had tried to boost enterprise productivity; and it remained true under Brezhnev and Andropov, who had also overseen discussions on how to get enterprises to respond to market-like signals. Under Gorbachev, these discussions were restarted in 1986, resulting at the end of June 1987 in the passage of the massive Law on State Enterprises (Associations).<sup>31</sup>

In addition to many secondary provisions, the 1987 Law stipulated five central tenets, according to which enterprises were now expected to work. First, factory directors were to be more responsible to workers, and procedures were laid out by which directors could be elected by the workers themselves. Second, enterprises were required over a two-year period to shift to a system of “self-financing” (*khozraschet*), whereby they would be required to cover their own costs, rather than rely upon state-directed funds. Third, in accordance with the requirement to be self-financing, enterprises were given direct control over a much greater proportion of their profits. Fourth, enterprises were encouraged to make direct contracts with other factories and organizations; only a portion of their contracts (called “*Goszakaz*”) would now be centrally directed and administered by state bodies such as the State Provisioning Committee (*Gossnab*). And finally, enterprises were given nearly full control over the capital goods and property under their authority: they could now even “transfer” goods or monetary funds to other enterprises or “organizations” without any approval from the state planning committees.<sup>32</sup>

On its face, the 1987 Law on State Enterprises initially seemed to be following earlier attempts to reform Soviet enterprises. In fact, it even seemed to repeat certain existing provisions. Since 1965, for example, Soviet enterprises had

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<sup>31</sup> For some of the first arguments about the law, see Cherniaev, Veber, and Medvedev, *V Politbiuro TsK KPSS*, 76. An extensive collection of notes and documents related to the law’s development can also be found in GARF f. 5446, op. 148, dd. 2-8.

<sup>32</sup> For the content of the final 1987 Law on State Enterprises, see GARF f. 5446, op. 148, d. 3. For a discussion about the election of factory managers, see *Postanovlenie Tsentral'nogo komiteta Kompartii Tadzhikistana, Soveta Ministrov Tadzhikskoi SSR, Tadzhikskogo respublikanskogo soveta professional'nykh soiuзов no. 84 ot 16.03.1988*, TsGART f. 18, op. 8, d. 3656, l. 328.

directly controlled a certain portion of their profits.<sup>33</sup> In 1983, moreover, reforms directed by Andropov had already expanded enterprises' rights to distribute these profits relatively freely. Direct contracts had also been an integral part of Soviet industry since the very beginning: while nominally routing their contracts through Gosplan and other bodies, Soviet enterprises were adept at cutting deals with one another and reaching out to producers directly when in need of inputs.<sup>34</sup> The changes promoted seemed largely ones of scale, not of operational difference. A close comparison of the 1987 Law's provisions with earlier laws, however, makes it clear that the simple scale of the new reform was enough to engender systemic change – to change, as Ryzhkov later put it, “the structure of the entire economic mechanism.”<sup>35</sup>

While earlier attempts at enterprise reform had only cautiously toyed with the idea of market incentives, the 1987 Law on State Enterprises pushed far enough to make market relationships a central element of enterprise behavior. Nor was this any accident: written in part and influenced by econometrics-associated economists, including Aganbegian, Anchishchkin, Bogomolov, Petrakov, Sitarian, and others, the 1987 Law was intended to revitalize Soviet production through the implementation of market structures.<sup>36</sup> Disappointed by the restrictions placed on earlier reforms – which many of them had also been involved in developing – these economists quickly took advantage of the opportunity provided by Gorbachev to finally put their “nonstandard” ideas to work.<sup>37</sup> Although since the 1965 reform Soviet enterprises had been able to keep a portion of their profits, the percentage was relatively low (often around 10%), and restricted to a series of four “funds,” which were earmarked for particular needs – research, salaries and

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<sup>33</sup> Since 1965 the intent and consequence of the “Kosygin reforms” have remained a matter of academic debate. Many authors (Popov, *Reformirovanie nereformiruemogo*; Ellman, *Socialist Planning*, 17; Chernyshova, *Soviet Consumer*, 15) have argued that the reforms “failed,” insofar as they did not (a) liberalize the Soviet economy or (b) lead to long-term growth increases. At the same time, the Kosygin reforms provided Soviet enterprises with the right to retain a portion of their profits, a right that they did not have before. This right remained constant thereafter, representing a fundamental change to Soviet enterprise law and behavior.

<sup>34</sup> See, for example, K. Klimenko, “Uskorenie nauchno-tekhnicheskogo progressa – obschenarodnogo zadacha,” *Kommunist* 39, no. 2 (January 1963): 66.

<sup>35</sup> Ryzhkov, *Desiat' let*, 62.

<sup>36</sup> On the involvement of particular economists in the development of the 1987 Law, see L.I. Abalkin, *Zigzagi sud'by: razocharovaniia i nadezhdy* (Moscow: Institut ekonomiki RAN, 1996), 18-19; GARF f. 5446, op. 148, d. 19, l. 1; Ryzhkov, *desiat'*, 46. For the influence of the econometrists and their promotion of market incentives, see Chapter Three of this dissertation.

<sup>37</sup> Pavlov, *Upushchen li*, 257-259.

bonuses, and so forth.<sup>38</sup> The 1987 Law, building upon Andropov's milder reforms of 1983, radically changed this balance. Now, having switched to "self-financing," enterprises were able to keep the majority of their profits – sometimes, more than 80% of them. Profits could also be moved around more easily, and even transferred to other organizations.<sup>39</sup>

By making enterprises the masters of their own fates, it was thought, these enterprises would be freed to increase their profits through savings and increased production.<sup>40</sup> In addition, by switching the centralized contract system to a dual system of state orders (*goszakazy*) and direct contracts, the econometrists had argued for years, it would be possible to rationalize and streamline enterprise production: rather than a central government body, the logic went, enterprises knew better where their inputs and outputs should go.<sup>41</sup> Before the reform, Gorbachev argued in January 1987, the level of state oversight had growing stifling – and, in his view, ridiculous. "Factories are wearing such a leash that they are gagging," he mused, "It goes as far as the Council of Ministers of the RSFSR confirming a factory's toilet construction."<sup>42</sup> The answer, as with the Law on Individual Labor Activity, was to encourage enterprises to embrace market incentives – to take previously tolerated but frowned-upon practices and make them central to the Soviet economy.

## II. Cooperatives

Building on the 1986 Law on Individual Labor Activity and the 1987 Law on State Enterprises, by early 1988 Gorbachev and his team were ready to move one step further towards their conception of a "socialist" market. As Gorbachev had

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<sup>38</sup> The 1965 reforms had initially created three "funds" – an "enterprise development fund" for research and capital purchases, a "socio-cultural fund" to provide incentives to workers, including housing, and a "bonus fund." In 1983, a fourth fund (for "science and technology") was added. See: Popov, *Reformirovanie nereformiruemogo*, 317-330; Ryzhkov, *Perestroika*, 47-48; TsGART f. 355, op. 16, d. 33, ll. 90-92.

<sup>39</sup> For the provisions of implementation covering the 1987 Law, see Proekt Postanovleniia Soveta Ministrov "O poriadke i srokakh primeneniia Zakona SSSR "O gosudarstvennom predpriatii (ob"edinenii)" k predpriatiiam, ob"edininiam i organizatsiiam sfery material'nogo proizvodstva, ne perevedennym na polnyi khozaistvennyi raschet i samofinansirovanie, a takzhe k organizatsiiam neproizvodstvennoi sfery," 13.10.1987, GARF f. 5446, op. 148, d. 3, ll. 10-56.

<sup>40</sup> Abalkin, *Zigzag sud'by*, 20-21.

<sup>41</sup> The economist Bogomolov made this argument and promoted the "goszakazy" system in a paper sent to the CPSU Central Committee in April 1984. See O. Bogomolov, "Soobrazheniia k iskhodnoi kontseptsii kompleksnogo sovershenstvovaniia khozaistvennogo mekhanizma," 07.04.1984, RGASPI f. 653, op. 1, d. 39, l. 358.

<sup>42</sup> Cherniaev, Veber, and Medvedev, *V Politbiuro TsK KPSS*, 130.

signaled in 1986, “cooperative business” was the final step towards “healthy competition” and improved production, a promise made real by the March 1988 Law on Cooperatives. Creating the legal basis for private business in the Western sense, this 1988 law built upon a more limited February 1987 directive of the Council of Ministers of the USSR, which had provided for the creation of cooperatives as long as the new businesses produced consumer goods.<sup>43</sup> The March 1988 Law, however, freed cooperative businesses to operate in most economic spheres, and to determine (within some limits) the prices of their goods, the salaries of their employees, and their contracts with enterprises and individuals. In an attempt to incentivize cooperative business over individual entrepreneurship, moreover, a flat 13% tax rate was set on all cooperative profits.<sup>44</sup>

Even more than the earlier laws, the introduction of private businesses into Soviet society helped to guarantee that a semblance of a market – the undirected purchase and sale of goods and services – would begin to arise. As Gorbachev put it: “The cooperative is independent. It will go to the market – not to us.”<sup>45</sup> The Soviet state was staking a claim on the relative efficiency of privately directed production: even more than reformed state enterprises, they argued, private cooperatives would be able to provide the goods and services Soviet consumers needed. In turn, this would bring down deficits and improve overall standards of living. This initiative was also the most controversial element of Gorbachev’s reforms, as the promotion of cooperatives challenged central Soviet precepts about the proletariat’s ownership and control of industry. Yet Gorbachev and his supporters simply shrugged off these worries. “We have grown cross-eyed in our dogmas,” Gorbachev countered during Politburo arguments about cooperatives. Instead of discussing theory, he suggested, the state should just “let the people go and work in cooperatives.” At least there they would be producing something for the market.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> See the February 05 1987 Act of the Council of Ministers of the USSR, No. 162 “O sozdanii kooperativov po proizvodstvu tovarov narodnogo potrebleniia,” *V Politbiuro TsK KPSS*, 137-138.

<sup>44</sup> Cox, *From Perestroika to Privatisation*, 83-84. This was also discussed by the Tajik Council of Ministers in early 1987. See Stenogramma Zasedaniia Prezidiuma Soveta Ministrov Tadjikskoi SSR ot 05.02.1987, TsGART f. 18, op. 8, d. 3635, ll. 19-20.

<sup>45</sup> Cherniaev, Veber, and Medvedev, *V Politbiuro TsK KPSS*, 287.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 138

As controversial as it was ideologically, the Law on Cooperatives did draw on a long history of private business-like structures in the USSR. While truly private business had been factually outlawed in the Soviet Union since the end of Lenin's New Economic Policy (NEP) in the early 1930s, certain elements of non-state production had survived over the decades. Most important to the Soviet economy were the "private plots" (*priusadbennie uchastki*) provided to kolkhoz members since the 1930s.<sup>47</sup> Under the heading of "consumer cooperative production" (*potrebitel'skaia kooperatsiia*) kolkhoz members were allowed to sell the produce from their private plots outside of state stores and distribution networks. This sale, moreover, occurred under largely market-like conditions: there were official restrictions on "speculation," but the sale of produce often occurred at markets or bazaars, and prices were set by supply and demand, not by the state. This, however, hardly undermined the importance of the "cooperative sector." In the late 1970s, for example, nearly half of the total value of all foodstuffs bought and sold in the Tajik SSR represented "cooperative" (non-state) production.<sup>48</sup> Some products were completely dominated by "cooperative" production: 91% of all of the walnuts sold in the Tajik SSR were the product of kolkhoz workers' private plots.<sup>49</sup>

In this perspective, the Soviet state's 1988 Law on Cooperatives can also be seen as an attempt to harness the existent but frowned-upon market structures that had long been part of Soviet society. The state spent millions of rubles every year building stores for "cooperative" produce in an attempt to more effectively funnel it to the market at reasonable prices; it relied upon the production of individual kolkhoz workers to fill the gaps in centralized production.<sup>50</sup> Yet the parallel system remained inefficient, uncontrollable, and often untaxed. Giving the initiative to kolkhoz workers, industrial toilers, and other Soviet citizens to form their own private businesses appeared a ready fix: newly founded cooperatives

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<sup>47</sup> Technically, this right was "reestablished" in 1965 – it had been initially provided but then removed under Khrushchev. See V.V. Grishin, *Ot Khrushcheva do Gorbacheva: Politicheskie portrety. Memuary* (Moscow: ASPOL, 1996), 74; I. Lakhman and R. Nazarov, "Sovetskaia trgovlia: ee uspekhi, trudnosti, problemy," *Kommunist* 41, no. 3 (1965): 77.

<sup>48</sup> Gazibekov, "Sotsial'no-ekonomicheskie preobrazovaniia," 80-83.

<sup>49</sup> TsGART f. 18, op. 8, d. 3646, l. 55.

<sup>50</sup> Gazibekov, "Sotsial'no-ekonomicheskie preobrazovaniia."

would negotiate amongst themselves, establish a market for their products, and bring consumers the variety of goods that they had long been demanding.<sup>51</sup>

In the end, the reforms passed by Gorbachev and the Soviet government over the course of 1986-1988 were brought together by their combined focus on the market as a method of increasing the production of consumer goods. This included both the three major reforms outlined above, as well as other reforms to the banking sector and those allowing “joint enterprises” with foreign capital (in both cases, to provide easier credit to businesses).<sup>52</sup> Drawing upon the work of the economists around Gorbachev, these reforms posited that enterprises, individuals, and private businesses were better placed to make decisions about production targets, sales, or internal research and development than centrally located planners and politicians. Left to their own devices and direct contracts, it was suggested, these same enterprises and businesses would fill the market with consumer goods and services, lowering deficits and prices. Nor was it any accident that Gorbachev’s reforms were centrally focused on consumer goods: as Chapter Three of this dissertation demonstrated, the lack of quality goods was one of the central concerns and complaints of citizens across the USSR. By staking his reforms on the market, Gorbachev was ultimately making a double bet: first, that market incentives would lead to economic growth, and second, that this growth would fill store shelves and consumer homes. Any alternative result was bound to be fraught with political risk.

### **III. The Initial Consequences of Reform**

At first, Gorbachev’s reform program seemed to have at best limited effect. While reforms continued to be debated and passed over the course of 1986-1987, their initial consequences were unclear. In Moscow, some economists heralded increases in productivity brought about by creating pay imbalances and “freeing up” workers. “Reserves [of productivity] are appearing,” wrote Gorbachev’s economic advisor Leonid Abalkin in 1986, “about which before we had not even

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<sup>51</sup> For supporting interpretations, see Cox, *From Perestroika to Privatisation*; Morozova, “Trudoizbytochna li,” 77; Matthews, *Patterns of Deprivation*, 17.

<sup>52</sup> On changes to the banking system, see Proekt Postanovleniia Soveta Ministrov SSSR “O strukture i shtatakh Bankov SSSR,” GARF f. 5446, op. 148, d. 68, l. 2; on joint enterprises, Miller, *The Struggle to Save*.



guessed.”<sup>53</sup> In peripheral republics such as Tajikistan, however, the focus remained on the promises of *uskorenie* as a source of funds for the development of local factories and other labor-intensive projects. As Kahhor Mahkamov, First Secretary of the Communist Party of Tajikistan (CPT), characterized the central reform project to a CPT Central Committee Plenum in August 1987, “The central element for the resolution of our economic and social problems is the speeding up (*uskorenie*) of national wealth production rates.”<sup>54</sup> A year later, Mahkamov and Izatullo Khayoev, the Chairman of the Tajik SSR’s Council of Ministers, sent a list of 14 factories and other “industrial objects” at various stages of construction to the Soviet Council of Ministers. These objects, they noted, could now be completed thanks to the state’s funding for “machine-building” and other “labor intensive” industries.<sup>55</sup> Reforms aside, business seemed to be continuing as usual: the Tajik budget and economy, for example, grew much at the same rate in 1987 as in previous years.<sup>56</sup>

By 1988, however, the full force of Gorbachev’s reform package had been implemented, and its results were felt swiftly and negatively. Most immediately, the 1987 Law on State Enterprises had a sharp and significant impact on enterprise behavior once it came into effect on January 01, 1988. The new law required that all enterprises move to full “self-financing” (*khozraschet*) by the end of 1989.<sup>57</sup> Enterprises wasted no time in declaring themselves “self-financing”: by some accounts, by the end of 1988 between 50-60% of all enterprises had already moved to the new category.<sup>58</sup> While there were obvious doubts about the number of enterprises that were really “self-sufficient,”<sup>59</sup> it was also eminently clear that benefits accrued to those enterprises that shifted categories. Once “self-financing,” enterprises could retain a much higher proportion of their profits and make direct deals with other enterprises and cooperative businesses. While a portion of their production was still dictated by central planning authorities, this percentage (now

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<sup>53</sup> Abalkin, *Kurs uskoreniia*, 66.

<sup>54</sup> Protokol sed'mogo plenuma TsK Kompartii Tadjikistana ot 01.08.1987, RGASPI f. 17, op. 156, d. 1957, l. 4.

<sup>55</sup> GARF f. 5446, op. 149, d. 290, ll. 91-100.

<sup>56</sup> Industrial growth in for 1987 was 2.4% in the Tajik SSR. See TsGART f. 18, op. 8, d. 3638, l. 128.

<sup>57</sup> GARF f. 5446, op. 148, d. 3, l. 1.

<sup>58</sup> Ryzhkov, *Perestroika*, 228.

<sup>59</sup> Donald Filtzer has argued that by the end of 1988 only 8.5% of all Soviet enterprises were actually “self-financing.” See Filtzer, *Soviet Workers*, 132.

termed “*goszakazy*” or state orders) was also meant to decrease with time, giving enterprises more and more control over their own fates and profits.<sup>60</sup>

What many enterprise directors quickly realized, moreover, was that greater profits did not actually require greater production. In fact, much in contradiction to Gorbachev and his advisors’ plans, innumerable enterprises began to produce fewer but more expensive goods. Instead of filling the new Soviet consumer market with goods, they followed a standard profit motive (and not the logic of Gorbachev’s “socialist market”) and began filling their own coffers. At first, greater enterprise profits appeared to signal overall economic growth, but it didn’t take long for the central authorities to realize something was off. As early as February 1988 Gosplan committee members expressed concern over the growing imbalance between monetary returns shown by enterprises and actual production figures. Everyone was claiming that the plan would be met, Gosplan member V.G. Gribov complained at a closed meeting, but “there are no contracts for delivery” – something was not lining up.<sup>61</sup> In early 1989, the Central Committee of the CPSU confirmed Gosplan’s worries, writing that over the course of the past year the growth of “production volumes in monetary terms had been frequently accompanied by a reduction in the absolute volume of products produced.”<sup>62</sup> This situation continued to worsen with each passing month. Throughout 1989 and 1990 both internal Gosplan figures and published reports continued to point to factual drops in the production of many important goods and industrial inputs, even as profits in cash continued to rise.<sup>63</sup> Enterprises, further emboldened in 1988 by the end of Party controls over the economy (see Chapter Five), also began to simply refuse to sign production contracts. In many cases it was more profitable to hold onto monetary resources: in 1989, Gosplan reported, enterprises signed

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<sup>60</sup> The portion of enterprise production dictated by *goszakazy* was set at around 80% for most enterprises in 1988, but then radically dropped to only 25-35% in 1989. See Doklad Gosplana “O sotsial’no-ekonomicheskom polozhenii strany v 1989 godu,” 12.04.1990, RGAE f. 4372, op. 67, d. 9355, ll. 217-218; Vid and Ivanov, *Novaia filosofia planirovaniia*, 67-70.

<sup>61</sup> Material zasedaniia kollegii Gosplana SSSR ot 26.02.1988, RGAE f. 4372, op. 67, d. 8405, l. 270.

<sup>62</sup> “O polozhenii del s roznichnymi tsenami na tovary narodnogo potrebleniia i tarifami na uslugi, okazyvaemye naseleniiu,” *Izvestiia TsK KPSS* 1, 1989, 63-64.

<sup>63</sup> This situation was especially worrying in relation to capital goods, the production of which dropped by 8% from 1986 to 1989. The production of consumer goods, however, also decreased in total volume over the same period. See V.N. Pavlov, Iu.A. Petrov and A.V. Kiselev, “Otsenka dinamiki promyshlennoi produktsii v 1986-1989 godakh,” *Ekonomika i organizatsiia promyshlennogo proizvodstva (EKO)* 20, no. 5 (1990): 105-107; also see Doklad Gosplana SSSR “O proekte Obshchesoiuznogo prognoza Soveta Ministrov SSSR o funktsionirovanii ekonomiki strany v 1991 godu,” RGAE f. 4372, op. 67, d. 9341, l. 25.

contracts equal to less than 60% of expected volume. By 1990, this percentage was less than 30%. As Nikolai Nestorovich, the former deputy head of the Gosnab Research Institute, later recalled – “The producers curtailed the production of, or outright discontinued, products that were unprofitable, even if these enjoyed customer demand... An economic decline masked by a hidden growth of prices started in 1988.”<sup>64</sup>

Concrete examples of the broader trend observed in Moscow could be found across the USSR. In Tajikistan, for example, the silk factory “Tajikatlas” hurriedly modified its behavior to fit with the new law – and quickly began to lower production while increasing its profits. Long a profitable and widely celebrated enterprise, Tajikatlas posted average annual profits of 2.2 million rubles in the years before the 1987 Law on State Enterprises; of this, the factory kept between 200,00 and 350,000 rubles a year – the remaining 85-90% of its profits was sent to the republican and federal Soviet budgets. It also paid on average around 5 million rubles in “turnover taxes” a figure that provided a representation of total sales volume at the factory.<sup>65</sup> Once the factory declared itself “self-financing” in 1989, however, these numbers shifted radically. Total sales in monetary terms grew only incrementally in 1989 and 1990, but profits soared: by 6% in 1989 and by 66% in 1990.<sup>66</sup> The factory also began to retain the majority of its profits, holding on to 76% of the 1989 profit and 91% of the massive 1990 profit.<sup>67</sup> Importantly, these increased profits had not been made through an increase in production. Instead, the factory decreased its workforce by 6% and increased prices.<sup>68</sup> Total physical sales actually dropped, represented by a 15% drop in turnover taxes paid compared to pre-perestroika figures.<sup>69</sup> Instead of making silk, Tajikatlas was

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<sup>64</sup> Nikolai Nestorovich, “Reform of the Supply System,” in Michael Ellman and Vladimir Kontorovich, eds., *The Destruction of the Soviet Economic System: An Insider's History* (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, Inc. 1998), 264.

<sup>65</sup> Since turnover taxes were levied against finished products and were generally around the same amount for similar but slightly differently priced products, tracking changes in tax volume can demonstrate changes in sale volumes. On Tajikatlas, see TsGART, f. 355, op. 16, d. 33, l. 121; 158; d. 122, l. 15.

<sup>66</sup> Finansovyi plan na 1989 g. po P/O “Tadzhikatlas,” MMP Tad. SSR, TsGART f. 355, op. 16, d. 48, ll. 134-135; for 1990, see f. 355, op. 16, d. 175, l. 135.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid. Also see Raschet otchislenii v biudzheth ot fakticheskoi raschetnoi pribyli po p/o Tadzhikatlas za god 1990, TsGART f. 355, op. 16, d. 175, l. 138.

<sup>68</sup> TsGART f. 355, op. 16, d. 122, l. 1.

<sup>69</sup> TsGART, f. 355, op. 16, d. 175, l. 135.

making a profit, and refusing to reinvest its newfound finances: by the end of 1990, the enterprise was sitting on nearly 3 million unspent rubles.<sup>70</sup>

Enterprises across the Tajik SSR – and Soviet Union as a whole – were engaged in similar behavior; in aggregate, the newly business-like behavior of enterprises such as “Tajikatlas” began to undermine the fabric of the Soviet economy. In the Tajik SSR tax revenues dropped from 1988, and the entire republican economy went into recession in 1989.<sup>71</sup> Enterprises’ focus on lowering production and avoiding unprofitable contracts meant that innumerable products were simply never sent to the republic. Throughout 1988-1990 the leaders of the Tajik SSR continuously wrote to the Council of Ministers of the USSR, complaining about the “systematic non-delivery” of “construction machines,” “cables,” “lumber,” “excavators,” “buses,” “batteries,” “cement,” and many more industrial inputs.<sup>72</sup> Altogether, the situation led to increasing work slowdowns, decreases in production targets, and even growing deficits of consumer goods.<sup>73</sup> The same trend was also observable on the federal level, as dropping industrial output slowly wore away at the heart of the Soviet economic system. Numerous observers have noted that the years 1988-1989 marked the start of increasing deficits, lowered output, and general “malaise” in the economy, as Rafik Nishanov, then the First Secretary of the Uzbek Communist Party, put it in his memoirs.<sup>74</sup> Left to their own devices, enterprises had violated Gorbachev’s expectations: instead of reacting to “market” incentives by filling store shelves, they were instead taking advantage of increased freedoms to fill their own accounts. By June 1989, these accounts already contained more than 250 billion unspent rubles.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Otchet o dvizhenii sredstv fondov i tselevogo finansirovaniia za 1991 god, Predpriiatie Tadzhiikatlas, TsGART, f. 355, op. 16, d. 175, l. 154.

<sup>71</sup> On 1988 finances in the Tajik SSR, see Otklonenie po otdel’nym pokazateliam proekta biudzheta respubliky na 1988 god protiv ustanovlennogo biudzheta na 1987 god, TsGART f. 18, op. 8, d. 3649, ll. 37-38; on 1989, Doklad zam. predsedatelia Soveta Ministrov TSSR Koshlakova v SM SSSR SM “Ob itogakh vypolneniia Gosudarstvennogo plana ekonomicheskogo i sotsial’nogo razvitiia TSSR za 1989 god,” GARF f. 5446, Op. 162, d. 260, ll. 16-18.

<sup>72</sup> GARF f. 5446, op. 149, d. 290, ll. 13, 47; op. 150, d. 276, ll. 25-26, 106-107, 134; TsGART f. 297, op. 40, d. 1235, l. 80.

<sup>73</sup> TsGART f. 297, op. 40, d. 1230, ll. 162-163; also see interview with Tajik Communist Party Secretary Zaragul Mirrasanova, Dushanbe, September 2014.

<sup>74</sup> Rafik Nishanov, *Derev’ia zeleneiut do metelei* (Moscow: Molodaia Gvardiia, 2012), 250; for similar accounts, also see Kriuchkov, *Lichnoe delo* v. 1, 260; V.I. Vorotnikov, *Gavana – Moskva. Pamiatnye gody* (Moscow: Fond imeni I.D. Sytina, 2001), 221-261.

<sup>75</sup> Figures quoted by Ryzhkov in June 1989. See *Pervyi s’ezd narodnykh deputatov SSSR, 25 maia – 9 iunia 1989 goda. Stenograficheskii otchet* (Moscow: Izdanie Verkhovnogo Soveta SSSR, 1989), v. 3, 25.

#### IV. (More) Cooperatives

Hoarding profits only made sense, however, if enterprise directors could somehow benefit from them personally. Here, the growing “cooperative” business sector created in 1988 provided the necessary outlet. Although they had been called upon to fill the Soviet consumer market with goods and services, in practice the majority did anything but – instead largely helping enterprises to embezzle profits and avoid production. Rather than independent entrepreneurs setting up shop to fill market niches, the majority of “cooperatives” – by some estimates, up to 86% of them – were founded “under” state enterprises and worked only with these enterprises, creating closed schemes aimed at siphoning off state funds.<sup>76</sup> Part of the reason for this was the state’s early attempts to promote cooperatives: in 1988 it was not unusual for enterprises to be encouraged to found an in-house cooperative to “increase productivity.”<sup>77</sup> The larger reason, however, was brutal self-interest. As an internal memo circulated among the Soviet Council of Ministers argued in 1990:

*“Cooperatives’ attachment to enterprises is largely explained by the fact that it is more profitable for them to secure contracts with enterprises and organizations that have powerful financial and productive resources and that control a large reserve of non-cash funds (beznalichnykh sredstv), which can be used to pay for cooperatives’ services.”<sup>78</sup>*

As this memo went on to note, moreover, cooperatives were not restricted – in contrast to all other Soviet organizations – in the amount of non-cash funds they could convert to cash. This meant that they were ideally positioned to act as a channel for corruption, converting non-cash funds into cash and distributing it back to those enterprise directors and managers who had made the original transfer.<sup>79</sup> The example of a construction cooperative in Dushanbe demonstrates how this process worked. Founded in 1988, the cooperative was then hired by the Tajik filial of the Soviet car manufacturer AvtoVAZ to build a repair shop in Kumsangir District in the south of the republic. The cooperative took the full

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<sup>76</sup> L.I. Abalkin, *Neispol’zovanyi shans: Poltora goda v pravitel’stve* (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1991), 249-251.

<sup>77</sup> In republics where cooperatives were rare, such as the Tajik SSR, this was particularly common. See TsGART f. 18, op. 8, d. 3647, ll. 272-274.

<sup>78</sup> GARF f. 5446, op. 163, d. 1284, ll. 120-121.

<sup>79</sup> Enterprises were limited in the amount of “non-cash funds” they could convert to cash; this restriction was not applied to cooperatives. See Doklad Gosplana “O sotsial’no-ekonomicheskoi polozenii strany v 1989 godu” ot 12.04.1990, RGAE f. 4372, op. 67, d. 9355, l. 230.

payment for the construction of a large factory but instead built a small building where one or two cars could be repaired at a time. The remaining funds were converted to cash and shared between the cooperative owner and the director of the filial in Dushanbe.<sup>80</sup> In addition, enterprises would sometimes simply sell their inputs to cooperatives on the cheap; the cooperatives would then resell the goods for cash and distribute the profits.<sup>81</sup> Evidence from around the USSR made it clear that this was a Union-wide problem: cooperatives were “regularly paying off the same [enterprise] employees” that had founded the cooperatives in the first place.<sup>82</sup>

As the number of cooperatives grew, so did the scale of the problem. By the end of 1988, there were approximately 77,500 active cooperative businesses in the USSR, which employed 1,397,000 individuals.<sup>83</sup> At the end of 1989, these figures had risen to 193,000 cooperatives and nearly 5 million employees.<sup>84</sup> And the close relationship between cooperatives and enterprises only grew closer. Studies in Moscow, Dushanbe, and on a federal scale all demonstrated that by 1989 only 15-19% of all cooperative production was being sold to consumers, with the rest going to enterprises.<sup>85</sup> Cooperatives were also concentrated in areas of industrial production: 66% were located in the RSFSR, while only 1% of the total had been founded in the much less industrial Tajik SSR.<sup>86</sup> While the content of cooperative-enterprise contracts remained opaque, they were overwhelmingly profitable. Cooperatives were reported to have transferred 29 billion rubles into cash by the

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<sup>80</sup> Interview with a former cooperative owner, Dushanbe, September 2016.

<sup>81</sup> See, for example, Prikaz no. 7 Ministerstva mestnoi promyshlennosti Tadjikskoi SSR ot 30.01.1989 “Ob ispol’zovanii polimernogo syr’ia na DEZPiNO NPO “Voskhod” za 1988 god, TsGART f. 355, op. 16, d. 18, l. 12

<sup>82</sup> G. Popov, “Fundament reformy ekonomiki,” in L.I. Abalkin and P. Bunich, eds., *Etot trudnyi, trudnyi, put’* (Moscow: Mysl’, 1989), 175.

<sup>83</sup> V.A. Tikhonov, “Sotsializm, kooperatsiia, gosudarstvo,” *Ekonomika i organizatsiia promyshlennogo proizvodstvo (EKO)* 20, no. 4 (1990): 4. For supporting figures, see Tomas Bauer, “The Firm Under Perestroika,” *Berichte des Bundesinstituts fur ostwissenschaftliche und international Studien* 37 (1989): 29; Ryzhkov, *Perestroika*, 228.

<sup>84</sup> Doklad Gosplana “O sotsial’no-ekonomicheskom polozhenii strany v 1989 godu,” 12.04.1990, RGAE f. 4372, op. 67, d. 9355, ll. 218-219.

<sup>85</sup> For Moscow, see Semen Kuznetsov, “Moskovskaia kooperatsiia – glazami MGK i ispolkoma,” *Kommersant’* no. 2, January 1990; for Dushanbe – Sadriddin Arslanbekovich Gazibekov, “Rezervy razvitiia proizvodstvennykh kooperativov v Tadjikistane,” (Dissetatsiia na soiskanie uchenoi stepeni kandidata ekonomicheskikh nauk, AN RT, 1992), 37; for the USSR as a whole – GARF f. 5446, op. 163, d. 1284, ll. 120-121.

<sup>86</sup> Gazibekov, “Rezervy razvitiia,” 3.

end of 1989, equal to more than two thirds of their total reported production since March 1988.<sup>87</sup>

Soviet consumers, however, saw little benefit: cooperatives “had limited influence on the fulfillment of the population’s needs.”<sup>88</sup> In republics such as the Tajik SSR they were represented in public only by a proliferation of new and expensive *shashlyk* (barbeque) stands.<sup>89</sup> Across the USSR, moreover, sociological surveys showed that only a minority (29%) of Soviet citizens had actually bought goods or services from a cooperative.<sup>90</sup> In the background, however, cooperatives were quietly worsening the economic situation. Not only were the prices of cooperative goods and services uncontrolled and frequently inflationary, the flood of cash they brought to the market far exceeded any goods they produced. This led to worsening deficits and shortages, as Soviet consumers’ access to income continued to surpass their access to goods.<sup>91</sup> Cooperatives also proved effective at lowering their tax burden, which had the effect of attracting previously illegal incomes in need of laundering. By lobbying the federal and republican governments, many cooperatives managed to pay a factual tax rate of around 6% in 1989 – and by 1990, the flat rate for all cooperatives was reduced to 3%. As a result, great sums of money were simply shuffled through cooperatives: the Soviet grey economy was given a cost-effective mechanism of cleaning its books, all without having to produce much of anything for the market.<sup>92</sup>

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Paralleling changes to Soviet enterprises and the growth of the cooperative sector, the Soviet labor market also underwent notable upheavals in 1988 and 1989. Based on the early reforms of perestroika passed in 1986 and 1987, this first and

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<sup>87</sup> See Valerii Legostaev, *Kak Gorbachev “prorvalsia vo vlast”* (Moscow: Eksmo, 2011), 122, citing internal CC CPSU data. The total value of goods and services produced by cooperatives in 1988 and 1989 was likely no more than 42-43 billion rubles. See Ryzhkov, *Perestroika*, 228; RGAE f. 4372, op. 67, d. 9355, ll. 218-219.

<sup>88</sup> RGAE f. 4372, op. 67, d. 9355, l. 219.

<sup>89</sup> See Evgenii Tiuchkalov, “Glubinka – poniatie sotsial’noe,” in *Partkom i Perestroika*, ed. A. Rudenko (Dushanbe: Ifron, 1990), 101; also “Kooperativy: pervye shagi, trudnye shagi,” *Kommunist Tadzhikistana*, February 05, 1988.

<sup>90</sup> Tikhonov, “Sotsializm, kooperatsiia,” 4.

<sup>91</sup> Woodruff, *Money Unmade*, 65-66.

<sup>92</sup> Pavlov, *Upushchen li*, 219; Cox, *From Perestroika to Privatisation*, 25; for an example of lobbying efforts, see TsGART f. 18, op.8, d. 3660, l. 224.

foremost meant the “freeing up” of Soviet workers and the promotion of more divergent pay structures. As early as 1987 these initiatives had led to clear results, with “notable freeing of personnel noted at nearly all enterprises.”<sup>93</sup> Ministries and government agencies were admonished to enact 30-50% reductions in the total number of workers under their authority, as well as within their own apparatuses.<sup>94</sup> In consequence, hundreds of thousands of workers lost their jobs: in 1987 150,000 workers were cut from factory jobs, 280,000 from railroad-related positions, 95,000 from the oil industry, and 34,350 from positions overseen by the Ministry of Communications.<sup>95</sup> Even Moscow’s many centralized bureaucracies were told to decrease their overall staff numbers by 63,000.<sup>96</sup> By the end of 1987, more than 1 million Soviet workers had been “freed up;” by the end of 1988 this figure had reached 3 million.<sup>97</sup>

In theory, the policy of “freeing up” workers had been meant to create a dynamic labor market, where enterprises would compete for newly available workers by offering higher salaries for the best employees. In practice, matters turned out to be more complicated. As described in this chapter, changes to enterprise law mean that factories were actually economically incentivized to reduce workers instead of hiring more. Productivity improvements and increased profits, most enterprises found, required lowering personnel costs: the Khorog sewing factory “Guldast” in the east of Tajikistan, for example, reduced its staff by 20 seamstresses for these very reasons.<sup>98</sup> Cooperatives, which had also been meant to compete for the newly available workers, were equally unreliable. Statistically, most cooperatives across the USSR remained small operations, and their workers often overlapped with the staff of existing enterprises. Altogether, many of the “freed up” workers found themselves without new employment. Statistics from the late

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<sup>93</sup> As reported by Goskomtrud in July 1987. See GARF f. 5446, op. 162, d. 153, ll. 72-73.

<sup>94</sup> Stenogramma zasedaniia komissii Politbiuro o kompleksnoi sisteme mer po trudoustroistvu i obespecheniiu effektivnosti zaniatosti naseleniia, 16.10.1987, GARF f. 5446, op. 148, d. 7, l. 40.

<sup>95</sup> GARF, f. 5446, op. 162, d. 153, l. 88, 93; 122-123.

<sup>96</sup> Stenogramma soveshchaniia u Predsedatelia Soveta Ministrov SSSR t. Ryzhkov, N.I. ot 14.09.1988, GARF f. 5446, op. 148, d. 6, l. 30.

<sup>97</sup> Doklad Goskomtruda SSSR “O sostoianii del po sovershenstvovaniiu zarabotnoi platy v otrasliakh proizvodstvennoi sfery,” 06.03.1988, GARF f. 5446, op. 162, d. 153, l. 153; Filtzer, *Soviet Workers*, 19.

<sup>98</sup> TsGART f. 355, op. 16, d. 62, ll. 1, 7, 11, 58, 76.



1980s are inconsistent, but even the most optimistic estimates indicate that at least half a million of these workers remained unemployed by the end of 1988.<sup>99</sup>

The policy of “freeing up” workers and promoting competition for jobs also seemed to ignore regional differences in the USSR. In the republics of Central Asia, which had long been labeled “overfilled with labor” (*trudoyzbytochnie*), factual unemployment had already been a central problem. For years, economists had been promoting the development of industry in the region, if only to find jobs for the growing number of unemployed local workers.<sup>100</sup> Applying the policy of freeing up workers to Central Asia, as Ryzhkov pondered at a CPSU Politburo commission meeting in late 1987, “brings up the problem of those excessive (*ubytochnykh*) workers’ employment.” Perhaps, Ryzhkov asked, “it won’t be necessary to apply this order to Central Asia?”<sup>101</sup> Ryzhkov’s concerns, however, were not taken into consideration, and unemployment only grew in the region. In the Tajik SSR, for example, the number of working age individuals “uninvolved in public production” – a Soviet code phrase for unemployment – had reached 26% in 1987. It would continue to rise to nearly 30% over the next two years.<sup>102</sup>

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Over the course of 1986-1989, as this chapter has argued, Mikhail Gorbachev and the Soviet government developed and implemented a series of economic reforms meant to harness the power of the market for the Soviet economy. According to the logic of perestroika, Soviet enterprises would be freed from bureaucratic entanglements. Reacting to signals in the Soviet consumer market, they would hire workers from the increasingly dynamic labor market, boost productivity, and reap growing profits. Cooperatives would also be free to pursue their own economic

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<sup>99</sup> For various statistics about the total number of workers “freed up” and later rehired, see John Tedstrom, “Supreme Soviet Deals with Economy and Budget Deficit,” *Radio Liberty Research Bulletin* 484/88, October 27, 1988; GARF, f. 5446, op. 162, d. 153, l. 153; Bauer, “The Firm Under Perestroika,” 29.

<sup>100</sup> For example, V. Kostakov, “Zaniatost’: defitsit ili izbytok?” *Kommunist* 63, no. 2 (1987); A. Madzhidov, “Razmeshchenie naseleniia i problema ispol’zovaniia trudovykh resursov Tadzhikskoi SSR,” *Izvestiia Akademii nauk tadzhikskoi SSR, otделение obshchestvennykh nauk* 4, no. 102 (1980).

<sup>101</sup> Stenogramma zasedaniia komissii Politbiuro o kompleksnoi sisteme po trudoustroistvu i obespecheniiu effektivnoi zaniatosti naseleniia, 16.10.1987, GARF f. 5446, op. 148, d. 7, l. 13.

<sup>102</sup> On 1987, see Vypiska iz protokola Zasedaniia Prezidiuma Soveta Ministrov Tadzhikskoi SSR, 08.10.1987, TsGART f. 18, op. 8, d. 3644, l. 139; for 1988-1990 – Protokol No. 11 zasedaniia sekretariata TsK Kompartii Tadzhikistana ot 22.07.1991, RGASPI f. 17, op. 160, d. 1672, l. 3.

interests in the new Soviet system, which in theory meant creating consumer goods and filling store shelves. Yet this was not at all what had happened. By 1989 the economy was in fact much worse than it had been in 1986, and the behavior of reformed enterprises and cooperatives was at the heart of the economic downturn. Instead of producing consumer goods, enterprises and cooperatives alike had found it more profitable to cut workers, save on inputs, and produce a small number of (if any) expensive “prestige” goods. In addition, the vast sums of unspent rubles held by enterprises and converted into cash by cooperatives was further unbalancing the Soviet monetary system. By 1989 the amount of “uncaptured” Soviet income, unspent on goods and services, had doubled from its pre-perestroika mark, reaching 11% of all wages and incomes.<sup>103</sup> This quickly led to “galloping inflation,” which in the Soviet context meant deficits and a deeply imbalanced consumer market.<sup>104</sup> Many things were clearly going wrong with the Soviet economy, and there was no shortage of information available to the leadership of the USSR about the worsening situation. As this chapter has shown, memos from Gosplan, the Central Committee of the CPSU and other high-level Soviet bodies all clearly linked the reforms of perestroika to the growing economic chaos in the Soviet Union. There should not have been any doubt about what was going on.

In many ways, moreover, the economic downturn engendered by perestroika’s economic reforms should not have been terribly surprising. As Donald Filtzer has argued, the combined impact of Gorbachav’s reforms was to lead enterprises and cooperatives “to function according to the logic of the market, but without a market having been created” – i.e., to compete for profits without the risk of going bankrupt.<sup>105</sup> Since enterprises still retained links to local and federal budgets, and were provided with operating revenue related to previous plans and “*goszakaz*,” they could plausibly produce nothing while still making a profit. In the long run, of course, this practice would have terrible results, as evidenced by the state of industry in Russia after the collapse of the USSR. In the short term, however, it was a rational operating policy. This also aligned with the “soft budget constraint”

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<sup>103</sup> IMF data presented in Woodruff, *Money Unmade*, 65.

<sup>104</sup> S.M. Nikitin, “Infliatsiia,” *Ekonomika i organizatsiia promyshlennogo proizvodstva (EKO)* 20, no. 6 (1990): 5-7.

<sup>105</sup> Filtzer, *Soviet Workers and the Collapse*, 127

that the Hungarian economist Jonas Kornai had warned against in 1980. If enterprises were only constrained by the amount they could receive from external sources, Kornai argued, they would do everything in their power to produce less and hoard both profits and inputs. In many ways this is exactly what occurred in 1988-1989.<sup>106</sup>

Even faced with both theoretical issues and overwhelming factual evidence that the introduction of market elements to the Soviet system was breaking the Soviet economy, Gorbachev and the economists who designed the reforms refused to change tactics. Instead of acting to balance against the profit-grabbing of enterprises and corruption of cooperatives, in fact, they called for more of the same style of reform. From this perspective, the undeniable economic downturn had been caused by a “lack” of any factual reform. At a roundtable held on the reforms in early 1989, for example, a group of economists that included some of the reforms’ architects declared that “The Law on Enterprises, which came into effect in January 1989...did not become a real law: its central provisions are being ignored.” Enterprises and ministries alike were accused of simply declaring their acceptance of the new law without modifying their behavior.<sup>107</sup> That same year the economist Aganbegian, long at Gorbachev’s ear on economic issues, also blamed the country’s growing problems on the “improper implementation” of reform and opposition by conservative forces.<sup>108</sup> For his own part, Gorbachev made it very clear that he also saw no link between his reforms and the economic downturn. As Gorbachev’s advisor Valerii Boldin noted in his memoirs, the more the economy began to wobble, the more Gorbachev blamed the “stalling-out” (*probuksovka*) of reforms and disobedience on the part of local party structures.<sup>109</sup> Throughout Perestroika, in fact, Gorbachev never tired of accusing government agencies of misdirection: statistical agencies had lied for decades, Soviet diplomats and ministries were lying, and enterprises were lying about engaging in market

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<sup>106</sup> Janos Kornai, *Economics of Shortage, Volume A* (Amsterdam: North Holland Publishing Company, 1980), 188.

<sup>107</sup> “Obzor otvetov uchastnikov ‘kruglogo stola’ na voprosy ankety,” in *Perestroika upravleniia ekonomikoi: problemy, perspektivy*, ed. N.I. Balashova (Moscow: Ekonomika, 1989), 165-173, quote on 165.

<sup>108</sup> Aganbegian, “Odin iz ekonomicheskikh,” 163-164. Aganbegian repeated this idea in his English-language memoir (Aganbegyan. *Moving the Mountain*, 13).

<sup>109</sup> Boldin, *Krushenie p’edestala*, 189.

behavior.<sup>110</sup> “Direct contracts between enterprises are stalling out,” Gorbachev complained to the Politburo, and “they want everything to be [centrally] dictated.” Worse, he later concluded in 1988, “Administrative fiat continues everywhere; everywhere the law is disregarded.”<sup>111</sup>

Gorbachev genuinely appears to have believed his own argument that established forces in the USSR were “blocking” (*meshali*) perestroika’s reforms, and since 1991 both he and many of his supporters have continued to promote this argument.<sup>112</sup> How he managed to miss the enormous evidence to the contrary was likely a combination of two interrelated factors. On the one hand, as Gorbachev’s advisor Anatolii Cherniaev later lamented, Gorbachev became unable to see evidence that contradicted his expectations: “from actual facts Gorbachev came to “calming” conclusions...he “forced” [*podgonial*] what was occurring into a framework that he considered convenient for continuing his program.”<sup>113</sup> On the other hand, moreover, like many others in the Soviet Union, Gorbachev was operating with an idealized conception of the “market,” in which competition between market actors inherently led to increased production, lower prices, and economic growth. When the introduction of market practices into the Soviet economy failed to lead to any of these results and instead caused theft, corruption, and economic crisis, Gorbachev simply could not square results and theory. Instead, he continued to wait for “capitalism with a human face,” refusing to see aspects of the market in the system he had introduced and insisting that the negative results on display could only be the result of blocked reforms.<sup>114</sup>

Undeterred by contrary evidence or argument, Gorbachev pushed forward to overcome the “blockage” of his reforms. He identified, moreover, two social

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<sup>110</sup> For Gorbachev’s views on TsSU and other statistical agencies, see Chapter Three. For his statements about “lying” ministries and diplomats, see Cherniaev, Veber, and Medvedev, *V Politbiuro TsK KPSS*, 19.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 241, 295.

<sup>112</sup> On Gorbachev’s belief, see Gorbachev, *Zhin’ i reformy*, 348-352; Hough, *Democratization*, 105; for accounts that exonerate Gorbachev, see Miller, *The Struggle to Save*; Brown, *The Gorbachev Factor*; Gaidar, *Collapse of an Empire*.

<sup>113</sup> Cherniaev, *Shest’ let*, 387.

<sup>114</sup> On the Socialist conception of “capitalism with a human face” and the idea that the market system that developed in the late Soviet period was not “real capitalism,” see Steven Greenhouse, “The World: In Search of Capitalism with a Human Face,” *New York Times* 20 May 1990; for a general critique of the view that “real” markets inherently lead to growth, see John Quiggin, *Zombie Economics: How Dead Ideas Still Walk Among Us* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 174-198.

groups that were holding back change in the USSR: the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the Soviet people themselves. Long educated and inculcated into Soviet ideals, many Soviet citizens were skeptical of market reforms and “wanted to return” to life before Perestroika, as A.D. Migranian, a reform-minded Soviet sociologist, put it in 1989.<sup>115</sup> Or, as the academic V.A. Tikhonov more directly put it, “violence would be required” to bring much of the Soviet populace to capitalist ideas.<sup>116</sup> While Gorbachev also complained about the passivity of the Soviet population, he reserved particular ire for the Communist Party. It was the Party, he repeatedly stated in 1987 and 1988, that “was falling behind the processes” of perestroika, was “unacceptably” promoting reform, and in many places “acting as though there is no perestroika at all, or frequently even failing to act at all.”<sup>117</sup> If perestroika failed, he harangued his Politburo colleagues, there would be no one else to blame:

*“...[T]he stalling out [of perestroika] is first and foremost connected to our own work – the work of the Central Committee, Oblast committees, and local district committees. There is no one else for us to point at.”<sup>118</sup>*

With conservative industrialists and party workers spreading “terror” and the “darkest of darkneses” amongst the first Soviet entrepreneurs, as Yakovlev put it in a handwritten 1988 note to Ryzhkov, something clearly had to be done to save perestroika.<sup>119</sup> With the Party compromised and suspected of “blocking” perestroika, Gorbachev needed new allies – and new institutions of power outside of existing structures. He decided, as he later wrote, to “bring my ideas and conceptions about the future to the widest possible audience – to include people in the active development of politics.”<sup>120</sup> As Chapter Five will describe, Gorbachev’s plan to circumvent the Party would come to involve democratization, “openness” [*glasnost*], and the creation of non-Party political institutions, such as the Congress of People’s Deputies. In practice, these new political platforms did little to save perestroika or build economic growth. They did, however, help to fray the very

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<sup>115</sup> “Lichnost’, obshchestvo, gosudarstvo. Kruglyi stol ANP i zhurnala Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniia,” *Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniia* 15, no. 4 (1989): 31.

<sup>116</sup> V.A. Tikhonov, “Zhit’ bez illiuzii,” *Ogonyok*, September 2-9, 1989.

<sup>117</sup> Cherniaev, Veber, and Medvedev, *V Politbiuro TsK KPSS*, 181, 201

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 153

<sup>119</sup> RGASPI f. 653, op. 1, d. 147, l. 5.

<sup>120</sup> Gorbachev, *Zhizny i reformy*, 388.

fabric of Soviet society, whether in central Moscow or on the dusty provincial streets of rural Tajikistan.

## **Chapter Five**

### **National in Form, Imitation in Content? Glasnost and Democratization in Tajikistan**

One Sunday afternoon in September 1988, a journalist from Dushanbe visited the regional Tajik city of Gissar. September in Tajikistan is still a summer month: hot and dry, and the streets of small cities like Gissar are filled with rolling plumes of dust and bored teenagers. In the spirit of perestroika, this journalist noticed that these “spry underage sunflower-seed sellers have gotten comfortable on the sidewalk and are testing themselves out as entrepreneurs.” Other than an increase in sunflower seed sales, however, absolutely nothing had changed in Gissar since 1985; the reform and change promoted in Moscow had had almost no visible effect on life in the rural town. “In Gissar you can die from boredom,” one of the teenagers told the journalist. “If perestroika is happening somewhere, it hasn’t shuffled its way down to us.”<sup>1</sup>

Nor was Gissar an unusual example. In many regional cities and towns across the USSR the first years of perestroika had brought little clear change. While enterprises and cooperatives were beginning to embrace market principles and bend the rules of the planned economy, life for the majority of Soviet citizens continued much as before. In Dushanbe, for example, an early 1989 survey found that only half of the city’s residents had “felt” the impact of perestroika. Many others expressed the feeling that “stories about perestroika look much more impressive on paper than in real life.”<sup>2</sup> While newspapers and Party meetings exhorted workers to form “family brigades,” push for increased productivity, and embrace perestroika, for many the whole project seemed largely opaque. As Chapter Two has shown, moreover, for many in the Tajik SSR there seemed little obvious reason for reform: on its face, the system was working. Faced with another reform program of unclear impact, Soviet citizens in both Dushanbe and many other cities seemed most likely to greet the call for reform with a simple shrug.

It was this pan-Soviet passivity that Mikhail Gorbachev aimed to overcome through his calls for mass participation in the politics of perestroika. By engaging

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<sup>1</sup> A. Ziborov, “Skol’ko ni povtorai ‘khalva’,” *Kommunist Tadzhikistana*, October 6, 1988.

<sup>2</sup> Dil’bar Aminova, Dmitrii Karatygin, and Simon Rozenblat, “Pogovorim nachistotu,” in *Partkom i perestroika*, ed. A. Rudenko (Dushanbe: Irfon, 1990), 61-63.

the Soviet populace in his reform program, moreover, he believed he could tamp down the conservative forces in the Communist Party, which he felt were holding back economic reform (see Chapter Four). From 1987 on, Gorbachev began to strenuously call for “glasnost” (openness) and “democratization,” the two pillars of what would become his broader program of political reform. Although Gorbachev’s turn to political reform has often been represented by Western commentators as an ideological choice in favor of democracy and pluralism, this chapter will demonstrate that the initial push was far from democratic and more calculating than liberal.<sup>3</sup> Glasnost and democratization were at least partially intended to undermine Party authority and bypass its control over economic decision making by introducing new pro-perestroika politicians and movements. By publicly criticizing Party bureaucrats and creating a new political body, the popularly elected Congress of People’s Deputies, Gorbachev thought, he could finally get perestroika to work.

In the Tajik SSR, where both average citizens and political elites were skeptical of the need for change, glasnost and democratization found little initial support. This led to concerted efforts on the part of Moscow politicians to foment glasnost-style criticism and the development of new political movements, which slowly but inevitably helped to develop a rich local political sphere. Rather than representing an upwelling of long-suppressed anger and frustration with the Soviet system, however, these new movements were often initially state-promoted and frequently very tentative in their claims. They were also overwhelmingly focused on the deteriorating state of the Soviet economy, only turning to religion, history, and language as ways of building support for their political platforms. This narrative helps to counter discourses that have frequently linked perestroika-era political movements in the Tajik SSR to simmering nationalism and inter-ethnic frustrations kept just under the surface by Soviet authoritarianism.<sup>4</sup> Instead of a socially driven outburst of anger, in Tajikistan glasnost and democratization took the form of a slow and contradictory wave of criticism against the same authorities, local and central, that were promoting change. Only as time went on –

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<sup>3</sup> For Western views on Gorbachev’s promotion of democracy and pluralism, see Kotkin, *Armageddon Averted*; English, *Russian and the Idea*; Brown, *The Gorbachev Factor*.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Roy, *The New Central Asia*; Dudoignon, and Qalandar, “They were all”; Poliakov, *Traditsionalizm v sovremennom*.



and as the underlying problem of a collapsing economy went unresolved – would this wave begin to threaten the foundations of the political order in Dushanbe.

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Directed mass participation in Soviet politics was something that Gorbachev had spoken about since arriving in the offices of the General Secretary of the Communist Party in early 1985. Far too rarely, he harangued his Politburo colleagues, were local Party committees informing the Soviet people about political decisions; far too infrequently were they concerned at all about public opinion.<sup>5</sup> In his opening speech at the 27<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in February 1986, he spoke forcefully of the need for “an active social policy...and the deepening of socialist democracy.”<sup>6</sup> It was only after perestroika’s initial “stalling out” (*probuksovka*) in late 1987 and early 1988, however, that the exact contours of this mass participation began to take shape. Since Gorbachev believed that perestroika’s failures were entirely the fault of entrenched Party and industrial interests, the solution was to bypass these interests and remove their authority over economic decision-making. As he told a Politburo meeting at the end of 1987:

*“At long last, we need to deal with the problem of the Party’s role as the political avant-garde and free it from inappropriate functions...Right now the Party not only develops theory and politics and provides ideological direction, but also directly manages everything.”<sup>7</sup>*

Freeing the Party from “inappropriate” functions, in Gorbachev’s view, meant giving authority to the economic actors he thought likely to support perestroika: enterprises and Soviet workers. Over the next two years, this would mean that the previously unshakable authority of the CPSU was undermined by a policy of “glasnost,” which encouraged criticism of Party structures, statements, and eventually even Soviet history. In addition, democratizing reforms introduced at the 19<sup>th</sup> Party Conference in mid-1988 created a new political body, the Congress of Peoples’ Deputies, and a new body of perestroika-minded politicians. These

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<sup>5</sup> Cherniaev, Veber, and Medvedev, *V Politbiuro TsK KPSS*, 51, 12.

<sup>6</sup> M. Gorbachev, “Politicheskii doklad Tsentral’nogo komiteta KPSS XXVII S’ezdu Kommunisticheskoi partii Sovetskogo soiuza,” in *XXVII S’ezd Kommunisticheskoi partii Sovetskogo soiuza*, 25 fevrialia – 6 marta. *Stenograficheskii otchet* (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1986), v. 1, 42.

<sup>7</sup> Cherniaev, Veber, and Medvedev, *V Politbiuro TsK KPSS*, 280.

politicians proved unreliable and unpredictable, but their impact on undermining the role and authority of the Party in Soviet society was undeniable. In Tajikistan and across the USSR as a whole, moreover, the joint influence of glasnost and democratization served to shake the established order of Soviet politics, opening up space for an unheralded pluralism of ideas about how to escape the increasingly desperate state of the Soviet economy.

## **I. Glasnost**

While a central element of Gorbachev's political reforms, from the very beginning "glasnost" (lit. "openness") defied clear definition. Openness might be interpreted in two different ways: either freedom of speech and the press and the end of censorship, or a change in Party policy requiring increased self-criticism and open interaction with the Soviet polity. This opacity was only heightened by the lack of any clear legal backing for glasnost. A draft law "On glasnost" was developed over the course of 1987-1988 by the Soviet Academy of Sciences' Institute of State and Law, but was never formally adopted or even supported with any fervor by Gorbachev.<sup>8</sup> With no obvious legal boundaries to glasnost, many Western and post-Soviet authors have argued in favor of the first interpretation, emphasizing the explosion of critical and even anti-Soviet and anti-Party material that was published in Moscow after 1987.<sup>9</sup> Yet the evidence for this argument is scarce: in Moscow and Dushanbe alike there was often little to indicate a true wave of "freedom of speech," and Soviet censorship remained alive and well until 1990, when it was finally overturned by a new Soviet "Law on the Press" [*Zakon o pechati*].<sup>10</sup>

In the 1980s, censorship in the USSR was overseen by the Central Administration for the Protection of State Secrets in Publication, or "Glavlit." Glavlit's reviewed newspapers, journals, and other publications before and after their printing to ensure that material was in accordance with Soviet political, ethical, and military regulations. Until 1990, it continued to fulfill these functions, and its censors continued to sit in the offices of most Soviet publications. The start of glasnost in

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<sup>8</sup> On the development of the Soviet Law "On glasnost" and its provisions, see Yuri Baturin, "Popytka glasnosti: k istorii zakonodatel'noi neudachi," *Trudy po intellektual'noi sobstvennosti* 9, no. 1 (2009).

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, Beissinger, *Nationalist*, 59; Nurali Davlat, "Mirbobo Mirrahim: peshtozi harakati istiqlokhohy," *Ozodagon*, March 15, 2017.

<sup>10</sup> GARF f. 9425, op. 2, d. 1093, l. 14

1987 actually saw an increase in the Glavlit budget, and there was no move to limit the agency's authority.<sup>11</sup> Instead, there was a late 1987 change to the *content* of censorship: a reduction in the official "list of materials forbidden for open publication." More than 100 topics of "a political nature" were removed, opening up space for the political campaign of glasnost.<sup>12</sup>

Considering the changes to Glavlit, glasnost appears less a call to end censorship – and more a directive to broaden the boundaries of the uncensored and reveal previously hidden aspects of Party policy and history to criticism. From his first references to glasnost, Gorbachev frequently mentioned the need to accentuate attention on the Party's "failures and oversights."<sup>13</sup> By 1987 he was informing journal editors and Party propagandists: "There should not be any hidden themes (*belykh piaten*) in either history or literature."<sup>14</sup> Leading journals and newspapers were sent numerous critical articles, suggestions, and leaks from the Ideological Division of the Central Committee of the CPSU. As Viktor Afanas'ev, then the editor of *Pravda*, later recalled, there was no obligation to print these articles – but they had been "approved" at the highest levels, which provided strong incentive to do so.<sup>15</sup> In other words, while it is undeniable that after 1987 Soviet society was flooded with a deluge of information critical of Stalinism, economic policy, national development, and many other topics, this flood was not a completely spontaneous upwelling. It was, contradictory as this may be, at least partially directed by the very Party it criticized. On the rare occasion when glasnost was used to criticize not the Party but perestroika itself – such as in the infamous Nina Andreeva affair – the Party's almost outraged response tended to emphasize the policy's directed nature.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> GARF f. 9425, op 2, d. 1030, ll. 7, 11.

<sup>12</sup> GARF f. 9425, op. 2, d. 1030, l. 2.

<sup>13</sup> M. Gorbachev, "Politicheskii doklad Tsentral'nogo komiteta," 83.

<sup>14</sup> Pis'mo V. Bushueva, redaktora otdela istorii zhurnala "Kommunist" ot 24.03.1987. RGASPI f. 599, op. 1, d. 993, l. 189.

<sup>15</sup> Afanas'ev, *Chetvertaia vlast'*, 8-9.

<sup>16</sup> On March 13, 1988 the newspaper *Sovetskaia Rossiia* published Nina Andreeva's letter entitled "I Cannot Compromise Principles" (*Ne mogu postupat'sia printsipami*), which heavily criticized the course of perestroika and glasnost. The Politburo then spent two full days discussing and declaiming the letter, resulting in a counter-article by Yakovlev appearing in *Pravda* on April 5 and forced retraction in *Sovetskaia Rossiia* (Cherniaev, Veber, and Medvedev, *V Politbiuro TsK KPSS*, 298-306; "Printsipy perestroiki: revoliutsionnost' myshleniia i deistvii," *Pravda*, April 5, 1988).

On balance, glasnost was best understood as a Party-directed campaign to promote criticism of past and present Party activity to a degree previously forbidden. This was meant to both undermine the Party's "inappropriate" control over the economy and to help Gorbachev and his supporters to cull those Party members who were skeptical of reform. As Yegor Ligachev has argued, Aleksandr Yakovlev's role as head of the Ideological Division gave him the authority to appoint the editors of Party-associated journals and newspapers, which he used to emplace those who supported his (and Gorbachev's) vision of a less uniformly dominant Party.<sup>17</sup> As one particularly adept Western observer noted in 1988, this increased criticism in the Soviet press was also an important "instrument of factional politics": it provided Gorbachev, Yakovlev, and others with a tool to "oust one elite and to bring in another."<sup>18</sup>

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In the Tajik SSR, where glasnost had since the beginning been interpreted as a Moscow-directed campaign, there was little evidence of its widespread acceptance. As one contemporary Tajik observer later put it, it was as if "the winds of perestroika just didn't want to blow down to Tajikistan."<sup>19</sup> Kahhor Mahkamov, the First Secretary of the Communist Party of Tajikistan (CPT), frequently gave lip service to glasnost, but in practice there were few changes.<sup>20</sup> Throughout 1987 and early 1988, even as Gorbachev criticized "stagnation" and pushed through a "rejuvenation" of the Party in Moscow, nothing seemed to happen in Dushanbe. Local newspapers stayed largely passive, criticizing individuals or elements of the Soviet system, but staying away from locally sensitive issues, such as collectivization, the 1920s Basmachi movement, or the economic development of rural villages.<sup>21</sup> Rather than follow the central Party line and promote internal criticism, Tajik politicians acted as though nothing significant had changed. This

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<sup>17</sup> Ligachev, *Zagadka Gorbacheva* 80-81; Also Legostaev, *Kak Gorbachev*, 149.

<sup>18</sup> David E. Howell, "Soviet Glasnost: Definitions and Dimensions," *Current History* 87, no. 531 (1988): 344.

<sup>19</sup> Davlat, "Mirbobo Mirrahim: peshtozi."

<sup>20</sup> See Sultonov, *Yoddoshthoi ziyoi Shuravy*, 501-503; Nourzhanov and Bleuer, *Tajikistan*, 178.

<sup>21</sup> Critical material in 1986-1988 was largely limited to exposés of how reforms were not being implemented or how certain politicians had failed to "rebuild their approach to work" (*perestraivat'sia*). See, for example: "V storone ot perestroiki – poka nakhoditsia vakhshskaia raionnaia partiinaia organizatsiia," *Kommunist Tadzhikistana* August 22, 1986; N. Gadoev, "Gde buksuet samookupaemost?" *Kommunist Tadzhikistana*, January 15, 1988.

was particularly obvious to those travelling between Dushanbe and the Soviet capital. The Party worker D.A. Ashurov observed that:

*"I was working in Moscow in the CPSU Central Committee Apparatus, and then I was invited in 1988 to work as the Communist Party of Tajikistan's Central Committee Ideological Division head. I had felt what sort of processes were occurring in the country, but having arrived here, it was as if I had fallen into a completely different environment...I tried to get work done [on glasnost], but everything failed."*<sup>22</sup>

This lack of forward movement on glasnost was certain to have irked its architects in Moscow, most especially glasnost's central advocate, Aleksandr Yakovlev. In early April 1987, Yakovlev arrived in Dushanbe, nominally to speak on behalf of the Politburo at a CPT Central Committee Plenum on April 7. There, he repeatedly criticized the local party for its "inertia, psychological conservatism, and social apathy."<sup>23</sup> Behind closed doors he was especially harsh: "No matter the question, there are everywhere delays, everywhere dereliction...and the worst is that around these problems there is only talk and no progress."<sup>24</sup> Moving forward with perestroika and glasnost, Yakovlev harangued the Tajik Communist Party's leaders, meant overcoming the impulse to "keep things as they were, easy and familiar" and to embrace the need for change. In part, this meant promoting glasnost in Party work – but in part it also meant removing those Party functionaries who were opposed to change. "The approach taken to perestroika," Yakovlev told the Plenum, "has been accepted as the central criteria by which to judge [Party] workers."<sup>25</sup>

Calls for personnel changes were disturbing for the conservative leadership of the Tajik SSR, which had done its best to avoid the turnover observed in other republics in the mid 1980s. While Mahkamov had instigated some rearrangements since becoming First Secretary in 1985, replacing half of the Tajik Communist Party's Bureau and shuffling a number of cabinet ministers and local chairmen, the changes were nothing like those in Uzbekistan, where Moscow's hand had been

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<sup>22</sup> TsGART f. 297, op. 40, d. 1260, l. 17. The filmmaker and politician Davlat Khudonazarov has reported similar feelings (Interview with Davlat Khudonazarov, Moscow, December 2016).

<sup>23</sup> "Vystuplenie A.N. Yakovleva," *Kommunist Tadzhikistana*, April 8, 1987.

<sup>24</sup> Protokol sed'mogo plenuma TsK Kompartii Tadzhikistana ot 01 avgusta 1987 goda, RGASPI f. 17, op. 156, d. 1957, l. 34.

<sup>25</sup> "Vystuplenie A.N. Yakovleva."

much heavier.<sup>26</sup> In Tajikistan, only the Second Secretary, Petr Luchinskii, had been sent from Moscow, with all other posts having been filled with local cadres.<sup>27</sup> Many of the “new” leaders in the CPT and Council of Ministers of the Tajik SSR, moreover, were hardly new at all: they had worked for years for the Tajik state or Party, simply in different positions. Further demonstrating the Tajik Party’s conservatism, three out of the republic’s four oblast Party Committee chairmen – Rif’at Hojiev in Leninabad, A.K. Kasimov in Kurgan-Tiube, and Salohiddin Hasanov in Kulyab – remained in their posts through 1987.<sup>28</sup> Yakovlev’s vision for glasnost presented a significant challenge to this conservative core at the center of the Tajik Communist Party.

This conflict came into the open during Yakovlev’s last few days in Dushanbe, when he met with a group of local intelligentsia at the Tajik Academy of Sciences. In addition to leading CPT members, including Mahkamov, Luchinskii and the Bureau member Guljakhon Bobosadykova, a number of reform-minded intellectuals were invited to speak, amongst them the poetess Gulurukhsor Safieva, the philosopher Akbar Tursun, and the controversial filmmaker Davlat Khudonazarov. Long a critical voice with an eye for the poverty of Tajik villages and the extremes of the Stalinist past, Khudonazarov had been elected a few months prior at the end of 1986 to the post of Chairman of the Tajik Union of Filmmakers. Since this position would automatically elevate him to candidate membership in the Central Committee of the CPT, his election was bitterly opposed by CPT conservatives, led by Bobosadykova, who felt his critical views should not be given a greater audience. Having brewed for months, the struggle exploded when Khudonazarov was given the floor at the Academy of Sciences. With Yakovlev’s approval, Khudonazarov excoriated Bobosadykova for her

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<sup>26</sup> While some accounts (cf. Karim Abdulov, *Rohi Behbud* (Dushanbe: Self-published, 1995), 17) have accused Moscow of sending Russian or outsider Party workers to fill local posts, much as was done in 1980s Uzbekistan, there is no contemporary evidence to support this claim.

<sup>27</sup> Luchinskii arrived in Tajikistan in January 1986 from the Central Committee apparatus in Moscow (“Luchinskii, Petr Kirillovich,” *Entsiklopediiai sovetii tojik* (Dushanbe: Akademiiai fanhoi RSS Tojikiston, 1988), v. 8, 540).

<sup>28</sup> Hojiev retired in mid-to-late 1987 at the age of 61 after 15 years as First Secretary in Leninabad Oblast (“Hojiev, Rif’at,” *Entsiklopediiai sovetii tojik* (Dushanbe: Akademiiai fanhoi RSS Tojikiston, 1988), v. 8, 413); Kasimov remained in his post until May 1988 (see, for example, “Postanovlenie vos’mogo plenuma Kurgan-Tiubinskogo oblastnogo komiteta Kompartii Tadzhikistana,” *Kurgan-Tiubinskaia Pravda*, April 21, 1988); Hasanov was removed in March 1988 (RGASPI f. 17, op. 157, d. 1912, l. 133-136). The First Secretary of the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast, Mukhitdin Zairov, was the only one replaced in early 1987; he retired from his post that April (Aziia-Plus, “Schast’e – byt’ nuzhnyim liudiam!” *Asia-Plus*, February 12, 2016).

conservatism and intransigence on allowing criticism of the party.<sup>29</sup> This sort of personal attack on a senior Party member was unheard of in Dushanbe: it seemed to many in the Party as if “anti-Soviet activities” were being openly promoted by Moscow’s representative.<sup>30</sup> Yet Khudonazarov emerged the clear victor from the confrontation, with Bobosadykova “promoted” just a few months later to the post of Deputy Chairperson of the All-Soviet “Znanie” (Knowledge) Society in Moscow. Recommended by the Central Committee, this transfer was obviously intended to remove Bobosadykova from the Tajik Party’s leadership.<sup>31</sup> The signal was clear: the CPT should expect intervention from the Central Committee in case it failed to follow the new Party line on glasnost.

## II. Democratization

As Yakovlev’s statements and actions in Dushanbe demonstrated, Moscow’s program of political reform went beyond internal Party criticism. It also envisioned transformations in Party staff and policy to bring forward those people as equally reform-minded as Gorbachev and his advisors. It also demanded structural changes to the political order: the Party was still “overburdened with functions not inherent to it” – functions such as control over economic policy and reform.<sup>32</sup> Changes to Party regulations and administration required an extraordinary mandate, however, which Gorbachev aimed at by calling for a new All-Union Party Conference, the first since February 1941. (Much larger than the Party Congresses held each five years, a Party Conference was called irregularly and had greater constitutional authority.) Necessary for the “further democratization of the life of the party and of society as a whole,”<sup>33</sup> Gorbachev argued, the Conference would give new strength to perestroika’s reforms. A CPSU Central Committee Plenum duly approved Gorbachev’s request in June 1987, and the 19<sup>th</sup> Party Conference was scheduled for June 1988.

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<sup>29</sup> Interview with an anonymous former member of the Tajik Communist Party’s Bureau, Dushanbe, July 2016; Interview with Davlat Khudonazarov, Moscow, December 2016; GAKRT, k.ia. 11 03 03, no. 1-13523.

<sup>30</sup> Vladimir V. Petkel’, *Zhiznennye ukhaby chekista* (Donetsk: Astro, 2010), 145.

<sup>31</sup> Protokol sed’mogo plenuma TsK Kompartii Tadjikistana ot 01.08.1987 goda, RGASPI f. 17, op. 156, d. 1957, l. 130; Interview with an anonymous former member of the Tajik Communist Party’s Bureau.

<sup>32</sup> “Record of a Conversation of M. S. Gorbachev with President of Afghanistan, General Secretary of the CC PDPA Najibullah,” June 13, 1988, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, AGF. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/117252>.

<sup>33</sup> Quoted in Stephen White, “Gorbachev, Gorbachevism and the Party Conference,” *Journal of Communist Studies* 4, no. 4 (1988): 128.

While heralded in the Soviet press as a victory for glasnost and democratization, the preparations for and elections to the 19<sup>th</sup> Party Conference hardly differed from earlier Soviet elections. They remained largely undemocratic and planned from above, with candidates proposed by local Party committees passing through a vetting process on the regional and republican levels.<sup>34</sup> This allowed candidates to be judged and culled accordingly; as Gorbachev stated less than a week before the elections, “The principle political directive is to elect active supporters of perestroika to the conference.”<sup>35</sup> In the Tajik SSR, for example, the majority of proposed candidates were ultimately rejected by the Central Committee of the CPT, which accused many local Party organizations of “formalism” and “masking miscalculations and failures.”<sup>36</sup> Ultimately, 33 handpicked delegates, including many of the Tajik SSR’s leaders, were sent from the republic to join the 5,000 Party members gathered at the Party Conference in Moscow.<sup>37</sup>

Provided with a loyal base of delegates at the Party Conference, Gorbachev faced minimal opposition to his proposals for “democratization” (*demokratizatsiia*). Taken together, these proposals – and the resolutions passed by the Conference – called for a fundamental overhaul of the relations between party and state in the USSR. Previously, the CPSU, taking advantage of its “leading role” in society, had developed both political and economic policy, with the Supreme Soviet, as the USSR’s highest legislative body, essentially rubber-stamping CPSU decisions and the Council of Ministers implementing them. According to the Conference resolutions, this would no longer be the case. A new legislative body, the Congress of Peoples’ Deputies, would be created to democratically represent the will of the Soviet people; the Congress would then elect a new Supreme Soviet, which would dictate policy to the Council of Ministers. The Party itself would back off from the

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<sup>34</sup> Aryeh L. Unger, “The Travails of Intra-Party Democracy in the Soviet Union: The Elections to the 19<sup>th</sup> Conference of the CPSU,” *Soviet Studies* 43, no. 2 (1991).

<sup>35</sup> “Cherez Demokratizatsiiu – k novomu obliku sotsializma. Vstrecha v Tsentral’nom Komitete KPSS,” *Pravda*, May 11, 1988.

<sup>36</sup> For the selection process, see “Informatsionnoe soobshchenie o X plenumе Tsentral’nogo Komiteta Kommunisticheskoi partii Tadzhikistana,” *Kommunist Tadzhikistana*, May 22, 1988; on the Party’s criticism, I.K. Kalandarov, *Vsesoiuznaia partiinaia konferentsiia – demokratizatsiia partiinoi zhizni* (Dushanbe: Znanie, 1988), 11.

<sup>37</sup> “Gruppa delegatov iz Tadzhikistana – uchastniki XIX vsesoiuznoi partikonferentsii, Moskva,” GAKRT, k.i.a. I1 06 01, no. 0-107642; “Delegaty, isbrannye na XIX vsesoiuznuiu konferentsiiu KPSS ot Tadzhikskoi respublikanskoi partorganiatsii,” *Kommunist Tadzhikistana*, May 22, 1988.



day-to-day operations of the state (and most especially the economy): its staff would be cut, its oversight functions limited, and its authority restricted.<sup>38</sup>

By July 1988 the Central Committee of the CPSU had certified the Conference's resolutions, leading to immediate and irrevocable changes to the Party and its control over Soviet society. Nearly 40% of the Central Committee's staff was cut, including 600 "senior staff members" (*otvetstvennye rabotniki*), who had previously been responsible for developing and implementing political and economic policy.<sup>39</sup> In early 1989, moreover, the Central Committee Apparatus' 26 Divisions (*otdely*) and Committees were consolidated into 8 Divisions, one Committee, and the Central Committee's Administration (*upravlenie delami*). Lost in the shuffle were the seven Divisions that had answered for particular elements of the Soviet economy: the Division of Heavy Industry, the Division of Machine Building, The Division of Agricultural Machine Building, the Division of Chemical Industry, the Division of Light Industry and Consumer Goods, the Division of Construction, and the Division of Transport and Communications.<sup>40</sup> In line with Gorbachev's vision to remove "inappropriate functions" from the Party, these divisions were not added to one of the 10 new units, but instead simply abolished. This had an immediate effect on the Central Committee's ability to oversee economic policy, a situation that was exacerbated by the decision to create a series of "CPSU Central Committee Commissions for key areas of internal and international policy."<sup>41</sup> These commissions, operating parallel to the existing Central Committee Secretariat (made up of Division heads), took over the day-to-day business of Party policy-making and oversight. The Secretariat subsequently failed to meet for more than a year from September 1988 to September 1989; when it began meeting again it did so infrequently.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> White, "Gorbachev, Gorbachevism," 154-157.

<sup>39</sup> Otchet o rabote partiinogo komiteta apparata TsK KPSS i zadachi partiinoi organizatsii v novykh usloviakh deiatel'nosti apparata, RGANI f. 74, op. 6, d. 286, l. 84.

<sup>40</sup> RGANI f. 74, op. 6, d. 286, ll. 149, 154; "Zapiska t. Gorbacheva M.S, ot 24 avgusta 1988 g. 'K voprosu o reorganizatsii partiinogo apparata,'" *Izvestiia TsK KPSS* 1, 1989, 86. For a representation of the pre-reform structure of the Party and Central Committee, see [Appendix II: Hierarchical Structure of the Communist Party](#).

<sup>41</sup> "V tsentral'nom komitete KPSS," *Izvestiia TsK KPSS* 1, 1989, 33. For discussion of the commissions and their influence, see Stephen Kotkin, "Stealing the State," *New Republic*, April 13, 1998; Legostaev, *Kak Gorbachev*, 120.

<sup>42</sup> Ligachev, *Zagadka Gorbacheva*, 93,95.

With the Central Committee of the CPSU functionally out of the way, Gorbachev turned to the creation of the Congress of the People's Deputies. A democratically elected parliament, the Congress was meant to become the highest legal authority in the USSR and legitimize the "transfer of day-to-day administrative functions over the economy from the various Central Committee Divisions to the government."<sup>43</sup> In line with the resolutions approved at the 19<sup>th</sup> Party Conference, the Supreme Soviet of the USSR passed both a new election law and constitutional amendments on December 01, 1988, which together created the legal basis for the new democratic Congress. A total of 2,250 deputies were to be elected in multi-candidate elections in March 1989; of their total, 1,500 would be elected on the basis of open elections to individual mandates, while another 750 would be elected from various "social organizations" (*obshchestvennye organizatsii*), such as the Communist Party or the Writers' Union.<sup>44</sup> In turn, the Congress would elect a 542-member Supreme Soviet, which would act as the USSR's factual parliament: in contrast to the Congress, which would meet only intermittently, it would sit on a permanent basis, taking over the business of political and economic policy-making.<sup>45</sup>

When elections took place in March 1989, they proved markedly different from earlier exercises in Soviet "democracy" – in many ways, they were actually democratic. While the majority of the 750 seats delineated to organizations were contested by only one candidate, the opposite was the case with the 1,500 directly elected mandates. Here, only 380 seats (25%) had only one candidate up for election; in all others at least two (and often many more) candidates actively campaigned amongst the population for votes.<sup>46</sup> More strikingly, many Communist Party candidates lost. Hamstrung by official Party directives dictating "democratization" and "non-interference," local Party officials and committees were often unsure how to promote their own candidates and in practice withheld

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<sup>43</sup> "Zapiska t. Gorbacheva M.S.," 84.

<sup>44</sup> The 1,500 individual mandates were divided across the USSR by both population (750 mandates) and republic and oblast (another 750 mandates). This was meant to equalize representation between regions with higher and lower populations. See A.V. Berezkin et al., *Vesna 89: Geografiia i anatomiia parlamentskikh vyborov* (Moscow: Progress, 1990).

<sup>45</sup> Stephen White, "The Elections to the USSR Congress of People's Deputies March 1989," *Electoral Studies* 9, no. 1 (1990).

<sup>46</sup> *Vedomosti Verkhovnogo Soveta SSSR* no. 11, March 15, 1989, 130.

administrative leverage.<sup>47</sup> As a result, 38 regional and district Party first secretaries lost their elections, and a full 13% of the elected Congress was made up of non-Party members.<sup>48</sup>

Levels of “democratization” in the election results did vary geographically. In the Tajik SSR, numerous territorial mandates had only a single candidate, and on average slightly less than two candidates contested any one constituency.<sup>49</sup> In addition, although 57 deputies were elected from Tajikistan to the Congress, only 20 came from open elections for individual mandates. The remaining 37 had been elected from the republic’s “social organizations.” This helped to skew the Tajik SSR’s deputies in favor of the ruling elite: 54% of the republic’s deputies were party leaders, party workers, or managers of state institutions. Another 27% represented members of the “intelligentsia,” and only 16% were drawn from the working class.<sup>50</sup> Leading members of the CPT and republican government elected to the Congress included Kahhor Mahkamov, the First Secretary of the CPT, Petr Luchinskii, the Second Secretary, Jamshed Karimov, Dushanbe City Committee First Secretary, Goibnazar Pallaev, the Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Tajik SSR, Izatullo Khayoev, Chairman of the Tajik Council of Ministers, and Vakhob Vakhidov, Khayoev’s First Deputy and also a member of the CPT Bureau.<sup>51</sup> Unsurprisingly, the Tajik delegation to the Congress showed little initiative, overwhelmingly supporting Gorbachev’s proposals – including the latter’s election to the post of Chairman of the Supreme Soviet. For the leaders of the Tajik SSR, the Congress seemed little more than a necessary step to reestablishing their legal authority in the new order. While hardly saying a word throughout the entirety of the First Congress of People’s Deputies (May 25-June 9, 1989), both Mahkamov and Pallaev were summarily elected to the new Supreme Soviet.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Ligachev, *Zagadka Gorbacheva*, 76.

<sup>48</sup> Ryzhkov, *Perestroika*, 284; White, “The Elections to the USSR,” 63.

<sup>49</sup> Berezkin, et al., *Vesna* 89, 115, graphic 3-5; 118, table 3-4.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.; also 179, table 5-4.

<sup>51</sup> All three of the Tajik SSR’s oblast committee first secretaries – Sohibnazar Beknazarov in GBAO, Izatullo Khalimov in Khatlon, and Temurbai Mirkhalikov in Leninabad – as well as Talbak Nazarov, the Tajik SSR’s Education Minister and Georgii Koshlakov, Deputy Chairman of the Tajik Council of Ministers, were also deputies. See: *Pervyi s’ezd narodnykh deputatov*, v. 1-6; “Spisok narodnykh deputatov SSSR, izbrannykh ot territorial’nykh, natsional’no-territorial’nykh okrugov i ot obshchestvennykh organizatsii,” *Izvestiia*, April 05, 1989, 2-12.

<sup>52</sup> *Pervyi s’ezd narodnykh deputatov*, v. 1, 211-216; 243-251.

A few intellectuals inclined towards reform and sympathetic to Yakovlev's calls for increased criticism of the Party were all the same elected to the Congress from Tajikistan. Notable amongst them were the poets Gulrukhsor Safieva and Mumin Kanoat, as well as the filmmaker Khudonazarov. Already infamous in Dushanbe for his attack on Bobosadykova, Khudonazarov found himself nominated for one of the territorial mandates in his native Khorog in the east of Tajikistan. The central authorities in Dushanbe "put pressure on people not to vote for me," Khudonazarov later recalled: "They even sent a delegation with Pallaev to campaign against me." These efforts, however, had no effect, and Khudonazarov was elected to the Congress.<sup>53</sup> At the same time, this small group of Tajik reformers faced an upward battle bringing their chosen issues to the fore. Safieva and Kanoat were elected to the Supreme Soviet, but Khudonazarov remained in the mass of the Congress; all three of them struggled throughout 1989 to gain speaking time during the Congress' sessions.<sup>54</sup> In Dushanbe, moreover, they lacked support. The politics of glasnost and democratization had produced its first alternative Tajik politicians – but had yet to prepare a ready political base in the Tajik republic.

### **III. Glasnost and Democratization's Delayed Arrival in Tajikistan**

Inevitably, though, the winds of perestroika were slowly making their way down to the Tajik SSR. Both individual efforts like Yakovlev's and the broader political changes on display in Moscow were having an incremental but slowly noticeable effect upon life in Tajikistan. Still very much part of the Soviet Union, Tajikistan could resist centrally promoted reform only for so long. At first, the impact of glasnost and democratization occurred behind the closed doors of the CPT and went unseen by the majority of the Tajik public. In line with the CPSU's broader reorganization, the CPT was required to shed hundreds of party workers per year, reducing its total staff by nearly 40% by 1990. In addition, by early 1988 all four of the republic's oblast first secretaries had been replaced, along with 59% of district and city first secretaries.<sup>55</sup> In part this seemed to have been driven by normal personnel turnover – Leninabad's Khojiev and GBAO's Zairov quietly retired

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<sup>53</sup> Interview with Davlat Khudonazarov, Moscow, December 2016.

<sup>54</sup> *Pervyi s'ezd narodnykh deputatov*, v. 1, 211-216; 243-251.

<sup>55</sup> Otchet biuro TsK Kompartii Tadzhikistana o rabote po rukovodstvu perestroiki v respublike, RGASPI f. 17, op. 156, d. 1958, l. 225.

during this period after long Party careers – but Moscow’s push for more open and effective Party work also began to be felt here as well. A.K. Kasimov, the First Secretary of the Kurgan-Tyube Oblast Committee, lost his job in May 1988 when the Kurgan-Tyube and Kulyab Oblasts were combined into the Khatlon Oblast.<sup>56</sup> Based on “advice received from the Central Committee of the CPSU,” as stated by Goibnazar Pallaev, the unification of the two oblasts was meant to cut costs and overlapping staff in line with reforms to the CPSU and Soviet state.<sup>57</sup> This would have also cost the Kulyab First Secretary, Solihiddin Hasanov, his job as well – but he had already been arrested and removed from the Party in March 1988 as part of a broader Moscow-backed anti-corruption campaign.<sup>58</sup> State and Party “democratizing” reforms were beginning to be felt, with CPT leaders and staff alike finding themselves without their stable jobs of the past.

With time, glasnost also began to creep out from behind the closed doors of the Communist Party of Tajikistan. Like everyone else in the USSR, citizens of the Tajik SSR were privy to central Soviet newspapers and television, both of which were filled with criticism of the Party and Soviet society.<sup>59</sup> Critical articles about life in Tajikistan from *Izvestiia* and *Pravda* were also increasingly reprinted in local newspapers. In June 1987, for example, *Kommunist Tadjikistana* reprinted a short article from *Izvestiia* about difficulties faced by some girls to finish school in Gissar in light of pressure to get married.<sup>60</sup> In January 1988, moreover, *Pravda’s* Tajikistan correspondents harshly attacked the Central Committee of the CPT for “imitating” the form of perestroika without “filling it with content in accordance with the spirit and demands of the time,” criticism that was also reprinted in the

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<sup>56</sup> GARF f. 5446, op. 149, d. 234, l. 1. Kurgan-Tyube Oblast had only been formed in 1977 (GARF f. 5446, op. 145, d. 361, l. 1) and would again be divided into its own oblast in January 1990 (TsGART f. 1718, op. 2, d. 60, l. 2).

<sup>57</sup> For Pallaev’s comments, see Nasreddinov, *Tarkish*, 58. On the reasoning behind unification, see Mahkamov’s comments at an April 29, 1988 meeting of the CPSU Politburo Commission on the “Perestroika” of State Agencies and Structures, GARF f. 5446, op. 149, d. 8, l. 15.

<sup>58</sup> Hasanov was accused in March 1988 of being “deeply corrupt” and taking bribes of 350,000 rubles (see Cherniaev, Veber, and Medvedev, *V Politbiuro TsK KPSS*, 243; also Protokol deviatogo plenuma TsK Kompartii Tadjikistana ot 26.03.1988, RGASPI f. 17, op. 157, d. 1912, ll. 133-136, 157). After spending more than three years in jail, however, all charges against Hasanov were dropped in July 1991 (Ne”mat Bobodzhon, “Krakh ‘tadjikskogo dela’,” *Biznes i politika*, December 25-31, 1993). Whether true or not, the accusations clearly seemed to be part of Moscow’s attempt to “clean up” and “democratize” the Party in Central Asia.

<sup>59</sup> Interview with residents of Dushanbe, February 2015.

<sup>60</sup> L. Mahkamov, “Ten’ paradzhi,” *Kommunist Tadjikistana*, June 9, 1987.

pages of *Kommunist Tadjikistana*.<sup>61</sup> This idea of “imitating” perestroika and glasnost highlighted the contradictory stance taken by the CPT leadership. Moscow had dictated that reform was necessary, and Dushanbe wished to remain loyal and follow this order. Yet there remained little local support for change or understanding as to why it was necessary: the CPT was left to go through the motions of being “critical” for the sake of being loyal.

In January 1988, however, the situation in Dushanbe began to change. It was then that glasnost finally found a truly local outlet in Tajikistan with the publication of the article “To ba kai ob az tagi iakh meravad?” (Taj. “For how long will water flow under the ice?”) in the newspaper *Komsomoli Tojikiston*.<sup>62</sup> Written by the young philosopher Mirbobo Mirrahim, who had just a year before defended a dissertation in Moscow on religion and secular Soviet traditions,<sup>63</sup> “To ba kai ob az tagi iakh meravad?” brought together many of the issues that would come to dominate discourse in Tajikistan in the next few years. Built around a discussion about Tajik language and culture, Mirrahim’s article criticized the history of Tajikistan’s founding, the current state of the language, and the practices of regional Soviet development. As a result of Soviet “super-internationalism” and “national nihilism,” Mirrahim argued, Tajikistan had lost its historical capitals of Samarkand and Bukhara to Uzbekistan in the 1920s, was currently losing its national literary language, and in general was being held back in its development.

Reactions to Mirrahim’s article were quick and emotional. This had less to do with its nominal topic – discussions about the state of the Tajik language were not entirely new – and much more to do with its framing.<sup>64</sup> In Mirrahim’s reading, the declining state of the Tajik language was just one representative aspect of the larger problem of Soviet development since the 1920s. This brought out strong feelings among the Tajik elite. Karim Abdulov, who in 1988 was working for the

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<sup>61</sup> O. Latifi and V. Loginov, “Dushanbinskii urok,” *Kommunist Tadjikistana*, January 05, 1988.

<sup>62</sup> Mirbobo Mirrahimov, “To ba kai ob az tagi iakh meravad?” *Komsomoli Tojikiston*, January 6, 1988.

<sup>63</sup> M. Mirrahimov, “Rol’ sovetskoi obriadnosti v preodolenii religioznykh traditsii (na materialakh respublik Srednei Azii)” (Dissertatsii na soiskanie stepeni kandidata filosofskikh nauk, Akademiia obshchestvennykh nauk pri TsK KPSS, Moscow, 1987).

<sup>64</sup> While Mirrahim has claimed that his argument was fundamentally new, the Tajik language issue does seem to have been previously discussed. See: Salomiddin Mirzorakhmatov, *Geroi – istinnye i mnimye. Istoriia v litsakh* (Astana: Self-Published, 2011), 41; Davlat. “Murbobo Mirrahim: peshtozi.” For Mirrahim’s position, see Mirbobo Mirrahim, *Hamtabaqi Shodmon Yusupov va Khul’kar Yusupov Pukid* (Dushanbe: Bukhoro, 2012), 12-13.

CPT Central Committee in Dushanbe, recalled intense discussions between Party workers after the article was published. For his own part, Abdulov “expressed personal feelings” in support for the article and its promotion of the Tajik language.<sup>65</sup> For many Tajik intellectuals and government employees like Abdulov, Mirrahim’s article struck a nerve, emphasizing issues of cultural and linguistic development that they felt ought to be discussed more openly.

Official reactions were quite the opposite. The Central Committee of the CPT quickly condemned the article, as did the republican Komsomol, which published an article by its Ideological Division head, Zafar Saidov, who called Mirrahim a “dilatant” and his ideas dangerous.<sup>66</sup> In early February the newspaper *Kommunist Tadjikistan* also published a response to Mirrahim’s article by the journalist Khul’kar Yusupov, accusing Mirrahim of falsifications and “denouncing even that which doesn’t need to be denounced.”<sup>67</sup> By February 17, the Bureau of the republican Komsomol held a meeting to discuss Mirrahim’s article, which was officially declared to be “one-sided” and “to be full of errors and irresponsible generalizations.”<sup>68</sup> The newspaper *Komsomoli Tojikiston*, which was overseen by the republican Komsomol, was reprimanded, and its editor, Ato Khojaev, summarily fired from his position.<sup>69</sup> Abdulov also lost his job in the Central Committee of the CPT, a reprisal, he felt, for his support of the article. With its call for a reconsideration of Soviet history and republican territorial divisions, Mirrahim’s article opened up too many difficult questions that the leadership of the CPT was unprepared to answer. By discussing the status of Bukhara and Samarqand, it also threatened to ignite conflict with Uzbekistan, which Mahkamov was keen to avoid.<sup>70</sup> Altogether the republican leadership saw strong reason to try to stamp out Mirrahim’s ideas entirely.

They were, however, too late. Over the next two years the ideas outlined by Mirrahim in his article would grow in scope and resonance in the Dushanbe press.

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<sup>65</sup> Abdulov, *Rohi behbud*, 10-13.

<sup>66</sup> Nurali Davlat, “Mirbobo Mirrahim: Peshtozi harakati istiqlokhohy,” *Ozodagon*, March 29, 2017.

<sup>67</sup> Kh. Yusupov, “Tochka zreniia: a razve ledokhod ne nachalsya?” *Kommunist Tadjikistana*, February 03, 1988.

<sup>68</sup> Nurali Davlat, “Mirbobo Mirrahim: Peshtozi harakat istiqlokhohy,” *Ozodagon*, April 05, 2017.

<sup>69</sup> TadjhikTA, “V TsK Kompartii Tadjhikistana,” *Kommunist Tadjhikistana*, March 04, 1988.

<sup>70</sup> This did, in fact, lead to conflict, as the leadership of the Uzbek SSR reacted badly to Mirrahim’s and subsequent claims. See Nishanov, *Derev’ia zeleneiut*, 254-255.

Critical articles and public discussions began to grow in number, on issues ranging from the role of Islam in perestroika-era Tajikistan,<sup>71</sup> the state of the republic's ecology,<sup>72</sup> the historical role of the Communist Party in the Tajik SSR,<sup>73</sup> and the slow pace of economic reform.<sup>74</sup> More worrisome, this criticism frequently followed Mirrahim's framing, and placed independent complaints within a broader disparagement of Soviet development in Tajikistan as a whole. The Roghun dam construction was critiqued for disregarding the local villagers whom it would displace, as well as the increased reliance on centralized funding it would require to complete.<sup>75</sup> The history of Tajikistan's institutional establishment as a republic, "in serious need of historiographical analysis and generalization," as the Tajik historian Rahim Masov wrote in 1988, continued to be argued over.<sup>76</sup> And many writers questioned why Tajik villages were increasingly full of "sauntering mustachioed youth" without jobs when perestroika had seemed to offer the promise of increased economic development and employment.<sup>77</sup>

There did seem something clearly wrong about Tajikistan's trajectory. As perestroika picked up speed in 1988 and 1989, many of the underlying contradictions in Tajikistan – in particular, the imbalance between demographic growth and available jobs and the republic's reliance on other Soviet republics – began to grow both increasingly obvious and increasingly harsh. It was also clear that public interest, piqued as equally by growing economic hardship as by glasnost in Moscow and in the central press, was primed for greater participation in Gorbachev's program of democratization. While all of the newspapers in Tajikistan remained government owned and operated throughout 1988 and 1989, some quickly gained a reputation for their critical positions – and were rewarded by readers by sharp increases in circulation. The Tajik-language literary weekly

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<sup>71</sup> TadjhikTA, "Ateisticheskoe vospitanie: novye podkhody," *Kommunist Tadjhikistana*, March 18, 1988; also Interview with Parviz Mullojanov, Dushanbe, January 2017.

<sup>72</sup> M. Georgiev, "Gde zhit' sazanu i fazanu?" *Pamir* 39, no. 6 (1988).

<sup>73</sup> I. Kalandarov, "Istina – bez prikras," *Vechernii Dushanbe*, October 4, 1988.

<sup>74</sup> For example, see Kh. Kiyomiddinov, "Partkom i ekonomicheskaiia reforma: ne kompaniia – programma na gody," *Vechernii Dushanbe*, October 6, 1988; Ivan Khlevniuk, "Nadeius' na podderzhku," *Kommunist Tadjhikistana*, January 4, 1989.

<sup>75</sup> On the threat to local villages, see Otakhon Latifi, "Plotina," *Pravda*, November 11, 1988. On the economic arguments made against Roghun by the reformist economists Tohir Abdujabbor and Hojimukhammad Umarov, see Gholib Ghoibov, *Ta'rikhi Khatlon as oghoz to imruz* (Dushanbe: Donish, 2006), 637.

<sup>76</sup> R.M. Masov, *Istoriia istoricheskoi nauki i istoriografiia sotsiolisticheskogo stroitel'stva v Tadjhikistane* (Dushanbe: Donish, 1988), 11.

<sup>77</sup> Shodi Khanif, "Khoziaeva i nakhlebniki," *Kommunist Tadjhikistana*, January 11, 1987.



*Adabiyot va San''at* ("Literature and Culture"), the critical voice of the Tajik Union of Writers, more than doubled its circulation between 1986 and 1989.<sup>78</sup> By early 1989, moreover, frustration and criticism in Dushanbe had already begun to move beyond the restrictive pages of local newspapers and into the sphere of public activism, "informal" organizations, and even protest.

#### **IV. Democratization's (Brief) Foray into the Dushanbe Streets**

On the morning of February 24, 1989 a large group of predominantly young men gathered in front of the Tajik Supreme Soviet on Lenin Square in Dushanbe. By noon their number had reached around 1,000, swelled by students from local universities. Organized in support of a law currently under discussion in the Supreme Soviet that would make Tajik the official state language of Tajikistan, the demonstration was alive with calls for change. "We are for perestroika!" the banners held by the students read; "We demand the resurrection of the ancient Tajik culture!"<sup>79</sup> While the demonstration remained calm throughout the afternoon, it was factually illegal: the organizers, including Mirrahim, had made a formal request to hold the demonstration only three days prior, while the law required all requests to be made ten days in advance. This left the Tajik state – both the police surrounding the demonstration and the parliamentarians inside the Supreme Soviet – unsure of how to react. Their confusion was only increased by their lack of experience with similar events. While other Soviet cities had experienced protests, demonstrations, and unrest in 1988 and 1989, Tajikistan had retained its air of calm. In fact, the demonstration in front of the Supreme Soviet was the first in at least 40 years – since 1945 no comparable event had been recorded in the Tajik SSR.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> *Adabiyot va San''at*'s circulation rose from 37,200 in 1986 to 83,000 in 1989; see RGASPI f. 17, op. 155, d. 2180, l. 14; op. 159, d. 1706, l. 40.

<sup>79</sup> TadjhikTA, "Uchimsia demokratii: Miting na ploshchadi," *Kommunist Tadjhikistana*, February 26, 1989; A. Ganelin, "Skazhi mne po-tadjhikski – brat," *Komsomolets Tadjhikistana*, August 25, 1989.

<sup>80</sup> According to data from the KGB, only one "disturbance" (*besporiadok*) was recorded in Tajikistan from 1945-1988: a large street fight in 1985 between local Tajiks and a group of Slavic outsiders (Spravka ot Predsedatelia KGB Chebrikova M.S. Gorbachevu ot 04.03.1988. APRF f.3, op. 108, d. 523, ll. 27-34. Reprinted in *Istochnik: vestnik arkhiva prezidenta Rossiskoi Federatsii* 19, no. 6 (1995): 152). Mark Beissinger has identified one additional "protest" event in Tajikistan in 1987 ("Mass Demonstrations and Mass Violent Events in the Former USSR, 1987-1992," <http://www.princeton.edu/~mbeissin/research1.htm#Data>), but upon review, the event in question turns out to have been a group of students having an "agitated" discussion about the 1985 fight ("Tajikistan's Russian-Tajik Ethnic Conflict," *FBIS Daily Report on the Soviet Union*, January 24, 1989 (FBIS-SOV-89-014)).

Ultimately, the Supreme Soviet decided to overlook the “illegal” nature of the demonstration.<sup>81</sup> After the gathered students had refused repeated calls to disperse, a delegation was sent by the Supreme Soviet to meet with the crowd. Led by Goibnazar Pallaev, the Chairman of the Supreme Soviet’s Presidium, the delegation assured those gathered that their concerns would be taken into consideration. A draft of the Law on Language of the Tajik SSR had already been written, they said – and would soon be published for public consideration.<sup>82</sup> Both government representatives and leading intellectuals, including the philosopher Akbar Tursun and poet Mumin Kanoat spoke about the need to promote the study of the Tajik language, and after a few hours the crowd dispersed on its own. Shocked by the unexpected turn of events, the Supreme Soviet deputies went back to their work on the language law.

Arguably, however, they should not have been quite so surprised. While free of protests or demonstrations, the six months prior to February 1989 had seen the development of the first “informal” (*neformal’nye*) organizations in Tajikistan. While limited in scope and activity during 1988, these organizations did bring together leading intellectuals in Tajik cities, who began to discuss the course of perestroika reforms and voice their frustrations. In Dushanbe, the poets Bozor Sobir and Loik Sherali, together with the editor Askar Hakim, informally began meeting with other reform-minded intellectuals, referring to themselves as the “Yovoroni Bossozi” (Taj. “Supporters of Perestroika”).<sup>83</sup> In Kulyab in the south of Tajikistan, the poet Safarmuhammad Aiubi and actor Rustami Abdurahim went further, forming the organization “Oshkoro” (Taj. “Glasnost”) with the express goal of returning to Kulyab its status as an oblast and promoting its local economic development. By late 1988, moreover, Oshkoro had managed to organize at least one meeting with Mahkamov and Pallaev, where its members berated the Tajik leadership for the state of the economy and the lack of attention paid to provincial

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<sup>81</sup> The organizers were “warned” by the Prosecutor’s Office not to repeat their mistake, but were not prosecuted. See S. Krylov, “Ob”iavlennoe predostereozhenie organizatoram nesanktsionirovannogo mitinga,” *Kommunist Tadzhikistana*, March 7, 1989.

<sup>82</sup> In fact, a Commission of the Supreme Soviet of the Tajik SSR had been working on the law since early January 1989. TsGART f. 297, op. 41, d. 335, l. 35.

<sup>83</sup> While it was reported that Yovoroni Bossozi published an official program and organized demonstrations, there is no evidence to support this. Instead, the “organization” seems to have existed for a short period of time and held very informal meetings. For varying accounts, see Annett Bohr, “Formation of a People’s Front in Tajikistan,” *Radio Liberty Research Bulletin*, November 16, 1988 (498/88); Suzanne Crow, “Informal Groups in Tajikistan – Will They Have a Role?” *FBIS Daily Report on the Soviet Union*, February 23, 1990.

areas outside of Dushanbe.<sup>84</sup> Together with the growing pugnaciousness of the Tajik press, this certainly ought to have been sufficient warning about the societal frustration brewing in the Tajik SSR.

Yet just as this wave of glasnost-driven criticism and democratic social activism – as not incidentally promoted by Gorbachev, Yakovlev, and others in CPSU Central Committee – crested in February 1989, it just as quickly began to ebb, dissipating back into the normally calm waters of Dushanbe politics. No further demonstrations followed on the heels of the first one on February 24, and additional “informal” organizations failed to crop up in the subsequent months. The ideas around which earlier criticism had been organized, moreover, began to wane in social importance. While ecological concerns had become a major concern in other Soviet republics, in Tajikistan they failed to mobilize a large portion of the population, and by late 1988 and early 1989 even the number of local newspaper articles touching upon ecology began to drop.<sup>85</sup>

The Roghun dam, which had been partially criticized on ecological grounds, retained high levels of support, with only a small minority, led by the poet Gulrukhsor Safieva – who had been born in one of the villages slated for flooding – continuing to question its construction.<sup>86</sup> Questions about history, culture and religion had seemed to lose their edge, with the darkest corners of Soviet history remaining untouched and the Soviet state’s increased tolerance for religious institutions opening up space for dialogue with Tajikistan’s mullahs.<sup>87</sup> “We consider it the duty of all Muslims and citizens of the USSR to help perestroika however we can,” the imam-hatib of the Central Leninabad Mosque had said in late 1988 – here, too, there seemed little cause for democratic mobilization.<sup>88</sup> Even language, which had nominally driven both Mirrahim’s 1988 article and the 1989 demonstration, was not the guaranteed motivating factor it may have seemed. In

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<sup>84</sup> On Oshkoro, see Nasreddinov, *Tarkish*, 57-58.

<sup>85</sup> Shoiria Muzafarovna Toirova, “Osobennosti razvitiia sovremennoi tadjzhikskoi ekologicheskoi zhurnalistiki v svete problem vodnykh resursov, stroitel’sstva Rogunskoi GES i chrezvychainykh situatsii” (Dissertatsiia na soiskanie uchenoi stepeni kandidata filologicheskikh nauk, Slavianskii Universitet, Dushanbe, 2015), 40-42.

<sup>86</sup> Interview with Parviz Mullojanov, Dushanbe, January 2017; cf. Sodiqov, “From resettlement to conflict.” Sodiqov has argued that opposition to Roghun was widespread during perestroika, but there is no contemporary evidence for this.

<sup>87</sup> The first local work on Stalin-era repressions of Tajik politicians, for example, was only published in 2012. See: Qurboni Alamshoh, *Pomir, 1937* (Dushanbe: Irfon, 2012).

<sup>88</sup> M. Saifiddinov, “Tseli perestroiki poniatny nam,” *Kommunist Tadzhikistana*, October 9, 1988.

contrast to claims made by Mirrahim and others about the threat to the Tajik language, sociological surveys showed the opposite: in fact, only 30% of Tajiks in Tajikistan were fluent in Russian, while the vast majority (88%) reported fluency in Tajik.<sup>89</sup> On the local level, moreover, Tajik citizens often had a hard time understanding what the fuss was about. In Panj district in the south of Tajikistan, for example, one activist promoting the Law on Language reported that “people looked at us funny” when they heard about the law. “‘Why do we need this law?’ – they asked, ‘we already speak in Tajik anyways.’”<sup>90</sup>

Giving the lie to both Western expectations of nationalist uprisings in Central Asia and broader narratives of “post-colonial” stirrings on the back of ecological and developmental concerns, the population of the Tajik SSR was simply failing to mobilize. Part of the problem, as a Komsomol committee concluded in 1989, was that it was “difficult to orient in the political situation” – in other words, people were increasingly frustrated, but there was no clear organizing principle for their anger.<sup>91</sup> To an even greater degree, however, mobilization failed to take hold because glasnost continued to follow a mold dictated from outside. The increasingly critical tone of Dushanbe’s literary journals and newspapers followed a pattern set by Moscow a few years prior, as did the initial spikes of street demonstrations. Glasnost and democratization remained phenomena dictated from Moscow. Yet Mahkamov and the leadership of the Tajik SSR had little choice but to push for its acceptance: Moscow continued to complain about the lack of glasnost and intra-party democracy in the republic. Reacting to this ongoing pressure, in the spring of 1989 the CPT began to double its efforts. Over the next six months the coordinated efforts of the Central Committee of the CPT, the Tajik Komsomol, and politicians in Moscow would lead to both the founding of several new “informal” organizations in Tajikistan, as well as a surprisingly open and public debate over the Law on the Tajik Language.

## V. Promoting Glasnost from Above

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<sup>89</sup> On knowledge of Russian: E.M. Ermolaeva, “Iazyk respondentov, iazyk ankety,” *Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniia* 13, no. 1 (1987): 98-99; on knowledge of Tajik: R. Alimov and M. Saidov, *Natsional’nyi vopros: raschety i proschety* (Dushanbe: Irfon, 1991), 37.

<sup>90</sup> Interview with Hikmatullo Saifullozoda, Dushanbe, February 2015.

<sup>91</sup> “Molodezh’. Mitingovaia demokratiia: ‘za’ i ‘protiv’,” *Kommunist Tadzhikistana*, August 16, 1989.

In accordance with Soviet practice, the task of directing the energies of discouraged young people in Dushanbe was delegated to the republican Komsomol. Already frustrated with the lack of informal political groups in the Tajik SSR, the Komsomol leadership quickly took to the task of negotiating with the organizers of the February 24 demonstration.<sup>92</sup> By early April 1989 an agreement had been struck: the political club “Ru ba Ru” (Taj. “face-to-face”) was founded under the authority of the Central Committee of the Tajik Komsomol.<sup>93</sup> Intended as a forum for political dialogue, Ru ba Ru organized meetings between Tajik citizens and the leaders of the republic, during which constructive criticism could be leveled against the latter. Taking place at the House of Political Enlightenment (*Dom politicheskogo prosvesheniia*) in Dushanbe, the Ru ba Ru meetings were envisioned by the republican leadership as a controlled solution to the dissipate frustration on display in the republic.<sup>94</sup> Citizens would now be able to express their concerns directly to their state representatives – and those representatives, in turn, would be forced to respond in a productive and democratic manner.

Ru ba Ru held its first meetings in May 1989. Each meeting took the form of a public debate, with a political leader speaking to a crowd made up of university students, professors, and political activists. Early participants included Mirrahim, the reform-minded economists Tohir Abdujabbor and Hojimukhammad Umarov, an organizer of the February 24 demonstration, B. Makhsudov, and the Komsomol secretary Jumakhon Isoev.<sup>95</sup> These activists, writers, and economists, moreover, quickly began to dominate the proceedings, laying into the invited politicians over the state of the Tajik economy, growing unemployment, and the apparent inaction of the republican government. Leading Tajik communists, including Kahhor Mahkamov, Izatullo Khayoev and Jamshed Karimov, the first secretary of the Dushanbe City Committee, were all heavily criticized, with participants “proving that the invited leader had made only mistakes and blunders in his work.”<sup>96</sup> It

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<sup>92</sup> Alimov and Saidov, *Natsional'nyi vopros*, 84-85.

<sup>93</sup> “Polozhenie o politicheskome klube ‘Ru ba Ru,’” *Komsomolets Tadzhikistana*, October 11, 1989.

<sup>94</sup> Nurali Davlat, “‘Ru ba ru’: Az taloshi ehyoi zaboni Tojiki to qasdi tarki komsomol,” *Ozodagon*, October 9, 2015.

<sup>95</sup> Ruikhati mahdomi siyosyi “Ru ba ru,” dated 19.05.1989; document held in the personal collection of Nurali Davlat, Dushanbe; Mirrahim, *Hamtabaqi*, 34-35.

<sup>96</sup> Alimov and Saidov, *Natsional'nyi vopros*, 85. On Ru ba Ru, see Kamoli Kurbonien, “Litsom k litsu litso uvidet' možno,” *Komsomolets Tadzhikistana*, October 11, 1989; Abashin and. Bushkov, *Tadzhikistan: nekotorye posledstviia*, 29; Nurali Davlat, “‘Ru ba ru’: Az oghoz to anjom,” *Ozodagon*,

quickly became clear that the “constructive” dialogue desired by the Tajik leadership was not part of the Ru ba Ru participants’ plan. Quite on the contrary: for those like Mirrahim, the idea was to prove the incompetence of those running the republic. “Tajikistan’s ministers and bureaucrats came to the club ‘Ru ba Ru’ with fat and full stomachs,” he later wrote, “but left with sweaty faces, bowed with shame and disgrace.”<sup>97</sup>

While hardly the productive atmosphere the Tajik leadership had hoped for, Ru ba Ru proved inarguably successful, drawing in crowds of hundreds and quickly becoming the leading platform for political dialogue in the Tajik SSR.<sup>98</sup> It also spawned numerous local imitations, as regional branches of the Tajik Komsomol also began to encourage the formation of informal organizations and “political clubs.” Over the course of 1989 similar organizations were founded with Komsomol support in Leninabad (“Ekh”yoi Khujand”), Ura-Tyube (“Vakhdat”), Vakhsh District (“Tajdid”), and Nurek (“Dirafshi Koviya”).<sup>99</sup> In some cities, these organizations took on localized goals - Ekh”yoi Khujand, for example, advocated for Leninabad’s name to be changed back to the historical “Khujand” - but in general they followed the model of Ru ba Ru, providing a space for increasing loud and critical debate.

One prominent topic in these debates, moreover, was the Law on Language of the Tajik SSR. At first, the push to make Tajik the official language of the Tajik SSR had seemed to fade after February 1989, with limited public support and Mahkamov and other leaders of the republic expressing skepticism about the need for the law. After a few months, however, Moscow got involved, which changed the situation entirely. In early April 1989, the draft Law on Language of the Tajik SSR was sent to the Central Committee of the CPSU for comment. As the Chairman of the Presidium of the Tajik Supreme Soviet, Pallaev received a series of minor changes

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October 2, 2015; Nurali Davlat, “‘Ru ba ru’: Az peshnihodi Turajonzoda to khashmi Vahhobov,” *Ozodagon*, October 15, 2015.

<sup>97</sup> Mirboboi Mirrahim. *To ba kai ob az tagi iakh meravad?* (Tehran: Atlas, 1998), 78. Also see: Isaac Scarborough, “From February to February and From Ru ba Ru to Rastokhez: Political Mobilisation in Late Soviet Tajikistan,” *Cahiers d’Asie centrale* 26 (2016).

<sup>98</sup> Interview with former Ru ba Ru participants, Dushanbe, February 2015; I. Usmonov, *Ta’rikhi siyosiyi Tojikistoni sohibistiqlo* (Khujand: Nuri Ma’rifat, 2003), 19-22.

<sup>99</sup> Prilozhenie k. p. 1 “g”, prot. St. no. 68, Programma raboty respublikanskogo seminarasoveshchaniia ideologicheskikh kadrov po rabote s samodeiatel’nymi obshchestvennymi organizatsiiami, 02.02.1990, RGASPI f. 17, op 159, d. 1709, l. 10.

to the law, as well as advice from Yakovlev to “go ahead and pass the law,” since “Russian [language] doesn’t need any sort of protection in Tajikistan.”<sup>100</sup> Tajik lawmakers also received copies of Estonia and Latvia’s recent Laws on Language as examples of similar successful legislation.<sup>101</sup> Given the Central Committee’s clear support for the law, Pallaev, Mahkamov, and the other leaders of the Tajik SSR had little choice but to set their concerns and skepticism aside. As they had initially promised, they opened the law up to public debate, hoping to both appease Yakovlev and his (as they understood it) ascendant faction in the Moscow Politburo and deflate social tension in Dushanbe.<sup>102</sup>

Far from receding, however, tensions only became inflamed. From May 1989 the Tajik language became a central topic of debate at Ru ba Ru meetings, amongst intellectuals in Dushanbe, and in the press. Thousands of letters were also sent to the Supreme Soviet both supporting and opposing the law.<sup>103</sup> Activists on both sides mobilized support, with most of the appeals sent clearly copied from form letters: Russian-language letters overwhelmingly opposed the law and worried over “inter-ethnic conflict,” while Tajik-language writers supporting the law proclaimed the “happiness of the republic’s people” in relation to the law’s passage.<sup>104</sup> While language had been at best a minor concern before 1989, the linguistically organized mobilization and debate drew sharp lines of division in society. Low-level economic and social frustrations gained an organizing principle, with the Tajik language becoming a stand-in for the development of the republic as a whole. Tajik speakers began to see Russian’s dominance as a symbol of the growing contradictions in the Tajik economy – between the relative wealth

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<sup>100</sup> See the marked draft Pallaev received from the Central Committee of the CPSU, TsGART f. 297, op. 41, d. 335, l. 34. For Yakovlev’s comments, see Nurali Davlat, “Qahhor Mahkamov: Oghoz va farjomi ‘prezidenti javon’,” *Ozodagon*, August 10, 2016.

<sup>101</sup> TsGART f. 297, op. 41, d. 344, ll. 89-101.

<sup>102</sup> For an early public push for debate on the Law on Language, see TadjhikTA, “Satus gosudarstvennogo – tadjhikskomu iazyku. S rasshirennogo zasedaniia biuro TsK Kompartii Tadjhikistana,” *Kommunist Tadjhikistana*, April 7, 1989. The draft law was published on April 14 (“Proekt: Zakon Tadjhikskoi sovetskoi sotsialisticheskoi respubliki o iazyke,” *Kommunist Tadjhikistana*, April 14, 1989).

<sup>103</sup> In May and June 1989 thousands of letters were sent to the Supreme Soviet related to the Law on Language (TsGART f. 297, op. 41, dd. 338-341). Some reports listed up to “74,000 written and spoken suggestions” (TsGART f. 297, op. 41, d. 341, l. 69).

<sup>104</sup> For an example of this sort of Russian-language appeal, see TsGART f. 297, op. 41, d. 341, l. 15; for the standard Tajik formula, see d. 339, l. 123.

of Russian-speaking Dushanbe and the decreasing opportunities in the Tajik-speaking rural areas.<sup>105</sup>

With debate and emotions rising, Mahkamov and the leadership of the CPT retained their initial skepticism. Mahkamov finally approved the law only after a telephone conversation with Gorbachev, in which the latter expressed his support for the law and encouraged Mahkamov to avoid falling behind other republics that had already passed similar legislation.<sup>106</sup> Following Gorbachev's express support, the Law on Language of the Tajik SSR was given the green light in the Tajik Supreme Soviet, and was passed into law on July 22, 1989. Although softened from its original draft and giving Russian the status of "language of interethnic communication," the law did make Tajik the sole state language of the Tajik SSR and dictate the long-term replacement of Russian by Tajik in all state activities.<sup>107</sup> The law was also quickly claimed as a political victory for those who had promoted it, including the increasingly vocal participants of *Ru ba Ru* in Dushanbe.

The Law on Language would not be Moscow's final incursion into the politics of glasnost in Dushanbe. Having been elected to the Congress of People's Deputies and Supreme Soviet of the USSR in April 1989, the poetess Gulrukhsor Safieva had used her new political status to continue advocating against the Roghun hydroelectric dam.<sup>108</sup> Her arguments tended to focus on the flooding of local villages, including her family's, and by late summer 1989 she had helped mobilize a group of local elders (*aksakaly*) from these villages, who visited Moscow to argue against the dam. In Moscow, the elders failed in their attempt to meet with Boris Yeltsin, the chairman of the Supreme Soviet Construction Committee and a symbol of Soviet opposition following his famous removal from the Politburo in late 1987 and triumphant election to the Congress of People's Deputies in the face of overt

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<sup>105</sup> Interview with Parviz Mullojanov, Dushanbe, January 2017.

<sup>106</sup> Asliddin Sohbnazar, *Subhi sitorakush* (Dushanbe: Donish, 1997), v. 1, 14-15.

<sup>107</sup> See the "final version" of the law as approved by the CC CPT on 30.06.1989 (TsGART f. 297, op. 41, d. 335, ll. 103-149) and the nearly identical version passed by the Supreme Soviet on 22.07.1989 ("Zakon Tadzhijskoi Sovetskoi Sotsialisticheskoi Respubliki o iazyke," *Komsomolets Tadjikistana*, August 2, 1989). More radical provisions, such as the teaching of the Arabic script in Tajik schools, had also been removed.

<sup>108</sup> See Aziiia-Plius, "Gulrukhsor: Prorokov posylaet Bog, poetov vybiraet narod..." *Asia-Plus*, December 23, 2013; "Gulrukhsor: Man hargiz ziddi sokhtmoni Roghun nabudam," *Radoi Ozody*, May 1, 2010; online <http://www.ozodi.org/a/2029458.html>.



resistance from the CPSU.<sup>109</sup> They did, however, manage to meet with Sogdiana, a “public organization” founded and registered in Moscow by a group of postgraduate students from Tajikistan. Sogdiana had been searching for ways to affect change in Tajikistan, and quickly took up the elders’ cause. Together with Pavel Florenskii, a geologist who had questioned the safety of the Roghun dam, they secured a meeting with Yeltsin and convinced him to visit the dam.<sup>110</sup>

In August 1989 Yeltsin visited Tajikistan, spending most of a week in and around the Roghun construction site. Although he had initially promised Sogdiana immediate action, the results of his visit were inconclusive. Publically, he limited himself to mild criticism, noting that “the project is a bit raw,” while privately assuring the leaders of the Tajik SSR that the dam had Moscow’s full support.<sup>111</sup> This waffling left everyone disappointed, with Safieva and Sogdiana left to continue their lobbying and Mahkamov and others wondering what Moscow’s position on the dam might actually be. Worried that financial and political support could dry up, the leaders of the Tajik SSR buckled under pressure. The Central Committee of the CPT and the Council of Ministers of the Tajik SSR issued a joint order, indicating that the Roghun Dam’s height would be decreased by from 325 to 275 meters. This would “allow a 60% reduction in the number of people to be relocated from the flooding area,” leaving only around 9,000 individuals to be resettled.<sup>112</sup> On both Roghun and the Law on Language Moscow’s hand had proven critical: rather than relying on an upwelling of local support, Tajik activists had been able to appeal and depend upon members of the CPSU elite to push through their chosen causes.

## **VI. Conclusion: Rastokhez and Political Mobilization in Dushanbe**

By the fall of 1989 the efforts of politicians in Dushanbe and Moscow had born fruit: glasnost and democratization had finally arrived in the Tajik SSR. In addition

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<sup>109</sup> On Yeltsin’s removal from the Politburo in 1987, see Cherniaev, Veber, and Medvedev, *V Politbiuro TsK KPSS*, 258-263; on his election to the Congress in 1989, see Boris El’tsin, *Ispoved’ na zadannuiu temu* (Riga: Rukitis, 1990), 3-12; 174-179.

<sup>110</sup> Interview with Parviz Mullojanov, founding member of Sogdiana, Dushanbe, January 2017.

<sup>111</sup> For Yeltsin’s comments, see Ekaterina Kozhevnikova and Liliia Gaisina, “Georgii Koshlakov za kulisami Sovetskoi vlasti,” *Asia-Plus*, November 19, 2008; on his trip to Tajikistan, see “Menia porazili liudi. Semnadtsat’ voprosov Borisu El’tsinu,” *Komsomolets Tadjikistana*, September 8, 1989; interview with Parviz Mullojanov, Dushanbe, January 2017.

<sup>112</sup> TsGART f. 18, op. 8, d. 3659, l. 25. Initially, 22,500 people had been scheduled for relocation; see Pis’mo Makhkamova i Koshlakova Pred. SM SSSR Ryzhkovu ot 05.03.1988, GARF f. 5446, op. 149, d. 290, l. 51.

to a combative local press, “informal” (if state-sponsored) organizations had appeared around the republic, and political lobbying from a variety of corners had become part of the otherwise closed political process in Dushanbe. In political clubs and public meetings, frustrations and social dissatisfaction were finding an increasingly organized – and increasingly strident – outlet. While demonstrations and other public signs of struggle remained unseen after February 1989 (in contrast to Moscow and many other corners of the USSR), life in the Tajik SSR was clearly growing more politicized. It was this politicized environment, moreover, that gave birth to the first independent political movement in Tajikistan – “Rastokhez” (Taj. “rebirth”).

Founded by some of the most active members of Ru ba Ru, including Tohir Abdujabbor, Mirbobo Mirrahim, and the professors Hamidullo Habibullo and Sharofiddin Imomov, Rastokhez was meant to provide a more independent platform to advocate for political and economic change.<sup>113</sup> Holding its first official meeting on September 14, 1989, Rastokhez elected the economist Abdujabbor its chairman and called on the Tajik Party and government to help revive both Tajik culture and traditions and the state of the local economy. Achieving both of these goals, Rastokhez argued, would mean furthering the work of perestroika to rebuild the Soviet economy.<sup>114</sup> It would also mean giving Tajikistan greater control over its own resources and development: from Abdujabbor’s perspective, one of Tajikistan’s fundamental problems was economic mismanagement from Moscow. Given full control over local resources and revenues, he and Rastokhez argued, the republic would be able to resolve its underlying contradictions by selling raw goods on the world market and investing in infrastructure.<sup>115</sup> “The Tajik SSR should be a sovereign state,” Rastokhez summarized in its Charter, “and should independently resolve issues related to the political, economic, and social development of the republic.”<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Rastokhez does not appear to have kept membership records, and its organization was always somewhat ad-hoc. Other members included Askar Hakim, Ahmadshoh Komilzoda, and Abdunady Sattorzoda. See Nurali Davlat, “Tohiri Abdujabbor: ‘Padar’-i e’lomiiai istiqlo’l,” *Ozodagon*, September 21, 2016; Mirrahim, *Hamtabaqi*, 34.

<sup>114</sup> “Programma organizatsii ‘Rastokhez,’” reprinted in N.G. Chicherina (ed.), *Grazhdanskie dvizheniia v Tadzhikistane* (Moscow: TsIMO, 1990), 115-123.

<sup>115</sup> On Abdujabbor’s economic reasoning, see Kalinovskiy, *Laboratory of Socialist Development*; also Davlat, “Tohiri Abdujabbor.”

<sup>116</sup> “Ustav organizatsii ‘Rastokhez,’” reprinted in N.G. Chicherina (ed.), *Grazhdanskie dvizheniia v Tadzhikistane* (Moscow: TsIMO, 1990), 133.

Although Rastokhez's calls for increased perestroika and economic liberalization were in accordance with the Party line, its more radical calls for full economic sovereignty and local political control set it at odds against the CPT and Dushanbe politicians. From the very beginning, moreover, it began to act as an opposition movement, emphasizing popular issues like the recent Law on Language and the need to protect Tajik cultural values.<sup>117</sup> Building on the increasingly politicized atmosphere in Dushanbe, the movement rallied support for its political and economic program, organizing dissipated and disparate frustrations into a single platform. Its success quickly outshone the other "informal" groups in Tajikistan, with organizations such as Ekh'yoi Khujand, Vakhdat, and Oshkoro joining its platform in late 1989.<sup>118</sup> As Rastokhez waxed in popularity, moreover, Ru ba Ru waned, with an increasing number of well-known intellectuals, including Bozor Sobir, joining the former movement.<sup>119</sup> By the final months of 1989, moreover, Rastokhez was openly acting as a political party, supporting 50 candidates for the upcoming February 1990 elections to the Supreme Soviet of the Tajik SSR.<sup>120</sup> The Tajik state tried to hamper its efforts by refusing to register the organization and accusing its members of "extremism," but to little immediate effect.<sup>121</sup>

Building upon the burgeoning politicization in Dushanbe and the broad framework of criticism established by Oshkoro, Ru ba Ru, and other organizations, Rastokhez was able to outline a unified political platform in opposition to the CPT. By criticizing the whole of Soviet development in Tajikistan, moreover – from the imbalances created by "turnover taxes" and the limited revenues provided to the Tajik SSR to the historical promotion of the Russian language – Rastokhez harnessed the frustrations of many different social groups. On the one hand, there were the intellectuals (teachers, professors, and most prominently, writers)

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<sup>117</sup> On Rastokhez's activities in late 1989, see Oleg Panfilov, "Rasprostraneno zaiavlenie dvizeniia 'Rastokheza'. Rukovodstvo dvizheniia udivleno ocherednoi provokatsiiei vlastei," *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, January 11, 1996; Scarborough, "From February to February."

<sup>118</sup> Sh.M. Sultanov, *Demontazh SSSR: Velikaia katastrofa XX-ogo stoletia. Tadjikistan na poroge grazhdanskoi voini (1990-1991 gg.)* (Khujand: Khoroson, 2014), 117.

<sup>119</sup> Ru ba Ru held meetings at least until January 1990, but seems to have had limited importance after the founding of Rastokhez; see Qironshohi Sharifzoda, "'Rubaru' va intikhobot," *Javononi Tojikiston*, January 24, 1990; Nurali Davlat, "Ru ba ru: Shohidi, peshnihod, va padrudi noma"lum," *Ozodagon*, November 30, 2015.

<sup>120</sup> Davlat, "Tohiri Abdujabbor." On Rastokhez's campaigning, see Mirbobo Mirrahim and Kholnazar Muhabbat, "Buzurgy ba aql ast, na ba sol," *Javononi Tojikiston*, January 24, 1990.

<sup>121</sup> Press Gruppa KGB TSSR, "Kto est' kto," *Komsomolets Tadjikistana*, October 17, 1989.

concerned about the state of the Tajik language and culture. On the other hand, there were the masses of recent graduates, workers, and young people increasingly frustrated about the state of the economy, growing deficits, and decreasing economic opportunities.<sup>122</sup> Together, these concerns were molded into a wider critique of the ways that Tajikistan had developed, in Rastokhez's reading, often for the greater benefit of the urban few or Moscow bureaucrats than for the average citizen of the Tajik SSR.

Even as "national rebirth" and development were often couched in linguistic or cultural terms, however, there was little doubt about the underlying cause of social frustration: the worsening state of the economy was on everyone's mind. The Tajik SSR had moved into official recession in 1989, and both deficits of basic goods and unemployment were growing. Day to day life was getting increasingly difficult for the citizens of Tajikistan, a fact reflected in Rastokhez's frequent reference to the need for economic reform. Its first major foray into policymaking, in fact, was a long proposal for increased market liberalization, published in January 1990.<sup>123</sup> The state-promoted campaign of glasnost and democratization had brought many new issues to the fore of the public consciousness – the Tajik language, Soviet development practices, the divide between city and village – but for most people the most immediate concern remained the shrinking economy. A contemporary survey amongst young people in Dushanbe, for example, found that the most common frustration voiced about perestroika was the growth of deficits and the "goods mafia" (*torgovaia mafia*).<sup>124</sup> Given the opportunity to voice criticism, the residents of the Tajik SSR were just as likely to criticize the state's own reforms as anything else.

With economic reform directed from Moscow, however, there was little either the leaders of the Tajik SSR or the new class of politicians could factually do to

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<sup>122</sup> On the different groups supporting Rastokhez, see Iu.G. Kul'chik, S.I. Rumiantsev, N.G. Chicherina, "Analyticheskii obzor – grazhdanskoe dvizhenie v Tadjikistane," in *Grazhdanskoe dvizhenie v Tadjikistane*, ed. N.G. Chicherina (Moscow: TsIMO 1990), 35; Alimov and Saidov, *Natsional'nyi vopros*, 75.

<sup>123</sup> Tohiri Abdujabbor, Kh. Azimov, Kh. Muhabbatov, J. Mahmadshev, A. Murodov, Kh. Homidov, H. Habibulloev, B. Maqsudov, A. Kholiqzoda, M. Saidov, Sh. Yusupov, and M. Mirrahimov, "Loihai al'ternativy: Kontseptsii mustaqilii iqtisodii Jumhurii Shuravii Sotsialistii Tojikiston," *Javononi Tojikiston*, January 31, 1990.

<sup>124</sup> Alimov and Saidov, *Natsional'nyi vopros*, 87. The "goods mafia" most likely refers the corrupt practice whereby goods were unofficially sold on the side, rather than through official stores. These practices skyrocketed after the introduction of cooperatives in 1988.

improve the situation. Instead, they watched helplessly as the economy collapsed. The most worrying issue was unemployment, which was always growing.<sup>125</sup> As Alimamad Niyozmamadov, the First Secretary of the Panj District Party Committee, complained in late 1989, “there is a great surplus of labor power (*rabochaia sila*): healthy young men are literally wandering around unemployed.” Nobody, Niyozmamadov worried, seemed to be able to find them jobs, even in the cooperative sector.<sup>126</sup> The idea that unemployment was central to the growing social frustration seen in the Tajik press and amongst informal groups was accepted by most everyone in Dushanbe: it was publically acknowledged by both Mahkamov and the Rastokhez associate Abdunaby Sattorov during the later half of 1989.<sup>127</sup>

Unable to improve the underlying economic situation, Mahkamov and the leadership of the CPT were also hamstrung in their ability to stop others from using the economic collapse against them. Gorbachev, Yakovlev, Yelstin, and others in the Central Committee in Moscow had made it clear that glasnost, democratization, and new “national movements” needed to be promoted – and should not be undermined. As a result, by the end of 1989 an entirely new class of politicians, such as Mirrahim and Abdujabbor, had emerged in Dushanbe, promoted by Moscow benefactors and protected by the aura of “glasnost.” These politicians took advantage of the economic collapse and growing discontent to mobilize supporters for their vision of “national rebirth” and economic sovereignty. Paralleling contemporary events in many other republics and repeating the same pattern observed in Moscow over the previous two years, the growth of glasnost, “democracy,” and multi-party politics in Dushanbe had, all the same, turned out to be anything but popularly driven.

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<sup>125</sup> By late 1989, unemployment in Tajikistan had reached at least 28%, if not more; it would reach 30% by late 1990. See RGASPI f. 17, op. 160, d. 1672, l. 3.

<sup>126</sup> Tiuchkalov, “Glubinka – poniatie sotsial’noe,” 101.

<sup>127</sup> For Mahkamov’s comments, see “O zadachakh partiinykh i komsomol’skikh organizatsii respubliky po povysheniiu roli molodezhi v perestroike i demokratizatsii obshchestvennoi zhizni. Doklad K.M. Makhkamova,” *Komsomolets Tadzhikistana*, September 27, 1989; for Sattorov’s – “Molodezhnaia politika. Kakoi ei byt’?” *Komsomolets Tadzhikistana*, July 07, 1989.

## Chapter Six

### The Harsh Reckoning of February 1990

On March 1, 1990 the poetess and member of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR Gulrukhsor Safieva handed an emotional handwritten note to Mikhail Gorbachev. She begged him to investigate the riots that had shaken her home earlier that month:

*"I ask for a word! ... The cause of the events in Dushanbe has not been investigated!!! I ask, as I promised the 20,000 gathered at a demonstration in Dushanbe, promised to bring to your attention the state of our people – poverty, destitution, social injustice, unemployment – and to ask: what led people to such extremes?"<sup>1</sup>*

Safieva went on to request that the Supreme Soviet establish an independent commission to investigate the riots, reminding Gorbachev that "the people await your decision and a political appraisal of what has happened in Dushanbe." Shortly before giving her note to Gorbachev, Safieva herself had heard these same demands on February 18, when a crowd of tens of thousands gathered outside of a movie theater a few kilometers from the center of Dushanbe and called for an investigation into the causes of the ongoing demonstrations.<sup>2</sup> Strangely, the people in the crowd seemed to be demanding from Moscow an answer as to why they had been gathering on the streets of Dushanbe all week. Neither the crowd itself, nor those addressing it on February 18, including Safieva and other representatives of the central and republican Soviet governments, had been able to provide a clear answer to this question. In fact, from the very beginning of the riots on February 11 there had been a great deal of confusion amongst all involved about exactly why tens of thousands of primarily young men were flooding the streets of Dushanbe and demanding political change. That unexpected and bloody riots had engulfed the previously calm capital of the Tajik SSR was undeniable, but no one seemed able to explain just how and why this might have occurred.

#### **I. Riots in Need of An Explanation**

The "events" that Safieva referred to were a week of demonstrations and rioting that rocked the Tajik capital from February 11 to 18, 1990. Over the course of this

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<sup>1</sup> Safieva to Gorbachev, undated, GARF, f. 9654, op. 6, d. 176, l. 30; read by Gorbachev March 2 following a meeting with Safieva on March 1. On the meeting, see Sh. Shabdolov, ed., *Rasshirennii XVIII plenum TsK Kompartii Tadzhikistana. 03 Marta 1990 g. Stenograficheskii ochet* (Dushanbe: Irfon, 1990), 74.

<sup>2</sup> See: N. Sautin, "Snova mitingi," *Pravda*, February 20, 1990; Buri Karimov, *Krovavii fevral': pravda i lozh'* (Moscow: Intransdornauka, 2015), 312-329.

week at least 25 people were killed, shops were looted, citizens assaulted, and tens of millions of rubles in damages incurred. Nominally started over rumors about the provision of scarce housing to Armenian refugees from Baku, Azerbaijan (the site of bloody ethnic riots the month before), the demonstrations quickly grew out of hand, nearly overthrowing the government of the Tajik SSR and requiring martial law to restore order. For a republic that had barely embraced the new politics of perestroika and glasnost, this was a violent awakening. It also challenged all sorts of conceptions about Tajikistan as a peaceful and reliable outpost of Soviet calm away from the travails of Moscow politicking. It seemed almost impossible for violence to have erupted quite so quickly and unexpectedly in Dushanbe, a confusion that was only strengthened by the rioters' apparent perplexity about their own motivations.

This lack of clarity quickly gave rise to a number of varied and contradictory explanations and narratives. In Tajikistan, where the February 1990 events remain to this day extremely controversial, arguments have from the beginning tended to cluster around two mutually exclusive accounts. On the one hand, the national movement Rastokhez is accused of organizing the riots in an attempt to wrench power from the leaders of the Tajik SSR.<sup>3</sup> Those more sympathetic to Rastokhez, on the other hand, have blamed either the political leaders of the republic or the republican KGB for organizing the riots to discredit Rastokhez prior to elections to the Tajik Supreme Soviet on February 25, 1990.<sup>4</sup> Both narratives stress the idea that the riots were "organized" by someone from the outside: the idea that the events could have been spontaneous or uncontrolled is frequently dismissed outright.

Western accounts of the February events have also clustered around these two narratives, with some writers accusing the republican authorities or the KGB of

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<sup>3</sup> Viktor Ponomarov, "Kolokola nadezhdy," *Pravda*, May 10-11, 1990; E. Saidov, "Neskol'ko shtrikhov k fevral'iu," *Komsomolets Tadjikistana*, July 15, 1990; "Voqeahoi fevral: tahqiq idoma dorad," *Tojikistoni Shuravy*, January 15, 1991; Sulkhiya Kobilova, *Fevral'skie sobytiia 1990 g. v Tadjikistane* (Khudjand: Tadjhikskii gosudarstvennii universitet prava, biznesa, i politiki, 2007); Sultanov. *Demontazh SSSR*.

<sup>4</sup> Sh. Shabdolov, ed., *Vneocherednoi 17-ii plenum TsK Kompartii Tadjikistana, 15-16 fevralya 1990 g (stenograficheskii otchet)* (Dushanbe: Irfon, 1990), 48; K. Myalo and P. Goncharov, "Vspyshka v gorakh," *Novoe vremia* 9 (1990); A. Ganelin, "Esli pozhary zazhigayut," *Komsomol'skaia pravda*, March 28, 1990; Dustov, *Zakhm bar*, 29-30; Nurali Davlatov, "Krovavii fevral' 1990 goda," *Asia-Plus*, February 19, 2015.

organizing the riots for their own benefit.<sup>5</sup> While Western authors tend not to directly accuse Rastokhez of controlling the riots, an alternative body of work has stressed the growth of “national sentiment” in Tajikistan prior to 1990, pointing to the long-held frustrations of the titular national majority as the ultimate cause of the riots. In this reading of events, the February 1990 riots were a minor episode in the broader “rise” of nationalism engendered by glasnost and democratization during perestroika.<sup>6</sup> Here, Rastokhez is seen as symptomatic, rather than causal: its visibility during the riots was simply a demonstration of nationalism’s growth and ultimate cause of the February riots.<sup>7</sup>

Throughout all of these accounts, however, the actual mobilized are often lost in the discussion of the mobilizers and mobilizing factors. The motivations that drove tens of thousands of Tajik Soviet citizens into the streets in February 1990 – as well as those motivations’ potential legitimacy – are rarely, if ever, discussed. Demonstrators are infrequently quoted or cited, and instead reference is made to political conspiracies, backdoor deals, or background processes of nationalist growth occurring across the USSR as a whole. As a result, the dominant narratives avoid extended discussion of either the rioters’ motivations or the immediate background to the riots: the period of economic downturn and collapse of 1988-1989. As this dissertation has argued, however, the growth of new political parties and movements in the Tajik SSR was directly related to the economic downturn of the perestroika era, with unemployment leading the way in driving social and political frustrations. By turning to a detailed analysis of the February 1990 events, as well as the motivations and frustrations felt by its participants, this chapter demonstrates that the riots in Dushanbe were also driven, more than anything else, by the slow crumbling of the Soviet economic and social order experienced during perestroika. While Rastokhez was visible and present during the riots, and some Tajik politicians tried to take advantage of the chaos for their own benefit, neither group had been in any position to organize or coordinate the riots. Instead, the

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<sup>5</sup> Ro’i, “Central Asian Riots”; Juraeva, “Ethnic Conflict”; Stephane Dudoignon, “Political Parties and Forces in Tajikistan, 1989-1993,” in *Tajikistan: The Trials of Independence*, eds. Mohammad-Reza Djalili, Frederic Grare, and Shirin Akiner (London: Curzon, 1998), 57-58; Nourzhanov and Bleuer, *Tajikistan*, 188; Parviz Mullojanov, “February 1990 Riots in Tajikistan: Who Was Behind the Scenes? Review of the Main Existing Versions,” *Cahiers d’Asie centrale* 26 (2016): 249.

<sup>6</sup> Akbarzadeh, “Why did nationalism fail”; Akiner, “Melting Pot, Salad Bowl”; Glenn, *The Soviet Legacy*; Collins, *Clan Politics*; Markowitz, “How Master Frames.”

<sup>7</sup> See Nassim Javad and Shahrbanou Tadjbaksh, *Tajikistan: A Forgotten Civil War* (London: Minority Rights Group, 1995), 11; Atkin, “Tajikistan: reform, reaction.”



February 1990 events in Dushanbe are best understood as an uncontrolled expression of public frustration that quickly got out of hand: a cry of rage and violence against an order that was failing to live up to its many promises.

## II. The Unfolding Unrest

The first week of February 1990 gave little indication of the violence to come. Dushanbe was shrouded in winter rains and overhung clouds, a dour but calm backdrop to the growing but unrealized frustrations of perestroika-era Tajikistan. In the Tajik capital and regions, campaigning was in full swing for the upcoming elections to the Supreme Soviet of the Tajik SSR. Meetings were frequently held in Dushanbe, where opposition politicians, such as Rastokhez's Tohir Abdujabbor, up for election in Asht District in the Tajik north, would declaim the republic's poor management. On Friday, January 26, for example, Abdujabbor promoted his campaign by demonstrating in front of the headquarters of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Tajikistan (CPT), a sprawling neocolonial building of red brick at Dushanbe's then central intersection. Abdujabbor called for "the government of Tajikistan to be cleaned of swindlers, wreckers, traitors, and mafiosos,"<sup>8</sup> and he and his supporters held signs with the words of the famous Pakistani poet Muhammad Iqbal: "Awake from your deep sleep!"<sup>9</sup> Yet this demonstration, like those before it, ended quietly and without apparent impact on either the Central Committee of the CPT or Tajik society as a whole.

By February 8, however, something had begun to change. That evening Maqsud Ikromov, the mayor of Dushanbe, spoke on Tajik republican television about a group of Armenian refugees who had recently arrived in Tajikistan from the ethnic violence in Baku.<sup>10</sup> Ikromov was light on the particulars, and perhaps it was the modesty of the Tajik SSR's actions that led him to avoid detail: a total of only 47 refugees, including 29 Armenians, had arrived in Dushanbe during the last week of January, most of whom ended up staying with friends or relatives.<sup>11</sup> The Tajik government, as part of a broader Soviet program of support for refugees from the

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<sup>8</sup> Nasreddinov, *Tarkish*, 95, 108; also D. Nazriev and I. Sattorov, eds., *Respublika Tadjikistan: istoriia nezavisimosti. God 1991-i (khronika sobytii)* (Dushanbe: AK-94, 2002), 206.

<sup>9</sup> Pers. "Az khobi garon khez!" See: Nasreddinov, *Tarkish*, 78-79.

<sup>10</sup> Mirrahim, *Khamtabaqi Shodmon Iusupov*, 44.

<sup>11</sup> Protokol shestnadsatogo plenuma TsK Kompartii Tadjikistana ot 14.02.1990 goda, RGASPI f. 17, op. 159, d. 1695, l. 3; Spravka "O rabote komissii prezidiuma Verkhovnogo Soveta Tadjikskoi SSR po rassledovaniu obstoiatel'stv, svyazannykh s sobytiiami v gor. Dushanbe 12-14 fevralia," August 1990, TsGART f. 297, op. 41, d. 279, l. 149.

conflict in Baku, had distributed on average 30 rubles to each of the arriving Armenians, spending a grand total of 930 rubles on the whole operation.<sup>12</sup> There was probably little reason for further comment.

For many of those watching, however, this news apparently came as a shock – and one that would grow enormously through rumor and misinformation. By the afternoon of Friday, February 9, the information had spread throughout Dushanbe and its surrounding suburbs, quickly growing in size and importance.<sup>13</sup> In the public imagination, the 29 Armenians became thousands; the unstated amount of support became state-provided apartments. At Friday prayers across the capital, where many people had gathered at noon, groups of local men became incensed: the idea that outsiders would be provided with apartments when tens of thousands of Dushanbe residents had been on waiting lists for years was galling. Given the constantly worsening economic conditions, increasing unemployment, and shrinking opportunities for Soviet Tajik citizens, government support for outsiders was all the more infuriating.

Angry talk led to action, and on Friday afternoon a large crowd had gathered in front of the Central Committee building. Amongst others, Abdujabbor again railed against the government of Tajikistan for their lack of support to the Tajik people, once more reading the poetry of Iqbal while others “gave voice to their own protests.”<sup>14</sup> As during previous demonstrations, however, the leaders of the Tajik SSR paid little attention, and they continued to ignore the angry voices on the street on February 10, even as demands were made to meet with the First Secretary of the CPT, Kahhor Mahkamov.<sup>15</sup> In contrast to earlier events, however, the lack of any official response only made things worse: rumors continued to swirl and push people into the streets. Matters came to a head on the rainy afternoon of Sunday, February 11, when a group of about 150 men gathered on Lenin Square in front of

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<sup>12</sup> The refugees that arrived in Dushanbe represented a tiny portion of the tens of thousands of Armenians from Baku for whom the USSR was attempting to find housing and support; the majority was in Moscow and the RSFSR. In late January 1990 a federal program was developed to redistribute the refugees and 29 arrived in Dushanbe. See Zapiska Ryzhkova Doguzhievu, V.Kh., Shcherbakovu, V.I., Kriuchkovu, V.A., Vlasovu, A.V., Bakatinu, V.V. ot 26.01.1990, GARF f. 5446, op. 162, d. 180, ll. 52-56.

<sup>13</sup> “Voqeahoi fevral: tahqiq idoma dorad”; also Karimov, *Krovavii fevral*, 92; Shabdolov, *Vneocherednoi 17-ii plenum TsK*, 49.

<sup>14</sup> Nasreddinov, *Tarkish*, 67; Karimov, *Krovavii fevral*, 94.

<sup>15</sup> Nasreddinov, *Tarkish*, 68.

the Supreme Soviet of the Tajik Soviet Socialist Republic. Those gathered continued to express anger about the “thousands” of Armenian refugees who were supposedly receiving apartments from the republican government. Finding no one at work in the Supreme Soviet building on the chilly Sunday, the crowd moved north along Lenin Avenue to the Central Committee building. By the mid-afternoon the crowd had grown into massive protest of more than 2,500 people, who made loud and repeated demands to remove the refugees from the republic.<sup>16</sup>

The shouting eventually reached its mark, and a delegation from the Communist Party of Tajikistan, including Mahkamov and the CPT’s second secretary, Gennady Veselkov, emerged from the Central Committee building to speak with the crowd. As Veselkov later reported, “for the next three and a half hours, during which time the demonstration continued near the main entrance of the Central Committee, we conducted a dialogue with the hundreds and hundreds of people” gathered there.<sup>17</sup> Mahkamov and Veselkov assured the crowd that the rumors circulating in Dushanbe since February 8 about thousands of Armenian refugees were completely baseless. As they told the crowd, an internal government review had already verified that all of 47 of the refugees from Baku were staying with relatives and not a single apartment had been provided to them.<sup>18</sup>

Mahkamov also assured the crowd that the Central Committee was very aware of the concerns expressed about the lack of housing in Dushanbe and the perceived injustice of its provision to outsiders. He further promised an “investigation” into the rumours about refugees to be conducted together with the Chief Mufti (*Qazy Kalon*) of Tajik Muslims, Hoji Akbar Turajonzoda, meant to play the role of an impartial authority figure. Accounts differ about when the results of this investigation would be made public: some later argued that Mahkamov had promised to speak with the crowd again in 24 hours, while Mahkamov insisted that he had made no such promise, and that the crowd itself decided on this deadline.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> *Soobshchenie Komissii prezidiuma Verkhovnogo Soveta Tadzhikskoi SSR po proverke sobytii 12-14 fevralia 1990 g. v g. Dushanbe*, Personal Archive of Buri Karimov, Moscow, Russian Federation.

<sup>17</sup> RGASPI f. 17, op. 159, d. 1695, l. 3.

<sup>18</sup> *Soobshchenie Komissii prezidiuma Verkhovnogo Soveta Tadzhikskoi*.

<sup>19</sup> For the claim that Mahkamov failed to follow through on his promise, see Davlatov, “Krovavii fevral’.” For Mahkamov’s version of events, see RGASPI f. 17, op. 159, d. 1695, l. 11.

One way or another, the promise of an investigation calmed the crowd, and by the early evening the demonstration was over.

During the evening of February 11, efforts were made to identify refugees who had recently arrived from the Caucasus and verify that no one had received support inappropriately. In the process, numerous Armenian families that had lived in Dushanbe for decades were inadvertently scared into leaving: by the early morning hours of February 12 all of the 47 individuals that had recently arrived in Dushanbe had rushed to the airport and departed the republic, together with many of their relatives from the city. Turajonzoda accompanied the fleeing refugees and their relatives to the airport, and later reported to the Central Committee that a total of 223 individuals had left the republic in this way overnight.<sup>20</sup> Over the next few days, Dushanbe's Armenian residents would continue to flee the perceived threat: by February 15, a total of 1390 had left the republic.<sup>21</sup> With tensions on the rise, Mahkamov and the Central Committee of the CPT also took no chances. An appeal was made that evening to the Ministry of the Interior of the USSR for military support, and by the morning of February 12<sup>th</sup> both a battalion of 150 internal force troops (*vnutrennie voiska*) and a small group of commandoes from the KGB's "Alpha" unit had arrived and been deployed around the Central Committee building in Dushanbe.<sup>22</sup>

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The morning of February 12 initially returned Dushanbe to its normal routine: there were no protesters on the streets, and government workers went about their normal business. "After lunch I went to the [Council of Ministers] meeting," the then Chairman of the Tajik Gosplan, Buri Karimov, later wrote, "which started at about two thirty." Just a few minutes after the meeting began, though, Karimov and the other ministers were startled by a call from the Central Committee building.<sup>23</sup> They were shocked by what they heard. As if one cue at 14:45, hundreds and then

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<sup>20</sup> RGASPI f. 17, op. 159, d. 1695, l. 4.

<sup>21</sup> This included at least 614 permanent residents. See TsGART f. 297, op. 41, d. 279, l. 149.

<sup>22</sup> RGASPI f. 17, op. 159, d. 1695, l. 11. As of February 11<sup>th</sup> all of Tajikistan's own internal force (*vnutrennie voiska*) units had been sent to keep order in Baku. The 150 internal force soldiers and unclear number of KGB commandoes that arrived on the morning of the 12<sup>th</sup> would have been the main force, together with the Dushanbe police (*militsiia*), guarding the Central Committee building. On the Alpha commandoes, see: Karimov, *Krovavii fevral'*, 135.

<sup>23</sup> Buri Karimov, *Kurbonii duzakhma* (Dushanbe: Oriyonob, 1992), 24.

thousands of young men had begun to arrive on the square in front of the Central Committee building. They immediately demanded to speak with Mahkamov, who had also been at the Council of Ministers of meeting and only learned of the events from the frantic phone call. While Mahkamov sought a path from the Council of Ministers building to the Central Committee headquarters, other members of the Central Committee tirelessly explained to those gathered that all of the very few refugees had already left the republic and that their concerns had been taken into consideration. This seemed to have little effect on the crowd, which immediately changed its demands to Mahkamov's resignation, refused to leave the square, and began to burn buses and loot the surrounding stores.<sup>24</sup> Even Mahkamov's own arrival on the square had little effect, and attempts continued to be made by the crowd to storm the Central Committee building and surrounding ministries. The authorities called in the police and internal force troops and in the ensuing chaos shots were fired, leading to the deaths of both demonstrators and witnesses in nearby buildings.<sup>25</sup> The use of lethal force further enraged the crowd, which continued to riot on the central square and combat the internal ministry forces who had now been restricted to using non-lethal means of crowd control, including truncheons, blank ammunition, and tear gas. Only by nine that evening was the crowd finally dispersed.<sup>26</sup>

By the time a state of emergency and curfew were declared at ten p.m., nine people had died, more than 70 had been wounded (46 with bullet wounds) and 46 shops and restaurants, two movie theaters, and a bank had all been looted or damaged. The Ministry of Land Reclamation and Water Management, which was located next to the Central Committee building, had also been set on fire.<sup>27</sup> The night passed without incident, but it was anyone's guess as to what would happen the next morning.<sup>28</sup>

Initially, February 13 appeared to repeat the events of the previous day. The morning was quiet, and the Tajik Council of Ministers took the opportunity to discuss what had happened. Unfortunately, the discussions went nowhere: "In

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<sup>24</sup> Karimov, *Krovavii fevral'*, 95.

<sup>25</sup> "Voqeahoi fevral: tahqiq idoma dorad."

<sup>26</sup> RGASPI f. 17, op. 159, d. 1695, l. 4.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.; TsGART f. 297, op. 41, d. 279, ll. 150-152; Karimov, *Krovavii fevral'*, 137.

<sup>28</sup> RGASPI f. 17, op. 159, d. 159, l. 5.

truth no one could provide an explanation as to the conditions and cause of the events.”<sup>29</sup> By midday, moreover, large groups of young men began to again gather on the streets around the Central Committee, clash with the internal force troops stationed there, and loot surrounding stores and restaurants. Violence also spread outwards from the Central Committee, with deaths, wounds, and looting reported in multiple outlying areas of Dushanbe (in fact, all of the deaths reported on February 13 occurred far away from the center of the riots).<sup>30</sup> The number of demonstrators in front the of Central Committee equivalently increased throughout the day, and by the late afternoon a crowd of tens of thousands had pushed the troops back to the Central Committee building itself, having occupied the whole of the square in front of it.<sup>31</sup> (By some accounts, the crowd on February 13 numbered up to 50,000.)<sup>32</sup>

In contrast to previous days, the crowd also began to organize itself and its demands. At some point during the afternoon a group coalesced around the Rastokhez members A. Kholikov and Kh. Khabibuloev, who began to put together a list of initially 17 writers and intellectuals (including the leaders of Rastokhez) who would represent the demonstrators as a “People’s Committee.”<sup>33</sup> Many of these individuals, however, were not initially in the crowd: Mirbobo Mirrahim, for example, arrived on the square on the evening of the 13<sup>th</sup>, and the Rastokhez chairman Abdujabbor and poet Bozor Sobir only showed up to join the committee on the 14<sup>th</sup>.<sup>34</sup> Those present, however, wrote up a list of their chosen representatives and then decided that the committee should be led by Buri Karimov, the Chairman of the Tajik Gosplan, who was also not present in the crowd. Egged on by the nascent People’s Committee, the demonstrators crafted a

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<sup>29</sup> Karimov, *Kurbonii duzakhma*, 29.

<sup>30</sup> TsGART f. 297, op. 41, d. 279, ll. 153-154.

<sup>31</sup> RGASPI f. 17, op. 159, d. 159, l. 5.

<sup>32</sup> Karimov, *Krovavii fevral’*, 119.

<sup>33</sup> “Voqeahoi fevral: tahqiq idoma dorad”; also Nazriev and Sattorov, *Respublika Tadjikistan*, 209; Nasreddinov, *Tarkish*, 100. The committee elected to negotiate with the republican leadership was referred to in Russian as the “People’s Committee” (*narodnii komitet*), “Provisional Committee” (*vremennii komitet*), and “Committee of 17” (*komitet-17*). The term “People’s Committee” has been chosen here, as it most accurately portrays the original Tajik title (*shuravy mardumi*). For a comparison of the titles in Russian and Tajik and a list of members, see *Protokol sovmestnogo zasedaniia rukovodstva respubliki s narodnym komitetom, izbrannym mitinguiushchim narodom ot 14 fevralia 1990 g.* and *Protokoli masvaratii bainitarafaini rohbariyati jumkhuri va sozmoni mardumi az 14.02.1990*, Personal Archive of Buri Karimov, Moscow, Russian Federation.

<sup>34</sup> For Mirrahim’s whereabouts on February 13-14, see Mirrahim, *Hamtabaqi Shodmon Yusupov*, 45-47; for Abdujabbor’s, see Shabdolov, *Vneocherednoi 17-ii plenum TsK*, 30-31; for Sobir’s, see Bozor Sobir, *Chashmi safedor* (Dushanbe: Adolat, 1991), 103.

series of large posters and began to shout “We trust Karimov!” and “We want Karimov as First Secretary!”<sup>35</sup>

Having learned of the crowd's demands, Karimov travelled to the Central Committee building, where Mahkamov and Izotullo Khayoev, the Chairman of the Tajik Council of Ministers, asked him to try to calm down those present.<sup>36</sup> Exiting the main entrance of the Central Committee building directly onto a crowd of tens of thousands, Karimov reported feeling an overwhelming sense of fear. “But then I pulled myself together,” he recalled, “and began to speak,” exhorting the crowd to remain calm through poetry:

*The mockery of youth may be strong,  
Yet in pride the eyes of arrogance are blind.  
With bravado a nail is hammered in today,  
Tomorrow it will be taken up by plyers.*<sup>37</sup>

Once the crowd had begun to calm down, Karimov was handed a piece of paper with the “People’s Committee” and his name added on top.<sup>38</sup> While accusations would later be made that Karimov insisted on leading the committee himself,<sup>39</sup> what is clear no matter the case, and what Karimov has also explicitly admitted, is that from this moment on he too began to act in “political opposition” to the leadership of the Tajik SSR. Just like the members of the crowd he now represented, he also began to demand their resignation.<sup>40</sup>

Negotiations between the committee and the government began that evening. In addition to demanding Mahkamov’s resignation from his post as First Secretary, Karimov and the “People’s Committee” also insisted on Khayoev’s resignation as the Chairman of the Council of Ministers and Ghoibnazar Pallaev’s from his post as the Chairman of the Presidium of the republic’s Supreme Soviet.<sup>41</sup> Although they did not give in to these demands, Mahkamov, Khayoev, and Pallaev did agree to release a number of detainees who had been arrested the day before.<sup>42</sup> It was

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<sup>35</sup> Karimov, *Krovavii fevral’*, 115-116; 118.

<sup>36</sup> Karimov, *Kurbonii duzakhma*, 37-38; Nasreddinov, *Tarkish*, 72-73.

<sup>37</sup> Karimov, *Kurbonii duzakhma*, 38-39.

<sup>38</sup> Karimov, *Krovavii fevral’*, 122-123; Nasreddinov, *Tarkish*, 74.

<sup>39</sup> Shabdolov, *Vneocherednoi 17-ii plenum TsK*, 126-127.

<sup>40</sup> Karimov, *Krovavii fevral’*, 122.

<sup>41</sup> Shabdolov, *Vneocherednoi 17-ii plenum TsK*, 41.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

hoped that this would help to calm the crowd that continued to riot and loot throughout that evening, but the attempt proved fruitless. Disturbances continued on the central square until eight p.m. that evening, and once the demonstrators were pushed back they simply began to commit violence elsewhere in the city.<sup>43</sup> In an attempt to somehow stave off the ongoing rioting, Mahkamov, Khayoev, Pallaev, together with the deputy chairman of the Council of Ministers, Otakhon Latifi, appealed to the citizens of Dushanbe on republican television, calling for the formation of self-defense committees to patrol and protect the capital's outlying neighborhoods.<sup>44</sup>

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Mahkamov also took the opportunity to appeal to Moscow for additional help, and by the morning of February 14 a delegation headed by Boris Pugo, the Chairman of the Party Control Committee of the Communist Party of the USSR and candidate member of the CPSU Politburo, had arrived in Dushanbe.<sup>45</sup> Not insignificantly, another contingent of 1068 internal force troops also arrived that same morning from the Turkestan Military Command.<sup>46</sup> Pugo and his team helped to organize a special plenary meeting of the Central Committee of the CPT at which any idea of resignation was rejected. At the same time, the plenary meeting showed clear division in the ranks of the Central Committee, as political camps formed around Mahkamov and Karimov. The meeting also failed to lower tensions in the city: by the afternoon on the 14<sup>th</sup> another enormous crowd of approximately 30,000 people had gathered at the Central Committee building to demand Mahkamov, Khayoev, and Pallaev's resignations and the right to conduct a religious funeral service (*janoza*) on the square for those who had died on the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> in the course of the riots. Neither demand was acceded to, and the demonstrators continued their pattern of rioting, lighting buildings on fire, and combatting the government forces on the street.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> RGASPI f. 17, op. 159, d. 1695, l. 5; Karimov, *Krovavii fevral'*, 131.

<sup>44</sup> RGASPI f. 17, op. 159, d. 1695, l. 5.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., l. 26.

<sup>46</sup> *Soobshchenie Komissii prezidiuma*, 29.

<sup>47</sup> Shabdolov, *Vneocherednoi 17-ii plenum TsK*, 11-12.



At the same time, negotiations continued between the People's Committee and the republican leadership, now with Pugo's additional participation. Beginning in the mid-afternoon, these negotiations continued for six tense hours, during which time the committee continually demanded the resignation of the leadership and unidentified individuals ran into the meeting room and made threats about what would happen in case they didn't resign: blood would be spilled; buildings would be burned; the republic would collapse.<sup>48</sup> At around nine PM, the three leaders of the republic finally agreed to quit their posts and a memorandum of agreement was signed between them and the People's Committee in which Mahkamov, Khayoev, and Pallaev all agreed to resign in "accordance with existent legislation."<sup>49</sup> Acting as Moscow's representative, Pugo gave his consent to the agreement, after which point the three leaders left the Central Committee building.<sup>50</sup> Bozor Sobir was sent by the People's Committee to the republican television station to record an announcement about the resignation, which was supposed to run immediately after the news show "The Times" (*Vaqt*) at around ten p.m.<sup>51</sup> As a result of bureaucratic intransigence at the station, however, the announcement was only run after midnight.<sup>52</sup>

Yet the resignation of the Tajik leadership did not bring about the immediate calm that had been promised by the People's Committee. Demonstrations on the central square continued throughout and after the negotiations, and even after the announcement of the leadership's resignation was played late at night on television disorder and rioting continued in many parts of Dushanbe. By the end of February 14<sup>th</sup>, a further five people had died, including at least three at the hands of internal force soldiers responding to reports of unrest.<sup>53</sup>

Immediately after the negotiations ended, moreover, the two sides had begun positioning themselves for further conflict. Karimov returned to his Gosplan office with a group of his supporters, including the Minister of Higher Education of the Tajik SSR, Nur Tabarov, the editor of the newspaper *Tojikistoni soveti*, Mazhabsho

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid, 41.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, 12; *Protokol sovместnogo zasedaniia*.

<sup>50</sup> Karimov, *Kurbonii duzakhma*, 55.

<sup>51</sup> Karimov, *Kurbonii duzakhma*, 60; Nasreddinov, *Tarkish*, 117-118; Sobir, *Chashmi safedor*, 105; "Voqeahoi fevral: tahqiq idoma dorad."

<sup>52</sup> Karimov, *Kurbonii duzakhma*, 60.

<sup>53</sup> TsGART f. 297, op. 41, d. 279, ll. 38-39; 153-154.

Muhabbatshoev, and the Central Committee secretary Nurullo Khuvaidullaev to discuss how to proceed. Tabarov also began to call in others. Maqsud Ikromov, the chairman of the city council of Dushanbe, was invited, apparently to win him over to Karimov's side, but he left quickly thereafter. Those remaining agreed that Karimov should become acting chairman of the Council of Ministers in Khayoev's stead, and Usman Usmanov, deputy chairman of the Supreme Soviet Presidium, under the authority of which such decisions were officially made, was called in for additional discussions.<sup>54</sup> After Usmanov left, A. Khabibov, the director of the political section of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Tajik SSR, was sent to deliver a copy of the resignation agreement and information about Karimov's plans to Pugo and Mamadayoz Navjuvonov, the Minister of Internal Affairs of the Tajik SSR.<sup>55</sup> Given Pugo's (and thus Moscow's) earlier approval of Karimov's accession to a leadership post, it seemed as though everything was settled.<sup>56</sup> "We have won," the Rastokhez members and Karimov backers Olim Zafarbekov and Muhammad Haitov were heard to have cheered late at night in the Central Committee building – "We have made a revolution. Now we will start cleaning out this Committee."<sup>57</sup>

Unbeknownst to Karimov and his supporters, though, political gears were still in motion – and would soon be turned against them. As soon as Usmanov and Ikromov had left Karimov's office, they had made phone calls to the republican and party leadership, setting in motion a series of countermoves. Ikromov spoke with Jamshed Karimov, the chairman of the Dushanbe Party Committee, who called together a late night meeting of his Committee that condemned the resignation and demanded another Special Party Plenary Meeting the next day.<sup>58</sup> Usmanov, for his part, called Pallaev, who categorically refused to initiate proceedings designating Karimov as acting Chairman of the Council of Ministers. Pallaev also appears to have spoken late into the night with Mahkamov, Khayoev, and others, insofar as by the morning of the 15<sup>th</sup> the supporters of the republican leadership were able to destroy a good portion of that day's *Tojikistoni sovety*, the newspaper that had carried the resignation announcement, and hold an extended closed-door session

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<sup>54</sup> Shabdolov, *Vneocherednoi 17-ii plenum TsK*, 100, 119; Karimov, *Krovavii fevral'*, 157-158.

<sup>55</sup> RGASPI f. 17, op. 159, d. 1711, l. 18.

<sup>56</sup> On Pugo's acceptance of Karimov's candidacy, see Sobir, *Chashmi safedor*, 104-105.

<sup>57</sup> Nasreddinov, *Tarkish*, 118.

<sup>58</sup> TadzhiKTa, "Sobranie aktiva," *Kommunist Tadzhikistana*, February 16, 1990.

of the CPT Bureau.<sup>59</sup> A sizeable further contingent of internal force troops had also arrived in the city overnight, leaving the center of Dushanbe looking like a strictly controlled war zone on the morning of February 15<sup>th</sup>.<sup>60</sup>

Over the next two days, an emotional Special Plenary Session of the Central Committee of the Tajik Communist Party was held together with the Dushanbe City Committee and the People's Committee. The CPT accused Karimov and the People's Committee of attempting a *coup d'état*, while the latter continued to call for the republican leadership's resignation, accuse Mahkamov and the local security services of instigating the riots, and threaten further instability in the case that the leadership would renege on its promise to resign. After two days of arguments, however, the Central Committee rejected Mahkamov, Pallaev, and Khayoev's resignations, expressed faith in Mahkamov's leadership, and initiated an investigation into Karimov and his supporters' attempts to wrest power from the leadership on February 13-14.<sup>61</sup> Outside on the street demonstrations continued, but on a much more limited basis: on February 15 only one large meeting was held on Lenin Square, and on the 16<sup>th</sup> none were registered.<sup>62</sup> The self-defense committees controlled the outer neighborhoods, the Internal Ministry troops continued to patrol the center, and the republican KGB and police force worked overtime to detain the criminal elements that had emerged to take advantage of the chaotic situation.<sup>63</sup>

Yet two days remained before the end of the demonstrations. Saturday, February 17<sup>th</sup> passed quietly and without event; Pugo and the republican leadership met with groups of citizens and religious leaders and worked to convince people that the chaos was over.<sup>64</sup> On Sunday the 18<sup>th</sup>, however, a massive crowd began to gather on Lenin Square in front of the Supreme Soviet. While the people gathering

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<sup>59</sup> For the published announcement, see: Sh. Masriddin and I. Kholnazar, "Dar borai iste"foi rohbariyat," *Tojikistoni soveti*, February 15, 1990.

<sup>60</sup> *Soobshchenie Komissii prezidiuma*, 29.

<sup>61</sup> Shabdolov, *Vneocherednoi 17-ii plenum TsK*, 130-132. Since the memorandum of agreement between the People's Committee and Mahkamov, Pallaev, and Khayoev indicated that the three would "resign in accordance with existent legislation," their resignations would have had to be confirmed by the Communist Party and/or Supreme Soviet. Since the Communist Party rejected the resignations, it was clear that the Supreme Soviet would also do so; the resignations were thus considered void.

<sup>62</sup> Shabdolov, *Vneocherednoi 17-ii plenum TsK*, 12.

<sup>63</sup> Petkel', *Zhiznennie ukhaby*, 145-147.

<sup>64</sup> Karimov, *Krovavii fevral'*, 228.

seemed not to have any one leader or clear direction, their arrival on Lenin Square was anything but accidental: during the Special Plenary Session of the Central Committee on February 15, committee member A. Ochilov had threatened a repeat demonstration on the 18<sup>th</sup> if the republican leadership were to renege on their resignations.<sup>65</sup> Since the center of Dushanbe was now under strict military control, however, the demonstrators were quickly pushed off of Lenin Avenue and moved west along Putovskii Avenue, coming to a halt near the recently built movie theater "Kohi Borbad."

The crowd of tens of thousands (estimates varied between 15 and 50 thousand<sup>66</sup>) then spent the afternoon loudly protesting the behavior of the republican leadership during the week's riots and demanding an investigation into the cause of the unrest. Politicians, including Buri Karimov, Davlat Khudonazarov and Gulrukhsor Safieva, as well as the deputy chairman of the Council of Ministers of the Tajik SSR, Georgii Koshlakov, all assured the crowd that an investigation would be held on the highest levels.<sup>67</sup> The idea that an investigation would be conducted by an independent commission on the Union level seemed to calm the crowd, which began to break up at around five p.m. that evening.<sup>68</sup> This proved the end of the riots and demonstrations, as after February 18<sup>th</sup> no further crowds gathered in the city and Dushanbe's citizens began to take stock of the damage done to their home. Over the course of the week 25 people had been killed, more than 700 wounded (including 106 with bullet wounds), and more than 32 million rubles in damage done to shops, restaurants, and city infrastructure.<sup>69</sup>

### **III. Unfinished Investigations and Unclear Explanations**

Safieva kept her word to the crowd on February 18. She and Khudonazarov met with Gorbachev on March 1, and they exhorted him to initiate a Union-level investigation into the February riots in Dushanbe. Gorbachev promised to "closely

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<sup>65</sup> Shabdolov, *Vneocherednoi 17-ii plenum TsK*, 32-33.

<sup>66</sup> Buri Karimov has claimed 50,000 at this meeting (Karimov, *Krovavii fevral'*, 313), whereas Safieva said 20,000 (GARF f. 9654, op. 6, d. 176, l. 30). Official sources estimated 15,000 ("Sostoial'sia miting," *Kommunist Tadjikistana*, February 19, 1990).

<sup>67</sup> Karimov, *Krovavii fevral'*, 314-322;

<sup>68</sup> Jum'a Davlat, "Girdihamoi," *Javononi Tojikiston*, February 20, 1990.

<sup>69</sup> "Press-tsentr: ofitsial'noe soobshchenie," *Kommunist Tadjikistana*, February 21, 1990; "Ruikhati kurboniyoni fojia," *Sukhan*, February 15, 1991; Shabdolov, *Rasshirenniy XVIII plenum*, 29; TsGART f. 297, op. 41, d. 279, l. 152.

follow the situation in the republic,” but quickly seemed to lose interest.<sup>70</sup> During the third Congress of Peoples’ Deputies, held just two weeks later on March 12-15, 1990, the February events were mentioned only once, and only by Kahhor Mahkamov.<sup>71</sup> No further comment was given, and no calls were made for an independent Supreme Soviet commission, such had investigated violence in Tblisi, Georgia the year before.<sup>72</sup> Instead, nearly all of Gorbachev’s and the Congress’s attention was given over to establishing the post of “President of the USSR,” a position to which Gorbachev was quickly elected in an uncontested election.

While the desired Supreme Soviet commission was never created, three other investigations into the February events were conducted. Respectively overseen by the Central Committee of the CPT in Dushanbe, the General Prosecutor’s Office (*Genprokuratura*) of the Tajik SSR, and the Tajik Supreme Soviet, all three investigations failed to issue conclusive reports. Instead, all three made contradictory and suggestive statements about the causes and instigators of the riots while leaving many questions unanswered and uninvestigated. At the same time, all of the investigations ended up suggesting a similar nationalistic framing for the February events, which was both politically advantageous and unsupported by much available evidence.

The tone was set by the “Party investigation” initiated by the Central Committee of the CPT immediately after the end of the riots. The February riots, the CPT argued, had been a “planned action with the goal of destabilizing the situation in the capital and republic” and ultimately “stopping the elections” scheduled for later in the month.<sup>73</sup> The Party investigation also established that Buri Karimov and his supporters had taken advantage of the chaos to attempt an illegal *coup d’etat*. As a result, Karimov and Nur Tabarov were removed from the Central Committee of the CPT, kicked out of the Communist Party entirely, and fired from their respective

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<sup>70</sup> Shabdolov, *Rasshirenniy XVIII plenum*, 74.

<sup>71</sup> *Vneocherednoi tretii S’ezd narodnykh deputatov SSSR, 12-15 marta 1990 g.: Stenograficheskiy otchet* (Moscow: Izdanie Verkhovnogo Soveta SSSR, 1990), v.1, 129-133.

<sup>72</sup> A committee sent by the Council of Nationalities’ Commission for the Social and Economic Development of Union and Autonomous Republics, National Districts, and Oblasts that visited Tajikistan in August 1990 included Khudonazarov and Z.S Gulova, two Congress of People’s Deputies members from Tajikistan. In the committee’s report, these two deputies took the opportunity to discuss the February riots. Neither the committee, nor its trip to Tajikistan, however, was connected to an investigation into the riots. See: GARF f.5446, op. 163, d. 180, ll. 6-9.

<sup>73</sup> Shabdolov, *Rasshirenniy XVIII plenum*, 74; 38.

positions as Chairman of the Tajik Gosplan and Minister of Education for the Tajik SSR. Others who had appeared to support Karimov, including the editor of *Tojikistoni sovety*, Mazhabsho Muhabbatshoev, and the head of the legal department of the Central Committee of the CPT, Nurullo Khuvaidulloev, were also removed from the Central Committee.<sup>74</sup> At the same time, however, the Party investigation remained vague about the underlying causes of the riots. Instead of pointing to particular social or economic causes or actual organizers, it instead hinted at “destructive forces” and “provocateurs,” which had “manipulated” the people into taking to the streets.<sup>75</sup> The CPT also emphasized that these “destructive forces” had used growing economic and social frustration to fan anti-Armenian and nationalistic feelings in Dushanbe.<sup>76</sup>

The next two investigations followed similar, if contradictory, trajectories. The enquiry conducted by the Tajik General Prosecutor’s Office, led by the young prosecutor Solidzhon Juraev, issued a single preliminary statement a year after the riots. While this report confirmed the CPT’s earlier assessment that the riots had not been entirely spontaneous, Juraev and the General Prosecutor’s Office did not blame Karimov for the violence, going as far as to drop all charges against him in February 1991.<sup>77</sup> Instead, as they highlighted in their report, the prosecutors believed that “the leaders of the organization “Rastokhez” and reactionary elements of the Islamic clergy” had “built up tension in interethnic relations and...brought about the massive disorder.”<sup>78</sup> Finally, the investigation conducted by a commission answering to the Tajik Supreme Soviet also managed to muddy the waters. Officially chaired by the metalworker Siroj Mikhtodzhev, the Commission was factually dominated by its deputy chairman, Safarali Kenjaev, a well-known lawyer who had been elected to the Supreme Soviet of the Tajik SSR in February 1990. In its one report to the Supreme Soviet of the Tajik SSR in September 1990, this commission largely focused on the known facts of the events – how many killed, how much damage done – and made vague speculation about

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<sup>74</sup> RGASPI f. 17, op. 159, d. 1706, ll. 2-3; 27-28.

<sup>75</sup> Shabdolov, *Rasshirenniy XVIII plenum*, 9; 15-16

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 86-87.

<sup>77</sup> Nurali Davlatov and Marat Mamadshoev, “Kto stoial za fevral’skimi sobytiiami?” *Asia-Plus*, February 10, 2012; Letter No. 18/100 ud-90 from 26.02.1991, sent from the General Prosecutor’s Office of the Tajik SSR to Buri Bachabekovich Karimov, Personal Archive of Buri Karimov, Moscow, Russian Federation.

<sup>78</sup> “Voqeahoi fevral: tahqiq idoma dorad.”

the causes of the events instead of providing clear explanation.<sup>79</sup> Arguing that Rastokhez's fault for the violence remained "unproven," the commission instead pointed fingers at supposed "Azerbaijani emissaries" who had arrived in Dushanbe to stir up nationalism and the KGB that had failed to stop them.<sup>80</sup>

Even as the three investigations disagreed on most points, they had found common ground on two central arguments: first, that the February riots were not spontaneous, but rather premeditated; and second, that they were meant to fan the flames of nationalism. Both of these assumptions carried clear political advantage. In the face of ongoing confusion over the cause of the riots, it was valuable to have someone to blame, rather than consider difficult questions of social and economic degradation. By framing the debate in nationalist terms, moreover, both sides of the debate – those accusing Rastokhez and those accusing state structures – were able to paint the February events in an appropriately negative shade of political paint understandable to everyone in the Soviet Union. Throughout the history of the USSR, excess nationalist sentiment had been seen as a threat to the multiethnic and multinational state, a discourse that had only grown during the unrest of the Gorbachev years. At a Politburo meeting about the ongoing conflict in the Nargorno-Karabakh region of Azerbaijan in February 1988, moreover, Gorbachev took the story further, arguing that these conflicts were latent to the very structure of the national-republican divisions in the USSR. Built into the framework of the state designed by Stalin, Gorbachev said, they could pop up anywhere.<sup>81</sup> In the Tajik SSR, for example, a conflict over water use during the summer of 1989 along the Tajik-Kyrgyz border had also been overwhelmingly interpreted in the Soviet press as an example of growing "nationalist sentiment" along republican borders.<sup>82</sup> It was thus doubly advantageous to place the February events squarely into this interpretation: their nationalist organizers, whoever they were, were clearly unacceptable politically, and the explosion of violence could be at the same time

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<sup>79</sup> "Zakliuchenie komissii Prezidiuma VS Tadzhikskoi SSR po proverke sobytii 12-14 fevralia 1990 goda v gorode Dushanbe," *Kommunist Tadzhikistana*, September 2, 1990; *Soobshchenie Komissii prezidiuma*.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Stenogramma zasedaniia Politbiuro ot 29 fevralia 1988 g. The Russian Archives Project, State Archive Service of Russia / Hoover Institution, f. 89, r. 1003, 89/42/18.

<sup>82</sup> Madeleine Reeves, "'And Our Words Must be Constructive!' On the Discordances of Glasnost' in the Central Asian Press at a Time of Conflict," *Cahiers d'Asie centrale* 26 (2016).

conveniently attributed to actions taken in the late 1920s, rather than any immediate effects from perestroika.

Given the lack of clear explanation provided by the investigations, it may be of little surprise that no consensus emerged after the February 1990 riots. Instead, two alternative but parallel narratives about the riots emerged: either that the events of February 1990 had been organized and led by Rastokhez on the back of growing nationalist and religious fervor, or, alternatively, that the February riots had been intentionally orchestrated by the security services to discredit Rastokhez and other “nationalists.” Hints of both of these views were present from the first week following the events, and have remained the dominant versions in Tajikistan ever since.<sup>83</sup> These narratives also tended to align well with the Western discourse about “nationalism’s rise” in peripheral Soviet republics, a narrative that would only gain in scope after the collapse of the USSR in 1991, coming to play an important role as one of the presumed causes of the collapse.<sup>84</sup> Yet on all counts – from the role of nationalism to the “organization” of the riots by either Rastokhez or the KGB – there is in fact good cause to doubt the dominant discourse that has developed since 1990.

First of all, there was simply little nationalism to fan in Dushanbe in February 1990. Sociological research had for years established relatively low levels of nationalist sentiment in the city and Tajik SSR as a whole: according one survey of university students conducted in early 1989, for example, Tajik students were less likely than their peers in other republics to view the local “interethnic situation” as a source of strife. The same study also found that only 34% of Tajik students were in favor of “republican citizenship,” a key marker at the time for nominally nationalist ambitions.<sup>85</sup> Having analyzed the development of national movements in Tajikistan, a group of researchers from the Soviet Academy of Sciences’ Institute of

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<sup>83</sup> On March 3, 1990, for example, Mahkamov hinted at national sentiment as one of the factors underlying the riots (Shabdolov, *Rasshirenniy 18-ii Plenum TsK*, 12). Numerous publications from 1990 and 1991 made much stronger claims against Rastokhez and “nationalists.” See: Ponomarov, “Kolokola nadezhdy”; Saidov, “Ne kol’ko shtrikhov;” also RGASPI f. 17, op. 159, d. 1710, ll. 16-17; GARF f. 5446, op. 162, d. 260, l. 57. Accusations against the KGB or other unseen organizers also started in 1990: Shabdolov, *Vnecherednoi 17-ii plenum TsK*, 48; Myalo and Goncharov, “Vspyshka v gorakh”; Ganelin, “Esli pozhar.”

<sup>84</sup> On nationalism and the collapse of the USSR, see: Beissinger, *Nationalist Mobilization*; Suny, *The Revenge of the Past*; Walker, *Dissolution*.

<sup>85</sup> L.G. Novikov and A.A. Rotman, “Stereotipy istoricheskogo samosoznaniia,” *Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniia* 15, no. 5 (1989): 5, 11.



Ethnology and Anthropology concluded in 1990 that “in Tajikistan the concept of a ‘national idea’ has not taken on particular political importance.”<sup>86</sup> Nor did the riots themselves demonstrate a particularly nationalistic character. Early frustrations over the apartments supposedly provided to outsider Armenians quickly bled into broader complaints about the state of the economy and Tajik society.<sup>87</sup> There was also no evidence that the participants in the February 1990 violence targeted the non-Tajik population of Dushanbe in any organized fashion. Violence was indiscriminate and spread amongst the city’s many nationalities. Rumors circulated about Russians being targeted during the riots, but no witnesses or evidence could ever be produced.<sup>88</sup>

As far as the supposed instigators of the February riots are concerned, it is exceedingly doubtful that Rastokhez could have organized the initial demonstrations or mobilized the rioters to the streets. First of all, although Rastokhez inarguably tried to take advantage of the riots once they started, nearly all of its leaders were out of Dushanbe during the first days of violence and looting. In addition, accusations made against Rastokhez generally failed to consider the actual level of support – or even name recognition – the organization had prior to the February events. Available survey data show that only after February 1990 had the majority of Dushanbe residents even heard of Rastokhez – and that most of those surveyed knew nothing more about the movement other than its participation in the riots.<sup>89</sup> While Rastokhez had developed a notable reputation amongst segments of the national elite in Dushanbe, its mass support amongst the populace was as of February 1990 at best limited.<sup>90</sup> Even after the riots mass support for the movement was limited, as evidenced by its poor showing in the late February 1990 elections to the Supreme Soviet of the Tajik SSR. The movement had fielded 50 candidates, and predicted that it would win 20-30% of the Soviet’s seats.<sup>91</sup> In reality, though, only two of their members – Abdujabborov and Sobir –

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<sup>86</sup> Kul’chik, Rumyanstev, and Chicherina, “Analiticheskii obzor,” 33.

<sup>87</sup> For a more thorough treatment of nationalism’s supposed “rise” in perestroika-era Tajikistan, see Scarborough, “(Over)determining social disorder.”

<sup>88</sup> In fact, the majority of those killed and wounded during the riots were Tajik in what was a then majority non-Tajik city. See: “Ruikhati kurboniyoni fojia”; *Soobshchenie Komissii prezidiuma*.

<sup>89</sup> Alimov and Saidov, *Natsional’nii vopros*, 64-65.

<sup>90</sup> S. Olimova and M. Olimov, “Obrazovannyi klass v perepetiakh XX v.,” *Vostok* 5 (1991): 101.

<sup>91</sup> Mullojanov, “February 1990 Riots in Tajikistan,” 248.

managed to be elected. The Supreme Soviet remained dominated by established members of the CPT.

Ultimately, Rastokhez simply did it not have the organizational wherewithal necessary to draft, organize, and mobilize thousands of people to the streets of Dushanbe. Its organizational structure was ad-hoc and informal, and later claims to contrary, it was not yet in contact with more established political parties that could have assisted it.<sup>92</sup> As the Tajik historian Gholib Ghoibov has summarized:

*“In truth, Rastokhez at that time was not a powerful organization...Rastokhez fell into the ready porridge (oshi taiyor) of the February events, for the preparation of which it simply did not have sufficient resources.”*<sup>93</sup>

Given Rastokhez’s limited social clout, there was also accordingly little reason for the Tajik authorities to be concerned with its supposed “threat” to their power before the riots. Much like the population as a whole, leading members of the Tajik SSR’s government have reported only learning about Rastokhez following the February riots.<sup>94</sup> In addition, during a Republican-wide seminar held by the CPT for “ideological workers on coordination with independent social organizations” only a week before the riots on February 2, no mention was made of Rastokhez whatsoever.<sup>95</sup> There was also good reason to doubt the movement’s claims about the number of parliament seats they were likely to win in the February elections. Having only fielded 50 candidates in elections for the 230-member Supreme Soviet, reaching 20% of parliamentary deputies would have required winning all 50 of these seats – a very unlikely feat. Reaching 30% would have been arithmetically impossible. There seemed little reason for the republican authorities to be concerned – and certainly no cause for anyone to organize riots simply to blacken the name of a political organization without mass support outside of Dushanbe. Most importantly, moreover, there is absolutely no actual evidence linking the KGB

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<sup>92</sup> It has been suggested (cf. Kobilova, *Fevral'skie sobytiia*; Atkin, “Tajikistan: reform, reaction, and civil war”) that Rastokhez received organizational support from the Sajudis movement of Lithuania, which in 1990 was much more established. However, Rastokhez had no contact with the Sajudis until August 1990, when its deputy chairman, Mirbobo Mirrahim, was introduced to the movement by the student organization Sogdiana in Moscow (Interview with Parviz Mullojanov, January 2017).

<sup>93</sup> Ghoibov, *Ta’rikhi Khatlon*, 669.

<sup>94</sup> Nasreddinov, *Tarkish*, 67.

<sup>95</sup> RGASPI f. 17, op. 159, d. 1709, l. 10.

or any state structure to the riots' planning or organization – only increasingly self-referential and unverifiable rumors.<sup>96</sup>

#### **IV. Reconsidering the Results of February 1990**

It may be tempting to search for “plots” and organizers behind the February events – and it certainly was tempting for those surveying the wreckage, who began to blame all sorts of “instigators,” KGB agents, “Azerbaijani emissaries,” and Rastokhez members. While a continuing source of debate, especially in modern Tajikistan, where “conspiracies” are said to lurk behind most political events, there is in fact almost no evidence to support the claims made against either Rastokhez or the KGB. Both the republican government and the new “national movement” were equally surprised by the riots when they came, and both tried in their own ways to take political advantage of them. That all involved began to blame each other for the “rising nationalism” in the republic, however, does not a convincing explanation make for one or another side’s culpability. It is also only part of the story. There were tens of thousands of men (and women) on the streets during the February riots. While these individuals were mobilized and directed in part by politicians, they were also reacting to immediate socio-political forces and protesting against the established leaders of the Tajik SSR. Given the state of the economy in February 1990, moreover, they in fact had good cause to do so.

As this dissertation has established, by February 1990 Tajik Soviet citizens had numerous reasons to protest. Unemployment had continued to grow in 1989 and 1990, much as it had in years past; the economic reforms of perestroika had increasingly led to delivery and product shortages in the Tajik SSR, consequently lowering production figures and overall economic growth; average wages were dropping for those who retained their jobs, even as inflation grew. In the social sphere, housing construction, one of the most pressing issues facing both Dushanbe and the republic as a whole, had by the late 1980s fallen far behind its planning schedule. Facts and rumors of corruption were also spreading together with the

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<sup>96</sup> Most versions suggest that one or another state official (usually Mahkamov, Khayoev, Pallaev, or the Tajik KGB Chairman, Petkel) met with the leaders of Dushanbe’s organized crime syndicates at the “Penguin” restaurant on February 9. The only evidence for this rumor, however, had been provided by a waitress from the restaurant who later admitted to making up the testimony (Karimov, *Krovavii fevral’*, 477). This admission is then often confusingly interpreted as evidence that the KGB organized everything (i.e., Davlatov, “Krovavii fevral”). This confusion has led even some proponents of this argument to admit that “there just isn’t evidence to support it.” See Interview with Nurali Davlat, Dushanbe, February 2015.

growth of cooperatives and private business activity, as certain state and party figures seemed to gain in wealth while the average Tajik citizen only saw the cost of living go up month after month. Perestroika had brought about the general deterioration of the Tajik economy and the provision of many of the goods and services that Tajik Soviet citizens had grown accustomed to take for granted.

By early 1990, moreover, the political winds of glasnost had finally reached Dushanbe, with Rastokhez and other new political organizations creating an outlet for many individuals' frustrations with the state of the Tajik SSR (see Chapter Five). Newspapers had begun to expand their critical coverage of events in Tajikistan, and the republican leadership was increasingly challenged on many questions of economic, cultural, and linguistic development. Finally, the election campaign leading up to the February 1990 elections to the Tajik SSR's Supreme Soviet had instigated a new era of open political struggle in the republic, with public declamations of corruption made on the street with no obvious consequences. Thus the citizens of the Tajik SSR would have found themselves in a situation where their livelihoods were degrading just at the very moment when they were encouraged to speak out against the state. It was in this social tinderbox that the riots of February 1990 occurred in Dushanbe, and it is important to remember that, nationalism aside, these factors would have most immediately motivated the protestors demanding the resignation of Mahkamov and the other leaders of the Tajik SSR.

Rather than nationalist uprising orchestrated by the KGB, Rastokhez, or others, the February riots are much better understood as a largely undirected explosion of frustration against political leaders who were seen as no longer guaranteeing the basic social functions the Soviet system had long provided. Those who joined the demonstrations appear to have been drawn from the groups most affected by the economic collapse of perestroika. This included those whose standards of living had dropped most notably over the past five years of perestroika: students living in Dushanbe without adequate housing, newly unemployed workers, kolkhoz members without clear employment, and many others.<sup>97</sup> Perestroika and glasnost had upturned many of Soviet citizens' basic assumptions, not least of all about the

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<sup>97</sup> On the heterogeneity of the protesters, see: RGASPI f. 17, op. 159, d. 1710, ll. 16-17.

guarantee of employment. Amongst the most primary rights, the Soviet state had long held in theory and practice, was the right to a job, and in the full employment system of the USSR the idea of becoming unemployed was almost nonsense.<sup>98</sup> By 1990, however, it was eminently possible: workers were losing their jobs and not being rehired. Many of those on Dushanbe's streets in February 1990 had found themselves in this shocking position, newly and inexplicably unable to find work and to support their families.<sup>99</sup> With no jobs and the previous assumption of slow but steady economic improvement turned on its head, there may have seemed no alternative but to try to affect change through street protest.

Behind closed doors, the leaders of the Tajik SSR were also willing to admit that unemployment and other unresolved economic issues may have lain at the heart of the February events. During the CPT plenum held on February 16, the second secretary Veselkov, for example, quietly noted that "the main problems are well known," pointing out that "the impossibility of getting a job was the deciding factor for many young people."<sup>100</sup> Kenjaev also repeated the sentiment at a late February Supreme Soviet session.<sup>101</sup> In many ways, moreover, the leaders of the Tajik SSR should not have been surprised by the links between unemployment and social disorder. As Mahkamov and Pallaev had been warned at a meeting with the organization "Oshkoro" in Kulyab in mid-1989: "Young men and women have been left entirely without work, and because of their unemployment they have begun to head down the wrong path." This could only lead to violence, the Oshkoro activist Qurbon Zardakov said, "and we are heading for a harsh reckoning."<sup>102</sup> Nor was this a pattern unique to Tajikistan. Over the previous two years unemployed young men in Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Armenia, and Azerbaijan had all begun to commit chaotic and semi-organized violence; over the next two years the same reckoning would be felt in Georgia, the North Caucasus, and elsewhere. Pointing to perestroika's economic downturn could not win the leaders of the Tajik SSR any political points in ways that an "orchestrated" nationalist uprising might. But it remained the most salient explanation for the explosion of violence in February 1990.

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<sup>98</sup> On the Soviet State's dedication to full employment, see Granick, *Job Rights*.

<sup>99</sup> Sautin, "Snova mitingi."

<sup>100</sup> Shabdolov, *Vneocherednoi 17-ii plenum TsK*, 58.

<sup>101</sup> Nasreddinov, *Tarkish*, 77.

<sup>102</sup> Quoted in Nasreddinov, *Tarkish*, 58.

None of this is to suggest that nationalist ideas, Rastokhez, or the KGB had no role at all in the development and course of the February riots. Notwithstanding its claims to the contrary,<sup>103</sup> Rastokhez was clearly involved in the early protests on February 9 that grew out of hand in later days, and its members played central roles in the People's Committee that came to represent the crowd during the riots. Moreover, the sense of economic frustration expressed by those participating in the riots, many of whom lived and worked in Dushanbe's Tajik-majority suburbs, would have been directed towards the better living standards in the "Russified" city of Dushanbe.<sup>104</sup> As a result, economic concerns may have easily blended into ethnic ones, and some of the seeming nationalist lines of the conflict may be visible here as well. Finally, the republican KGB and the reinforcements sent from Moscow showed clear incompetence on February 12 when they fired on the demonstrators, undoubtedly leading to greater violence and damage than would have otherwise been the case. Yet none of these factors were on their own sufficient to fully initiate the February events or mobilize the tens of thousands of protestors into the streets. Underlying the explosion of mass protest and violence was the fundamental downturn of the economy in the Tajik SSR from 1987-1990, a downturn that caught everyone unaware and contradicted basic assumptions about where life was going. When a small demonstration grew out of hand, it gave Tajik citizens an opportunity to voice their growing anger and desperation at politicians who seemed unable to return the republic to its previous prosperity. As tensions rose, shots were fired and demonstrators killed; and everyone, from looters and criminals to ambitious opposition figures and government politicians, began to try to use the chaos to their own personal advantage.

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<sup>103</sup> From the beginning of the riots members of Rastokhez attempted to disassociate themselves from the events in which were taking part. On February 12 they sent a letter to Mahkamov backdated to February 9 denying all responsibility for events that they could not have known about on the 9<sup>th</sup>, such as the demonstrations of February 11 and 12 (RGASPI f. 17, op. 159, d. 1695, l. 8). A letter was also sent sometime between February 13 and 19 by Rastokhez-associated members of the People's Committee to the Congress of People's Deputies in Moscow claiming that the Tajik intelligentsia had nothing to do with the riots (GARF f. 9654, op. 6, d. 176, ll. 21-22).

<sup>104</sup> On Dushanbe as a "Russified" city, see: Kalinovsky, *Laboratory of Socialist Development*; Alimov and Saidov, *Natsional'nii vopros*, 39.

As the dust settled on February events and their investigations, Dushanbe and the rest of Tajikistan seemed to return to its prior state of normalcy. Karimov and his supporters' attempt to take advantage of the riots and apparent political vacuum to pursue their own political ambitions had failed, and they had all been removed from positions of authority. Minor bickering could be heard in closed CPT meetings – as late as April 1990 some CPT members grouched that “Karimov had been right”<sup>105</sup> – but from the outside there were few signs of strife. Mahkamov, Khayoev and Pallaev had retained their posts at the head of the CPT and Tajik SSR; a compliant and Communist-dominated Supreme Soviet had been elected; and Moscow, through Pugo's intervention, had seemed to reaffirm its support for the current leadership of the republic.

In many ways, however, this sense of calm was misleading. As Chapter Seven will show, power struggles remained inside the CPT, with Mahkamov challenging Pallaev and others for increasing political power over the course of 1990. The lack of social unrest, moreover, was held in place by a state of emergency and curfew that, having been declared on February 14, were kept in place until June 27, 1991. And the state of the economy, the most important arbiter in keeping the population calm and happy, was only collapsing even further. As the final chapters of this thesis will demonstrate, the Tajik state's capacity to provide for its citizens in terms of jobs, social guarantees and even basic goods would only decrease over the next two years. Unfortunately, these were issues that were basically unresolvable on the republican level – based on Union-wide economics changes, they would have required investment and support from the Soviet center for any chance of successful resolution.

Even Moscow's support, moreover, was now suspect. Although Gorbachev and the Central Committee in Moscow remained the final instantiation of authority for everyone in Tajikistan, for its part Moscow appeared at best ambivalent about events in Dushanbe. February 1990 made it clear that Gorbachev and the other members of the Central Committee were essentially willing to accept anyone in the position of First Secretary of the CPT or Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the Tajik SSR, as long as that individual were to keep order in the republic. When the

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<sup>105</sup> RGASPI f. 17, op. 159, d. 1710, l. 66.

scales had seemed tipped towards Buri Karimov and his supporters, Moscow's envoy, Boris Pugo, was inclined to support him – and as soon as they tipped back to Mahkamov and Khayoev, so too did Pugo's (and Moscow's) loyalties.<sup>106</sup> Nor did Gorbachev, Nikolai Ryzhkov, or any other leading figure in Moscow ever respond to the appeals made by Safieva, Khudonazarov, or other Tajik politicians for further investigations into the riots. When he was interviewed about the February events a few years later in 1993, moreover, Gorbachev demonstrated only the vaguest of recollections about the riots, suggesting only that they had been caused by “clan conflicts” and arguing that such matters were the “internal affairs of the Tajik people.”<sup>107</sup> While Tajik politicians clearly could not imagine a political system without Moscow as the final and sacrosanct arbiter of political power, Moscow seemed to be paying less and less attention to the fate of its southern republic.

More than anything else, the February events brought to the fore the underlying struggles in late Soviet Tajik society, both between rival politicians and between those who had benefitted from perestroika and those who had lost. This “harsh reckoning” opened up space for a public political contest that had long been held behind closed doors. Open debate split the floor of the Tajik Supreme Soviet, with deputies criticizing both each other and the policies of the Tajik Soviet government. Citizens' complaints about the state of the economy, Tajik society, or their interactions with state bodies, moreover, were increasingly voiced in public and were increasingly jumped upon by ambitious political figures. Buri Karimov was simply the first Tajik politician to publically stake his career on a wave of populist anger; he would hardly be the last of the local demagogues and populists to contribute to the disintegration of the Soviet state. In the years following the February events, political parties began to be founded, further elections were challenged, and political struggle over time became an entrenched part of life in the Tajik capital.

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<sup>106</sup> Karimov, *Krovavii fevral'*, 208-209.

<sup>107</sup> Interview with Mikhail S. Gorbachev, *Charoghi Ruz* no. 2 (71), 1993.



## Chapter Seven

### The “Calm” Before the Storm: March 1990-July 1991

A modernist façade of round green windows behind a screen of high trees on Lenin Avenue, the hotel “Oktiabrskaiia” had long represented the height of comfort for Dushanbe’s elites. Belonging to the Central Committee of the Tajik Communist Party (CPT), this hotel was where visiting politicians, party workers, and government functionaries stayed when in town from Moscow or elsewhere in the USSR. In February 1991, however, it was quietly sold to the cooperative firm “EKOMPT.” Only founded a few weeks earlier, EKOMPT had in fact just bought from the Central Committee this hotel, the next-door House of Political Enlightenment, the Institute of Political Studies further down Lenin Avenue, and 36 automobiles. As a government investigation would later reveal, EKOMPT’s source of revenue was the very same Central Committee: immediately prior to its purchases, the CPT had transferred the cooperative firm 21.9 million rubles. Of these, 12.4 million were used to fund EKOMPT’s buying spree in Dushanbe. The rest went towards founding a network of local representative offices across Tajikistan that were involved in purchasing and reselling consumer goods at high markups.<sup>1</sup>

In many ways this backroom deal represented the state of the Soviet economy in both Dushanbe and elsewhere in the USSR by early 1991. Just like the majority of other cooperatives, EKOMPT had been founded “under” (*pri*) a Soviet institution, in this case the Central Committee of the CPT. As in many other cases, EKOMPT received expensive capital goods not only effectively for free, but in a way that allowed it to convert funds into cash and pay back its founding institution in hard currency. Like many other cooperatives, moreover, EKOMPT quickly declared itself independent of its founders and justified its actions on the new rules of the economy. In the hands of the Central Committee, after all, these buildings “had not provided income.”<sup>2</sup> The new dictates of the market required that capital be put to use to make a profit.

In addition, the sale of the “Oktiabrskaiia” Hotel to EKOMPT, involving the Central Committee and millions of rubles of Party income, was demonstrative of the

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<sup>1</sup> RGASPI f. 17, op. 160, d. 1672, ll. 6-7; TsGART f. 297, op. 40, d. 1274, l. 43, 48, 277-283.

<sup>2</sup> Stenogramma Zasedaniia Prezidiuma Verkhovnogo Soveta Respubliki Tadjikistan, 21.12.1991, TsGART f. 297, op. 40, d. 1274, l. 46.

changed political environment of 1991. On the one hand, it showed the complicity of the CPT in the economic burgling of the Soviet state, much as the Party across the USSR was beginning to take advantage of its position economically.<sup>3</sup> In Dushanbe, as much as anywhere in the USSR, politicians were inimically and immediately involved in the founding of cooperatives and the corrupt shuffling of assets, a process that locally became known in Tajik as *shu''badabozi* or "bamboozlement."<sup>4</sup> Yet the attempt was still made to avoid publicity, even as the activities of many cooperatives and the general economic downturn had become well known. The sale of the hotel and other objects to EKOMPT was only revealed after August 1991; it required an extensive government investigation to reveal the Central Committee's true role in the process. Even as the Party was effectively admitting that the old order was collapsing by selling off assets it was just the same attempting to keep up appearances. Whatever else was happening in the economy and Soviet society, the CPT repeated throughout 1990 and 1991, the Party remained in control. Politics was continuing like normal.

This basic contradiction between the reality of disintegrating economic and social order and the placid image of Tajik society presented by the Kahhor Mahkamov and the other leaders of the CPT would come to define much of the period between February 1990 and August 1991. To some degree, of course, life in Dushanbe in February 1991 was much more stable than a year prior. The city's streets were free of political demonstrations, and no major violent events had been reported throughout the republic over the year following the 1990 riots. There seemed an attempt to return to life as it was before. Football games were held as scheduled; new holidays, including the Tajik Language Day set for July 22, were celebrated; and the citizens of the Tajik SSR went about their lives as best they could. A façade of normalcy had returned.

Yet this was at best a thin façade – and one ultimately held in place through the demonstration of force and threat of renewed violence. Although the majority of residents of Dushanbe and other cities in Tajikistan continued to go to work, many of them were being laid off, while others began to see large pay discrepancies

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<sup>3</sup> On this process elsewhere in the USSR, see Solnick, *Stealing the State*; Hough, *Democratization and Revolution*; Handelman, *Comrade Criminal*.

<sup>4</sup> Nurali Davlat, "Maqsud Ikromov: Gharqshudai girdobi bozihoi siyosiy," *Ozodagon*, April 26, 2017.

appear between workers and managers. The new rules of Soviet “free enterprise” meant that resources were increasingly siphoned out of enterprises, given to cooperatives, and exported abroad for hard currency. The cost of living was rising, as was inflation, and basic standards of living were being ground away. Although political parties were not openly protesting on the streets of Dushanbe, moreover, they were being founded and meeting behind closed doors. All of these potential sources of strife were only kept at bay by the state of emergency and 10 p.m. curfew that had been declared during the February 1990 riots – measures that remained in force in Dushanbe until July 1991.<sup>5</sup> Even football games had to receive special permission from the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Tajik SSR before they could be held.<sup>6</sup> All other large gatherings were by default banned.

While Mahkamov and the Party leadership presented a façade of normalcy, the floor was falling out from underneath them. The economy was now openly collapsing, and multi-party politics was out in the open, with a number of important parties founded and beginning to operate between February 1990 and July 1991. These developments occurred largely behind closed doors, off of the streets, and away from the public gaze, but this hardly limited their impact on the structure and form of events to come in the fall of 1991 and thereafter. In fact, although the eighteen months before the August 1991 Putsch tend to be treated (if at all) as a historical dead-zone – a period in which little of note occurred in Dushanbe – this period in fact defined the very shape of the political order to come. From the parties that burst into the political arena in late August 1991 to the demonstrators filling Dushanbe’s squares on these parties’ call – everyone was reacting to the overall deteriorating economic and political situation that had developed over the past year and half.

## **I. Political Struggles in Moscow and Dushanbe**

Winters in Tajikistan’s valleys tend to be relatively short and mild; they are quickly and summarily overturned each March by spring’s gentle but insistent arrival. For the citizens of the Tajik SSR, the sunlight of March 1990 was a welcome break from

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<sup>5</sup> On the state of emergency and curfew in Dushanbe, see GARF f. 9654, op. 10, d. 59, l.102; TsGART f. 297, op. 40, d. 1231, l. 31; d. 1239, ll. 340,345. On its final removal in July 1991, see Postanovlenie Prezidiuma Verkhovnogo Soveta Tadzhikskoi SSR No. 443 “Ob otmene chrezvychainogo polozheniia na territorii gor. Dushanbe,” 27.06.1991, TsGART f. 297, op. 40, d. 1248, l. 22.

<sup>6</sup> TsGART f. 297, op. 41, d. 278, ll, 78-79.

the cold drizzles of February, which had followed the riots from start to finish. The elections of late February 1990, shadowed by the riots, had also seemed dampened by the time they occurred. They did, however, return a sense of Party-controlled order, insofar as representatives of the CPT managed to secure an overwhelming majority (216 out of 230 representatives) in the Supreme Soviet. Even increased emphasis on “democratization,” and the encouraging of multiple candidates in most districts had not cost the CPT its support.<sup>7</sup> The majority of the Supreme Soviet were those who already “had drunk from the cup of high office,” one of the few oppositional candidates, Asliddin Sohibnazar, groused; the old guard retained and was strengthening its position of power.<sup>8</sup> Yet just as the political elite of Dushanbe was catching its breath, events were already apace in Moscow that would come to shake up the already fragile order reestablished in Dushanbe after February.

On March 12, 1990, the Extraordinary Third Congress of People’s Deputies gathered in the Kremlin, called by Mikhail Gorbachev in his capacity as Chairman of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. This extraordinary congress was called not, as many would have expected and hoped, to discuss the ongoing wave of violence in many corners of the USSR, or even Lithuania’s declaration of independence from the USSR on March 11. In fact, deputies were actively discouraged from “getting agitated” over such issues, with some Soviet leaders withholding telegrams, for example, about ongoing violence between Armenia and Azerbaijan.<sup>9</sup> Instead, the purpose of the congress was twofold: to remove from the Soviet Constitution its 6<sup>th</sup> Article, which guaranteed a “leading role” for the Communist Party, and to establish the position of the President of the USSR.<sup>10</sup> Gorbachev remained convinced that the Party was the largest impediment to perestroika, and that its conservative wing was continuing to sabotage his reforms. He therefore sought to

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<sup>7</sup> “Spisok narodnykh deputatov Tadjikskoi SSR, izbrannykh 25 fevralia 1990 goda,” *Kommunist Tadjikistana*, March 4, 1990; “Spisok narodnykh deputatov Tadjikskoi SSR, izbrannykh 4 i 9 marta 1990 goda,” *Kommunist Tadjikistana*, March 22, 1990; Statisticheskii otchet o sostave Verkhovnogo Soveta, Prezidiuma, komitetov, i postoiannykh komissii Verkhovnogo Soveta Tadjikskoi SSR. GARF f. 9654, op. 10, d. 100, l. 227. Some districts were contested by up to 5 candidates; see PA IPI KPT f. 3, op. 384, d. 195, ll. 35-36, cited in Sultanov, *Demontazh SSSR*, 192.

<sup>8</sup> Sohibnazar, *Subhi sitorakush*, v. 1, 18.

<sup>9</sup> GARF f. 9654, op. 2, d. 134, l. 12.

<sup>10</sup> For the planning behind the Congress, see Cherniaev, Veber, and Medvedev, *V Politbiuro TsK KPSS*, 592-593; 605-606.

even further undermine its authority, while establishing a more secure position for himself atop a political pyramid built parallel to the Party.<sup>11</sup>

Notwithstanding both grumbling over the speed at which amendments were being made to the Soviet constitution and unexpectedly strong opposition to Gorbachev's candidacy, the Congress of People's Deputies fulfilled both requests.<sup>12</sup> The 6<sup>th</sup> article was removed from the constitution, and Gorbachev was duly elected on March 15<sup>th</sup> to the newly created post of President of the USSR. For Kahhor Mahkamov, the First Secretary of the Communist Party of Tajikistan, the lesson to be taken away from this 3<sup>rd</sup> Congress was twofold. First, Moscow showed little interest in investigating or otherwise involving itself in peripheral affairs, and Mahkamov's attempt to discuss the February events fell on deaf ears, just as previous appeals to Gorbachev had failed.<sup>13</sup> In general, moreover, the level of attention and support that Mahkamov and the other leaders of the Communist Party of Tajikistan could count on from the center was fading. With the Communist Party denied its previously official "leading" role in society and Moscow increasingly disengaged from Tajikistan's day-to-day political affairs, Mahkamov found himself in need of new institutional pillars of support. Gorbachev had made it clear at the Congress that the political axis had shifted: it was now necessary to supplement the authority of the once omnipotent Party.

Returning to Dushanbe after the 3<sup>rd</sup> Congress of People's Deputies, Mahkamov acted quickly to secure himself a non-Party leadership position. Rather than move to modify the constitution of the Tajik SSR – which would have been required to establish a presidential post – he instead targeted what was already officially the most powerful position in the republic, the Chairman of the Supreme Soviet. While on paper this represented the Tajik SSR's head of state, in practice it had been a largely ceremonial role, if one that retained political clout. From Mahkamov's perspective, however, it could be turned into a position of real power – and provide the political legitimacy the Party was quickly losing. In the first days of

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<sup>11</sup> On Gorbachev's reasoning and the background to his decision to run for president through the Congress, see Brown, *Gorbachev Factor*, 185-205; George W. Breslauer, *Gorbachev and Yeltsin as Leaders* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 89.

<sup>12</sup> On the grumblings of some deputies to the Congress, see *Vneocherednoi tretii s'ezd*, v. 1, 355; on opposition to Gorbachev as the only candidate, see Brown, *Gorbachev Factor*, 205.

<sup>13</sup> For Mahkamov's speech to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Congress, see *Vneocherednoi tretii s'ezd*, v. 1, 129-133.

April 1990 a Plenum of the Central Committee of the Communist Party was called at Mahkamov's behest, and the current Supreme Soviet Chairman, Ghoibnazar Pallaev, was summarily convinced to "request to retire" from his post.<sup>14</sup> When the Supreme Soviet of the Tajik SSR convened on April 10, Pallaev followed orders and submitted his resignation.<sup>15</sup> This easy success led Mahkamov to believe that he would be running unopposed for the position of Chairman, and his faction of supporters in the Supreme Soviet confidently put forward his candidacy on April 12.<sup>16</sup> Left without any position in the government and angry at Mahkamov's aggressive move on his job, however, Pallaev also quite unexpectedly put forward his own candidacy.<sup>17</sup> When a vote was called following a short but unusually sharp debate, Mahkamov was left the victor, receiving 162 votes to 62 for Pallaev.<sup>18</sup>

Mahkamov had won – but at a higher political cost than expected. The political struggles that had long remained hidden behind the closed doors of the Communist Party of Tajikistan were thrown into the public view. This exposed not only underlying disagreements between Communist Party members, but also a growing schism in the republic's leaders over the recent February events. During the short debate that preceded his election, Mahkamov was exposed to unprecedented and harsh criticism. Sohibnazar, the opposition deputy elected to the Supreme Soviet in February, led the charge. He accused Mahkamov of extreme incompetence:

*"Is a man who failed to calm a crowd of 2-3 thousand with a bullhorn, who met his own people with bullets, and who has committed many other sins – is he really today called upon to be the leader of a 5-million strong nation?"*<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Nasreddinov, *Tarkish*, 123.

<sup>15</sup> Technically, the full "Session" of the 12<sup>th</sup> Convocation of the Supreme Soviet of the Tajik SSR opened on April 12, but the work of the Presidium began on April 10. See "Ukazi Prezidiumi Shuroi Olii ChShS Tojikiston "Dar borai dav" at kardani Shuroi Olii ChShS Tojikiston," *Tojikistoni soveti*, March 13, 1990; TadzhiKTA, "Dar Prezidiumi Shuroi Olii ChShS Tojikiston," *Tojikistoni soveti*, April 11, 1990.

<sup>16</sup> Technically, Pallaev had previously been the "Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet." The April 1990 Session of the Supreme Soviet also quietly disbanded this post, combining it with the previously distinct "Chairman of the Supreme Soviet."

<sup>17</sup> See Nasreddinov, *Tarkish*, 123; Sohibnazar, *Subhi sitorakush*, v. 1, 96-98; Nurali Davlat, "Asliddin Sohibnazarov: Sohibnazar yo 'folbini jumhuri,'" *Ozodagon*, August 2, 2017.

<sup>18</sup> TadzhiKTA, "Khabari mukhtasar dar borai majlisi Olii RSS Tojikiston," *Tojikistoni soveti*, April 13, 1990.

<sup>19</sup> Sohibnazar, *Subhi sitorakush*, 107.

Other deputies followed suit. Although Mahkamov and his supporters were able to end the debate before it grew out of hand, this level of criticism clearly demonstrated the willingness of many deputies – including many members of the Communist Party – to buck the Party line and challenge the republic’s leaders. Even beyond the few non-Party opposition members in the Supreme Soviet (primarily Sohbnazar, Tohir Abdujabbor and Bozor Sobir), it was growing increasingly obvious that there was greater and greater support in the Tajik SSR for alternative political positions and parties.

This also did not go unnoticed outside of the Supreme Soviet. Shodmon Yusuf, a university lecturer and expert in Marxist-Leninist philosophy (he was also the head of the local Party cell in the Philosophy Department of the Tajik Academy of Sciences), also made an entrance into the public sphere in April 1990. That month he published a controversial article entitled “The Wounds of History.” In this, Yusuf argued that the “totalitarian” system developed under Stalin and Brezhnev had undermined Lenin’s original ideas of a Soviet federation, leading to the underdevelopment of republics like Tajikistan. For Tajikistan to survive, he argued forcefully, it would need both political independence from Moscow and an open market economy. Yusuf began to meet with like-minded thinkers and supporters in April and May of 1990, publically demanding action on political issues, and even going as far as declaring a hunger strike. By June, Yusuf and his supporters had decided to found the Democratic Party of Tajikistan (DPT) to advocate change, and began lobbying the Tajik SSR for registration as a political party.<sup>20</sup> Together with the violence of February 1990, Yusuf would later write, it had been the increasingly open political struggle on display in Dushanbe that had led him into party politics.

More socially conservative forces also began to coagulate following the April 1990 session of the Tajik Supreme Soviet. The summer of 1990 saw the formal development of the Islamic Revival Party of Tajikistan (IRPT), which brought together a new class of radical politicians, like Davlat Usmon, one of the party’s main organizers, with representatives of informal but influential religious

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<sup>20</sup> On the development of the DPT, see Nurali Davlat, “Shodmon Yusuf: ‘Padari demokratiiai tojiki,’” *Ozodagon*, May 31 and June 7, 2017.

traditions, including Abdullo Said Nuri and Muhammadsharif Himmatzoda.<sup>21</sup> The latter two had been the students of Muhammadjon Hindustoni, one of the most important figures in Central Asian Islam during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, adding religious clout to the party's platform.<sup>22</sup>

Previous attempts at religiously inflected political activism had been dealt with quickly and harshly, with Nuri having been arrested in 1986 and sentenced to two years in a prison camp for distributing anti-Soviet literature.<sup>23</sup> In 1990, however, the situation was clearly different. Mahkamov's hands were bound by the removal of the 6<sup>th</sup> article of the Soviet Constitution: the Communist Party of Tajikistan could no longer claim a legal monopoly on the political sphere. While Mahkamov was unable to stop the IRPT or DPT from gathering, however, he did manage to keep the parties from holding founding conventions: with the ongoing state of emergency in the republic, it was a simple matter to simply refuse any and all political events the special state permission they required to be held. Frustrated with the intransigence he faced, Yusuf called and complained to the USSR's "head democrat," Boris Yeltsin, in July 1990. Having been elected the Chairman of the Supreme Soviet of the Russian SFSR in May 1990 and overseen the passage of Russia's Declaration of Sovereignty in June, Yeltsin increasingly represented a challenge to Gorbachev's authority in Moscow. Yeltsin promptly brought Yusuf's case to Gorbachev, who in turn called Mahkamov pressured him into allowing the DPT to register.<sup>24</sup> Still unquestioningly loyal to Moscow and Gorbachev, Mahkamov gave in and provided permission for the DPT to hold a founding congress on August 10, 1990.<sup>25</sup> While the IRPT was still denied registration, the Tajik state

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<sup>21</sup> According to internal party histories, the IRPT was founded in the early 1970s by Nuri and other followers of Hindustoni; this is unverifiable. Actual political activity can be tracked to the late 1980s, and as a party the group came together only after the founding of the Union-wide Party of Islamic Revival, which held its own conference in Astrakhan in June 1990. One of the organizers of the Dushanbe conference, Davlat Usmon, was also present in Astrakhan, and the two parties remained linked until late 1991. See Dudoignon, "Political Parties and Forces in Tajikistan," 64.

<sup>22</sup> For a discussion of Hindustoni's theology and his influence on the IRPT, see Epkenhans, *Origins of the Civil War*, 185-187; Nourzhanov and Bleuer, *Tajikistan*, 253-254.

<sup>23</sup> V. Rabiev, "Idushchie v nikuda," *Kommunist Tadzhikistana*, February 12, 1987; Nourzhanov and Bleuer, *Tajikistan*, 249; Monica Whitlock, *Beyond the Oxus: The Central Asians* (London: John Murray, 2002), 142.

<sup>24</sup> Nurali Davlat, "Mnogopartiinost' po-tadzhikskii," *Asia-Plus*, March 31, 2015; Davlat, "Shodmon Yusuf."

<sup>25</sup> Bushkov and Mikul'skii, "Tadzhikskaiia revoliutsiia," 16.



simply chose not to pay attention when the new party went ahead and held a conference in the village of Chortut outside of Dushanbe on October 6, 1990.<sup>26</sup>

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For Mahkamov and the other leaders of the Tajik SSR, the proliferation of political parties was both distasteful and disturbing: it was a challenge to their very sense of how society and politics should function. Yet there was little they could do. The independent Democratic and Islamic Revival Parties were founded, elected leaders – Shodmon Yusuf and Muhammadsharif Himmatzoda, respectively – and went about their political business of lobbying, building up membership, and even printing newspapers. Loyalty to Moscow and the continuing need for economic support from the center meant that Mahkamov and his supporters were essentially unable to reject the course set in the Soviet capital. That this course was increasingly contradictory and set by both Gorbachev and Yeltsin, who were locked in a growing power struggle, did not undermine its importance for Tajikistan. In practice it meant that the republic still bound to do exactly as the Soviet authorities in Moscow asked – even if this was to undermine the power of Soviet governance. In other words, the paradoxical cost of remaining a constituent element of the Soviet system, so it seemed, was to further undermine the political structures that had supported this system for decades.

Nor was the paradox of remaining loyal to the Soviet state by undermining its institutions restricted to the founding of new, non-Communist political parties. Quite the opposite: over the course of 1990 and 1991, Mahkamov's unflinching loyalty to Moscow would frequently lead him and the government of the Tajik SSR to take action that ultimately challenged Moscow's leadership. This was particularly obvious during the XXVIII Congress of the KPSS, held in Moscow in July 1990, which had the ultimate consequence of undermining the authority and governing capacity of the Communist Party. Even before the XXVIII Congress the leading institutions of the Party, the Secretariat and the Politburo, had been reduced in size and function – but following the Congress their role was limited

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<sup>26</sup> Nourzhanov and Bleuer, *Tajikistan*, 263; Vera Tolz, "The USSR this Week," *Radio Liberty Report on the USSR*, October 19, 1990. The organizers of this conference were fined in December 1990.

even further.<sup>27</sup> The newly expanded Politburo, which now included all of the first secretaries of republican parties, essentially copied the already established Council of the Federation, which, together with the Presidential Council, had been created by the Congress of Peoples' Deputies in March.<sup>28</sup> This made the Politburo as an institution in many ways redundant, and it met infrequently, if at all. In contrast to many other delegates to the Congress, who loudly protested this and other attacks on Party power before ultimately acceding to Gorbachev's proposed reforms ("he hypnotizes every last one of us," one delegate later complained),<sup>29</sup> the Tajik delegation quietly voted in favor of reform without voicing any opposition. Reporting on the Congress a month later to a plenum of the Communist Party of Tajikistan, Mahkamov was even strangely sanguine about the Party's future: the Congress, he reassured party members "has created a solid foundation for the ongoing renewal of the Party...and the strengthening of its leading role in society."<sup>30</sup>

As power continued to shift away from the Party, the leadership of the Tajik SSR also found itself under pressure from Moscow to express its political independence. Starting in late 1988 with Estonia and continuing through 1989 with Lithuania, Latvia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, Soviet republics had increasingly begun to declare their "sovereignty" over their constituent territories. What this meant in practice varied from republic to republic, but at a minimum it indicated that in case of contradiction, local legislation took precedence over central Soviet laws. This clearly undermined Moscow's power, and Gorbachev initially reacted by brow-beating, threatening, and even declaring an economic embargo against

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<sup>27</sup> Stephen White, "Background to the XXVIII Congress," in *The Soviet Communist Party in Disarray: The XXVIII Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union*, ed. E.A. Rees (London: Macmillan, 1992), 11. For earlier cuts to Party authority, see Chapters Four and Five.

<sup>28</sup> For the makeup of the new Politburo, see "Politbiuro i sekretariat tsentral'nogo komiteta KPSS," *Izvestiia TsK KPSS* 8, no. 307 (August 1990): 7.

<sup>29</sup> Stephen White, "The Politics of the XXVIII Congress," in *The Soviet Communist Party in Disarray: The XXVIII Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union*, ed. E.A. Rees (London: Macmillan, 1992), 49. Georgii Koshlakov, deputy chairman of the Tajik SSR's Council of Ministers, has also argued that Gorbachev was an effective "hypnotizer," able to get delegates to change their votes through sheer will power. See: Interview with Georgii Koshlakov, Dushanbe, July 2016.

<sup>30</sup> "Ob itogakh XXVIII s'ezda KPSS i osnovnykh napravleniiakh deiatel'nosti Kompartii Tadjikistana. Doklad chlena Politbiuro TsK KPSS, pervogo sekretaria TsK Kompartii Tadjikistana K.M. Makhkamova na III plenum TsK Kompartii respubliki 20 avgusta 1990 goda," *Kommunist Tadjikistana*, August 22, 1990.

Lithuania.<sup>31</sup> By the middle of 1990, however, with the majority of republics (most especially Russia) having followed the Baltics' example and now nominally "sovereign," Gorbachev changed tactics. On the one hand, he and his advisors continued to insist on "the supremacy of union legislation over republican [legislation]," while at the same time encouraging lagging republics to catch up with the rest of the Union in order to "usurp the local nationalists' agenda."<sup>32</sup> Gorbachev's exact motivations remain unclear: he may have been convinced that if all of the republics reached a position of "sovereignty" their individual nationalist movements could be cancelled out in a new Union. One way or another, though, he was pushing the situation dangerously close to the edge.

For its part, however, the Tajik SSR was in little hurry to declare its "sovereignty." As discussions in the Tajik Supreme Soviet in June 1990 indicated, for Dushanbe the benefits of such a declaration seemed limited:

*Comrade Nasreddinov: And we should discuss the Declaration [on Sovereignty].*

*Comrade Aslonov: Union republics are already discussing and passing them.*

*Comrade Gafarov: The Constitution already says "The Sovereign Tajik Soviet Socialist Republic."*

*Comrade Mahkamov: Why must we pass a separate Law on Sovereignty?*

*Comrade Nasreddinov: On political and economic sovereignty. The Uzbeks already have one. That is why it is necessary.*

*Comrade Mahkamov: We believe that the [Union] Agreement is needed first of all. These questions should be considered in the agreement. Those who pass Declarations are making particularistic claims. That is just one step from secession from the Union.<sup>33</sup>*

In contrast to other republics, the Supreme Soviet of the Tajik SSR saw little economic benefit to "sovereignty." Instead, the strongest argument in favor that could be found was that "the Uzbeks already have one" – Moscow's arguments to catch up with other republics were working. However, the risks were great, as

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<sup>31</sup> Gregory Gleason, "The Federal Formula and the Collapse of the USSR," *Publius: The Journal of Federalism* 22, no. 3 (1992): 149-150; for Gorbachev's earlier (and calmer) approach, see Cherniaev, *Shest' let*, 295; for an extended later exchange between Gorbachev and Algirdas Brazauskas, the First Secretary of the Lithuanian Communist Party, see "Vneocherednoi plenum TsK KPSS – 25-26 dekabria 1989 goda. Stenograficheskii otchet," *Izvestiia TsK KPSS* 6, no. 305 (June 1990): 40-50.

<sup>32</sup> See Cherniaev, Veber, and Medvedev, *V Politbiuro TsK KPSS*, 627-634; first quote on 634 by Rafik Nishanov on July 20, 1990; Martha Brill Olcott, "The Soviet (Dis)Union," *Foreign Policy* 82 (1991): 126-127, latter quote on 127.

<sup>33</sup> Stenogramma Zasedaniia Prezidiuma Verkhovnogo Soveta Tadzhikskoi SSR ot 28 iunia 1990, TsGART f. 297, op. 41, d. 279, l. 31.

Mahkamov highlighted. There was little stomach in Tajikistan for the idea of actually leaving the USSR.

Gorbachev, however, continued to encourage the passage of a declaration. Feeling “forced” by the wave of declarations and worried how Moscow would react to the lack of any local declaration, Mahkamov and the Tajik Supreme Soviet finally passed an official Declaration “On the State Sovereignty of the Tajik Soviet Socialist Republic” on August 24, 1990.<sup>34</sup> The opposition politicians in the Tajik Supreme Soviet, including Rastokhez’s Abdujabbor, who had helped to draft the final Declaration, welcomed the move towards economic and political self-control.<sup>35</sup> For Mahkamov and the established leadership, however, this brought up “sensitive issues” – not only about the Tajik SSR’s status vis-à-vis Moscow, but about the long-term stability of the Soviet Union as a whole.<sup>36</sup> Worse, it was the most influential leaders of the USSR – Gorbachev, Yelstin, and others in Moscow – who were pushing for these “sensitive issues” to be brought out into the open. They continued to assert their authority over Mahkamov and the CPT, but just as equally continued the paradox of pushing for decreased state and party authority, including in the long run their own.

This was also the case with ongoing discussions related to the new “Union Treaty.” Debates over both Tajikistan’s “sovereignty” within the Soviet system and the status of the Communist Party had taken place against the backdrop of broader confusion about this treaty. Called upon to secure and renew the USSR, the “Union Treaty” had been initially floated by Gorbachev in January 1990 in response to the first declarations of sovereignty and independence in 1988 and 1989.<sup>37</sup> After Russia declared its sovereignty in June 1990, moreover, Gorbachev and his advisors repackaged the concept as a “Union of Sovereign Socialist Republics,” in recognition and acceptance of the new status quo of “sovereign” republics.<sup>38</sup> With

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<sup>34</sup> Nurali Davlat, “Tohiri Abdujabbor: ‘Padar’-i e’lomiiai istiqlo’l,” *Ozodagon*, September 28, 2016; Bushkov i Mikul’skii, “*Tadzhikskaiia revoliutsiia*,” 17. The main provision of this Declaration was to give legal supremacy to republican legislation; see “Proekt: Deklaratsiia O gosudarstvennom suverenitete Tadzhikskoi SSR,” *Kommunist Tadzhikistana*, August 15, 1990.

<sup>35</sup> Davlat, “Tohiri Abdujabbor.”

<sup>36</sup> TsGART f. 297, op. 41, d. 297, l. 31.

<sup>37</sup> Cherniaev, *Shest’ let*, 323-326; Cherniaev, Veber, and Medvedev, *V Politbiuro TsK KPSS*, 589-590.

<sup>38</sup> On the first meeting “to discuss the Treaty concept,” see TsGART f. 297, op. 41, d. 278, l. 26; also Nishanov, *Derev’ia zeleneiut*, 324. On Gorbachev and his advisors’ position prior, see Cherniaev, Veber, and Medvedev, *V Politbiuro TsK KPSS*, 627, 635.

Yeltsin's political star rising in Moscow and Gorbachev having backed himself into a corner through his promotion of republican sovereignty, it was growing unclear what role would be left for either the central Soviet government or Gorbachev himself. By promoting the Union Treaty and asking all fifteen republics to agree to a new structure for the Union, Gorbachev hoped to secure at least the latter.

Very quickly, however, Gorbachev ran into difficulty. First, not all of the republics would attend meetings, with Estonia and Lithuania boycotting the proceedings. It also emerged that the leadership of different republics had strikingly different views on what the new Union should look like. Some, like Ukraine's Leonid Kravchuk<sup>39</sup> advocated a loose "confederation" of republics, while others advocated for essentially cosmetic changes that would leave the strong Union center intact. Tajikistan, for example, was in favor of a strong "federation," and asked for guarantees that its economy "would continue to be supported by Union resources" for at least another 5 years.<sup>40</sup> This conflict over the economic role of the Soviet center in the new Union and the distribution of economic and financial assets was further complicated by the development of two competing Market Transition Programs (*programmy perekhoda k rynku*) in August 1990. Developed by Leonid Abalkin and a team from the Council of Ministers of the USSR, on the one hand, and Stanislav Shatalin and others from the Council of Ministers of the RSFSR, on the other, the two programs contained markedly different visions of the role and functions to be held by the central Soviet government.<sup>41</sup> Abalkin's program retained a clearly defined central federal government; Shatalin's did not, leaving space only for a weakened "coordinative center." Since the Market Transition Program had been meant as a key element of the proposed Union Treaty, the clear contradiction between the central Soviet government's proposal and that made by the largest Soviet republic was particularly troublesome.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Plokhy, *The Last Empire*, 56-57; also Michael Mandelbaum, "Coup de Grace: The End of the Soviet Union," *Foreign Affairs* 71, no. 1 (1991/1992): 168.

<sup>40</sup> Stenogramma Zasedaniia Presidiuma Verkhovnogo Soveta Tadzhikskoi SSR ot 18.06.1990, TsGART f. 297, op. 41, d. 278, l. 14.

<sup>41</sup> The Shatalin plan, on which Grigorii Yavlinsky also worked, would come to be known as the "500 Days Plan," insofar as it proposed a 500-day transition to a full market. This plan was later adopted by the Russian Supreme Soviet. See Cherniaev, *Shest' let*, 370-371; Nikolai Ryzhkov, *Glavnyi svidetel'* (Moscow:Eksmo, 2009), 117-122; 139.

<sup>42</sup> Abalkin, *Neispol'zovannyi shans*, 195-214; Pavlov, *Upushchen li*, 254-255; Cherniaev, Veber, and Medvedev, *V Politbiuro TsK KPSS*, 637.

Gorbachev assigned a commission headed by the economist Abel Aganbegian the task of “combining” the two programs, but two months of work was inconclusive. Ultimately, a shortened and somewhat truncated version of Shatalin’s program was proposed to the Supreme Soviet and passed in October 1990.<sup>43</sup> While this obligated the USSR to finalize its ongoing transition to a market system in 1991, it left the status of the central Soviet government undefined and markedly unclear.<sup>44</sup> The Supreme Soviet did clarify matters somewhat on December 3, when it passed a resolution “On the General Conception of the New Union Treaty and the order of its Signing,” which defined the new form of the USSR as a federal union between sovereign states. The 4<sup>th</sup> Congress of People’s Deputies confirmed this interpretation on December 24<sup>th</sup>, but passed ultimate legal authority (and responsibility) to the Soviet people.<sup>45</sup> It was decided that a Union-wide referendum should be held on the status of the USSR in March 1991. This referendum, with some republican variation, asked citizens to vote yes or no on the “necessity of saving the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics as an updated federation of equal sovereign republics.”

When the citizens of 9 Soviet republics (6 republics boycotted the referendum) dutifully went to the polls on March 17, 1991 they overwhelmingly voted yes. With a mandate of more than 76% of voters behind them, Gorbachev’s team returned to the negotiating table with reinvigorated strength: the Soviet people, so it seemed, were firmly in favor of their vision of a Soviet “federation.” Yet the new round of talks, held at Novo-Ogaryovo, Gorbachev’s dacha outside of Moscow, ran into many of the same problems as the year before.<sup>46</sup> First, the six republics that had boycotted the referendum refused to participate, leaving the Union treaty to be discussed by the so-called “9+1” group – nine republics and the Union government. The talks ground on through the summer of 1991, with Gorbachev and his advisors continuously giving ground to Yeltsin and other republican leaders who insisted

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<sup>43</sup> Abalkin, *Neispol’zovannyi shans*, 216, 236-240; Cherniaev, *Shest’ let*, 373-376.

<sup>44</sup> M.F. Polynov, E.A. Tarasov, “Perekhod k rynochnoi ekonomike v SSSR v gody perestroiki: bor’ba za sozdanie kontseptsii. 1989-1991,” *Noveishaia istoriia Rossii* 18, no. 1 (2017): 118-121.

<sup>45</sup> The 4<sup>th</sup> Congress of People’s Deputies involved many scandalous declarations, including Eduard Shevardnadze’s claim of a “coming dictatorship” and associated resignation and Sazhi Umalatova’s call for Gorbachev’s removal. This, however, had little practical effect: Gorbachev was able to successfully coordinate the passage of resolutions in favor a new Union Treaty and a supporting referendum. See *Chetvertyi s’ezd narodnykh deputatov SSSR, 17-27 dekabria 1990 g. Stenograficheskii otchet* (Moscow: Izdania Verkhovnogo Soveta SSSR, 1991), esp. v. 1, 10, 552-559; v. 2, 206-232.

<sup>46</sup> Cherniaev, *Shest’ let*, 440-441.

on increasing authority within the new Union structure.<sup>47</sup> For its part, Tajikistan continued to favor a powerful central government: 96% of Tajik citizens had voted in favor of the new Union, and its leaders voiced a preference for a “gradual” transition to republican autonomy.<sup>48</sup> At the same time, it was unclear how Tajikistan would be able to implement its preferred vision of a newly strengthened Union. “We conducted the referendum,” the Tajik Supreme Soviet deputy Tukhtaboi Gafarov mused in April 1991, “and the result is well known. But how can we realize the results of the referendum?”<sup>49</sup> There was no obvious answer, and Mahkamov seemed boxed in by the paradoxical framework presented by Moscow, whereby loyalty was could only be demonstrated by undermining central Soviet authority. Desperate to retain some Union framework, Mahkamov continued to follow Gorbachev’s lead in ceding authority to the republics. From his perspective, there was simply no other option.

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Watching the calm streets of Dushanbe in the spring of 1991, Mahkamov and his supporters in the Tajik SSR’s government remained worried. And they had good reason to be: the Soviet Union seemed on the edge of collapse, a new Union treaty remained unsigned, and republics were interpreting “sovereignty” however they saw fit. Internally, the Tajik SSR was riven with political division, with opposition political parties growing in number and strength. In March 1991 Rastokhez, the DPT and the IRPT were joined on the political stage by the Pamiri-dominated “La”li Badakhson,” an organization founded in Dushanbe by the math teacher Atobek Amirbek with the goal of promoting Pamiri culture.<sup>50</sup> And then there was the problem of Islam, which by 1991 was growing increasingly prominent.

Although frequently highlighted in most histories of Tajikistan, Islam had played a limited political role in the Tajik SSR before 1990 and 1991. While most residents of Tajikistan considered themselves Muslims, Islam was a primarily personal

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<sup>47</sup> Brown, *Gorbachev Factor*, 288-289.

<sup>48</sup> See Mahkamov’s comments in November 1990 in Cherniaev, Veber, and Medvedev, *V Politbiuro TsK KPSS*, 653; on the results of the referendum in the Tajik SSR, see TsGART f. 297, op. 40, d. 1239, ll. 2-3.

<sup>49</sup> TsGART f. 297, op. 40, d. 1239, l. 15.

<sup>50</sup> S. Olimova and M. Olimov, *Tadzhikistan na poroge peremen* (Moscow: Tsentr strategicheskikh i politicheskikh issledovani, 1999), 111.

matter: it played an important role in the organization of daily life and life events (weddings, holidays, and the like), and Tajikistani Soviet citizens continued to adhere by Islamic cultural norms, such as circumcision and avoiding pork. The organized celebration of Muslim holidays, however, was kept to a minimum, and Islam was explicitly kept out of the public and political sphere.<sup>51</sup> This balance remained true in the first years of perestroika, as evidenced both by the arrest of Nuri in 1986 and the broader campaign against organized Islam conducted by both Moscow and Dushanbe from 1985-1987. In December 1985, for example, the Central Committee of the CPSU passed a resolution “On Additional Measures Connected with the Activation in Asia and Africa of so-called ‘Militant Islam,’” which in part required Tajikistan to increase its local atheist propaganda campaigns.<sup>52</sup> This was followed up in 1986 by further CC CPSU resolutions – and a general sense amongst the leadership of the republic that expressions of Islam needed to be kept to a minimum.<sup>53</sup> Noting the relatively low levels of religiosity in the south compared to elsewhere in the republic, for example, an organized campaign was started in 1986 to dispatch experienced party activists from Kulyab to more religious northern regions.<sup>54</sup> Even through 1990, as Asliddin Sohibnazar later remarked, “Communist ideology kept the upper hand in its battle against religion.”<sup>55</sup>

The situation was cardinally different in 1991. The Islamic Revival Party of Tajikistan, moreover, was only part of a much larger picture. With Moscow’s approach to organized religion slowly (if somewhat disorderly) softening, Mahkamov and the Tajik Supreme Soviet found themselves under increasing pressure to provide space for Islam in the public sphere.<sup>56</sup> In part, this meant expanding the activities of the Tajik *Qoziyot* (muftiate), which, under its young and active leader, Hoji Akbar Turajonzoda, quickly grasped the initiative, broadening

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<sup>51</sup> Atkin, *The Subtlest Battle*; Sartori, “The Secular that Never Was.”

<sup>52</sup> Protokol No. 47 zasedaniia biuro Leninabadskogo obkoma Kompartii Tadjikistana ot 17.12.1985, RGASPI f. 17, op. 154, d. 2431, ll. 150-154.

<sup>53</sup> S.M. Iskhakov, “Perestroika” i sovetskie musul’mane,” in *Tragediia velikoi derzhavoi: natsional’noi vopros i raspad Sovetskogo soiuza*, ed. G.N. Sevost’ianov (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo “Sotsial’no-politicheskaiia mysl”), 2005, 487-488; Interview with a former member of the CPT Bureau, Dushanbe, July 2016.

<sup>54</sup> Protokol no. 74 zasedaniia sekretariata TsK Kompartii Tadjikistana ot 19.11.1985. RGASPI, F. 17, Op. 154, D. 2385, L. 6.

<sup>55</sup> Sohibnazar, *Subhi sitorakush*, v. 1, 25-26.

<sup>56</sup> See Tett, “Ambiguous Alliances,” 37; also Andrei Mel’nikov, “Perestroika nadelila Tserkov’ pravami, a obiazannostiami ne uspela,” *Nezavisimaia Gazeta*, June 03, 2015.



its educational activities and printing a newspaper, the *Minbari-i Islom*. This was further strengthened by the separation of the Tajik *Qoziyot* from the Tashkent-based Religious Administration of Muslims of Central Asia and Kazakhstan (SADUM) in late 1989, which gave Turajonzoda and his office much greater local authority.<sup>57</sup> Space for religion, moreover, also required legislative initiative. In December 1990, the Tajik Supreme Soviet passed a Law “On Freedom of Religion and Religious Organizations,” which lifted most restrictions on mosque registration and the open practice of Islam.<sup>58</sup> Almost immediately, the total number of mosques in the republic jumped from 44 to nearly 3,000, including 130 larger “Friday” mosques.<sup>59</sup> In practice, of course, the majority of these smaller mosques had previously existed as informal or unofficial places of worship; the new law simply legalized existing local organizations, while also providing new impetus for their social influence.<sup>60</sup> Whether strictly new or not, however, the legalization of mosques allowed them to become unregulated places of social organization as well as religion. As the ethnographer Gillian Tett was told at a newly opened mosque in 1990: “Before, in the time of Stalin and Brezhnev we had no mosque, so we (the men) could not meet. But now - a thousand thanks to Gorbachev! [taj. *hazor rakhmat ba Gorbachev!*] - we have a mosque.”<sup>61</sup> Islam was moving into the political realm.

To the avowed atheist Mahkamov, the rise of organized religion was essentially incomprehensible: for him and many of the more conservative members of the CPT, Islam simply had no place in the political sphere. Between the collapsing Soviet superstructure, the rise of local parties, and the growing influence of Islam, however, the political order in Dushanbe was becoming almost unrecognizable. Mahkamov responded, in large part, by fighting to hold on to power however

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<sup>57</sup> Born Akbar Turaevich Qahhorov, Turajonzoda was appointed *Qazi Kalon* (Chief Mufti) of the Tajik SSR at the relatively young age of 34 in 1988. For his biography and career, see Epkenhans, *Origins of the Civil War*, 203-211; Nourzhanov and Bleuer, *Tajikistan*, 271-272.

<sup>58</sup> Bushkov and Mikul'skii, “*Tadzhikskaja revoliutsiia*,” 18; TsGART f. 297, op. 40, d. 1236, ll. 12-13.

<sup>59</sup> In 1989, there were only 17 mosques in the republic, including 5 in Dushanbe, a figure that rose to 44 by October 1990. On 1989, see M. Mirrahimov, “Strogo uchityvat' vse faktory mezhnatsional'nykh otnoshenii,” *Voprosy istorii* 5 (1989): 85; Atkin, *The Subtlest Battle*, 17. On 1990, see Protokol No. 6 zasedaniia biuro TsK Kompartii Tadzhikistana ot 24.10.1990, RGASPI f. 17, op. 159, d. 1708, l. 2. On 1991, see Niyazi, “Islam and Tajikistan's,” 184-185.

<sup>60</sup> Qadi Akbar Turajonzoda, “Religion: The Pillar of Society,” in *Central Asia: Conflict Resolution, and Change*, eds. Roald Z. Sagdeev and Susan Eisenhower (Chevy Chase, Maryland: CPSS Press, 1995), 268.

<sup>61</sup> Tett, “Ambiguous Alliances,” 94.

possible. After waffling for months, in November 1990 he finally initiated discussions in the Tajik Supreme Soviet about the post of President of the Tajik SSR, to which he was summarily nominated by the CPT.<sup>62</sup> Opposition politicians, however, both objected to the form of elections – much like Gorbachev in March 1990, the Tajik President was to be elected not by popular vote, but only by the Supreme Soviet – and collectively backed Rahmon Nabiev as an alternative candidate.<sup>63</sup> Returning to politics in February 1990 after his 1985 removal from the position of CPT 1<sup>st</sup> Secretary, Nabiev had initially failed to secure a seat in the Tajik Supreme Soviet. With the help of Sohbnazar and other opposition politicians, however, he was elected in a special election in April 1990, and had since become the public face of those opposed to Mahkamov in the parliament.<sup>64</sup> Although this challenge to Mahkamov once again failed, with Nabiev losing the presidential vote on November 29, 89 to 131,<sup>65</sup> the latter's return to politics could hardly calm the newly minted President of the Tajik SSR's nerves. As 1990 turned to 1991 and the spring thawed into summer, Mahkamov faced a political situation that was clearly and inexorably slipping out of his grasp.

## **II. From Bad to Worse: Economic Collapse**

Unfortunately, much of the instability Mahkamov faced was driven by factors over which he had little factual control. The economic downturn that had struck Tajikistan in 1989 had worsened throughout 1990 and grown into an open crisis by 1991. "In 1990," as the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Tajik SSR reported in early 1991, "it was not possible to halt the growth of negative economic tendencies.... The ruble continues to devalue and inflation is growing." The production of consumer goods remained outpaced by the growth of salaries, and even taking into consideration the widespread price increases seen since 1989 (see Chapter Four), Tajikistan's entire economy contracted by more than 1.2% in 1990.<sup>66</sup> Unemployment also failed to halt its ongoing rise, reaching more than 30% in many parts of Tajikistan. Just as they were losing jobs, moreover, Tajikistan's citizens also found goods disappearing from stores – and the cost of

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<sup>62</sup> "Otkrovennyi, delovoi razgovor," *Kommunist Tadjikistana*, November 16, 1990; TadjikTA, "Vydvinut kandidat v prezidenty respubliki," *Kommunist Tadjikistana*, November 18, 1990.

<sup>63</sup> Nasreddinov, *Tarkish*, 124; 128.

<sup>64</sup> Nurali Davlat, "Kahhor Mahkamov: Og'hoz va farjomi 'prezidenti javon'," *Ozodagon*, August 31, 2016.

<sup>65</sup> TadjikTA, "Informatsionnoe soobshchenie," *Kommunist Tadjikistana*, November 30 and December 1, 1990.

<sup>66</sup> TsGART f. 297, op. 40, d. 1230, ll. 162-163.

those that remained skyrocketing. There was little doubt that these factors were feeding the growth of new political parties and movements, and the Tajik state scrambled to find ways to alleviate the economic situation. Yet their efforts inevitably came up short, blocked most frequently by the centralized nature of Soviet economic reforms and their own limited control over the Tajik economy.

The structural limitations faced by Mahkamov and his advisors on economic questions were evident throughout the republic, but they were particularly clear in relation to the State Citrus Farm named for N. Qarabaev in Kolkhozobad District. Founded in the late 1960s, this state farm had for decades been an exemplar agricultural enterprise, producing high yields of Tajikistan's uniquely sweet and juicy lemons and always turning a profit.<sup>67</sup> Even in 1990 the state farm continued to be profitable, and its lemons were in high demand across the USSR. At the same time, by early 1991 it was going bankrupt and its lemons were nowhere to be found in the Tajik SSR's stores and markets.<sup>68</sup>

This contradictory state of affairs was the direct effect of perestroika's many convoluted layers of economic reform. Early on in his tenure as First Secretary in late 1985, Gorbachev had proposed an agricultural program that was meant to recentralize and boost food production across the USSR. Ultimately passed in the spring of 1986, this program in part combined the previously existing six agricultural ministries into a giant State Agricultural-Industrial Committee (*Gosagroprom*). In order to increase agricultural productivity, moreover, it created a series of "Scientific-Productive Associations" (*nauchno-proizvodstvennyye ob"edineniia* or NPO), which were given authority over a series of related state and collective farms. In Kolkhozabad District, control over the State Citrus Farm named for N. Qarabaev was given to the newly founded NPO "Boghparvar" (taj. "Orchard Management"). Amongst other things, Boghparvar was given the right to distribute the farms' profits, nominally in order to promote higher productivity.

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<sup>67</sup> Lemons began to be grown in Tajikistan in the 1930s and 1940s, when they were brought to the newly irrigated Vakhsh valley by the Georgian agriculturalist Vladimir Tsulaia. A selection process of 14 years was needed to cultivate the necessary sort, but once established in 1949, the Tajik lemon became an important part of local economies and diets. See I. Meskhi, "Po Tadzshikistanu," *Ogonyok*, October 10 1954, 27; Salomiddin Mirzorakhmatov, "Triumf vakhshstroia: 80 let nazad nachalos' osvoenie Vakhshskoi doliny," *Asia-Plus*, April 04, 2013.

<sup>68</sup> M. Urbanovichus, "Sponsory i nakhlebniki," *Komsomolets Tadzshikistana*, January 4, 1991.

At first, this new arrangement led to few practical changes. By 1989, however, two reforms again initiated in Moscow managed to turn matters on their head. First, Gosagroprom was disbanded and agricultural ministries recreated in its wake, leaving Boghparvar and other NPOs without a clear chain of oversight. Second, moreover, cooperative businesses had both been legalized and allowed to move around profits without restriction, providing clear incentive for corrupt links with NPOs that had access to profitable farms. Boghparvar's management wasted no time, withdrawing approximately 500,000 rubles a year from the Citrus State Farms' accounts and providing nothing in return. An investigation in early 1991 was unable to establish where these funds had gone: the best guess was somewhere in the cooperative sector, where they would have quickly been turned into cash.<sup>69</sup>

The situation worsened even further in 1991. The ongoing decentralization of the Soviet economy meant that established connections between state farms like the one in Kolkhozabad and state enterprises were often sundered. Lemons were still sold, but were frequently bought up by cooperatives or the new semi-private "Concerns" and exported abroad. Price liberalization, which had been pushed through in Moscow in January 1991, meant prices on most foodstuffs rose during the first months of the year. Mahkamov's government responded by subsidizing the cost of many basic goods, but this only led to the further disappearance of foodstuffs from Tajikistan: entrepreneurs would buy cheap flour, oil, or even lemons by the truck-full in Tajikistan and sell them in Kazakhstan or Russia, where the market price was much higher.<sup>70</sup> By June 1991 the Tajik SSR had already spent more than 150 million rubles on subsidies,<sup>71</sup> and yet food deficits had all the same reached "crisis" conditions and there seemed no end in sight to the downward tumble.<sup>72</sup>

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In the peak years of lemon production in the Vakhsh valley, a local saying summed up their economic importance: "*Limon nadori – imon nadori!*" (taj. "If you don't

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> On the export of lemons in 1991, see TsGART f. 297, op. 40, d. 1271, l. 40.

<sup>71</sup> GARF f. 5446, op. 163, d. 181, ll. 22; 43.

<sup>72</sup> TsGART f. 297, op. 40, d. 1247, ll. 88-89.

have lemons, you don't have wealth.")<sup>73</sup> Clearly, lemons were just a small if representative part of a much larger economic system, but in the last few years of the Soviet Union this saying rung especially true. The same problems faced by the State Citrus Farm named for N. Qarabaev on the level of an individual enterprise were also visible on the macro-level across Tajikistan. Much as Moscow-driven reforms had led to the disappearance of lemons from store shelves, so too had they brought about the collapse evident throughout the Tajik economy by mid-1991.

First and foremost, the same structural conditions that had already led Soviet enterprises to lower production and raise prices in 1988-1990 not only remained in place in 1991 – in some ways, they became even worse. In late 1990 and early 1991 legal changes were passed that were nominally intended to force enterprises to react to market signals: they lowered support payments from the state, allowed privatization through "the transfer of an enterprise to rental status," and required proof of production gains in exchange for increased payments.<sup>74</sup> At the same time, however, they also lowered taxes on many types of enterprises, and innumerable others were able to receive individualized "exceptions" from the new rules.<sup>75</sup> In practice, in other words, the new laws did little to stop enterprises from continuing to hoard profits, lower production, and focus on only the most profitable goods. The situation in Tajikistan thus reflected the USSR as a whole: as the investigative journalist Vasily Seliunin noted, changes to enterprise law had been "enough to destroy the consumer market and destroy the wholesale market."<sup>76</sup> Nor was privatization a successful way out, as the Tajik SSR found in 1991. Although the privatization of state property had been legalized in January 1991 and a list of 551 objects drawn up to be privatized, by the end of the year only 29 had actually been sold.<sup>77</sup>

To make matters worse, the ongoing program of decentralizing and marketizing relations between enterprises hampered Tajik factories' capacity to produce even

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<sup>73</sup> Mirzorakhmatov, "Triumf vakhshstroia."

<sup>74</sup> See the Law of the USSR "On Enterprises in the USSR," which came into effect on January 1, 1991 (GARF f. 5446, op. 163, d. 1284); Law of the USSR "On the Union Budget for 1991" (GARF f. 5446, op. 13, d. 1742, l. 109); and Decree of the Council of Ministers of the USSR "On Measures to Ensure the Normal Functioning of the Economy in 1991" (GARF f. 5446, op. 13, d. 1742, l. 14).

<sup>75</sup> A frequent justification was that production losses occurred "not through the fault of the collective." For such requests, see GARF f. 5446, op. 13, d. 1742, ll. 1-17, quote on 17.

<sup>76</sup> Interview with Vasily Seliunin, Moscow, June 1990. 2RR 1/2/9 44, p. 4.

<sup>77</sup> TsGART, f. 297, op. 40, d. 1235, l. 13; d. 1286, ll. 68-69.

the selection of expensive goods that remained profitable.<sup>78</sup> As the Tajik Finance Minister, Jonobiddin Lafizov, reported to the Supreme Soviet in late 1990, “Practically the republic’s entire economy has proven dependent upon imported and inter-republican deliveries.”<sup>79</sup> As the percentage of orders covered by *goszakaz* (obligatory state orders) continued to drop, however, enterprises became less and less likely to agree to direct deals between one another. According to internal Gosplan calculations, by 1991 enterprises were agreeing across the USSR to only 25% of the contracts needed to ensure full production.<sup>80</sup> As a result, Tajikistan was receiving less than 20% of the lumber it needed, and completing failing to receive hundreds of millions glass bottles, airline fuel, steel, sugar, cotton and wool cloth, and many other products.<sup>81</sup> Essentially held hostage by larger enterprises in Russia, Kazakhstan and other republics that were demanding payment “in kind” for raw inputs, the Tajik SSR was unable to produce enough goods either for its own citizens or for barter.<sup>82</sup> Much of its industry was at a standstill.

It was often suggested by politicians in Dushanbe and Moscow alike that foreign trade might help to solve Tajikistan’s economic woes, providing hard currency and both consumer goods and raw materials to fill store shelves and factory warehouses. In practice, however, the expansion of foreign trade only served to exacerbate matters. Although foreign trade had traditionally been strictly regulated in the USSR, passing almost exclusively through the Ministry of Foreign Economic Relations in Moscow, from 1986 the leadership of the USSR under Gorbachev had started to ease restrictions.<sup>83</sup> Local organizations began receiving the right to either import or export goods in direct contract with foreign firms, a group that by 1988 included the state agency “Tadzhikvneshtorg” (rus. “Tajik

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<sup>78</sup> On the promotion of direct contracts, see Chapter Four. On April 26, 1990 the USSR’s Supreme Soviet also passed the Law of the USSR “On Distributing Authority between the Soviet Union and Federative Subjects,” which dictated that republics now held responsibility for the enterprises on their territory. See Article 4 of this law, GARF f. 5446, op. 162, d. 175, l. 133.

<sup>79</sup> Zakliuchenie po proektu Respublikanskogo biudzheta Tadzhikskoi SSR na 1991 god, TsGART f. 297, op. 40, d. 1230, ll. 162-163.

<sup>80</sup> Doklad Gosplana SSSR “O proekte obshchesoiuznogo prognoza Soveta Ministrov SSSR o funktsionirovanii ekonomiki strany v 1991 godu,” RGAE f. 4372, op. 67, d. 9341, l. 26.

<sup>81</sup> GARF f. 5446, op. 163, d. 180, l. 41; d. 181, ll. 11-12, 25-26, 51-52; TsGART f. 355, op. 16, d. 22, l. 34; d. 182, l. 22.

<sup>82</sup> GARF f. 5446, op. 163, d. 181, ll. 17-18.

<sup>83</sup> Ryzhkov, *Perestroika*, 254-255.

Foreign Trade”).<sup>84</sup> Under the leadership of its energetic director, Yurii Gaitsgori, Tadzhiqvneshtorg actively began to export foodstuffs and aluminum to China, Afghanistan, and Pakistan, receiving in exchange expensive velvet cloth, silk, and other prestige goods.<sup>85</sup> In March 1989 Tadzhiqvneshtorg received the right to license enterprises and cooperatives to conduct foreign trade independently; by the end of the year nearly 50 organizations in Dushanbe were already in the import-export business.<sup>86</sup> Their number would continue to increase in 1990 and 1991.

Yet increasing imports and exports did little to alleviate either consumer deficits or the overall economic downturn. Instead, driven by low customs fees on export and high import fees,<sup>87</sup> Tajikistan’s organizations exported practically anything they could: raw materials (cotton, aluminum, foodstuffs), consumer goods (cotton cloth, shoes, kitchen dishes) and industrial inputs (fertilizer, cement, machine oil). In return, they overwhelmingly brought expensive prestige goods: computers, Japanese television sets, western cosmetics and perfume, and a very large amount of synthetic fabric.<sup>88</sup> These goods, along with the large amount of foreign currency also received, made a small number of newly minted Tajik businessmen very rich. Yet they “did not have a significant impact improving the provision of goods to the population.”<sup>89</sup> This was an understatement: they in fact made deficits much worse, as hundreds of millions of rubles of needed goods were sent abroad. Hardly helping matters, multiple investigations kept disclosing facts of theft and embezzlement, and Tajik organizations patently ignored restrictions placed on the export of certain goods.<sup>90</sup> Illegality was a small price to pay when the rewards figured in the millions of dollars.

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<sup>84</sup> TsGART f. 2046, op. 1, d. 8 ll. 1-2; f. 18, op. 8, d. 3656, ll. 180, 302.

<sup>85</sup> TsGART f. 2046, op. 1, d. 8 ll. 3-4.

<sup>86</sup> This was in line with the Decree of the Council of Ministers of the USSR No. 203 of March 7, 1989 “On Efforts of State Regulation of Foreign Trade Activity.” See TsGART f. 2046, op. 1, d. 8, l. 10.

<sup>87</sup> On customs fees established by the Council of Ministers of the USSR in 1991, see GARF f. 5446, op. 163, d. 48, ll. 4-7.

<sup>88</sup> For the content and value of import and export in the Tajik SSR in 1991, for example, see TsGART f. 297, op. 40, d. 1280, ll. 95-115.

<sup>89</sup> E. Sh. Kashaeva, “Problemy i perspektivy sozdaniia i razmeshcheniia sovmestnykh predpriatii na territorii sredneaziatskogo regiona (na primere Tadjhikskoi SSR),” in *Sovetologi o problemakh sotsial’no-ekonomicheskogo razvitiia SSSR i soiuznykh respublik* (Moscow: Institut ekonomiki AN SSSR, 1991), 80.

<sup>90</sup> In 1989, for example, the state agency “Tadjhikpotrebsoiuz” contracted with an Austrian firm to exchange fertilizer for seed potatoes. It received a loan from a state bank to purchase the fertilizer from local producers in the Tajik SSR, and failed to either send the fertilizer or acquire potatoes. Its

As the example of export demonstrated, as space for unregulated economic activity opened up in the Tajik SSR, so did the incentive for ethically questionable and even openly illegal pursuits. Partly this was related to the cooperative sector, the influence of which from the beginning had been at best ambiguous. By 1991, moreover, the sector had almost fully merged with the republic's "grey" economy. Reports showed that more and more "criminal elements" and "former convicts" were involved in the cooperative sector, and that "unhealthy tendencies" were dominating its activities.<sup>91</sup> This included millions of rubles in theft, tens of millions of unpaid taxes, and the frequent failure to fulfill contracts.<sup>92</sup> In addition, these cooperatives were less and less frequently involved in the production and sale of consumer goods. Instead, the number of cooperatives "founded on the base of state enterprises" actually grew by nearly 10% in 1991.<sup>93</sup> These businesses claimed to be involved in "production," but in practice tended to buy up equipment and raw materials, which was then either exported or sold at market prices to the local population. Notwithstanding its questionable social value and negative impact on the economy, however, the sector continued to grow, with more than 70,000 Tajik Soviet citizens working in more than 3,400 cooperatives in 1991.<sup>94</sup> For the individual worker, cooperatives could offer a lot – and first and foremost salaries of more than 300 rubles a month, at least 50% higher than average.<sup>95</sup>

Cooperatives were also just one piece of the larger puzzle of new business-like organizations that started to flourish in 1990 and 1991. In 1990, a number of Tajikistan's ministries were practically rented out: they were turned into "concerns" (*kontserny*) and their ministers transferred to the position of "director." While this was meant to increase the ministries' activities through market incentives, in practice it led to directors assigning themselves salaries of nearly

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export license was suspended, but by 1991 was again sending raw goods abroad in violation of republican restrictions. On the 1989 case, see GARF f. 5446, op. 162, d. 260, ll. 60-65; on 1991, see I. Sarychev, "KGB protiv sabotazha," *Komsomolets Tadjikistana*, April 12, 1991; on legal restrictions on export – TsGART f. 2046, op. 1, d. 5, ll. 139-142.

<sup>91</sup> Programma bor'by s prestupnost'iu i ukrepleniia pravoporiadka v Tadjikskoi SSR na 1991-1995 gg., TsGART f. 297, op. 40, d. 1252, l. 52; Protokol No. 75 Zasedaniia Prezidiuma Verkhovnogo Soveta Respubliki Tadjikistan, 06.12.1991, TsGART f. 297, op. 40, d. 1271, ll. 5-6.

<sup>92</sup> TsGART f. 297, op. 40, d. 1235, l. 80; d. 1271, ll. 5-6.

<sup>93</sup> Gazibekov, "Rezervy razvitiia proizvodstvennykh," 43-44.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 3, 40; TsGART f. 297, op. 40, d. 1271, l. 18.

<sup>95</sup> Gazibekov, "Rezervy razvitiia proizvodstvennykh," 45.



2,000 rubles a month and avoiding payments to the state budget.<sup>96</sup> Since January 1991 a new flat tax rate of 5% on all business income meant that the concerns could legally hold onto the majority of their income.<sup>97</sup> In this environment, corruption, bribery, and embezzlement skyrocketed. By 1991, the Ministry of the Interior of the Tajik SSR was reporting that claims of bribery and financial mismanagement had increased by 1,000% since 1988, and “if citizens used to arrive with claims about bribery in the amount of 200 rubles, now we are investigating different cases – those of businesses where damages are greater than 1 million rubles.”<sup>98</sup> Perhaps emboldened by the actions of this new class of businessmen, the Tajik SSR’s leaders also doubled and tripled their salaries in 1991 in order to receive between 1,000 and 2,000 rubles a month.<sup>99</sup> The Communist Party of Tajikistan went further, founding the business “EKOMPT” in February 1991 and loaning it millions of rubles to purchase cars and central Dushanbe buildings from the Party itself.<sup>100</sup>

### III. State and Social Paralysis

Economic recession, decreased production, the siphoning off and export of much-needed consumer goods and increasing corruption all had the consequence of starving the Tajik SSR of tax revenue. This was especially damaging in 1991, when efforts to implement “principles of autonomy and self-financing” on the republican level finally came into effect. Initially promoted during perestroika by the Baltic republics and other more industrially developed parts of the USSR, republican self-financing (*samofinansirovanie* or *khozraschet*) essentially meant that the Tajik SSR would need to “more fully provide for its internal needs based on its own production,” as one early policy analysis argued.<sup>101</sup> Long a matter of debate, by

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<sup>96</sup> The Ministry of Social Provision (*Ministerstvo sotsial'nogo obespecheniia*), for example, became the Concern “Hizmat” (taj. “Service”); see TsGART f. 306, op. 27, d. 1383, l. 1. On concerns in general, see TsGART f. 297, op. 40, d. 1237, l. 10.

<sup>97</sup> TsGART f. 306, op. 27, d. 1403, ll. 124-127.

<sup>98</sup> TsGART f. 297, op. 40, d. 1271, l. 38.

<sup>99</sup> In 1991, Aslonov received 2,000 rubles a month as Chairman of the Supreme Soviet of the Tajik SSR. Most other leading government figures received 1,000 rubles a month. See TsGART f. 297, op. 40, d. 1249, ll. 3; 14-16. This was an increase of more than 300% from 1989 (TsGART f. 18, op. 8, d. 3660, l. 182).

<sup>100</sup> On EKOMPT and its activities in 1991, see Protokol No. 11 zasedaniia sekretariata TsK Kompartii Tadjikistana ot 22.07.1991, RGASPI f. 17, op. 160, d. 1672, ll. 6-7; TsGART f. 297, op. 40, d. 1274, ll. 43; 48; 277-283.

<sup>101</sup> Kompleksnaia programma razvitiia proizvodstvennykh sil soiuznykh respublik Srednei Azii i Kazakhskoi SSR na period do 2010 goda, RGAE f. 4372, op. 67, d. 7785, l. 48. On early discussions in Tajikistan, see Rasporiazhenie Soveta Ministrov Tadjikskoi SSR No. 238 ot 10.08.1989, TsGART f.

1991 this meant that Tajikistan was required to cover the costs of subsidizing foodstuffs and making pension and social support payments to its citizens, all of which had traditionally been covered by the Union budget in Moscow. At the same time, the Tajik SSR was still required to sell cotton to the Soviet center at under-market rates, for which it continued to receive none of the attendant taxes.<sup>102</sup> In short, for Tajikistan republican self-financing was a terrible bargain: it lost much of the Union support it had enjoyed, while receiving literally nothing in return.

As a result, the Tajik Minister of Finance Lafizov reported as early as February 1991, “there was no real money in the state coffers.” The Tajik SSR’s budget obligations were doubling to more than 4 billion rubles in 1991, while expected income was down from 1990 to around 2.4 billion rubles. Lafizov suggested “filling the [deficit] of 1.8 billion rubles from subsidies provided from the newly recreated all-Union extraordinary fund for economic stabilization,” as well as through “new and various additional taxes.”<sup>103</sup> Over the course of 1991, new taxes were raised, as were fines for traffic violations and fees for international travel – all in an attempt to raise revenue.<sup>104</sup> In practice, however, these measures came up extremely short, especially in light of rampant inflation and price liberalization.<sup>105</sup> Afraid of the social impact of price increases – “the people are embittered (*ozlobleny*),” one Supreme Soviet deputy reported, “and it’s frightening to meet with them”<sup>106</sup> – Mahkamov and his government spent even more subsidizing the cost of bread and other basic foodstuffs. Yet this had little impact other than increasing deficits as goods were hauled out of the republic by the truckload to further enrich a small number of new entrepreneurs. Nor was the stabilization fund cited by Lafizov, linked to the unsigned Union Treaty and requiring payments

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18, op. 8, d. 3659, l. 57. For the Baltic influence, see Interview with Georgii Koshlakov, Dushanbe, July 2016; also A.N. Grinberg, “*Ekonomicheskii mekhanizm mezhrespublikanskikh i mezhregional'nykh otnoshenii*,” *Ekonomika i organizatsiia promyshlennogo proizvodstva (EKO)*, 9, 1989, 38.

<sup>102</sup> RGAE f. 4372, op. 67, d. 9351, l. 31.

<sup>103</sup> TsGART f. 306, op. 27, d. 1403, ll. 124-127.

<sup>104</sup> TsGART f. 297, op. 40, d. 1247, ll. 18-20.

<sup>105</sup> Technically, the prices of basic goods were only “increased” by the Soviet government in April 1991. In practice, however, many retail enterprises acted as though all limits on prices had been removed. See E. Gonzalez, “*Chto delat' s partiei tovara?*” *Izvestiia*, April 2, 1991.

<sup>106</sup> Stenogramma Zasedaniia Presidiuma Verkhovnogo Soveta Tadzhikskoi SSR ot 08.04.1991, TsGART f. 297, op. 40, d. 1237, l. 25.

from other increasingly skeptical republics, able to shore up the Tajik budget.<sup>107</sup> By the summer of 1991 the Tajik government found itself hundreds of millions of rubles in debt, factually bankrupt, and hurtling into an apparent abyss.<sup>108</sup> Nor did the government have much of a plan to dig itself out. "There is absolutely no sense of any work being done," the deputy Ashurov complained in April 1991, "...where exactly are we heading? Where is our republic going?"<sup>109</sup>

Mahkamov was silent in response; this would have in any case been a difficult question for him to answer. As the economy nosedived and deficits increased in 1991, so too was society roughening around the edges. Crime in the republic had increased by nearly 10% over the first half of 1991, with organized crime, narcotics use, and economic crime related to bribery and embezzlement growing at particularly notable rates.<sup>110</sup> Government officials were increasingly involved in the "bamboozlement" (*shubadabozy*) hiding and selling of state property, and "seeing theft and pillaging by the republic's representatives, so too did the people take to theft and petty crime (*avboshy*)."<sup>111</sup> With unemployment continuing to rise along with consumer deficits, thousands of desperately needed specialists were moving out of Dushanbe, leaving the local airport, for example, barely able to function.<sup>112</sup> Outside of Dushanbe, moreover, people were growing increasingly angry. As the Supreme Soviet deputy from the southern district of Kobodiyon, E. Kurbanov, told his colleagues in mid-1991:

*"My constituents asked me to pass their words to you, and said that if I didn't pass their words, that I would answer to them in the afterlife. It should be said that they angrily spoke about being lied to by the President of the republic...this is a barrel of gunpowder: just bring a spark and it will explode into I don't know what. That is the fevered state of my constituents."*<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> By the end of 1991, inflation and the collapse of the central Soviet government had increased Tajik budget obligations to almost 5.2 billion rubles, while payments from central funds had only amounted to 1.3 billion. See TsGART f. 306, op. 27, d. 1422, ll. 8-12;

<sup>108</sup> GARF f. 5446, op. 163, d. 181, l. 62; also Nasreddinov, *Tarkish*, 139.

<sup>109</sup> TsGART f. 297, op. 40, d. 1237, l. 13.

<sup>110</sup> On rising crime rates, see Programma bor'by s prestupnost'iu i ukrepleniia pravoporiadka v Tadzhikskoi SSR na 1991-1995 gg., TsGART f. 297, op. 40, d. 1252, ll. 51-54; "Zakonu net al'ternativy," *Komsomolets Tadzhikistana*, May 17, 1991.

<sup>111</sup> Nasreddinov, *Tarkish*, 136. On the "bamboozlement" sale of state property, see Davlat, "Maqsud Ikromov."

<sup>112</sup> TsGART f. 297, op. 41, d. 279, ll. 32-33.

<sup>113</sup> TsGART f. 297, op. 40, d. 1237, l. 11.

As President of the Tajik SSR, however, Mahkamov either could not or simply failed to take control of the situation. Rather than demand an increased portion of tax revenue in exchange for budget obligations he stayed silent in order to avoid any “backlash from the Union and other union republics.”<sup>114</sup> Instead of aggressively tackling the growing crime rates and low-level criminality, he allowed the position of General Prosecutor of the Tajik SSR to go unfilled from December 1990 to May 1991 as he waited for legal disagreements to be sorted out in Moscow.<sup>115</sup> Once elections were finally held for the post, moreover, his favored candidate, Safarali Kenjaev, lost to the opposition-supported Nurullo Khuvaidulloev.

Increasingly, Mahkamov’s hold on power appeared to be slipping: the ongoing state of emergency kept people off of the streets, but behind closed doors frustration was growing. Newspapers, too, were increasing in number and censure, as independent publications such as *Charoghi Ruz* joined the critical state and party papers.<sup>116</sup> With opposition parties and politicians clamoring for a fight in the face of economic collapse and government weakness, it was anyone’s guess how long the status quo could last. Unemployment and the degradation of people’s standard of living remained the most salient, and unresolvable, issue, with increasingly large numbers of workers left idle and angry with the politicians they blamed for their plight. As frustration grew, so did the efforts of opposition politicians to build on and exploit social tensions. And the next few months would in fact prove Kurbanov right: in the end all it took was a spark to tip the system into utter dysfunction.

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<sup>114</sup> TsGART f. 306, op. 27, d. 1403, l. 127.

<sup>115</sup> Nasrullo Asadullo, “Qonunhoi nomukammal,” *Adabiyot va sa’nat*, April 25, 1991. The previous General Prosecutor of Tajikistan, Genadii Mikhailin, had retired in December 1990, leaving the post in the hands of his deputy, Tukhta Pochomulloev. Since December 1990, however, the Supreme Soviet of the USSR was debating the order in which General Prosecutors were to be elected (see *Chetvertyi s’ezd narodnykh deputatov*, v. 1, 571). Until this question was resolved in late spring 1991, no elections were held for the position in Tajikistan.

<sup>116</sup> Oleg Panfilov, *Tadzhikistan: zhurnalisty na grazhdanskoi voine* (Moscow: Prava cheloveka, 2003), 15-16.

## **Chapter Eight**

### **Slouching Towards Independence**

On the morning of Monday, August 19, 1991, a strange coded telegram was delivered to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Tajikistan (CPT). Sent by the Secretariat of the CPSU Central Committee in Moscow, it referenced a “State Committee for the State of Emergency” and the need to support this committee’s actions in the coming days. Shortly thereafter another coded telegram arrived, this time from the office of Genadii Yanaev, the Vice-President of the USSR. In this telegram, the leaders of the CPT were ordered to distribute the Committee’s request for support to local government offices throughout the republic. No further explanation was provided.<sup>1</sup>

Unbeknownst to Kahhor Mahkamov and the leadership of the CPT, the night of August 18<sup>th</sup> had been a busy one in other parts of the USSR. A group of conspirators, including Yanaev, Prime Minister Valentin Pavlov, KGB Chairman Vladimir Kriuchkov, Defense Minister Dmitry Yazov, and Deputy Chairman of the Security Council Oleg Baklanov, had come to the conclusion that the final version of the Union Treaty meant to be signed on August 20 essentially represented the end of the USSR.<sup>2</sup> Unwilling to allow this, they instead chose to form an “Emergency Committee” and temporarily remove Gorbachev from power.<sup>3</sup> Together with Gorbachev’s close advisor and Committee sympathizer Valery Boldin, Baklanov was dispatched to “Object Zaria” near Foros, Crimea, the Soviet President’s summer resort. Boldin and Baklanov were instructed to negotiate with Gorbachev about the terms of his removal and, if necessary, oversee his house arrest. The rest of the Committee set about taking control of Moscow and the Soviet government. Troops were brought into the Soviet capital and took up positions on the streets, while supporters of the Committee already in control of state television and radio were bolstered by additional security forces at key transmission stations.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> TsGART f. 297, op. 40, d. 1633, l. 247.

<sup>2</sup> The Emergency Committee later came to include Interior Minister Boris Pugo, and the industrial and agricultural union leaders Vasily Starodubtsev and Aleksandr Tiziakov.

<sup>3</sup> On the Emergency Committee’s motivations and plans, see Yanaev’s letter to US President Bush on August 19, 1991. George H.W. Bush Presidential Library, Gorbachev – Sensitive, July-December 1991. File No. OA-ID 91130-004.

<sup>4</sup> Brown, *The Gorbachev Factor*, 294-296; also: Boldin, *Krushchenie pedestal’ia*, 8-21.

In Dushanbe, no one was quite sure how to respond. Many in the Tajik leadership – and certainly Mahkamov personally – were sympathetic to the Emergency Committee's goals: they too had wished to stop the slow disintegration of Soviet statehood. While calmly accepting the news from Moscow, however, Mahkamov avoided openly supporting the Committee or even spreading their orders as far as requested.<sup>5</sup> Instead, given pause by plotters' seeming incompetence – even the telegrams sent to Dushanbe were improperly signed and stamped, and foreign radio stations were awash with reports of confusion in Moscow – Mahkamov chose to “take a wait and see approach.”<sup>6</sup> As the days passed, this began to seem a wise choice. Having failed to arrest Boris Yeltsin and the other leaders of the Russian republic in Moscow, the Emergency Committee faced increasingly large crowds of protestors in the streets, bolstered and led by Yeltsin's speeches in front of the Russian “White House” (the seat of the Russian parliament). By August 21, the Emergency Committee simply admitted its defeat: unwilling to order Soviet troops to fire on the crowds, it instead began to withdraw troops from Moscow and recalled Gorbachev to the capital, where he was met by a triumphant Yeltsin and an ascendant Russian parliament.

The collapse of the Emergency Committee and the failure of its putsch represented the final reversal of Soviet political fortunes. The Russian republic's leadership had at last demonstrated its domination over the Soviet center: the plotters, representing the old (federal) political leaders, were arrested, and Gorbachev confirmed a new cabinet largely dictated by Yeltsin. The Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the Russian Federation, Ivan Silaev, for example, was quickly made the new Soviet Premier, notwithstanding the opposition of both “all of the republics” and Gorbachev's own circle.<sup>7</sup> Facing a rapidly changing political landscape, Mahkamov continued his policy of inaction and indecision. On August 22, he issued a brief statement, in which he praised the Tajik people for their “wisdom” in waiting out the situation calmly and vaguely positioned himself as

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<sup>5</sup> On the “calm” reaction to the putsch in Dushanbe, see Usmonov, *Soli Nabiev*, 6; Shifrtelgramma No. 210471, 20.08.1991, GARF f. 9654, op. 7, d. 1360, l. 105.

<sup>6</sup> TsGART f. 297, op. 40, d. 1633, ll. 247-248; quote on 248. Those in charge of the putsch in Moscow became famous for their incompetence upon taking power, whether in terms of their vague and rambling press conference on August 19 or their inability to take control of the Russian parliament.

<sup>7</sup> On the opposition to Silaev, see Stenogramma Zasedaniia Prezidiuma Verkhovnogo Soveta Tadzhikskoi SSR, 26.08.1991, TsGART f. 297, op. 40, d. 1253, l. 13.

having been against the putsch.<sup>8</sup> He then also gave a speech on Tajik television on August 25, in which he again called for “calm” and avoided any clearly statement of judgment about the Emergency Committee and its failed putsch.<sup>9</sup>

By repeating the word “calm,” Mahkamov seemed to be attempting to will it into reality. At first, moreover, it appeared to work: much as there had been no public response to the putsch in Dushanbe, so was there little reaction to its collapse. While the superstructure of the USSR was disintegrating before his eyes, this at least allowed Mahkamov some breathing room – and space to approach the pressing questions of the day, such as Union Treaty, which he still felt deserved attention.<sup>10</sup> Yet Mahkamov’s respite would prove short-lived. Within a few days Dushanbe would too feel the repercussions of the new political order that had arrived in the USSR on August 22. Much as in Moscow, moreover, this new order would split society in two – those in favor of a new, if ill-defined, post-Soviet world, and those who remained loyal to the sinking ship of the Soviet state.

In contrast to most Western and Soviet expectations, however, in Tajikistan both sides of the political divide agreed on one point: Tajikistan’s future remained tied to Moscow. Instead of the final push for independence or a grasp at post-colonial freedom, Tajikistan’s reaction to the putsch and Soviet disintegration in late 1991 was at best ambiguous. Even those advocating a break from the Soviet past made no attempt to break with Moscow or the economic ties that bound Dushanbe to the Russian economy. Nor did the opposition present a coherent plan for economic or political independence: much as the conservative leadership of Tajikistan, they too could little conceive of the practical realities of true independence. This remained true throughout the fall of 1991, even as the Russian government under Boris Yeltsin made increasing efforts to divest itself of both the Soviet superstructure and many of the Union Republics that had once constituted it. Even as Yeltsin met with the leaders of Belorussia and Ukraine on December 8, 1991 to plan the final

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<sup>8</sup> “Obrashchenie Prezidenta Tadzhikskoi SSR K.M. Makhkamova k narodu Tadzhikistana,” *Vechernii Dushanbe*, August 23, 1991.

<sup>9</sup> “Vystuplenie Prezidenta Tadzhikskoi SSR K.M. Mahkamova po televideniiu 25 avgusta,” *Vechernii Dushanbe*, August 27, 1991.

<sup>10</sup> The Union Treaty remained Mahkamov’s primary concern in late August 1991. See TsGART f. 297, op. 40, d. 1253, l. 13.

end of the USSR, Tajikistan's president was trying to call Yeltsin to advocate a stronger Union. Dushanbe showed little stomach for independence.

As a result, when Tajikistan did finally find itself a factually independent nation in January 1992, its leaders had little to no idea about how to proceed. There were no plans for independence, and no conception of how to rule an independent country. There was, however, a collapsed economy, an empty budget, and an increasingly unruly social order. Rather than the lack of a "political bargain" between opposed political factions, or the influence of radical ideas such as political Islam, as have been variously suggested, it was instead this impossible imbalance between a paralyzed government and a disintegrating economy that would ultimately lead to social breakdown and violence in March 1992.<sup>11</sup> The preceding six months, moreover, from the end of the Putsch to the end of February 1992, would define the lines of social cleavage that would later come to the fore.

### **I. The Struggle to Remain in Moscow's Shadow**

It only took a few days after the putsch for the fault lines to show. With the earlier state of emergency having finally been repealed, Dushanbe's opposition parties found that their hands were no longer tied. On the morning of Saturday, August 24, the city's residents awoke to the first of many political demonstrations: Shodmon Yusuf and his Democratic Party (DPT) had staged a large protest against the putsch in front of the central opera theater.<sup>12</sup> With the Emergency Committee having collapsed days before and its members already under arrest, this demonstration implied an ongoing struggle between those in favor of change and those who had, actively or passively, supported the putsch. This set the tone for the debates and political struggle of the next week. "The putsch did not fail – the putsch is ongoing!" declared Davlat Khudonazarov at an extraordinary session of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR in Moscow on August 27, accusing Mahkamov of not only sympathizing with, but also supporting the Emergency Committee. On August 19, Khudonazarov told the Supreme Soviet, Mahkamov had met with the journalist (and former Deputy Chairman of the Tajik Council of Ministers) Otakhon Latifi. According to Latifi, Mahkamov had expressed his support "in principle" for

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. Driscoll, *Warlords and Coalition*; Markowitz, *State Erosion*; Tuncer-Kilavuz, "Understanding Civil War."

<sup>12</sup> A. Liubimenko, "Otstoiat' demokratiuu. Reportazh s mitinga," *Vechernii Dushanbe*, August 27, 1991.



the putsch.<sup>13</sup> After Latifi passed this information to Khudonazarov, the latter had tried to discuss it with Mahkamov a few days later on a plane to Moscow, but Mahkamov refused to speak at all – indicative, Khudonazarov argued, of the former’s conservatism and intransigence in the face of change.<sup>14</sup> Khudonazarov’s comments were met with support in the Supreme Soviet and Dushanbe alike, indicative not only of Tajikistan’s continued emphasis on Moscow as the seat of ultimate political power – but also the changing source of that power.

With political clout rapidly shifting away from Gorbachev and the Soviet center, Mahkamov’s loyalty to the old system was quickly starting to look to many in Dushanbe like a liability. Mahkamov and his supporters in the CPT Bureau moved to disassociate themselves from the now tainted Party apparatus in Moscow: they cut ties with the CPSU and, copying a move made by Yeltsin in July, declared an official “departification” (*departizatsiia*) of all presidential and parliamentary offices. Yet this had little effect.<sup>15</sup> By the time a full session of the Supreme Soviet of the Tajik SSR gathered on August 29, social pressure was reaching a breaking point. On the square outside the parliamentary building a loud political demonstration was underway, organized by a coalition of opposition forces, including the DPT, Rastokhez, and the Islamic Revival Party of Tajikistan (IRPT). Pressuring the parliamentary deputies, the thousands of demonstrators “denounced the CPSU and the republican leadership” and called for Mahkamov’s resignation.<sup>16</sup> Encouraged by Latifi, who repeated his criticism of Mahkamov at the parliamentary session, the Supreme Soviet deputies met with the protestors and began discussing the possibility of removing the president.<sup>17</sup> In a few days a coalition had formed between the small minority of opposition deputies in the

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<sup>13</sup> *Verkhovnii Sovet SSSR. Vneocherednaia sessiia. Biulleten’ No. 4 sovместnogo zasedaniia Soveta Soiuza i Soveta Natsional’nostei. 27 avgusta 1991 g.* (Moscow: 1991), 35-36.

<sup>14</sup> On Khudonazarov’s criticism of Mahkamov, see Mirzoi Salimpur, “GKChP dar Maskav va Tojikiston,” *Radoi Ozody*, August 15, 2011; interview with Davlat Khudonazarov, Moscow, December 2016.

<sup>15</sup> On the status of the CPT, see “Reshaetsia sud’ba partii,” *Vechernii Dushanbe*, August 28, 1991. For the decision to “departify,” see “Ukaz Prezidenta Tadzhikskoi SSR “O prekrashchenii deiatel’nosti organizatsionnykh struktur politicheskikh partii i massovykh obshchestvennykh dvizhenii v pravookhranitel’nykh organakh i v apparate Prezidenta Tadzhikskoi SSR,” *Vechernii Dushanbe*, August 26, 1991; TsGART f. 297, op. 40, d. 1254, l. 4. On Yeltsin’s earlier move, see Kevin O’Connor, *Intellectuals and Apparatchiks: Russian Nationalism and the Gorbachev Revolution* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2006), 257-258.

<sup>16</sup> A. Khodzhaev, “Prizyv k ob’edineniiu demokraticheskikh sil,” *Vechernii Dushanbe*, August 30, 1991.

<sup>17</sup> On Latifi’s comments, see Nazriev and Sattarov, *Respublika Tadzhikistan*, 21. On the actions of parliamentary deputies, see TsGART f. 297, op. 40, d. 1260, l. 18.

parliament and a new class of ambitious politicians, spearheaded by Safarali Kenjaev, who sensed political blood in the water. A popular former prosecutor from the outskirts of Dushanbe, Kenjaev had a reputation for both eloquence – he wrote detective novels as a hobby – and personal ambition, both of which would become evident in the political struggles of 1991 and 1992.<sup>18</sup> On August 31 Kenjaev initiated a successful vote of no confidence, leading to Mahkamov's quiet resignation that afternoon.<sup>19</sup>

Mahkamov's resignation removed any final pretense of calm from the political arena in Dushanbe. With the post of president vacant, the Chairman of the Tajik Supreme Soviet, Qadriddin Aslonov, became acting president until new elections could be held, which were preliminarily set for October 27. Much less experienced than Mahkamov, Aslonov was a handsome politician in his mid forties largely known as a former Party functionary and for his sympathies with some opposition figures.<sup>20</sup> Far from resting after their victory, moreover, the opposition parties banked on their newfound clout to demand even further change. Organizing ongoing demonstrations in front of the Tajik Supreme Soviet, the IRPT and other groups now demanded the banning of the Communist Party and the free registration of all other political organizations.<sup>21</sup> While avoiding any outright ban, Aslonov followed Moscow's (and Yeltsin's) earlier example, signing a presidential order on September 1 nationalizing all of the Communist Party's property in Tajikistan.<sup>22</sup> With the Party's authority (and wealth) dissipating, and sensing the hopelessness of his position, Mahkamov also retired from his final post as First Secretary of the Communist Party of Tajikistan on September 4.<sup>23</sup> With Mahkamov and the Communist Party removed from the political arena, the inexperienced Aslonov and the Supreme Soviet floundered without clear direction. Grasping for legislative initiative, they began to discuss a Declaration of

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<sup>18</sup> On Kenjaev, see Epkenhans, *The Origins of the Civil War*, 169-170.

<sup>19</sup> On Mahkamov's resignation, see TsGART f. 297, op. 40, d. 1260, ll. 15; 25; Usmonov. *Soli Nabiev*, 7; Epkenhans, *The Origins of the Civil War*, 144-145.

<sup>20</sup> On Aslonov, see Davlat, "Qadriddin Aslonov"; I.K. Usmonov, *Mirostroitel'stvo v Tadzhiikistane* (Dushanbe: Devashtich, 2006), 10.

<sup>21</sup> A. Khodzhaev, "S mesta sobytiia. Ploshchad' khochet byt' uslyshannoi," *Vechernii Dushanbe*, September 10, 1991; TsGART f. 297, op. 40, d. 1256, l. 16.

<sup>22</sup> Stenogramma Soveshchaniia u Predsedatelia Verkhovnogo Soveta Tadzhiikskoi SSR tov. Aslonova K.A., 06-07 sentiabria 1991 g., TsGART f. 297, op. 40, d. 1256, l. 17. Yeltsin nationalized CPSU property in the RSFSR on August 25; see Atsushi Ogushi, *The Demise of the Soviet Communist Party* (London: Routledge, 2008), 147.

<sup>23</sup> "Plenum TsK Kompartii Tadzhiikistana," *Vechernii Dushanbe*, September 5, 1991.

Independence for Tajikistan, justifying the idea as a matter of inevitability. Uzbekistan had passed a similar declaration, they argued, and “there is no other path” left.<sup>24</sup> “We no longer have a Union,” the deputy Hikmat Nasreddinov summed up at the end of the debate, “and it has all fallen into pieces. All that remains is us, Turkmenistan, and Gorbachev.”<sup>25</sup> The declaration was duly passed on September 9, 1991, making the Tajik SSR an “independent” nation by the name of the Republic of Tajikistan.

On paper, Tajikistan had become independent. The only problem was that no one in the Tajik government knew what this meant in practice. Although nearly all of the Soviet republics had now declared their independence from the USSR, the Union technically still existed. Gorbachev was still the president of the Soviet Union, and while the Congress of People’s Deputies had “voluntarily dissolved itself” (*samoraspustil’sia*) on September 5, the Center continued to claim authority over the combined Soviet military forces and economic coordination.<sup>26</sup> Nor had either Moscow or any foreign government formally recognized Tajikistan’s independence. This allowed the Tajik leadership, which was, as the Rastokhez leader Tohir Abdujabbor complained, “not only disinclined towards the independence and the freedom of the Tajik people, but even actively working to contradict them,” to continue to tread water somewhere between sovereignty and loyalty to the center.<sup>27</sup> At the same time as the declaration of independence, the Tajik Supreme Soviet was also debating the state of the Tajik economy and military forces – and in both cases managed to avoid any explicit rejection of Tajikistan’s place within a larger Soviet whole. In the case of the military, the Supreme Soviet passed a vague resolution dictating only the “development of a conception of defense and security for the Republic of Tajikistan.”<sup>28</sup> At the same time, moreover, Aslonov emphasized that Tajikistan presumed that within the USSR “the regular army would remain unified.”<sup>29</sup> During the parallel economic debate, the Prime Minister, Izatullo Khayoev was blunt – “The Union has stopped subsidizing us....

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<sup>24</sup> TsGART, f. 297, op. 40, d. 1256, ll. 9-10.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, l. 12.

<sup>26</sup> See Vneocherednoi Piatyi S’ezd narodnykh deputatov SSSR. Biulleten’ No. 6, 05.09.1991, GARF f. 9654, op. 1, d. 192; Dmitrii Lukashevich, *Iuridicheskii mekhanizm razrusheniia SSSR* (Moscow: TD Algoritm, 2016), 171-172.

<sup>27</sup> See Nurali Davlat, “Tohiri Abdujabbor: ‘Padar’-i e”lomiiai istiqlo,” *Ozodagon*, October 12, 2016.

<sup>28</sup> TsGART f. 297, op. 40, d. 1264, l. 35.

<sup>29</sup> TsGART f. 297, op. 40, d. 1256, l. 13.

Nobody is going to give us any more money”<sup>30</sup> – and yet the result was anodyne. The Tajik parliament failed to pass any economic program, and Aslonov went on republican television to say that the key to recovery lay “in the speedy reestablishment of inter-republican economic ties.”<sup>31</sup> For the leadership of Tajikistan, independence somehow meant a continuation of past practices. The USSR is collapsing, they told the Tajik population: long live the USSR.

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Abdujabbor and other opposition leaders, however, were less satisfied with this state of affairs, although they found themselves in a tricky position. On the one hand, having lobbied for Tajik independence and autonomy, they reasonably expected it to engender some legitimate change. On the other hand, they too had little idea of what life outside of the USSR would mean, nor any clear plan for economic development. (Even the opposition economists Abdujabbor or Sohbnazar failed to present any economic program, instead simply repeating calls for increased liberalization and privatization.) To negotiate this conflict, the opposition parties chose to protest not the Soviet state and Tajikistan’s continued status as a Soviet republic – but instead the “conservative” forces nominally holding back reform in the USSR. First and foremost this meant the Communist Party, which continued to operate in Tajikistan, and throughout September representatives of the DPT, IRPT, Rastokhez and others held protests against the Communist Party of Tajikistan (CPT). Holding portraits of Gorbachev and banners with democratic slogans, the protesters took up position on Lenin Square in front of the Tajik Supreme Soviet to demand a ban on the CPT.<sup>32</sup>

Tensions finally came to a head on September 21, 1991, when the CPT met for the first time since Mahkamov’s resignation. Gathering in the EKOMPT building – the opulent former House of Political Education on Lenin Avenue that the CPT had recently privatized and sold – the Party took stock of its reduced position. Down the street on Martyrs’ Square in front of the former Central Committee building, a crowd of thousands of protestors, enervated by the CPT’s temerity at calling a full

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid, l. 11.

<sup>31</sup> Nazriev and Sattarov, *Respublika Tajikistan*, 34.

<sup>32</sup> See, for example, “Chehrai maidoni Ozody,” *Adabiyot va sa’nat*, October 7, 1991.

meeting, shook windows with their demands that the Party dissolve itself.<sup>33</sup> The CPT, however, decided to strike a middle ground, renaming itself the “Socialist Party of Tajikistan” and electing a relatively moderate figure, Shody Shabdolov, to be first secretary of the Party. Hearing this news, the protestors only became more enraged, decamping back to Lenin Square and collecting thousands more angry young men along the way.<sup>34</sup>

By the early evening their number had reached nearly ten thousand, and led by Rastokhez deputy chairman Mirbobob Mirrahim and others, their chants were growing deafening.<sup>35</sup> In one of the more dramatic – and frequently repeated – episodes of modern Tajik history, Khayoev and Aslonov were forced to leave an ongoing Cabinet of Ministers meeting to address the crowd. They were joined on the roiling square by Maksud Ikromov, the then mayor of Dushanbe, as well as Abdujabbor and other opposition politicians. Trying to calm the crowd, Aslonov and Khayoev were shouted down until they declared that the Communist Party would be banned, waving an unsigned paper at the crowd to represent the as-of-yet unfinished resolution.<sup>36</sup> The crowd took Aslonov at his word, changing its shouts and boos to cheers of victory. Drunk with power, the now uncontrolled protestors also took it upon themselves to tear down the statue of Lenin that had given the square its name. Overseen and tacitly approved by Ikromov, this process ultimately required three cranes and led to the unseemly and disorganized sight of Lenin’s head and body rolling about before being summarily carted off.<sup>37</sup>

On the morning of Sunday, September 22, Aslonov met with his legal advisors and published the final resolution fully banning the CPT. Many other members of the Tajik elite were that morning glued to their televisions: it turned out that republican TV had filmed the destruction of Lenin’s statue, which it now included

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<sup>33</sup> Usmonov, *Soli Nabiev*, 10.

<sup>34</sup> L. Nikulina, “Iz kommunistov v sotsialisty,” *Vechernii Dushanbe*, September 23, 1991.

<sup>35</sup> Safarali Kendzhaev, *Perevorot v Tadzhikistane* (Dushanbe: Dushanbinskii poligrafkombinat, 1996), 18.

<sup>36</sup> Sources differ on whether Aslonov had planned to declare a ban on the CPT before going out to the crowd or simply state his intention to temporarily “freeze” (*priostanovit*) their activities, but once outside he declared it banned. It is also clear that the official resolution (*postanovlenie*) remained incomplete and partial until September 22. For divergent accounts see TsGART f. 297, op. 40, d. 1260, ll. 18, 26, 31.

<sup>37</sup> See Abdulov, *Rohi behbud*, 31; Davlat, “Maqsud Ikromov.”

in the morning news.<sup>38</sup> The sight of the uncontrolled crowd dictating politics and destroying symbols of the Soviet past split Tajik society. Those sympathetic to the crowd and critical of the now-crumbling USSR, such as the radical poet and parliamentary deputy Bozor Sobir, saw Lenin's fall as prophetic fulfillment of their past promises to "shred, shred, shred, and break that history."<sup>39</sup> For the majority of Tajik Supreme Soviet deputies and Dushanbe elites, however, the crowd had gone too far. Having grown up and come of age in the Party and Soviet society, they remained loyal to its symbols, especially Lenin. Watching the statue fall, as Kenjaev put it a few weeks later, for many it seemed as though "the whole nation was crying."<sup>40</sup>

By early that evening, this half of society's aghast desperation had turned to organized revolt. Leading conservative members of the government and Party, including the Prosecutor General, Nurullo Khuvaidulloev, and Vakhob Vakhidov, secretary of the CPT, together with Kenjaev, began to gather Supreme Soviet deputies in the Agricultural Institute, a few kilometers north on Lenin Avenue. By five p.m. nearly 90 deputies were gathered; later their number grew to at least 140, a clear majority of the 225-strong Supreme Soviet.<sup>41</sup> All present signed a protocol criticizing Aslonov's actions on the 21<sup>st</sup> and demanding a new session of the Supreme Soviet to evaluate the current political situation.<sup>42</sup> Arriving at the Supreme Soviet building early on the morning of Monday, September 23, the newly organized deputies caught Aslonov off guard. Led again by the openly ambitious Kenjaev, the Supreme Soviet harshly criticized Aslonov and demanded his resignation. Outside on the street, a large crowd had also been gathered by Vakhidov and Nizoramoh Zarifova, the former deputy chairwoman of the Supreme Soviet Presidium, who had remained a political force in the republic since her retirement in 1989.<sup>43</sup> Battered by the deputies inside and the clamoring outside,

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<sup>38</sup> This was, of course, politically motivated, which the opposition did not miss. See: Hoji Aqbari Turajonzoda, *Miyoni obu otash* (Dushanbe, 1998), 15.

<sup>39</sup> From the poem "Dar bunyodi "Rastokhez," published in mid-1991. See Sobir, *Chasmi Safedor*, 18.

<sup>40</sup> TsGART f. 297, op. 40, d. 1260, l. 26. For similar perspectives, see Usmonov, *Soli Nabiev*, 14; Abdulov, *Rohi behbud*, 31-32.

<sup>41</sup> TsGART f. 297, op. 40, d. 1260, ll. 26-27; Nurali Davlat, "Maqsud Ikromov: Gharqshudai girdobi bozihoi siyosy," *Ozodagon*, May 3, 2017.

<sup>42</sup> For the text of this protocol and its signatories, see "Ba Shuroi Oliy Jumhuriati Tojikiston az gurukhi deputathoi khalkii jumhuri," 22.09.1991, TsGART f. 297, op. 40, d. 1257, ll. 10-18.

<sup>43</sup> Usmonov, *Soli Nabiev*, 13; Dustov, *Zahm bar jismi*, 103-105; Nazriev and Sattarov, *Respublika Tajikistan*, 42-43; S. Ergashev, A. Yusupov, and A. Lukin, "Zharkii sentiabr' v Dushanbe," *Vechernii Dushanbe*, September 24, 1991.

Aslonov gave in, admitting that “the mantle of leadership (*shapka Monomakha*) was too heavy for me,” and resigning from his position as Chairman of the Supreme Soviet.<sup>44</sup> The resurgent conservative majority of the Supreme Soviet quickly elected Rahmon Nabiev, who had emerged during the 1990 presidential elections as a palatable alternative to Mahkamov, as Chairman. They also overturned the ban on the CPT and for good measure began to discuss the arrest of Dushanbe’s mayor, Maqsud Ikromov, for his role in allowing Lenin’s statue to be destroyed.<sup>45</sup>

By this point, it was growing increasingly clear that no one group in Tajikistan – neither the conservative majority of the government, nor the loose coalition of opposition parties – was in effective control of the republic. Instead, crowds of tens of thousands, organized by various and changing individuals and parties, dictated politics: demonstrating against Mahkamov had removed him from office; demonstrating against his replacement, Aslonov, had achieved the same result. Nabiev’s election to the position of Supreme Soviet Chairman (and de-facto acting president) led to further crowds, meetings, and unending demonstrations, which also threatened to spiral out of control. Fascinatingly, the response chosen by both the government and the opposition to this vacuum of real power was identical – to appeal to Moscow for support. Immediately upon assuming authority as the Chairman of the Supreme Soviet on September 23 (and even before the opposition could organize meetings against him), Nabiev sent a request to General Ivan Fuzhenko, the Commander of the Turkestan Military District, which included Tajikistan, querying about the possibility of sending Soviet troops to keep order in Dushanbe.<sup>46</sup> For its part, the opposition, whose ranks had been bolstered by Davlat Khudunazarov and Gulrukhsor Safieva, newly returned to Dushanbe from the now-defunct Congress of People’s Deputies, organized new street demonstrations.<sup>47</sup> But they also appealed to Gorbachev and Yeltsin for support. In a letter published on September 25, the opposition politicians publically called

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<sup>44</sup> TsGART f. 297, op. 40, d. 1260, l. 27.

<sup>45</sup> TsGART f. 297, op. 40, d. 1257, l. 9; TsGART f. 297, op. 40, d. 1260, l. 18.

<sup>46</sup> Konstantin Voitsekhovich and Oleg Moskovskii, “Voiska ne budut vmeshivat’sia,” *Vechernii Dushanbe*, September 25, 1991.

<sup>47</sup> These meetings started on September 24. See Usmonov, *Mirostroitel’sтво v Tadzhikistane*, 11; A. Lukin, “Miting reshaet po-svoemu,” *Vechernii Dushanbe*, September 25, 1991; Dustov, *Zahm bar jismi*, 108.

upon the Presidents of the USSR and Russia to “help reinstate democracy” in Tajikistan.<sup>48</sup>

Nabiev’s request was categorically rejected by Fuzhenko and the Ministry of Defense of the USSR, which banned its troops from “participation in the resolution of internal or interethnic conflicts in the sovereign republics.” The opposition’s plea, however, touched a nerve in Moscow, where Gorbachev was increasingly worried about Yeltsin’s growing clout in the peripheral republics. Responding to the Tajik opposition’s letter, Gorbachev’s advisor Georgii Shakhnazarov wrote a memo on October 1. “As deleterious as it is to force one’s way into the sphere of republican activity, inaction is just as dangerous for the center in [these] questions,” he wrote, and “the Russians are offering their own negotiating help to Tajikistan, emphasizing the Center’s torpor. With this in mind, I suggest immediately sending to Dushanbe...two members of the Political Consultative Council as personal representatives of the President of the USSR.”<sup>49</sup> Gorbachev took this advice, and quickly dispatched Anatoly Sobchak, the mayor of St. Petersburg, and Evgenii Velikhov, vice-president of the Soviet Academy of Sciences, to “normalize the situation” in Dushanbe.

Sobchak and Velikhov arrived in Dushanbe on October 4, where they found a city paralyzed by nearly two weeks of demonstrations and a government paralyzed by a week of negotiations with the opposition. Nabiev, Khayoev, and Kenjaev had been arguing daily with Rastokhez’s Abdujabbor and Mirrahim, the DPT’s Yusuf, and the IRPT’s Himmatzoda and Usmon since September 28 with little result. The opposition kept demanding Nabiev’s resignation; Nabiev kept refusing to resign; no one could agree on anything else.<sup>50</sup> Through a combination of brow-beating (“You, the leaders of the republic, are doing nothing!” Sobchak once exclaimed<sup>51</sup>) and giving the opposition a platform to make threats (if Nabiev remained

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<sup>48</sup> Signatories to this letter included Khudonazarov, Safieva, Sobir, Abdujabbor, Turajonzoda, Ikromov, and Sohbnazar. See “Prezidentu Soiuz SSR tovarishchu Gorbachevu M.S., Prezidentu RSFSR tovarishchu El’stinu B.N., Predsedateliu Verkhovnogo Soveta RSFSR tovarishchu Khasbulatovu R.I.,” *Vechernii Dushanbe*, September 25, 1991.

<sup>49</sup> Dokladnaia zapiska G. Shakhnazarova M.S. Gorbachevu o zadachakh tsentra, 01.10.1991. AGF, f. 5, op. 1, d. 18149, ll, 1-2.

<sup>50</sup> Protokol peregovorov rukovodstva Respubliki Tadzhikistan s predstaviteliami ob’edinennykh demokraticeskikh sil, 28-29 sentiabria 1991 g., TsGART f. 297, op. 40, d. 1259, l. 9.

<sup>51</sup> Zasedaniia Prezidiuma Verkhovnogo Soveta Respubliki Tadzhikistan s uchastiem tt. Sobchaka A.A., Velikhova, E.P., Yanova, A.Ll, Putina, V.V., 04.10.1991, TsGART f. 297, op. 40, d. 1261, l. 7.



president, Yusuf said, the crowd had promised to “stone you all to death and take power in its own hands.”<sup>52</sup>), Sobchak and Velikhov convinced Nabiev and his government to give in to most of the opposition’s demands. Nabiev resigned from his post as Chairman of the Supreme Soviet, allowing his deputy, Akbarsho Iskandarov, to take over until the presidential elections, which were also moved to November 24 to allow for a fairer contest. In addition, all charges were dropped against Ikromov and other demonstration participants, and the IRPT was finally given a guarantee that it could now register. (This took a little while: although the party held an official Congress in Dushanbe on October 26, it was only actually registered on December 4.)<sup>53</sup> In exchange, the opposition agreed to stop its public protests and the CPT was allowed to remain operational.<sup>54</sup>

This resolution created a very strange political backdrop for Tajikistan’s first presidential election as an “independent” republic. Having declared its independence from Moscow merely weeks before, Tajikistan’s government had subsequently requested a military intervention from the power from which it had just “freed” itself. This request, moreover, was rejected by a Soviet state that had not formally recognized Tajik independence on the basis of the republic’s right to determine its “sovereign affairs.” Yet when the opposition asked for an intervention, the Center obliged, sending its representatives to assert control and find a solution to political gridlock. When these representatives (Sobchak and Velikhov) arrived, moreover, everyone in Dushanbe acceded to their authority and abided by the agreement they brokered. Thus at once Tajikistan was nominally independent and sovereign and yet de facto still part of the USSR, a middle ground that satisfied everyone while resolving nothing.

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<sup>52</sup> Stenogramma soveshchaniia rukovodstva Verkhovnogo Soveta Respubliki Tadjikistan, narodnykh deputatov SSSR ot Tadjikistana, chlenov Verkhovnogo Soveta ot razlichnykh politicheskikh partii i gruppirovok s uchastiem tt. Sobchaka A.A., Velikhov E.P., 05.10.1991, TsGART f. 297, op. 40, d. 1260, l. 53.

<sup>53</sup> Nourzhanov and Bleuer, *Tajikistan*, 284; Nazriev and Sattorov, *Respublika Tadjikistan*, 142.

<sup>54</sup> On the agreement reached between Nabiev, the DPT, Rastokhez, the IRPT, and Sobchak and Velikhov, see Protokol No. 64 Zasedaniia Verkhovnogo Soveta Respubliki Tadjikistan ot 05.10.1991, TsGART f. 297, op. 40, d. 1260, ll. 1-2; Protokol No. 65 Zasedaniia Prezidiuma Verkhovnogo Soveta Respubliki Tadjikistan ot 06.01.1991, TsGART f. 297, op. 40, d. 1261, ll. 1-4; also Usmonov, *Mirostroitel'stvo v Tadjikistane*, 11.

Moscow's shadow remained evident even after Sobchak and Velikhov's departure. In fact, it continued to animate political discussions and disagreements throughout the presidential campaign. Moved to late November, these elections pitted Nabiev as the establishment candidate against a variety of opposition figures. While there were a total of 9 candidates registered,<sup>55</sup> the majority of opposition parties threw their weight behind Khudonazarov, who was seen as the candidate most likely to effectively challenge Nabiev. Backed by Rastokhez, the DPT, and the IRPT, Khudonazarov all the same presented himself as an independent politician able to stand up for the average Tajik citizen, who at this point was sceptical of most parties, Communist or otherwise.

Both Nabiev and Khudonazarov established extensive campaign networks and mobilised groups of volunteers across the republic. As they both worked to present themselves as candidates with strong links to Tajikistan, however, neither could avoid putting Moscow front and center. Nabiev emphasized his bona fides as a former first secretary in the Soviet system and his experience standing up for Tajik interests. He also pointed in official campaign literature to his endorsements from the Moscow newspaper *Pravda* and St. Petersburg's Sobchak.<sup>56</sup> His campaign supporters, moreover, assured voters that given the precarious state of Tajik society and the economy the most important thing was "not to go against the leadership of great Moscow and bring in new faces to Dushanbe."<sup>57</sup> Nabiev was Moscow's man, the argument went – and having Moscow's man in Dushanbe's corner was the clearest route out of the current predicament of complete and utter economic collapse.

According to Khudonazarov's supporters, however, Nabiev was too bound to the old structures of power to effectively coordinate with the new political order in Moscow. In this light, Khudonazarov was the real candidate with backing in Moscow – backing not from Gorbachev or the now-defunct Soviet center, but from Yeltsin and the democratic forces taking power there. And Khudonazarov did have strong links to many politicians in Moscow – links he did much to emphasize. His campaign distributed accolades from leading Russian democrats, such as

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<sup>55</sup> TsGART f. 297, op. 40, d. 1268, l. 10.

<sup>56</sup> *Nomzad ba Raisi Jumhirii Tojikiston*, 18-20.

<sup>57</sup> Usmonov, *Soli Nabiev*, 16.

Aleksandr Yakovlev, who praised him as “a man of freedom of the perestroika era.”<sup>58</sup> Developing links with the new market economy in Russia, Khudonazarov and his vice-presidential candidate, the economist Asliddin Sohibnazar, argued, was the only way to save the Tajik economy. This would mean increased liberalization, marketization, and price increases – but it also relied upon ongoing and even growing support from the Soviet (or at least Russian) center.<sup>59</sup>

When the elections were held on November 24, Nabiev won a convincing victory, receiving 58.5% percent of the vote in the first round. The election had inflamed passions, with turnout at more than 86% of the electorate.<sup>60</sup> Partly voters had been excited by the novelty of a free and open campaign; partly they realized the stakes involved; and partly they had been mobilized through effective get-out the vote campaigns.<sup>61</sup> Nabiev’s network was especially successful, drawing upon local authority figures – including those with questionable backgrounds, such as the soon-to-be infamous bartender and career criminal Sangak Safarov in Kulyab – to bring voters to the polling stations.<sup>62</sup> In some districts, this strategy provided with Nabiev with 90-100% of the local vote, leading to accusations of misconduct from Khudonazarov.<sup>63</sup> With no foreign or independent election observers present, however, and with little real evidence of falsifications, Khudonazarov quickly dropped his complaints.<sup>64</sup> Later he admitted that the 31% of the vote he received had likely been an honest reflection of voters’ preferences.<sup>65</sup> Tajikistan, it seemed, had successfully passed the test of its first independent elections, honestly electing a former Communist Party leader on a platform of close cooperation with Moscow. Many in Tajikistan, moreover, believed that this closeness with the Russian center would finally turn their fortunes around. “Everyone was saying ‘Now Nabiev will

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<sup>58</sup> Quoted in Nourzhanov and Bleuer, *Tajikistan*, 288.

<sup>59</sup> Nurali Davlat, “Asliddin Sohibnazarov: Sohibnazar yo ‘folbini jumhuri,’” *Ozodagon*, August 30, 2017.

<sup>60</sup> Stenogramma Zasedaniia Prezidiuma Verkhovnogo Soveta Respubliki Tadjikistan, 28.11.1991, TsGART f. 297, op. 40, d. 1269, l. 5. Usmonov, *Soli Nabiev*, 19.

<sup>61</sup> On the excitement of the election, see Interviews with local residents, Dushanbe, May 2016; on the mobilization of voters in general, see TsGART f. 297, op. 40, d. 1268, ll. 12-18.

<sup>62</sup> V. Medvedev, “Saga o bobo Sangake, voine,” *Druzhba narodov* 6 (1993): 191; Safarali Kenjaev, *Tabadduloti Tojikiston* (Dushanbe: Fondi Kenjaev, 1993), v. 1, 27.

<sup>63</sup> On localized results, see Dustov, *Zakhm bar jismi*, 134; for Khudonazarov’s protests – TsGART f. 297, op. 40, d. 1269, l. 5.

<sup>64</sup> On the lack of observers, see TsGART f. 297, op. 40, d. 1268, ll. 8-10, 24.

<sup>65</sup> Interview with Davlat Khudonazarov, Moscow, December 2016; Interview with a Khudonazarov campaign volunteer, Moscow, December 2016.

take a hold of things,” Ibrohim Usmonov wrote a few years later, “He will institute discipline and order, and we will aright the position of our people and state.”<sup>66</sup>

## II. Accepting the Inevitable

Just as Dushanbe was trying to once again bind its fortunes to Moscow, however, Moscow was again pulling away. Just two weeks after Nabiev’s election, Yelstin, Leonid Kravchuk, and Stanislav Shushkevich, the respective leaders of Russia, Ukraine, and Belorussia, met secretly on December 8 in Belovezhsk, Belorussia, where they agreed to dismantle the USSR and found a “Commonwealth of Independent States” (CIS) in its place. Ukraine had just overwhelmingly voted for independence in a referendum on December 1, and across the USSR it was growing increasingly clear that the advantages of remaining in the Soviet Union were exceedingly slim. Perhaps angry at not having been invited to Belovezhsk – or perhaps simply bluffing to give himself room to bargain – President Nursultan Nazarbaev of Kazakhstan gathered all of the Central Asian presidents, including Nabiev, in Ashkhabad on December 12, where they began to discuss the idea of a “Central Asian Union.”<sup>67</sup> Ultimately, this proposal was dropped, however, and on December 21, 11 of the 15 now former Soviet republics met in Alma-Ata, Kazakhstan to sign the formal agreement creating the CIS. Left with little alternative, Mikhail Gorbachev resigned from his position as President of the USSR on December 25, bringing to an end both the last institute of Soviet statehood and the Soviet state itself.

For the leadership of Tajikistan, this whirlwind of change was both unexpected and undesired. As late as December 5, Nabiev was insisting that “although we are a sovereign republic, we are part of the Union. Right now it will be difficult to get out of the current position, which is why there must be a Union body, there must be a Center.” Even as Yeltsin was preparing that day to visit Belorussia for his fateful summit with Kravchuk and Shushkevich, Nabiev was trying to call him and argue for the continued necessity of retaining the Union Center.<sup>68</sup> Notwithstanding all of the warning signs, Nabiev was even taken unaware by the final collapse of the

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<sup>66</sup> Usmonov, *Soli Nabiev*, 20.

<sup>67</sup> See Andrei S. Grachev, *Final Days: The Inside Story of the Collapse of the Soviet Union*, trans. Margo Milne (Boulder: Westview, 1995), 147, 161; Nazriev and Sattarov, *Respublika Tadzhikistan*, 142-143; Plokhy, *The Last Empire*, 352-356.

<sup>68</sup> Nazriev and Sattarov, *Respublika Tadzhikistan*, 34.

USSR and Gorbachev's resignation; he was completely "unprepared for work in the new conditions."<sup>69</sup> Nor was Nabiev alone: for many of the political elites in Dushanbe, the idea of living in a truly independent country was difficult to conceive. Even the opposition parties had consistently failed over the past two years to present any vision of economic or social life that was completely divorced from Moscow.

Yet as 1991 came to a close Nabiev and the other political leaders of Tajikistan found that they had no choice but to confront the prospect of economic and political independence. First and foremost, this meant taking stock of the current state of affairs in Tajikistan, which was far from appealing. The economy, which had already been in bad shape, almost completely collapsed in the fall of 1991, and by the end of the year had shrunk by as much as 10%.<sup>70</sup> When he arrived in Dushanbe in early October, Sobchak was taken aback by the level of economic degradation: "For all of the economic difficulties faced across the country, you have it the worst," he told Nabiev.<sup>71</sup> Matters had not improved in the subsequent months. In January 1992 the bread deficits that had begun in September 1991 worsened, notwithstanding attempts to control the situation through the implementation of a "voucher system" (*talonnaia sistema*).<sup>72</sup> Both gasoline and medicines were also heavily in deficit by January 1992, causing disruptions to local deliveries, supply lines, and hospitals.<sup>73</sup> At the same time, unfortunately, the Tajik state's access to financial resources had been sharply cut, giving state institutions limited ability to affect economic outcomes.

Public transport provided an important example of the impossible quandary faced by most Ministries in the newly independent Tajik state. Dushanbe's bus fleet included both a variety of Soviet-made buses, as well as higher quality Hungarian "Ikaruses." By the end of 1991, however, the Tajik government was unable to purchase new buses, spare parts, tires, batteries, or even diesel gasoline. In the

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<sup>69</sup> Usmonov, *Soli Nabiev*, 24.

<sup>70</sup> Rough estimate based on sales volumes as a proxy for NMP. See TsGART f. 297, op. 40, d. 1276, l. 62; TsGART f. 306, op. 27, d. 1422, ll. 8-12.

<sup>71</sup> TsGART f. 297, op. 40, d. 1260, l. 9.

<sup>72</sup> On bread deficits, see TsGART f. 297, op. 40, d. 1262, ll. 3-4, 8; Nazriev and Sattarov, *Respublika Tadjikistan*, 131. On the voucher system, see Stenogramma Zasedaniia Prezidiuma Verkhovnogo Soveta Respubliki Tadjikistan, 19.11.1991, TsGART f. 297, op. 40, d. 1268, l. 20.

<sup>73</sup> TsGART f. 297, op. 40, d. 1279, ll. 27-29; d. 1286, l. 9.

past, the central Soviet government had delineated “hard” export currency to purchase around 100 Ikarus buses a year for Dushanbe, a funding pool that had now dried up entirely.<sup>74</sup> To make matters worse, even the Russian factories that produced spare parts were now demanding hard currency. Without any access to foreign currency, the only choice left was to barter: “Our people are sitting in Nizhnokamske,” the Ministry reported to the Supreme Soviet, “and we’re even giving over our personal transport. We received permission to exchange one “Volga” automobile for 500 batteries.”<sup>75</sup> For the Hungarians, who were now demanding 83,000 US dollars for each bus (all foreign trade since January 1992 was conducted in dollars), the Tajik Cabinet of Ministers and the Tajik Aluminum Factory were coordinating on the possibility of bartering a thousand tons of aluminum. This, however, represented only a small fraction of the needed value – at 1992 market prices for raw aluminum, it would have represented approximately 15 Ikarus buses.<sup>76</sup>

Yet there was little else that the Tajik government could do other than route the available thousand tons of aluminum “through an Austrian firm” to Hungary and receive a miserly number of buses and spare parts in return. Other than aluminum and cotton, Tajikistan had few other sources of hard currency – and cotton was no longer under state control, with state farms having received the right to freely sell their harvest in December 1991. In practice, this meant that the entire cotton harvest had been bought up cheaply by private entrepreneurs and sold abroad in a way that brought little to the Tajik economy or budget.<sup>77</sup> Even aluminum sales never seemed to bring the expected returns. As the vice-president of Tajikistan, Nazrullo Dustov, frustratedly exclaimed in January 1992, “30 million dollars of aluminum and cotton were sold, but the money just disappeared into thin air [*pulro obu loi kard*].”<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> TsGART f. 297, op. 40, d. 1262, l. 21; d. 1271, l. 50.

<sup>75</sup> TsGART f. 297, op. 40, d. 1262, l. 21.

<sup>76</sup> On the world market, raw aluminum cost approximately 1200-1250 US dollars per metric ton in early 1992 (data from InfoMine.com). As the Tajik Supreme Soviet calculated, this would have provided only around 1,400,000 USD – far less than the 12-13 million needed for buses and parts. See TsGART f. 297, op. 40, d. 1271, ll. 49-50.

<sup>77</sup> TsGART f. 297, op. 40, d. 1280, l. 67.

<sup>78</sup> Usmonov, *Soli Nabiev*. 33.

Politicians were frustrated – this was not what they had had in mind when promoting “entrepreneurship” and individual business. They had assumed that “capitalism” would mean local production and the development of local enterprises. Yet this was not at all what they received. The cotton sector was highly representative of the broader situation in the Tajik economy in early 1992, as market freedoms allowed businesses to increase their export of any and all raw materials in exchange for cash or prestige goods that could be sold for cash. The firm “Nuri Nav,” for example, exported onions, beans, cabbage, and other scarce foodstuffs to Russia and Afghanistan. In exchange they brought back a few imported washing machines, but largely pocketed the profits. This was harmful for the Tajik market, which needed imported electronics far less than it needed basic produce – but it was perfectly legal. As the director of Nuri Nav, Ruslan Abdurakhmanov, openly told the Tajik Supreme Soviet at the end of January 1992, “We sent 80 tons of cabbage and bought nothing...if deals are profitable, we do them, this is not violating the law.”<sup>79</sup> Many other firms engaged in similar business practices. Salt, bed sheets, nails, and electrical sockets were traded by the Kulyab-based firm “Sorbon” to various Afghan partners in exchange for velour cloth and Japanese handkerchiefs, while the “Joint Soviet-Dutch Enterprise Ramaks-Nigina” exported 143 tons of apples, persimmons, grapes, and onions to Europe for cash.<sup>80</sup> Many of these new firms claimed they were benefitting Tajikistan by bringing significant tax revenue to the budget, but in practice they avoided paying either taxes on their profits or any sort of export tariffs.<sup>81</sup>

Private businesses were starving the budget. They were also doing little to help the overall economy. By the end of January 1992, production of all goods was down by 18% from a year before, and the production of already scarce foodstuffs had decreased by 224 million rubles if compared to January 1991.<sup>82</sup> At the same time, inflation was skyrocketing: having hit more than 25% over the course of 1991, it showed no sign of slowing its rise. Making the situation even worse, the Tajik

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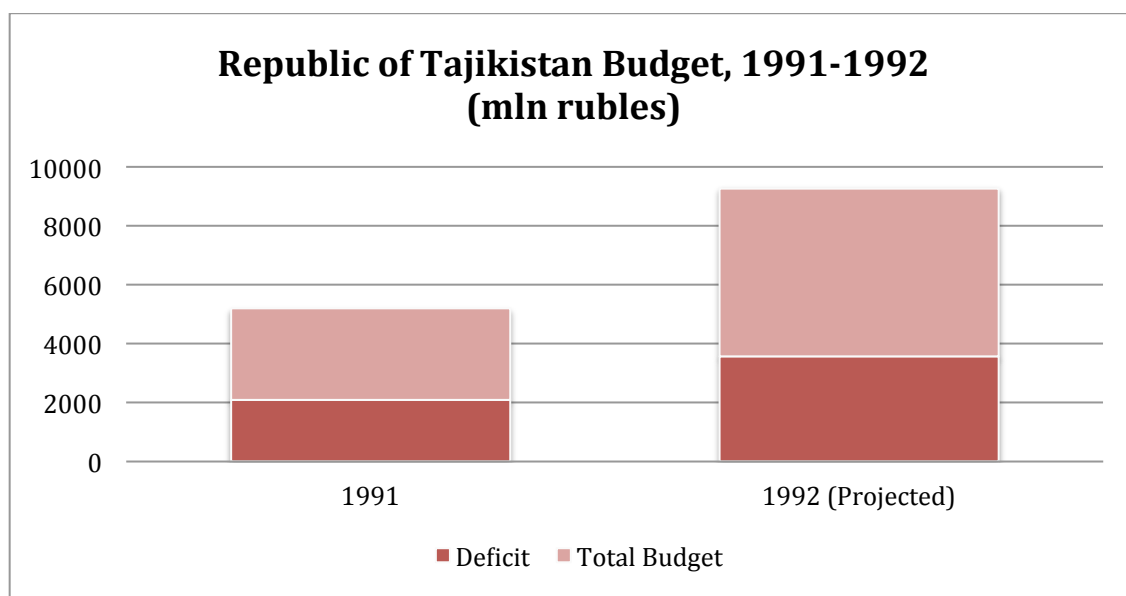
<sup>79</sup> Stenogrammai Majlisi Prezidiumii Shuroi Olii Jumhurii Tojikiston, 30.01.1992, TsGART f. 297, op. 40, d. 1280, l. 33.

<sup>80</sup> TsGART f. 297, op. 40, d. 1280, l. 99.

<sup>81</sup> See comments by the director of the export firm “Shark,” Nuriddin Khojaev, as quoted in M. Saifuddin and P. Saifuddin, “Esli sosed nuzhdaetsia,” *Vechernii Dushanbe*, July 17, 1992. For the difficulties related to collecting tariffs and taxes, see TsGART f. 297, op. 40, d. 1280, ll. 94, 99.

<sup>82</sup> “O prognoze Gosudarstvennogo biudzheta Respubliki Tadjikistana na 1992 god,” TsGART f. 297, op. 40, d. 1276, l. 35.

government had no levers over the monetary supply, which continued to be controlled by Moscow and, by January 1992, by the Central Bank of Russia. With rubles being printed in Moscow, Tajikistan was left to face the consequences of inflation without the benefits – that is, the capacity to print money to fulfill short-term obligations.<sup>83</sup>



**Figure 3: 1991-1992 Republic of Tajikistan State Budget<sup>84</sup>**

Thus the Tajik government was under pressure to increase salaries, but had no money to do so; it was desperate to repair its public transport and provide services previously financed by Moscow, but equivalently had no source of revenue to fill this gap. It wasn't even able to compile and pass a complete budget for the coming year.<sup>85</sup> With inflation projected by the Tajik Finance Ministry to hit 100% in 1992, the state found itself needing to somehow find more than 12 billion rubles in revenue by the end of the year. No one in the government had any idea how to do this, but extreme austerity, including the laying off of thousands of government workers, was one of the few measures found. This was a painful idea, but the times were as desperate as anyone could remember. "Our situation is extreme," Georgii Koshlakov, the former deputy chairman of the Tajik Council of Ministers, told the Tajik Supreme Soviet at the end of 1991. "We have never before had this sort of

<sup>83</sup> I.Kh. Davlatov, "Gosudarstvennaia nezavisimost' i novye funktsii natsional'nogo banka Tadzhikistana," *Regional'nye problemy preobrazovaniia ekonomiki* 6 (2015): 108.

<sup>84</sup> TsGART f. 306, op. 27, d. 1422, ll. 8-12; f. 297, op. 40, d. 1274, l. 311.

<sup>85</sup> Postanovlenie Verkhovnogo Soveta Respubliki Tadzhikistan "O perenosе srokov rassmotreniia proekta biudzheta Respubliki Tadzhikistan na 1992 god," No. 466 ot 25.12.1991, TsGART f. 297, op. 40, d. 1633, l. 119.



situation. We stand before the inevitability of accepting extremes in order to survive.”<sup>86</sup> The Tajik state was now alone, independent, broke, and tottering.

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With empty coffers and little idea of how to rule an independent country, Nabiev struggled to establish an effective government in the first months of 1992. Many of his advisors later agreed, moreover, that his choices of political allies and appointees did not help matters. Akbar Mirzoev, whom Nabiev tapped to replace Izatullo Khayoev as Prime Minister in January 1992 was “an empty figure in the history of Tajik statehood,” and quickly gained a reputation for getting “sick” and disappearing whenever important decisions needed to be made.<sup>87</sup> Nazrullo Dustov, picked by Nabiev as his vice-presidential candidate in November 1991 because of his status as an industrial worker from the South of Tajikistan, proved a largely ineffectual political operative. Most problematic, however, was Safarali Kenjaev, the ambitious former prosecutor who had led the attacks that removed both Mahkamov and Aslonov from the Tajik presidency. Having helped organize Nabiev’s presidential campaign, Kenjaev was rewarded in December 1991 when he challenged Akbarsho Iskandarov for the Chairmanship of the Supreme Soviet. With Nabiev’s backing, he won handily on December 2 and quickly began to enforce his will on many political decisions.<sup>88</sup>

With the effusive Kenjaev dominating internal politics and Mirzoev absent, Nabiev was largely left with the task of Tajikistan’s foreign policy. Elected on a platform of closeness with Moscow, he ensured that the Tajik Supreme Soviet quickly ratified the agreement creating the CIS and recognized the other CIS member states.<sup>89</sup> He also adhered closely in official statements to CIS policy announcements, and voiced faith in the CIS institutions that were supposed to take the place of Soviet coordinating bodies. Behind closed doors, however, he also sought out alternative regional partners, especially for industrial projects that Russia was no longer in a position to fund, such as the Rogun Hydroelectric Dam. With construction on the

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<sup>86</sup> Stenogramma Zasedaniia Prezidiuma Verkhovnogo Soveta Respubliki Tadjikistan, 12.11.1991, TsGART f. 297, op. 40, d. 1266, l. 25.

<sup>87</sup> Usmonov, *Soli Nabiev*, 21; Kendzhaev, *Perevorot*, 26, 32, 83.

<sup>88</sup> TsGART f. 297, op. 40, d. 1270, l. 1.

<sup>89</sup> Postanovlenie Verkhovnogo Soveta Respubliki Tadjikistan No. 25, 25.12.1991, TsGART f. 297, op. 40, d. 1633, ll. 71, 108.

dam coming to a stop for a lack of funds, Nabiev met with a Pakistani delegation in December 1991 to discuss the possibility of outside financing. The Pakistanis expressed interest, but asked for guarantees of political stability.<sup>90</sup> Other powers were less finicky. Iran quickly established the first foreign embassy in Tajikistan in January 1992 and even before that had begun distributing aid in the country.<sup>91</sup> Nabiev's government also moved to join the United Nations and establish relations with a variety of foreign powers, including the United States, whose Secretary of State, James Baker, paid a cordial if inconclusive visit to Dushanbe in February 1992.<sup>92</sup>

For all of their willingness to meet and establish diplomatic relations, however, none of Tajikistan's international partners backed up their words with pledges of financial support. Much as in Russia, international advisors, including from the IMF and World Bank, suggested cutting costs and promoting market relations, either unaware or unconcerned that these processes were already underway.<sup>93</sup> Foreign policy was unable to solve Tajikistan's internal issues, and these internal issues continued to worsen. The state was largely paralyzed, with Russian specialists and government workers leaving in large numbers: in January 1992, for example, the former 2<sup>nd</sup> Secretary of the CPT, Genadii Veselkov, gave up his mandate as a Supreme Soviet deputy and retired to rural Russia.<sup>94</sup> The Supreme Court of Tajikistan member V.I. Shashina also followed suit, citing her wish to move to the job of local district judge in the Russian city of Ulianovsk.<sup>95</sup> Government agencies were founded slowly and inconsistently, with key organs, such as the Tax Service of Tajikistan, coming together as late as February 1992.<sup>96</sup> With the budget still empty, moreover, it was sometimes unclear who was

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<sup>90</sup> Usmon, *Soli Nabiev*, 32; AKFD RT, 0-108396, k/ia B3 02 01.

<sup>91</sup> Interviews with Dushanbe residents, Dushanbe, September 2016; Nazriev and Sattarov, *Respublika Tadjikistan*, 125-126.

<sup>92</sup> "Poezdka Dzh. Beikera po Srednei Azii," *Krasnaia Zvezda*, February 14, 1992.

<sup>93</sup> In December 1991, for example, Ishan Kapur, then head of the IMF's Eurasia division, advised Nabiev to "liberalize prices," "open up trade," and "balance the budget." See Nazriev and Sattarov, *Respublika Tadjikistan*, 145.

<sup>94</sup> TsGART f. 297, op. 41, d. 1633, l. 338.

<sup>95</sup> TsGART f. 297, op. 40, d. 1281, ll. 52-53.

<sup>96</sup> Proekt Zakona Respubliki Tadjikistan "O gosudarstvennykh nalogovykh organakh Respubliki Tadjikistan," TsGART f. 297 op. 40, d. 1287, ll. 115-128.

supposed to staff the new agencies, although the employees of many different state agencies ended up working for months without pay throughout 1992.<sup>97</sup>

Political friction was also growing. Nabiev instituted a purge of Mahkamov appointees from his government and appointed a slate of new ministers in January 1992, frustrating many of his former supporters.<sup>98</sup> With the loud and often impolite Kenjaev doing little to make political friends, Nabiev found himself with few links to the CPT or other pillars of institutional support. Watching the dysfunction in Dushanbe, moreover, the Gorno-Badakhshon Autonomous Oblast (GBAO) in the Pamirs began to worry about its fate and place in an independent Tajikistan. Long supported financially by direct transfers from Moscow to the Oblast budget (via the so-called “Moscow provision” [*moskovskoe obespechenie*]) meant to support the far-flung outpost on the Afghan and Chinese borders, GBAO now found itself adrift and its own budget empty. With its population a tiny proportion of the Tajik whole, the Pamiri peoples of GBAO had good reason to wonder where they might end up in an independent and “democratic” Tajikistan. In response to a large demonstration and overwhelming popular support, the Oblast parliament passed a resolution on December 9, 1991, convening on itself the status of “Autonomous Republic” and requesting that the Supreme Soviet of Tajikistan recognize it as the Gorno-Badakhshon Autonomous Republic.<sup>99</sup> It argued that this would help to bring investment to the region, as well as guarantee its legal rights. The Supreme Soviet failed to respond, leaving the question and the Oblast/Republic’s status unclear, as well as equally increasing tensions in the Pamirs.

Outside of the halls of government and the parliament, however, the fundamental – and fundamentally unassailable – problem facing newly independent Tajikistan was the breakdown of social order. Economic degradation had slowly but inevitably bled into societal breakdown. Twenty percent of those surveyed in the fall of 1991 had said they were already “driven to the edge by the deteriorating

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<sup>97</sup> Workers have suggested that “this was the only thing to do. Sometimes we would receive food at work, at least.” See interviews with Dushanbe residents, Dushanbe, May 2016–September 2017.

<sup>98</sup> Nourzhanov and Bleuer, *Tajikistan*, 292

<sup>99</sup> Qarori Shuroi deputathoi khalqi viloiati mukhtori Kuhistoni Badakhshon Jumhirii Tojikiston “Dar borai tabdil dodani Viloiati mukhtori Kuhistoni Badakhshon ba Jumhuriati mukhtori Kukhistoni Badakhshon dar khaiati Jumhirii Tojikiston,” 09.12.1991, TsGART f. 297, op. 40, d. 1274, l. 260.

economic situation” and matters had only gotten worse by January 1992.<sup>100</sup> Crime was rising, as was drug use and trafficking, driven by “young people who make a living through the purchase, use, and sale of narcotics.”<sup>101</sup> With control over the Tajik-Afghan border breaking down, more and more heroin was making its way into Tajik cities and providing a source of income for unemployed young men. Along with heroin use, alcohol abuse was also on the rise, as were cases of corruption and the abuse of authority on the part of police officers and other government figures.<sup>102</sup> With government employees and industrial workers alike out of work, food shortages a constant fact of life, and young people with few sources of hope to turn to, chaos seemed just around the corner. And yet Nabiev did little to alleviate people’s concerns, instead announcing on Republican radio that, “The republic has no reserves and no potential.”<sup>103</sup> Perhaps meaning to ask Tajikistan’s citizens to tone down their expectations of independence, Nabiev instead did little but fan the flames of social collapse.

Coming to power on the cusp of Tajikistan’s independence, Nabiev, Kenjaev, and those around them were fundamentally unprepared to run a truly independent nation. Worse, they could hardly conceive of what it meant to be independent. Even as the USSR was collapsing around them, they continued to advocate for closer ties to Moscow. When the Soviet Union no longer existed, they replaced it with post-Soviet Russia, retaining the same orientation towards Moscow. This focus on Moscow did not always lead to tangible benefits, but it organized the focus of Tajikistan’s early foreign and domestic policy, which remained directed towards finding outside sources of funding to fill its empty budget. Without a clear plan for independence, Nabiev’s government continued to operate even after December 25, 1991 as though independence were somehow temporary or intangible. As a result, government inaction and dysfunction were the rule rather than the exception in the first days of Tajikistan’s independence. Government agencies were slow to be formed, slow to be staffed, and constantly unsure of their mandate. By February 1992 the outlines of a state were beginning to grow visible,

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<sup>100</sup> As quoted in Nourzhanov and Bleuer, *Tajikistan*, 277.

<sup>101</sup> TsGART f. 297, op. 40, d. 1287, l. 142.

<sup>102</sup> Programma bor’by s prestupnost’iu i ukrepleniia pravoporiadka v Tadjzhikskoi SSR na 1991-1995 gg., TsGART f. 297, op. 40, d. 1252, ll. 53-54; Protokol No. 101 Zasedaniia Prezidiuma Verkhovnogo Soveta Respubliki Tadjzhikistan 25.03.1992, TsGART f. 297, op. 40, d. 1294, l. 13.

<sup>103</sup> As quoted in Nourzhanov and Bleuer, *Tajikistan*, 293.

but they remained pallid and in many places translucent. At the same time, moreover, the economic downturn of 1990-1991 had become a complete economic disaster. The citizens of Tajikistan met independence increasingly jobless, denied salaries, without basic goods, and standing in line for bread. This contradictory state of affairs, in which a paralyzed government stood over a disorganized and disintegrating society, could only last for so long; in practice it held together for all of two months until its collapse into violence in March 1992.

## **Chapter Nine**

### **Empty Coffers and Populist Justice: The Final Road to Civil War**

In the first weeks of May 1992 a young Tajik family found its short vacation harshly interrupted by the final collapse of Tajikistan's social order. Driving to Kurgan-Tyube from a long weekend away at their dacha, the family passed through the Gissar Valley that separated Dushanbe from the southern Khatlon region. Suddenly, as they crested a hill, their path was blocked by homemade barriers and a group of men with automatic rifles. The men forced them out of the car at gunpoint, confiscated their car and the boxes of strawberries that they had collected at the dacha, and left the young couple and their three children on the side of the road. The family was forced to ride to Dushanbe on a bus that the armed men also stopped, commandeered, and sent back up the road to the capital.

At first, the family had no idea who these men were. Only the next day at work was the father, a leading surgeon in the republic, able to work out with his colleagues that the gunmen had been a group from the eastern region of Gharm associated with the new "Government of National Reconciliation" (*Pravitel'stvo natsional'nogo primireniia*) that had come to power a few days before. The hospital's chauffeur, also from Gharm, volunteered to retrieve the surgeon's car, and managed to bring it back that evening, along with some of the appropriated strawberries. The family, he told the surgeon, had ended up on the wrong side of a blockade: the new government had embargoed the entire Khatlon region and was not letting anyone in or out. In Tajikistan, a country almost entirely covered with high mountains, blocking a single road can be very effective. On the other side of the blockade, the driver said, the situation was getting bad – violence was already flaring up between rival factions, although who exactly was shooting whom remained unclear.<sup>1</sup>

Tajikistan had clearly tumbled over the precipice. Economic disorder and political paralysis had become utter social disintegration and the incipient sparks of civil war. Within the span of two months, from March to May 1992, the government of Tajikistan had effectively collapsed, lost control of much of its territory, and could

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<sup>1</sup> Interviews and conversations with Tajikistan's former head surgeon and his family, Dushanbe and Moscow, 2013-2016.

no longer claim even a semblance of maintaining order. The new “Government of National Reconciliation” was ineffective and riddled with disorder and disagreement, combining elements of the old state with opposition politicians and activists. It also relied on unpredictable non-state paramilitary groups, such as the Gharmis manning the Khatlon checkpoint; traditional police forces were nowhere to be seen. On the ground, people had begun to independently band together to protect themselves, choosing local and regional loyalties now that the republican state, and republican identity, had essentially failed. On the one side of the blockade were those supporting the new government, a group increasingly dominated by Pamiris and people from Gharm in the northeast; on the other side were the blockaded people of Khatlon and Kulyab. And everyone was increasingly angry and increasingly hungry, taking whatever possible to feed their families, even strawberries from other, equally confused and hungry, families.

This final collapse into state failure and civil war happened too fast for most people in Dushanbe or elsewhere in Tajikistan to understand what was happening. By mid-May there was no doubt that the country was at war with itself: the republic was literally split in half and sporadic violence was growing in both Dushanbe and across the Khatlon region. Yet who was fighting whom, and why, was not initially clear. As the years have passed, the basic facts of the civil war’s start have become more evident: the division into regional alliances, with Kulyab and the northern Khujand aligned against the Pamirs and Gharm; violence concentrated in the area around Kurgan-Tyube in central Khatlon, with regionalist militias targeting those with the “wrong” backgrounds; depravity met with depravity and violence answered with violence. Why this had all started, however, has remained more controversial.

As this dissertation has noted elsewhere, one series of works has held that without the authoritarian Soviet state and its institutions, Tajik regionalism and regional hatreds simply broke into the open – it was only a matter of time until violence would have erupted.<sup>2</sup> Other scholars, drawing on the insights of political science, have suggested that after the collapse of Soviet power politicians in Tajikistan were unable to make a deal about the distribution of “rents” from industries and

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<sup>2</sup> Roy, *New Central Asia*; Dudoignon and Qalandar, “They Were All From the Country.” For a full list of representative sources, see this dissertation’s Introduction.

agriculture. With strong incentives to “cheat” on any deal, these writers argue, and the Tajik economy dominated by labor and investment-heavy goods such as cotton, violence quickly became the most rational choice for politicians in a zero-sum game.<sup>3</sup>

As this chapter shows, however, the historical record tells a different story. When social order in Tajikistan finally collapsed into violence and chaos, it did so not as the result of long-standing regional hatreds or feuds, and just as equally not because politicians were unable to share the meager post-Soviet spoils they found on their territory. Both of these explanations tend to blend the causes of violence with their consequences: as the civil war began, so did regionalism and the division of spoils; neither phenomenon can be reliably identified prior to May 1992.<sup>4</sup> Instead, Tajikistan’s government lost control of its people and territory, first and foremost, because by March 1992 there were basically no spoils available to divide. Economic collapse, combined with ongoing low-level theft, embezzlement, and the completely legal (if unregulated) export of Tajikistan’s already limited produce had brought people to the edge. With unemployment and inflation soaring and basic standards of living flat-lining, many of Tajikistan’s citizens were willing to turn to extremes and even violence if this would improve their lives.

This was an ideal breeding ground for extreme populism. Politicians of all backgrounds took advantage of people’s anger, engaging in extremist behavior, provocative language, and calls for mass action in order to improve their own position. With effectively no state to stop it, this populism grew into competing crowds of tens of thousands that took over much of the capital and ultimately pushed the country into civil conflict. Once again, the government found that it had no resources available to calm the situation: the one Soviet military unit on Tajik territory, the 201-st Motorized Division, had somehow become “Russian” and took no part in the growing conflict. With no other significant armed units and thus no

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<sup>3</sup> Markowitz, *State Erosion*; Akbarzade, “Why did Nationalism”; Driscoll, *Warlords and Coalition*.

<sup>4</sup> A number of sources have emphasized the ways in which regionalism grew out of, rather than caused, the conflict. See: Abashin, *Natsionalizmy*, 235, 238; Rubin, “The Fragmentation,” 71; Epkenhans, *Origins of the Civil War*, 8.



monopoly on violence, the independent Tajik government could do little but watch as its citizens began murdering one another.

Of course, none of this was inevitable. The collapse into violence and chaos was the result of individual decisions made by individual politicians and other leading members of society, which collectively led the country to the limn over which it dropped. As this chapter outlines, this included figures in Rahmon Nabiev's government, as well as opposition politicians, all of whom were far more interested in short-term political gains than considerations about the long-term development of Tajikistan. And it included those who helped dictate Tajikistan's defense policy, a strangely Soviet idea of "collective defense" for a post-Soviet world order, which proved to deny Tajikistan the military forces that could have staved off the conflict. Together, it was these individual decisions and their consequences that brought Tajikistan to the edge of war by May 1992.

### **I. A Search For Scapegoats**

In March 1992, few people would have predicted that within two months Tajikistan would descend into civil war.<sup>5</sup> The situation, however, was clearly dire. President Nabiev's administration was largely inactive, with the Prime Minister, Akbar Mirzoev, also continuing his policy of "recovering" from various illnesses in the hospital rather than attending to state business.<sup>6</sup> Other government officials took advantage of the ongoing paralysis to enrich themselves from state coffers, either directly or through the export of deficit goods.<sup>7</sup> Everyone kept waiting for Nabiev to take control of the situation, but he remained silent and inactive. One of Nabiev's advisors, Ibrohim Usmonov, was later at a loss to explain his behavior. No matter what happened around Nabiev, Usmonov said, "he never said 'don't do this, that's not good,' – I don't know if this was politesse [*madaniiatnoky*], or fear, or callousness."<sup>8</sup> No matter Nabiev's reasoning, his inactivity set the tone for much of the rest of the government.

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<sup>5</sup> Notwithstanding many claims to the contrary, practically no one did predict the war, even as late as March 1992. As Gillian Tett notes in her first-hand account, moreover, even many of the participants in political protests assumed they would end without violence. See: Tett, *Ambiguous Alliances*, 200.

<sup>6</sup> Kendhaev, *Perevorot*, 32.

<sup>7</sup> Dustov, *Zahm bar jismi*, 20-21; Davlat, "Maqsud Ikromov."

<sup>8</sup> Usmonov, *Soli Nabiev*, 48.

Inaction, unfortunately, was the last thing that Tajikistan needed in March 1992. Something absolutely needed to be done with the economy, which was simply no longer functioning, leaving men of all ages out of work and increasingly angry. The state had no money to pay these workers, nor any capacity to create jobs for them; its attempts to acquire foreign investiture and aid had equally failed. Simple foodstuffs and other goods continued to leave Tajikistan's markets in massive quantities, leaving the citizens of Dushanbe and other cities to stand in breadlines for hours at a time. With little alternative, the Supreme Soviet of the Republic of Tajikistan began to discuss an "unbacked [*bezresursnaia*] credit emission" – in other words, releasing reserves of increasingly valueless paper money. Unsurprisingly, when money began to be released in April 1992, it had the effect of forcing inflation even higher. But without money of some sort, the Supreme Soviet had no idea how else to pay for "grain, medical supplies, energy sources" and other basic goods.<sup>9</sup>

Without outside funding – something independent Tajikistan was now unable to rely upon – there seemed no way to guarantee economic improvements. With no solution available, Tajikistan's politicians turned to finding those to blame for the current situation. The Supreme Soviet tightened laws on public speech, making it possible to imprison an individual for up to three years for public acts of defamation or slander [*oskorblenie*].<sup>10</sup> Contemporaneously in February 1992, Kenjaev brought a court case against the deputy chairman of Rastokhez, Mirbobo Mirrahim, accusing him of slander. Mirrahim was found guilty and given a two-year "probationary" [Taj. *ta"viq aftod* / Rus. *uslovni*] sentence that kept him out of prison but required him to avoid any public pronouncements on Kenjaev for the two-year period.<sup>11</sup> This effectively removed him from politics, and gave Kenjaev space to lambast Mirrahim and Rastokhez without worrying about return volleys. With Mirrahim sidelined, Kenjaev turned his attention to Maqsud Ikromov, the liberal mayor of Dushanbe who had sided with the opposition during the September 1991 protests. As Ikromov was also a Supreme Soviet deputy, Kenjaev first arranged a vote on March 8 to remove his parliamentary immunity, and then had Ikromov arrested on the floor of the Supreme Soviet in front of the assembled

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<sup>9</sup> Postanovlenie VS RT "O kreditnoi emissii," 06.04.1992, TsGART f. 297, op. 40, d. 1295, l. 41.

<sup>10</sup> TsGART f. 297, op. 40, d. 1291, l. 6.

<sup>11</sup> Mirrahim, *Hamtabaqi Shodmon Yusuf*, 74.

deputies. Officially charged with corruption, Ikromov's arrest was meant to show the state's efforts to reestablish order in the face of growing economic and social disintegration.<sup>12</sup>

Kenjaev, however, did not stop here. Mirrahim and Ikromov remained secondary figures, and their arrests did not in any obvious way put a halt to the state paralysis on view in Dushanbe. Personally ambitious, moreover, Kenjaev appears to have sought additional venues to publicize his political leadership and status a "law-bringer" in increasingly lawless Tajikistan.<sup>13</sup> Success with Mirrahim and Ikromov incentivized further scapegoating, rather than a search for long-term solutions to Tajikistan's economic and social problems. Since no one in Dushanbe could as of yet cogently express an independent path out of Tajikistan's problems, populist appeals to the masses through the arrest and prosecution of supposedly corrupt politicians must have seemed one of a few possible ways to stay in power.

Kenjaev's final – and most significant – salvo came on March 25, when he launched a multi-pronged attack on Mamadayoz Navjuvanov, the Minister of Internal Affairs (MIA). Accusing Navjuvanov of "dishonesty," "flagrant mistakes," and "incompetent leadership," Kenjaev leveled a series of detailed accusations against him.<sup>14</sup> First, he said, Navjuvanov had not taken seriously the level of disorder in the republic, especially a series of disturbances that had broken out in Kurgan-Tyube Oblast in December 1991. On December 15, 1991, a demonstration was held in Kurgan-Tyube's Kumsangir District, organized by the local branches of the Democratic Party of Tajikistan (DPT), Rastokhez, and the Islamic Revival Party of Tajikistan (IRPT). Decrying the level of economic degradation in the district, the demonstration lasted three days and ultimately forced the local District Chairman, a certain Rakhmatov, to leave his post.<sup>15</sup> No one was arrested at the time, and the Supreme Soviet had later asked Navjuvanov to fire the local MIA officials responsible for Kumsangir District. Since Navjuvanov had instead chosen to issue

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<sup>12</sup> Sh. Karimov, "Zamin ba "Kulak," Maqsud Ikramov ba khabs," *Javononi Tojikiston*, March 10, 1992; A. Akhmedov, "Priamo v zale zasedanii," *Vechernii Dushanbe*, March 09, 1992. Although infrequently mentioned, there was good evidence in support of the charges against Ikromov.

<sup>13</sup> Kenjaev later emphasized his work passing laws and prosecuting law-breakers; see Kendzhaev, *Perevorot*, 6-12.

<sup>14</sup> Protokol no. 101 Zasedaniia Prezidiuma Verkhovnogo Soveta Respubliki Tadzhikistan, 25.03.1992, TsGART f. 297, op. 40, d. 1294, ll. 11, 13.

<sup>15</sup> Protokol no. 78 Zasedaniia Prezidiuma Verkhovnogo Soveta Respubliki Tadzhikistan, 21.12.1991, TsGART f. 297, op. 40, d. 1274, l. 4.

warnings to these officials, Kenjaev accused him of disobedience; he was, after all, answerable to the Supreme Soviet. In addition, Kenjaev declared, Navjuvanov had allowed “egregious violations of the law” to fester in the MIA. As an example, Kenjaev pointed to an investigation by the Supreme Soviet, which had found “audacious facts of ministry automobiles being embezzled,” involving the personal sale of 139 cars by MIA officials.<sup>16</sup> Not only was Navjuvanov failing to keep others from undermining the fledgling Tajik state, Kenjaev implied – but he himself was corrupt as well, stealing the few resources that remained.

Navjuvanov was taken aback, and his response to these accusations made it clear that he had not expected anything of this sort when he arrived at the Supreme Soviet that morning. “I don’t agree [with this],” he said, “Let’s form a commission.... I’m not prepared to answer. I ask the members of the Presidium to hold off until the next session.”<sup>17</sup> And then, quite unexpectedly and a propos of nothing, Navjuvanov exclaimed: “I feel that there is a witch-hunt against the mountain people, in part the Pamiris.”<sup>18</sup> With the discussion heating up, and with Supreme Soviet deputies suggesting that he was “destabilizing the political situation in the republic,”<sup>19</sup> Navjuvanov only grew angrier. “Stop persecuting me, and stop encouraging nationalism,” he said, “You haven’t brought the mountain people to their knees, but you hate us, and dishonor us everywhere.”<sup>20</sup> Notwithstanding Navjuvanov’s protests and accusations of discrimination, however, the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet followed Kenjaev’s lead and voted to request that President Nabiev remove Navjuvanov from his post as Minister of Internal Affairs.<sup>21</sup>

Unusually, this session of the Supreme Soviet had been taped and shown on republican TV, meaning that much of the Tajik public was exposed to both the accusations made against Navjuvanov and his angry response.<sup>22</sup> Kenjaev may have arranged this to highlight his populist activities in parliament, but it instead

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<sup>16</sup> TsGART f 297, op. 40, d. 1294, ll. 11-14.

<sup>17</sup> Stenogrammai Majlisi Prezidiumi Shuroi Olii Tojikiston, 25.03.1992, TsGART f. 297, op. 40, d. 1294, ll. 45-46.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., l. 47.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., l. 53.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., l. 61.

<sup>21</sup> TsGART f. 297, op. 40, d. 1294, l. 15.

<sup>22</sup> Protokol no. 102a Zasedaniia Prezidiuma Verkhovnogo Soveta Respubliki Tadjikistan dvenadtsatogo sozyva, 02.04.1992, TsGART f. 297, op. 40, d. 1295, l. 67.

had the ultimate consequence of bringing into the open a burgeoning conflict between the eastern Pamir region and the central government in Dushanbe. Initially, there seemed no cause for Navjuvanov's outburst: although heavy-handed, there was nothing insulting or discriminatory in Kenjaev's accusations.<sup>23</sup> The majority of television viewers also saw little cause for Navjuvanov's anger, as did many politicians.<sup>24</sup> It was as if, Usmonov wrote, "Navjuvanov had turned his personal problem into a regional problem."<sup>25</sup> Navjuvanov's reaction, however, was not entirely baseless. For the past few months, Pamiris had been increasingly worried about their status in independent Tajikistan. The request for the Pamiri's Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast (GBAO) to be granted Autonomous Republic status (see Chapter Eight) had gone unanswered for months, only to be dismissed in early March as too expensive and unnecessary.<sup>26</sup> A group of parliamentary deputies from GBAO, including Akbarsho Iskandarov, the deputy chairman of the Supreme Soviet, officially protested this decision on March 14, but this also went unanswered.<sup>27</sup> Navjuvanov was also correct to point out that one of the subordinates he had been told to fire was also a Pamiri. Kenjaev's populism had managed to stray into very sensitive territory.

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Just how sensitive, moreover, became clear the very next day. On March 26, a group of a few hundred Pamiris gathered on Shakhidon Square in front of the former Central Committee (now Presidential Apparatus) building. Incensed by Kenjaev's comments, the leader of the Pamiri cultural organization La'li Badakhshon, Atobek Amirbek, had helped to organize the protest and mobilized many of its members to the square.<sup>28</sup> The protesters demanded Kenjaev's immediate resignation and Navjuvanov's retention as Minister of Internal Affairs. Very quickly the Vice President, Nazrullo Dustov, was sent out to talk to the crowd and assure them that their concerns would be considered appropriately. This seemed to calm the crowd, and by the evening the square had emptied. At the same

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<sup>23</sup> Claims to the contrary, there is no evidence of this. Cf. Epkenhans, *The Origins of the Civil War*, 223, following Sohbnazar, *Subhi sitorakush*, 273.

<sup>24</sup> Dustov, *Zahm bar jismi*, 31.

<sup>25</sup> Usmonov, *Soli Nabiev*, 31.

<sup>26</sup> TsGART f. 297, op. 40, d. 1289, ll. 2, 8-9.

<sup>27</sup> TsGART f. 297, op. 40, d. 1293, l. 12.

<sup>28</sup> Otambek Mastibekov, *Leadership and Authority in Central Asia: An Ismaili Community in Tajikistan* (London: Routledge, 2014), 115.

time, however, the political opposition sensed an important opportunity: it was not just Pamiris, but in fact wide swaths of Tajikistan's society that were frustrated with the government. The leaders of the DPT, IRPT, and Rastokhez spent the evening of the 26<sup>th</sup> coordinating with La'li Badakhshon, and on the morning of the 27<sup>th</sup> Nabiev's administration was surprised by an even larger crowd on its doorstep.<sup>29</sup> Now, moreover, the protesters were demanding more than just Kenjaev's resignation: they wanted the entire government, including Nabiev, to leave, and a new constitution written. They were asking, in short, for a completely new order, and as the day passed – and then days passed – their number grew into the many thousands.<sup>30</sup>

As the opposition had calculated, a great number of people were angry enough with Nabiev and Kenjaev's government to publicly protest. They came to the protests, moreover, from across the country. Groups of protesters were identified from Kulyab, Shaartuz, Kumsangir and Kurgan-Tyube in the south, Penjikent, Khujand, Ura-Tyube, and Isfara in the north, and from Gharm and GBAO in the east.<sup>31</sup> On the one hand, this level of widespread anger was partly due to the sense the government was overstepping its bounds in its search for those to blame for the current crisis. "People are not so much condemning the particular attempts to get rid of Ikromov, Navjuvanov, or Mirrahimov," the opposition politician Davlat Khudonazarov told a journalist on Shakhidon Square in front of the former CPT Central Committee building on March 27, "so much as they are upset by attempts to ignore the law."<sup>32</sup> Rather than pass laws to help average Tajik citizens, Khudonazarov argued, politicians were bending the existing laws to exact revenge on their political enemies.

For many of the protesters themselves, however, much more prosaic concerns dominated their thinking. "Prices have skyrocketed," one demonstrator said, "and we cannot feed our children or buy them new clothing."<sup>33</sup> Another protester, Balajon Bobiev, an older man, complained: "Over the past few months I have not

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<sup>29</sup> Kendzhaev, *Perevorot*, 23; Sohbnazar, *Subhi sitorakush*, 274-276.

<sup>30</sup> Around 5,000 strong in its first days. See Usmonov, *Soli Nabiev*, 39.

<sup>31</sup> V. Slezko, "Reportazh s ploshchadi. "Ne prichini zla blizhnemu," *Vechernii Dushanbe*, April 14, 1992; A. Liubimenko, "Reportazh s ploshchadi. Parlament – v otstavku. A dal'she?" *Vechernii Dushanbe*, April 15, 1992.

<sup>32</sup> A. Khodzhaev, "Posle teleperedachi – na miting," *Vechernii Dushanbe*, March 30, 1992.

<sup>33</sup> A. Liubimenko, "Budet li dostignut kompromiss?" *Vechernii Dushanbe*, April 03, 1992.

once received my salary.”<sup>34</sup> Even those who were paid could not make ends meet. A driver at the protest, A. Yusupov, noted that with inflation his 500 ruble salary was hardly enough to feed his ten children. And there was a deep sense of injustice amongst the protesters when they thought about the new economic order. “The deputies sitting in their chairs receive much more than me,” Yusupov said, “how is this just?”<sup>35</sup> Mirzo Khakimov, a veteran of the war in Afghanistan, outlined similar motivations for joining the protest:

*“I work in the cotton fields, and earn 300-400 rubles [a month]. The sovkhos chairman takes the cotton. He gives it to the district, the district to the oblast, and the oblast to the state. The state sells it abroad and they send us in exchange, for example, pretty coats. Look, you have one. The other guy has one. But I don’t have one. That is not just. Those who didn’t work received them. And this is wrong.”*<sup>36</sup>

While Khakimov’s understanding of Tajikistan’s new market system was somewhat inaccurate, he clearly understood its consequences: he worked and got poorer, and others got rich. He represented a great many of the protesters – people “who were far from politics, and thought little of it, but knew the price of bread.”<sup>37</sup> It was the government’s apparent inability to improve the economy that had brought the protesters out in such numbers. “Every one of them wants to improve their standard of living,” a journalist summarized, “and having failed to receive this” from Tajikistan’s current rulers, they were now turning to the opposition.<sup>38</sup> Populism was met with populism, as opposition leaders, including Rastokhez’s Tohir Abdujabbor, the IRPT’s Davlat Usmon, and Amirbek from La’li Badakshon camped out with the protesters on Shakhidon Sqaure and passed their demands in written form to the Supreme Soviet deputies at work down the street.<sup>39</sup>

The deputies received the demonstrators’ growing lists of demands, which by April 7 now included the dissolution of the entire parliament.<sup>40</sup> Yet no one knew how to respond. Nabiev declared that as President he did not have the authority to

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<sup>34</sup> A. Shermatov, “Reportazh s ploshchadi. “Idoma- prodolzhenie,” *Vechernii Dushanbe*, April 17, 1992.

<sup>35</sup> A. Shermatov, “Blitz-interv’iu. Shto dumaiu o mitinge,” *Vechernii Dushanbe*, April 13, 1992.

<sup>36</sup> A. Khodzhaev, “Kazhdyi sam sebe politik,” *Vechernii Dushanbe*, April 07, 1992.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> “Rastet chislo zhertv,” *Vechernii Dushanbe*, May 12, 1992.

<sup>39</sup> For example, “Ba rayosati Shuroi Olii Tojikiston,” TsGART f. 297, op. 40, d. 1295, l. 29.

<sup>40</sup> Protokol zasedaniia Prezidiuma Verkhovnogo Soveta Respubliki Tadjikistan dvenadtsatogo sozyva, 07.04.1992, TsGART f. 297, op. 40, d. 1295, l. 45.

dissolve parliament, and the Supreme Soviet determined that the law did not give it or its Presidium the right to dissolve itself. The only options, some deputies suggested, were either to pass a new constitution that would provide a legal route for parliamentary dissolution, or to conduct a referendum on the subject.<sup>41</sup> The deputies appealed to Nabiev for advice, but he brushed them off, citing his “own plans” for dealing with the demonstrators.<sup>42</sup> At a loss, the Supreme Soviet promised the crowd that it would consider its demands at the next session on April 11. It also declared that a referendum would be held, in the hope that this would convince the protesters to go home.<sup>43</sup>

Perhaps sensing the disingenuousness of the deputies’ last promise, the protesters not only stayed put, but also expanded south to Ozody Square (“Freedom Square,” formerly Lenin Square) in front of the Supreme Soviet building. This started a week-long game of populist intransigence, where each side accused the other of refusing to compromise and of derailing the political process. The deputies refused to hold a session of Parliament, citing the “political pressure” they felt from the crowd outside.<sup>44</sup> The leaders of the opposition on Ozody Square, for their part, refused to leave, suggesting that otherwise their demands would not be discussed. When the Supreme Soviet did finally meet on April 20, it proved the opposition right, deciding it was “unnecessary to include” the protesters’ demands in their work.<sup>45</sup> Kenjaev demonstratively offered his resignation, knowing full well that the majority of the deputies continued to support him: two thirds of the Supreme Soviet summarily voted to retain him as Chairman.<sup>46</sup>

Finding their legal path to change stymied by the conservative majority of the Supreme Soviet, the demonstrators turned to extralegal means. On the evening of April 21, they blockaded the Supreme Soviet, stopping anyone from leaving. They also took hostage around 15 members of parliament, to whom they threatened to

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., l. 67.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., l. 47.

<sup>44</sup> TsGART f. 297, op. 40, d. 1295, ll. 27-28; N. Sukhacheva, “O sessii, kotoroi ne bylo,” *Vechernii Dushanbe*, April 13, 1992.

<sup>45</sup> “Informatsionnoe soobshchenie,” *Vechernii Dushanbe*, April 21, 1992.

<sup>46</sup> Kendzhaev, *Perevorot*, 40.



do violence if Kenjaev were not to resign from his position.<sup>47</sup> Under pressure from all sides, on the morning of April 22 Kenjaev formally submitted his resignation, which was this time accepted by the Supreme Soviet.<sup>48</sup> Following extended negotiations with the leaders of the opposition parties (who continued to act as the “representatives of the demonstrators”), Nabiev’s government also signed a formal agreement that obligated it to form a constitutional commission, set new parliamentary elections, reconsider GBAO’s legal status, and refrain from any legal prosecution of the last month’s demonstrators. In return, the demonstrators promised to leave Shakhidon Square and finally go home.<sup>49</sup> All of the hostages were also released.<sup>50</sup>

Under pressure from the opposition, Nabiev’s government followed the letter of its agreement, forming a constitutional commission and formally asking the Supreme Soviet to consider the status of GBAO and begin discussions about new elections. At the same time, however, once the demonstrators had left Shakhidon Square as agreed on April 24, Nabiev and Kenjaev began to violate the spirit of the agreement. Although Kenjaev had resigned from his position as Chairman of the Supreme Soviet, he was quickly appointed head of the State Security Committee (KNB, renamed from KGB), where he began to investigate the leaders of the opposition.<sup>51</sup> In addition, Nabiev and Kenjaev mobilized a large demonstration of their own on Ozody Square in front of the Supreme Soviet. Largely brought in on buses from Kulyab in the south, a mass of young men led by Sangak Safarov, Rustami Abdurahim, and other Nabiev supporters began to call for Kenjaev’s reinstatement and the firing of Hoji Akbar Turajonzoda, the “Qazi Kalon” (Head Mufti) of the Republic.<sup>52</sup> Incensed by the government’s apparent revanche, the

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<sup>47</sup> N. Guliamova, “Ploshchad’ muchenikov na fone smeny dekoratsii,” *Vechernii Dushanbe*, April 22, 1992; Usmonov, *Soli Nabiev*, 56.

<sup>48</sup> Kendzhaev, *Perevorot*, 40; TsGART, f. 297, op. 40, d. 1295, l. 1.

<sup>49</sup> “Protokol soglasheniia mezhdru predstaviteliami Verkhovnogo Soveta i pravitel’sva Respubliki Tadzhikistan i rukovoditeliami mitinga na ploshchadi Shakhidon g. Dushanbe,” *Vechernii Dushanbe* 23 April 1992; also see Postanovlenie Prezidiuma Verkhovnogo Soveta Respubliki Tadzhikistan “Ob otstraneniі Kendzhaeva S. ot dolzhnosti Predsedatelia Verkhovnogo Soveta Respubliki Tadzhikistana,” 11.05.1992, TsGART f. 297, op. 40, d. 1298, l. 11.

<sup>50</sup> N. Sukhacheva, “Krizis vlasti. Zametki parlamentskogo korrespondenta,” *Vechernii Dushanbe*, April 24, 1992.

<sup>51</sup> Kendzhaev, *Perevorot*, 43

<sup>52</sup> Kenjaev has claimed that he had nothing to do with the demonstration on Ozody Square, and that it was not organized (cf. Kendzhaev, *Perevorot*, 44). Evidence suggests otherwise: Usmonov, *Soli Nabiev*, 56, 73; A. Alinazarov, “S mesta sobytiia. Vykhod – v ob”edinenii,” *Vechernii Dushanbe*, April 28, 1992.

opposition quickly recalled its supporters to Shakhidon Square. Dushanbe's main road was now completely shut down by the two warring squares, kept apart only by a "fragile cordon of two lines police officers, holding steady behind aluminum shields."<sup>53</sup>

The arrival of the "two squares" on Dushanbe's political scene in many ways represented the final and irrevocable division of Tajikistan into two warring camps. This pitted fiercely secular figures such as Nabiev or his supporter from Kulyab, Sangak Safarov, against the increasingly religious opposition. While the IRPT had always represented the Islamic arm of the opposition, the month of demonstration on Shakhidon Square had involved public prayers, the collective celebration of *Id al'-Fitr* marking the end of Ramadan, and calls for Islam's greater role in government. When Hoji Turajonzoda finally pledged for the opposition in mid-April 1992, it only solidified the sense that a secular-religious divide was growing, angering those who felt (such as those on Ozody) that he was meddling in politics.<sup>54</sup> Combining with the growing role of Islam, regional lines also began to show. While the opposition's protests had initially brought in people from around the country, the pro-government demonstration on Ozody was far more homogenous and overwhelmingly southern. This had the consequence of also incentivizing regional mobilization on the part of the opposition. As the opposition politician Asliddin Sohibnazar yelled at Kenjaev in late April – "I haven't yet engaged in regionalism [*mahalchigi*], but I will now!"<sup>55</sup>

The lines were drawn, and seemingly could no longer be crossed. With division growing stronger and seemingly more permanent, conflict also appeared imminent. Staving off mass violence, however, would require a resource that Tajikistan's nascent government had no access to: large-scale military or security forces capable of restoring order, if necessary, through force. In April 1992, however, the government had little more to offer than those "two fragile lines of police officers." There were military units on its territory, but they did not answer to the local government, and the Tajik state's attempts to form alternative security

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<sup>53</sup> A. Akhmedov, "S mesta sobytiia. Novyi vitok protivostoianii," *Vechernii Dushanbe*, April 27, 1992.

<sup>54</sup> On the growing religiosity of the protestors on Shakhidon, Square see Kendzhaev, *Perevorot*, 45.

<sup>55</sup> Usmonov, *Soli Nabiev*, 54.

forces had so far come up short. All of this left the Tajik state essentially defenseless. How this situation had managed to come about over the previous nine months, moreover, would help to explain the Tajik state's subsequent response to violence when it did, inevitably, arise.

## **II. The 201st Motorized Division**

Curiously, there was a significant military force stationed just outside of Dushanbe. The "201<sup>st</sup> Motorized Division" of the Soviet Army had been garrisoned in three bases near Dushanbe, Kurgan-Tyube, and Kulyab since the end of the war in Afghanistan in 1989.<sup>56</sup> Originally formed during the campaign to free Leningrad from its German blockade in World War II, the 201<sup>st</sup> Division had grown over the decades into an exemplar military unit. Its brigades took part in the Soviet war in Afghanistan (1979-1989) from start to finish, and its soldiers were, by 1992, highly decorated veterans. At full strength it could wield 12,000 mechanized infantry and 120 tanks, as well as helicopter air support. It was also quite internationalist in the Soviet sense, with a largely Slavic officer corps overseeing a diverse body of soldiers, including many Tajiks.<sup>57</sup> When the USSR collapsed, it was unclear what would happen to the 201<sup>st</sup> Division: military units across the former USSR were being nationalized or broken up, often chaotically. In May 1992, however, the Division quietly and somewhat unexpectedly became "Russian," further tying the hands of the already militarily limited independent Tajik state.

That the 201<sup>st</sup> Division became part of the Russian Federation's military was not an accident of history or simply "ordained by fate," as the literature has frequently suggested.<sup>58</sup> It was instead the direct result of a series of political decisions and calculations made by Tajik and Russian politicians alike over the preceding nine months. This story began even before the collapse of the Soviet state in September 1991. Upon succeeding Mahkamov as acting president in early September, Qadriddin Aslonov was quick to note that Tajikistan supported the

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<sup>56</sup> See Aleksandr Ramazanov, *Poslednii legion imperii* (Moscow: Litres, 2017), 87; the official title of the 201<sup>st</sup> was the "201<sup>st</sup> Gatchina Twice Decorated with the Order of the Red Banner Motorized Rifle Division."

<sup>57</sup> Epkenhans, *Origins of the Civil War*, 167.

<sup>58</sup> N.M. Nazarshoev, *Voennaia istoriia Tadzhikistana: kratkii ocherk* (Dushanbe: Matbuot, 2002), 416; Michael Orr, "The Russian Army and the War in Tajikistan," in *Tajikistan: The Trials of Independence*, eds. Mohammad-Reza Djalili, Frederic Grare, and Shirin Akiner (London: Curzon, 1998), 152.

idea that “the regular [Soviet] army will be unitary.”<sup>59</sup> This remained the state’s policy even after it became clear during the September protests that this “unitary” army would not actively support the Tajik government, having declared its neutrality at the first sign of disturbances (see Chapter Eight). The slow collapse of Soviet institutions in the following months also did little to shake the Tajik government’s faith in a “unitary” Soviet army. In October 1991 the Tajik Supreme Soviet began to discuss creating either a Ministry of Defense or a Parliamentary Defense Committee.<sup>60</sup> In November 1991, however, the deputies managed to form neither, suggesting that a Ministry of Defense would make a Committee unnecessary and vice-versa.<sup>61</sup> This left the state policy, by default, one of support for a unified Soviet military.

This aligned with Moscow’s position, which was, in the words of Evgenii Shaposhnikov, the last Soviet Minister of Defense, “to keep the military unified.”<sup>62</sup> By the fall of 1991 many Republics were already in the process of appropriating the military units on their territories, with Ukraine having taken the lead as early as August 1991.<sup>63</sup> Moldova and Azerbaijan were also following suit, with other republics, such as the Baltic States and Georgia simply demanding the removal of Soviet troops from their territories. Tajikistan, however, had responded positively to Moscow’s lobbying, and Shaposhnikov praised it and the other republics of Central Asia for continuing to support “unified or combined military forces.”<sup>64</sup>

Once the USSR was dissolved in December 1991, Moscow’s position on the Soviet military softened. Its main concern became the “strategic,” missile, and nuclear weaponry that was scattered across former Soviet territory. Both the Belovezhskoe agreement on December 8 and the official founding document for the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), signed in Alma-Ata on December

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<sup>59</sup> Stenogramma Soveshchaniia u Predsedatelia Verkhovnogo Soveta Tadjzhikskoi SSR tov. Aslonova K.A, 06-07.09.1991, TsGART f. 297, op. 40, d. 1256, l. 13; d. 1264, l. 35.

<sup>60</sup> Protokol no. 69 Zasedaniia Prezidiuma Verkhovnogo Soveta Respubliki Tadjhikistan, 31.10.1991, TsGART f. 297, op. 40, d. 1265, ll. 3, 13.

<sup>61</sup> TsGART f. 297, op. 40, d. 1266, l. 98.

<sup>62</sup> Evgenii Shaposhnikov, *Vybor: zapiski glavnokomanduiushego* (Moscow: Maska, 2011), 115.

<sup>63</sup> Following the failed Putsch in August 1991, Leonid Kravchuk, the Chairman of the Ukrainian Supreme Soviet, had appointed a Ukrainian Minister of Defense loyal to Kiev and pushed through a law appropriating all of the military units on Ukrainian territory. See Kostiantyn P. Morozov, *Above and Beyond: From Soviet General to Ukrainian State Builder* (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 2000), 132-172.

<sup>64</sup> Shaposhnikov, *Vybor*, 124.

21, mentioned only the USSR's nuclear and strategic arms in any detail. The latter document did note the existence of conventional forces, but provided for a five-year period in which to reform or redistribute the military units.<sup>65</sup> With Western governments, most especially the US, also pressuring Moscow to retain and control its nuclear arsenal, this backhanded approach to conventional forces quickly became entrenched in policy.<sup>66</sup> When the leaders of the CIS countries met on December 30, they agreed to "clarify" military questions within two months. In practice, this took three months, and resulted only in a document signed in Kiev on March 20, which vaguely gave the right to former Soviet republics to form their own militaries.<sup>67</sup>

In many ways, Moscow was simply accepting what was already the case. As its position had softened since December 1991, many republics had followed Ukraine's example and nationalized former Soviet military units. By March 1992, Moldova, Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Uzbekistan had all acquired armies in this fashion.<sup>68</sup> Kazakhstan was beginning to nationalize its own units, and Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan would follow suit within a month or two.<sup>69</sup> Almost uniquely amongst former Soviet republics, however, Tajikistan made no move to harden its military policy or to claim control over the 201<sup>st</sup> Division. When the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Tajikistan was reformed in January 1992, there was no discussion of forming a Ministry of Defense.<sup>70</sup> Instead, a "Presidential Defense Committee" was created, led by Farrukh Niyazov, a career officer in the MIA's Internal Forces.<sup>71</sup> In line with official CIS policy, President Nabiev had passed an order directing for the creation of a "national guard" of up to 1,000 soldiers, but no real action was taken on this count.<sup>72</sup> Even after March 1992, moreover, there

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 134, 143-144.

<sup>66</sup> On the US approach to the former USSR's military, see George Bush and Brent Scowcroft, *A World Transformed* (New York: Vintage, 1998), 542-547.

<sup>67</sup> Shaposhnikov, *Vybor*, 153, 161-165.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 184; Susan Clark, "The Central Asian States: Defining Security Priorities and Developing Military Forces," in *Central Asia and the World*, ed. Michael Mandelbaum (New York: Council on Foreign Relations Press, 1994), 195.

<sup>69</sup> Clark, "The Central Asian States," 178, 185, 194; Kairat Aildanovich Bisenov, "Stroitel'stvo vooruzhyonnykh sil respubliki Kazakhstan (1992-1997)," *Voenno-Istoricheskii Zhurnal* 6 (2014).

<sup>70</sup> TsGART f. 297, op. 40, d. 1278, l. 11.

<sup>71</sup> TadzhiKT, "Utverzhdeno polozhenie o Komitete oborony," *Vechernii Dushanbe*, January 31, 1992.

<sup>72</sup> Kenjaev, *Tabadduloti Tojikiston*, v.1, 40.

was no official discussion about the possibility of forming a national army or nationalizing the 201<sup>st</sup> Division.

It was not that Tajikistan's leaders were unaware of what was happening in other republics or the possibility of acquiring former Soviet military units.<sup>73</sup> Instead, they continued to act as though Moscow, through the new body of the CIS, was truly the best guarantor of collective security for Tajikistan and the former USSR. As Chairman of the Defense Committee, Niyazov never failed to assure Moscow and Shaposhnikov, now "Commander of the CIS forces," of Tajikistan's continued faith in the Commonwealth's "unified" military. In January 1992 he declared, "The Republic of Tajikistan will not form its own army," a sentiment he repeated later that same month at a meeting with Shaposhnikov.<sup>74</sup> In April following a meeting in Bishkek between the leaders of Central Asian republics, Nabiev was notably silent – even as Uzbekistan's Islam Karimov, Kazakhstan's Nursultan Nazarbaev and Turkmenistan's Saparmurat Niyazov all told reporters about their republics' new armies.<sup>75</sup> And at the very end of April Farrukh Niyazov, convinced that the soldiers recruited that spring would serve in a unified Commonwealth army, made a public call for them act appropriately as the "representatives of Republic of Tajikistan" in this multinational army.<sup>76</sup> The USSR had ceased to exist months before – but when it came to the military, Tajikistan was holding on as tight as it could to its last vestiges.

Unfortunately for Farrukh Niyazov and Tajikistan, the CIS military existed largely on paper. Shaposhnikov did oversee the former USSR's nuclear armaments, but little more. The military units on Russian territory were equally in the process of moving to Russian control, and by late spring Shaposhnikov's own position was increasingly insecure. Disturbed by the strange duality of power, the President of the Russian Federation, Boris Yeltsin, had created a Russian Ministry of Defense in March 1992 and officially took control over former Soviet military units on Russian

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<sup>73</sup> For local discussion of the actions of other republics in this regard, see V. Slezko, "Prisiagaiu na vernost' i klianus'," *Vechernii Dushanbe*, February 21, 1992.

<sup>74</sup> A. Ladin, "Farrukh Niyazov: Vooruzhennye Sily dolzhny byt' ob"edinennymi," *Krasnaia Zvezda*, January 9, 1992; "Marshal aviatsii E. Shaposhnikov v Dushanbe i Ashkhabade," *Krasnaia Zvezda*, January 16, 1992.

<sup>75</sup> A. Ladin, "Rukovoditeli gosudarstv Srednei Azii i Kazakhstana – za dogovor o vzaimnoi bezopasnosti," *Krasnaia Zvezda*, April 25, 1992.

<sup>76</sup> "Zhdem i verim!," *Krasnaia Zvezda*, April 29, 1992.

territory in early May 1992.<sup>77</sup> Following patterns from the past few years, just as Dushanbe was working to tie its fate to Moscow's security umbrella, Moscow itself was doing what it could to undermine the structures to which Tajikistan was clinging.

Officially, Moscow's new policy of pursuing a nationalized Russian military left little place for peripheral army units on former Soviet territory. In some cases, moreover, it went out of its way to avoid responsibility for military units, pressuring, for example, Kyrgyzstan's president Askar Akaev into accepting the 15,000-strong 8<sup>th</sup> Motorized Infantry Division in May 1992.<sup>78</sup> In Tajikistan, however, Dushanbe's unwillingness to reject Soviet-style collective security guarantees overlapped with Russian national interests. With Soviet troops having withdrawn from Afghanistan in 1989, the country had slowly but inevitably disintegrated into civil war, with Ahmadzai Najibullah, the last Soviet-backed President of Afghanistan forced into retirement and internal exile in April 1992. This left an increasingly unstable (and heroin-ridden) country along Tajikistan's extensive and mountainous southern border, a security risk for all of Central Asia that the Russian state was unsure about leaving unattended.<sup>79</sup> There was also the less frequently mentioned but perhaps more immediate issue of the "Window" Optical-Electronic Command and Control Center (*Optiko-elektronnyi uzel sviazi "Okno"*), a unique four-telescope observation post outside the city of Nurek in central Tajikistan. One of the most advanced anti-missile and satellite tracking installations in the world, the "Window" unit had taken the USSR decades and hundreds of millions of rubles to build. It was said to be equal or better to any equivalent American technology, and was not something that the Russian military was interested in losing. With instability growing in both Afghanistan and Tajikistan, the new Russian Ministry of Defense moved to secure de-facto control over "Window" and the Tajik-Afghan border, with the 201<sup>st</sup> seen as a necessary guarantee of for this control.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> "Pavel Grachev: Menia naznachili otvetstvennym za voinu," *Trud*, March 15, 2001.

<sup>78</sup> Clark, "The Central Asian States," 185.

<sup>79</sup> Kalinovsky, *Long Goodbye*; Braithwaite *Afgantsy*.

<sup>80</sup> Ramazanov, *Poslednii legion*, 89. Details about the "Window" military installation remain classified, but is said to be able to track all of the satellites currently in orbit around the planet in real time, no small military feat. See Vladimir Georgiev, "Optiko-elektronnyi kompleks "Okno" v Tadjikistane de-iure stanovitsia rossiiskim," *Fergana.ru*, April 17, 2006 (online:

As a result, Yeltsin's government made no move to counter Tajikistan's own ambivalence, leaving the 201<sup>st</sup> Division officially under the auspices of the CIS and de facto under Russian control. While Russia would only formally absorb the 201<sup>st</sup> Division in September 1992, by the spring its grip on the military unit was well understood in Dushanbe.<sup>81</sup> It had affirmed control in December 1991, when it sent Colonel Viacheslav Zabolotnii, an ethnic Russian from Ukraine to command the Division, along with Mukhriddin Ashurov as his deputy. Although Ashurov was ethnically Tajik, his entire career had been spent in the military outside of Tajikistan, and his loyalties were clearly with Moscow.<sup>82</sup> By April 1992, everyone in Tajikistan, from journalists to politicians accepted the Division's "Russian" status. Kenjaev, for example, reported that Zabolotnii told him during the April demonstrations that "without the permission...of President Yeltsin no intervention into the internal affairs of state of Tajikistan can be made." Nor did Kenjaev object, tacitly accepting the de-facto international status of the 201<sup>st</sup> on Tajikistan's territory.<sup>83</sup> Military force sufficient to remove the demonstrators and reassert control of Dushanbe stood just outside of the city – and yet by April 1992 the government of Tajikistan had lost all claim and access to it. The nascent Tajik state was left without an army

### III. The Conflict Grows Violent

Unwilling to challenge the Russian Federation for control of the 201<sup>st</sup> Division, Nabiev's government was forced to consider other sources of force with which to respond to the challenge of the "two squares." Its options were fairly limited. Although Nabiev had authorized the creation of a "national guard" in December 1991, in April 1992 this guard existed only on paper. No officers had been called up to staff it, and no soldiers actually enlisted. The national guard had access to 37 armored vehicles (*bronetransportery*), which had been purchased in February, but

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<http://www.fergananews.com/articles/4351>); Sergei Ponomarev, "Otkryvaia 'Okno' v Kosmos," *Komsomol'skaia Pravda*, July 27, 2016.

<sup>81</sup> For Russia's legal appropriation of the 201<sup>st</sup> Division, see Ukaz Prezidenta Rossiiskoi Federatsii No. 1068 "O perekhode pod iurisdiktsiiu Rossiiskoi Federatsii voinskikh formirovanii, nakhodiashchikhsia na territorii Respubliki Tadzhikistan," September 9, 1992.

<sup>82</sup> On Zabolotnii and Ashurov, see "Mai 1992 – liull' 1993 – general-maior Ashurov Mukhriddin Ashurovich," *Soldat Rossii* (online: <http://www.soldatrossii.com>); Shodmon Yusuf, "Chego zhe khochet rossiiskoe pravitel'stvo v Tadzhikistane?" *Charoghi ruz* 3 (72), 1993.

<sup>83</sup> Kenjaev, *Tabadduloti Tojikiston*, v. 1, 42.



they lacked drivers and mechanics.<sup>84</sup> The Dushanbe police garrison was already overwhelmed with both the two squares and growing crime, and the Ministry of Internal Affairs troops were both limited in number and of questionable loyalty (like everyone else in Tajikistan, the MIA was having increasing difficulty even paying salaries). Many of the latter even joined the protesters on Shakhidon Square or simply refused to arrest anyone there.<sup>85</sup>

Facing an almost complete vacuum of reliable forces capable of reestablishing order, Nabiev finally took the initiative. A Supreme Soviet resolution from late April had formally made him, as president, the head of Tajikistan's (non-existent) armed forces and a later resolution was pushed through on April 30 establishing "presidential rule" in the republic.<sup>86</sup> Together, this enabled Nabiev to create a "special forces brigade" within the legally established but non-existent national guard. In practice, this brigade, which was quickly dubbed the "national guard" itself, was drawn from the young men on Ozody square. A martial arts trainer, Burkhon Jabirov, was appointed its commander, and local authority figures from Kulyab, such as Sangak Safarov, helped to order its divisions.<sup>87</sup> The "national guard" also received around 1,700 automatic rifles from state reserves and began to conduct training drills on the square.<sup>88</sup> This was a risky step, but one that seemed to catch the opposition on Shakhidon off guard. Emboldened by the opposition's silence, Nabiev pushed the Supreme Soviet into reelecting Kenjaev as its Chairman on May 2.<sup>89</sup> He also made a public announcement that he was "no longer going to tolerate" the meeting on Shakhidon, and that this was the opposition's "last warning" to disperse.<sup>90</sup>

That Nabiev's actions pushed the opposition into a corner was predictable; that it would disturb members of his own circle with its authoritarian fiat was more surprising. By May 4 the demonstrators on Shakhidon Square were also arming

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<sup>84</sup> Kenjaev, *Tabadduloti Tojikiston*, v. 1, 41.

<sup>85</sup> Epkenhans, *Origins of the Civil War*, 241-244.

<sup>86</sup> TsGART f. 297, op. 40, d. 1295, ll. 16-18; "Ukaz Prezidenta Respubliki Tadjikistan," *Vechernii Dushanbe*, May 4, 1992; TIA Khovar, "Chetyrnatdsataia sessiia Verkhvnogo Soveta Respubliki Tadjikistan," *Vechernii Dushanbe*, May 1, 1992.

<sup>87</sup> A. Khodzhaev and V. Slezko, "Nikto ne khochet ustupat'," *Vechernii Dushanbe*, May 5, 1992.

<sup>88</sup> V. Slezko, "Nash sobesednik – general Rakhmonov," *Vechernii Dushanbe*, May 14, 1992; Kendzhaev, *Perevorot*, 55.

<sup>89</sup> TIA Khovar, "Informatsionnoe soobshchenie," *Vechernii Dushanbe*, May 5, 1992.

<sup>90</sup> "Vystuplenie R. Nabieva na sessii Verkhvnogo Soveta Respubliki Tadjikistan 2 maia," *Vechernii Dushanbe*, May 05, 1992.

themselves, and were suddenly joined by Bahrom Rahmonov, up until that moment the head of the presidential bodyguard. Frustrated with Nabiev's move to arm Ozody Square, Rahmonov had chosen to switch to the opposition, bringing with himself 4 armored vehicles, a cadre of soldiers, and 450 automatic rifles. This gave the opposition a fighting chance against the "national guard."<sup>91</sup> The main opposition parties, including the DPT, IRPT and La"li Badakhson, organized their own military structure, the "National Salvation Front" (*Fronty najoti vatan*) and moved to attack first, blockading the Cabinet of Ministers building in front of which they had been demonstrating.<sup>92</sup>

By May 5 open violence had erupted between the two squares. The state's attempt to instate a curfew went unheeded, and the lines of police officers between the warring crowds proved essentially powerless.<sup>93</sup> Opposition demonstrators, backed up by an increasing number of armed Interior Ministry defectors, occupied the State TV and Radio building, the railroad station, and the Presidential Palace. Numerous people were killed, including journalists and those with no connection to the conflict.<sup>94</sup> Shootings and other violence between warring bands of demonstrators from the two squares continued to flare for three days, until Nabiev was finally convinced to meet with the opposition leaders on May 7.<sup>95</sup> Browbeaten by Zabolotnii, the "neutral" commander of the 201<sup>st</sup> Division, into admitting his practical defeat, Nabiev agreed to disband his national guard, create a "Government of National Reconciliation," and remove Farrukh Niyazov and Nazrullo Dustov from their respective positions of Military Committee Chairman and Vice President. In exchange, the opposition leaders, represented by Tohir Abdujabbor (Rastokhez), Muhammadsharif Himmatzoda (IRPT), Shodmon Yusuf (DPT), Atobek Amirbek (La"li Badakhshon) and Davlat Khudonazarov, promised to clear the city of demonstrations and allow the government to return to business.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Safarali Kendzhaev, "Gorod Dushanbe, aprel'-mai 1992 goda, slukhi i deistvitel'nost'. Prodelzhenie," *Biznes i Politika*, August 23-29, 1992.

<sup>92</sup> "Tadzhikistan: novosti odnim abzatsem," *Vechernii Dushanbe*, October 13, 1992; A. Shermatov, "Pul's mitingov," *Vechernii Dushanbe*, May 4, 1992.

<sup>93</sup> "Ch'ia vlast' v gorode?" *Vechernii Dushanbe*, May 6, 1992.

<sup>94</sup> "Ne streliaite v zhurnalistov!" *Vechernii Dushanbe*, May 9, 1992.

<sup>95</sup> These events remain controversial and poorly documented. For two strongly varying accounts, see Epkenhans, *Origins of the Civil War*, 277-279; Nourzhanov and Bleuer, *Tajikistan*, 306-308.

<sup>96</sup> "Protokol soglashiia mezhdu Prezidentom respublik, Kabinetom ministrov, politicheskimi partiiami i narodnymi dvizheniiami," *Vechernii Dushanbe*, May 9, 1992, as well as the many supporting presidential orders published on May 9 in *Vechernii Dushanbe*; Nourzhanov and Bleuer, *Tajikistan*, 308.

Following the agreement on May 7, however, neither side moved quickly to fulfill its obligations. Perhaps bluffing, both Nabiev and the opposition waited to see how the other side would react. Neither Shakhidon nor Ozody quickly emptied of demonstrators, although the latter square began slowly to dwindle in number; neither the “national guard” nor the “National Salvation Front” gave up any weapons, although this had also been specified by the agreement.<sup>97</sup> No changes, moreover, were made to the government. This standoff lasted until May 10, when the opposition again took the initiative. A crowd of thousands moved south from Shakhidon Square to the KNB headquarters behind the Supreme Soviet, demanding that Nabiev, who was said to have taken refuge there, also leave his post. While still refusing to get fully involved in the conflict, Zabolotnii placed a tank in front of the crowd and ordered his troops to fire on the crowd, leading to the death of between 8 and 11 protestors.<sup>98</sup>

This loss of life forced the government’s hand, and Nabiev was again obliged to meet with the opposition leaders. This time they came to a series of concrete agreements and changes. The planned “Government of National Conciliation” was actually formed, including opposition representatives as Chairman and Deputy Chairman of the Committee for National Security (KNB), Minister of Foreign Affairs, Minister of Agriculture, and Minister of Education.<sup>99</sup> Davlat Usmon, the deputy Chairman of the IRPT, was appointed Deputy Chairman of the Council of Ministers, and Rastokhez’s Mirbobo Mirrahim, who had been serving a deferred prison term, was cleared of all charges and became Chairman of the State TV and Radio Company.<sup>100</sup> Dustov and Niyazov were asked to leave their positions, and a

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<sup>97</sup>“Obrashchenie mirnogo naseleniia goroda Dushanbe Respubliki Tadzhikistan v OON, k mirovoi obshchestvennosti, glavam gosudarstv SNG, vsem narodam i pravitel'stvam,” *Vechernii Dushanbe*, May 12, 1992; Nourzhanov and Bleuer, *Tajikistan*, 309.

<sup>98</sup> These events are also contested. See V. Korneev, “Fotoinformatsiia,” *Vechernii Dushanbe*, May 12, 1992; Mukhammad Egamzod, “Agar dar jahon du khalqi aziatdidavu jigarresh boshad, pas iake millati tojik ast,” *Jumhuriyat*, May 12, 1992; “Rastet chislo zhertv,” *Vechernii Dushanbe*, May 12, 1992; A. Ladin, “‘My obiazany byli ostanovit’ krovoprolitie’, tak okharakterizoval deistviia voennosluzhashchikh nachal’nik dushanbinskogo garnizona polkovnik Viacheslav Zabolotnyi,” *Krasnaia Zvezda*, May 13, 1992.

<sup>99</sup> Yusuf, “Chego zhe khochet.”

<sup>100</sup> “Postanovlenie Kabineta Ministrov Respubliki Tadzhikistan ‘O naznachenii Mirrahimov M. Predsedatelem Gosudarstvennoi teleradioveshchatel’noi kompanii Respubliki Tadzhikistan,’” *Vechernii Dushanbe*, May 13, 1992.

majority of the Supreme Soviet voted to remove Kenjaev as Chairman.<sup>101</sup> Under its new acting head, Akbarsho Iskandarov, the Supreme Soviet also formed a commission, which included not only deputies but also important opposition activists, to investigate the last week of violence.<sup>102</sup> On this background, the two squares were finally emptied: those on Shakhidon, triumphant, returned in small groups to their homes and villages, while those from Ozody, angry and frustrated, were sent back to Kulyab in a bus colonnade overseen by Davlat Khudonazarov.<sup>103</sup>

Rather than diffuse the conflict, however, the new government simply managed to send it, along with armed and angry “national guardsmen,” south. Within a few days reports were surfacing about former demonstrators from Ozody Square committing violence in Kulyab and Kurgan-Tyube.<sup>104</sup> Having returned to Kulyab, the leaders of the “national guard,” including Sangak Safarov, began establishing order in their own region. “Back home, those from Ozody Square first and foremost set about cleaning the region of “Wahhabists” [opposition members],” the Tajik historian Gholib Ghoibov has written, meaning that “Very quickly a number of people lost their lives.”<sup>105</sup> The new coalition government responded by blockading the south of the country on May 13, establishing block-posts on the roads leading north into Dushanbe and forcibly checking all cars travelling along the road for “weapons, explosives, and narcotics.” Citizens were also warned that they had one week left to turn in any arms they might have received during the last few months, and that the security services had the right to use force to “overcome any incidents.”<sup>106</sup> In practice, this system of block posts quickly became an opportunity for hungry soldiers to enrich themselves and their bellies, much as the young family at the beginning of his chapter encountered. It also further alienated the South from the new government, causing further hunger and deprivation in already desperate villages and outlying regions.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Protokol no. 112 Zasedaniia Prezidiuma Verkhovnogo Soveta Respubliki Tadzhikistan, 11.05.1992, TsGART f. 297, op. 40, d. 1298, l. 3.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., ll. 1-2.

<sup>103</sup> On the return of demonstrators from Ozody to Kulyab, see Usmonov, *Soli Nabiev*, 73; Ghoibov. *Ta’rikhi Khatlon*, 691; interview with Davlat Khudonazarov, Moscow, December 2016.

<sup>104</sup> V. Slezko, “Informatsionnyi golod,” *Vechernii Dushanbe*, May 16, 1992; “Rastet chislo zhertv.”

<sup>105</sup> Ghoibov, *Ta’rikhi Khatlon*, 695, 700.

<sup>106</sup> Ukaz Prezidenta Respubliki Tadzhikistan “Ob organizatsii kontrol’no-propusknykh punktov na mezhgorodnykh trassakh pri pod’ezde k g. Dushanbe,” 13.05.1992, TsGART f. 297, op. 40, d. 1298, ll. 18-19.

<sup>107</sup> See, for example, Sangak Safarov’s particular anger over the “blockade” in G. Gridnev, “I Allakh ne ostanovit etu voynu, esli sam narod ne zakhochet etogo,” *Vechernii Dushanbe*, October 9, 1992.

The country was divided in two, and practically in a state of civil war. By the end of May “the violent conflict had moved from Dushanbe to other regions, primarily to Kulyab and Kurgan-Tyube oblasts.”<sup>108</sup> Supporters of both the new government and its opponents were forming armed bands, stealing weapons from the police, and taking retribution for real or imagined slights. In Dushanbe, the situation was the same, with no one having real control: since mid-April armed gangs had begun to take over sections of the city, and by mid-May they faced little opposition. Violence was tearing society apart, with “two to three people killed each day” in Dushanbe and even more in the south.<sup>109</sup> On May 25, the Supreme Soviet deputy A. Khabibov was desperate: “There is no authority in the oblast. Yesterday five people were killed in Parkhar and one more in Moskovskii District.”<sup>110</sup> Yet neither the government nor the Supreme Soviet knew how to respond to the growing crisis. “We have taken a position of either disengagement or reassurance,” the deputy Nazarshoev puzzled, “and pretend that everything is okay. In truth, however, not only in Kulyab but also in Dushanbe everything is not okay.”<sup>111</sup> While the deputies debated what to do, the government failed to take any action and the violence spiraled out of control.

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That Tajikistan reached this precipice, with civil war flickering just over the horizon and the government unable or unwilling to regain control of the country, was ultimately the product of a few interrelated factors. First, the economy in Tajikistan had simply collapsed. Throughout perestroika unemployment had grown, and by 1991 inflation had also cut into people’s basic standard of living. Increased market freedoms had given a new class of businessmen the legal right to export Tajikistan’s already limited produce and raw resources. Before and following the collapse of the USSR, moreover, any material support from Moscow had evaporated, leaving the nascent Tajik state with millions of salaries and pensions to pay and no clear source of income. By March 1992 hundreds of

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<sup>108</sup> TIA Khovar, “Soobshcha vykhodit’ iz slozhivsheisia obstanovki,” *Vechernii Dushanbe*, May 29, 1992.

<sup>109</sup> Stenogramma Zasedaniia Prezidiuma Verkhovnogo Soveta Respubliki Tadjikistan, 25.05.1992, TsGART f. 297, op. 40, d. 1299, l. 19.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., ll. 19-20.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., l. 20.

thousands of people were truly unable to support themselves and feed their families. The government's promises to improve the situation proved empty, and many of these desperate masses turned to the populist claims of the opposition, which heralded a future free of the old class of politicians. The government responded with its own brand of populism, branding the opposition corrupt and irresponsible and finding scapegoats to blame for the economic collapse. On both sides this populism brought tens of thousands to the streets and began the social bifurcation that would lead to war.

In addition, Tajikistan was also brought to the edge by the actions and approach of its politicians. Even after the final collapse of the USSR in December 1991, President Nabiev and his advisors remained convinced that Tajikistan's best hope for development was to link their fate to Russia. Refusing to challenge Russia openly, they accepted the opaque CIS military policy, holding on in the face of overwhelming evidence to the idea of a "unified" CIS army. Making no move to acquire the 201<sup>st</sup> Motorized Division on its territory, the new Tajik government lost control of the one force that could have been used to avoid the conflict or tamp it down once it had started. This was also representative of Nabiev's basic approach to politics, which often seemed to be based on waiting for Moscow to say the final word: even after violence started he waited for Zabolotnii, the Russian commander of the 201<sup>st</sup>, to tell him what to do. It was as if Nabiev had still failed to grasp that the USSR no longer existed.

As Nabiev dithered, finally, other political actors took advantage of the situation. With the economy in ruins and Tajikistan itself stumbling into open conflict, those seeking power saw little advantage to avoiding violence. Instead, violence presented an opportunity to remake the structures of power, a view shared by the opposition politicians who had pushed the crowds into violence on May 5 and Nabiev's erstwhile supporters in Kulyab. The career criminal and "field commander" Sangak Safarov, who would become one of the most infamous and violent warlords in the coming civil war, was blunter – and clearer – about this new logic than anyone else. Having helped to establish the new "national guard" in Kulyab, he made his way through the blockade back to Dushanbe, where he positioned himself at Nabiev's ear. When Akbarsho Iskandarov, the acting

Chairman of the Supreme Soviet, went to speak with Nabiev on May 24 about the need to take action on the growing violence, he found Safarov there. “Sangak was there,” Iskandarov reported to the Supreme Soviet, “and he said that we don’t need to address these issues.”<sup>112</sup> With advisors like Safarov dictating policy, the descent into civil war became inevitable.

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<sup>112</sup> TsGART f. 297, op. 40, d. 1299, l. 22.

## Chapter Ten

### Conclusion

Once violence began in May 1992, it quickly spread across Tajikistan's southern oblasts, engulfing the Vakhsh valley, Kurgan-Tyube, and parts of Kulyab. As in many civil wars, this was a brutal and confused and terrifying time: village turned against village; neighbor against neighbor; friends against friends. From the very beginning, as a war fought between irregular armies and hastily formed militia groups, the line between combatant and civilian was irregular and blurry. Civilians were targeted in great numbers, coming to represent a large proportion of the war's tens of thousands of casualties. For many people in Tajikistan, the civil war represented the absolute collapse not only of the economy and national government, but of the state itself. Fearing for their families' lives, people from rural and remote villages overwhelmingly returned home and "concentrated their efforts on defending it against all outsiders, be they opposition or government forces."<sup>1</sup> For most of the population of Tajikistan, the distinction mattered little – they were simply trying to survive.

Officially lasting five years (1992-1997), the Tajik Civil War engendered particularly large-scale violence over the course of its first six months, a period that included multiple tank assaults on Dushanbe and pitched battles in the country's south. From 1993, however, the conflict ground to a standstill. The government that had come to power in November 1992 with the support of the "People's Front" [*Fronty Halqi*] of Safarali Kenjaev and Sangak Safarov controlled Dushanbe and the south, while the opposition retained support in the eastern areas of Rasht and the Pamirs. Khujand in the north was nominally on the side of Dushanbe, but also remained distinct, cut off by both mountains and local politics. The opposition's military forces decamped to northern Afghanistan, where they were supported by Ahmad Shah Masood, the ethnically Tajik former anti-Soviet *muhajid* who was now in the process of fighting his own civil war. This stalemate drug on with bursts of violence until June 1997, when four years of negotiations brokered by Iran, Afghanistan, Russia, and the United Nations finally led to the signing of a peace agreement between the President of Tajikistan, Emomali Rahmon, the leader of the United Tajik Opposition, Said Abdullo Nuri, and the UN

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<sup>1</sup> Tett, *Ambiguous Alliances*, 200.



Special Representative, Gerd Merrem.<sup>2</sup> This brought an official end to the civil war, with opposition parties again allowed to legally operate in the country and many opposition figures incorporated into the government. Estimates continue to diverge, but by 1997 between 20,000-50,000 people had been killed in the civil war,<sup>3</sup> while nearly 700,000 had been forced to flee their homes.<sup>4</sup> Yet even then violence continued, with sporadic fighting occurring in Rasht and the Pamirs as late as 2012. By some accounts, the civil war only ended in 2017, when the government of Tajikistan was able to finally exert its complete dominance over all previous opposition figures, removing them completely from state structures and putting many of them in jail.<sup>5</sup>

The Tajik Civil War has been examined in depth by many other works of excellent scholarship, and this dissertation will not delve into those years of darkness.<sup>6</sup> It has instead restricted itself to an examination of the *causes* of this conflict, emphasizing the ways in which Tajikistan's experience of economic and political collapse during the years of perestroika led to civil war. As this thesis has argued, the final disintegration of economic, political, and social order in Tajikistan was inherently connected to the path that Tajikistan took over the final years of the USSR. Properly understanding the reasons for Tajikistan's descent into chaos and its implications for the broader study of the Soviet collapse unavoidably requires a close study of the period preceding this downfall.

As this dissertation has shown, Tajikistan entered the period of perestroika (1985-1991) economically stable and politically calm. Both its population and leadership were widely supportive of the Soviet order, and saw ongoing year-on-year improvements in standards of living and amalgamate growth. When Mikhail

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<sup>2</sup> On the negotiations and ultimate agreement, see Usmonov, *Ta'rikhi siyosiy*, 115-127; United Nations Security Council, Report of the Secretary General on the Situation in Tajikistan, S/1997/686, September 04, 1997.

<sup>3</sup> V.I. Mukomel, "Demograficheskie posledstviia etnicheskikh i religional'nykh konfliktov v SNG," *Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniia* 25, no. 6 (1999); Dov Lynch, "The Tajik civil war and peace process," *Civil Wars* 4, no. 4 (2007):50.

<sup>4</sup> By 1993, there were 692,000 Tajikistani "refugees," – both internally and externally displaced persons. See TsGART f. 306, op. 27, d. 1613, l. 123.

<sup>5</sup> Interview with a foreign diplomat, Dushanbe, July 2017.

<sup>6</sup> For narratives of the civil war, see Jennifer Mitchell, "Civilian Victimization in the Tajik Civil War: How the Popular Front Won the War and Ruined the Nation" (PhD diss., Kings College London, 2014); Epkenhans, *Origins of the Civil War*; Ghoibov, *Ta'rikhi Khatlon*; Nourzhanov and Bleuer, *Tajikistan*, 323-335.

Gorbachev, motivated by urban populations disappointed with Soviet promises and a group of pro-market economists, began to advocate change in the mid-1980s, the leaders of the Tajik SSR were largely confused. Presuming “perestroika” to be a standard Soviet set of superficial changes, the First Secretary of the Tajik Communist Party, Kahhor Mahkamov, backed the reform package and promoted his own pet construction projects under its broader heading. Largely unconcerned with the needs of the Soviet periphery, however, Gorbachev focused his economic reforms on attempts to boost productivity and production through the introduction of market incentives and a more dynamic labor market. While this was supposed to address the needs of European Soviet cities such as Moscow and Leningrad for increased skilled labor and improved industrial output, in practice it had the combined effect of undermining the very structure of the Soviet economy. Enterprises, given the right to hold profits and determine their output, chose to produce less at the same time as newly minted “cooperative” businesses provided a corrupt outlet for the profits now retained by enterprises. In Tajikistan, which hardly needed increases to its already large population of unemployed youth, the reforms collectively led to extremely high unemployment rates, economic contraction, and a noticeable drop in living standards.

By 1988, it was undeniable that something was going wrong with the Soviet economy. Rather than admit his mistake and backtrack on the economic reforms, however, Gorbachev blamed the economic downturn on “entrenched interests” – ministries, industry, and, first and foremost, the Communist Party. Blind to the links between his reforms and their consequences, Gorbachev instead argued that these institutions were blocking reform and set about undermining their authority through “glasnost” and the establishment of alternative political institutions. In Tajikistan, however, Gorbachev’s political reforms elicited skepticism. Criticizing the Party that had succored the leaders of the Tajik SSR and had until recently continued to support the republic seemed illogical, and it took direct interventions from Moscow to establish glasnost in Dushanbe. The new political environment brought about by the Congress of People’s Deputies was additionally slow to take hold in Tajikistan. Non-Communist political parties began to be formed – but again following efforts by Gorbachev and his advisors to encourage their creation. Moscow made it very clear: staying loyal to the center and the Soviet system

meant, strangely and contradictorily, criticizing that very system and allowing opposition to develop. Confused but pliant, Mahkamov and the other leaders of the Tajik SSR complied. By February 1990 both glasnost and political opposition had finally arrived in Dushanbe. The “national movement” Rastokhez was founded and open criticism of the Party and Soviet society spilled into street demonstrations and riots that could only be controlled through military force and a subsequent state of emergency that lasted for 18 months.

The state of emergency helped to keep tensions under the surface, but was unable to remove the fundamental causes of conflict: economic downturn and the ongoing failure of Gorbachev’s reform program. In the eighteen months prior to the final collapse of the USSR, the Tajik SSR continually tried to retain its links to Moscow, backing calls for a new Union Treaty and trying to make bilateral trade deals with its neighbors. Moscow, however, was increasingly ambiguous in its relationship with the periphery, pressuring Tajikistan into following other republics and declaring its sovereignty and creating space for new political parties, including the openly religious Islamic Revival Party of Tajikistan. Following the failed putsch of August 1991 Tajikistan again found itself pushed away by Moscow even as it tried to remain in Moscow’s orbit. When Tajikistan declared independence on September 9, it was at best half-hearted; when the republic elected a new president in November 1991 the candidates each emphasized how they were “Moscow’s” candidate. Long supported by the Soviet Union and having benefited for generations from its economic development program, Tajik politicians and citizens simply could not conceive of life outside of the USSR. The fact that the USSR was crumbling did nothing to change this.

Nor did the final collapse of the USSR in December 1991 change this underlying relationship. The leadership of Tajikistan remained convinced that its fate lay in the hands of Moscow politicians. The new state emphasized its dedication to the Commonwealth of Independent States and its combined military force, making no effort to form an army or take control of the Soviet forces that had been left on its territory. When the economy finally collapsed in early 1992, and with no way of improving the economy, Tajik politicians turned to populism, blaming the opposition for the degradation faced by average citizens. The opposition parties

responded with their own populism, making wild promises and accusing the government of corruption and nepotism. Both sides mobilized tens of thousands of supporters to the streets of Dushanbe. Without the military forces for the control of which the Tajik state remained too compliant to challenge Moscow, the government was unable to retain control of the capital, and two months of demonstrations led to confrontation and violence. In the final assessment, perestroika and its attendant economic disintegration had brought Tajikistan to the edge of civil war.

Just as perestroika must remain central to the story of Tajikistan's collapse, moreover, so must Tajikistan remain part of the story of perestroika and the end of the USSR. While Tajikistan represents a far periphery and unusually extreme case of violence, its experience of economic reform and decline during perestroika is in many ways reflective of the entire Soviet Union during this period. Rather than a statistical outlier, it is instead simply one end of a broad spectrum of violence that arose along the edges of the former USSR. Its path to social collapse, moreover, was dictated from Moscow, making the broader contours of its disintegration relevant to studies of both the Soviet capital and other republics during perestroika. It was not only in Tajikistan but across the USSR that changes to enterprise law and the creation of private "cooperative" businesses led to economic recession and the large-scale theft of state resources. Gorbachev's attempts to wrench control over the Soviet economy from the Communist Party and other "entrenched interests" had equally destabilizing effects across the whole of the USSR, and the slow slippage into chaos that Tajikistan experienced in 1990 and 1991 can in many ways be seen to be representative of the entire USSR. The end result also had more in common than is often suggested. Tajikistan alone was engulfed by civil war in 1992, but violence was everywhere in the former USSR in those years, from war in Chechnya and Nagorno-Karabakh to criminal gun battles on Moscow's streets and the infamous shelling of the Russian Parliament in 1993.

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The narrative that emerges from the final years of Soviet power in Tajikistan is ultimately one of misguided reform, economic downturn, desperate attempts to hold onto power, and political collapse. As people's basic assumptions about life in

the USSR crumbled, and their access to salaries, resources, and even food disintegrated, they began to rebel against an order and state that increasingly bore little resemblance to the USSR. Even the leaders of the Tajik SSR felt lost. “I truly have no idea,” the Tajik Supreme Soviet deputy Moyonsho Nazarshoev mused in April 1991, “where we are living – is this the Soviet Union or a foreign country?”<sup>7</sup> When people came out into the streets of Dushanbe to protest in August 1991 and then again in April 1992, they did so in large part because they could no longer recognize the Soviet republic that had long been their home. Desperate to cling on to some semblance of Soviet order and unsure of how to operate as an independent nation, the leaders of independent Tajikistan ended up stumbling down a path towards populist violence and civil war.

As this dissertation has argued earlier, this story of center-driven collapse and the periphery’s desperate attempts to hold onto anything Soviet is neither terribly complicated nor entirely novel.<sup>8</sup> It is a version of events, however, that has been increasingly written out of history since the end of the Soviet Union in 1991. As histories have been written of the last Soviet years, they have grown more and more balkanized: “Soviet” and “Russian” narratives are told from Moscow, and “Tajik” narratives from Dushanbe. With the majority of accounts based largely on memoirs and other post-factum accounts, moreover, this division of narratives has had the consequence of reifying and strengthening the biases and political agendas of Soviet-era politicians. Gorbachev and his advisors paid little attention to events in the Soviet periphery during perestroika, at best considering them areas of “backwardness” and opposition to change. Unsurprisingly, both the memoirs of Gorbachev and his advisors and those academic works based on these memoirs follow suit, either dismissing or simply ignoring the periphery. In Tajikistan, politicians quickly reacted to the collapse of the USSR by reinterpreting events to emphasize the supposed agency of Tajiks, politicians and citizens alike, in fomenting Tajik state independence. In Safarali Kenjaev’s memoirs, for example, which conveniently begin in August 1991, there is no mention whatsoever of the failed August putsch or the actual collapse of the USSR. As Kenjaev would have it,

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<sup>7</sup> TsGART f. 297, op. 40, d. 1237, l. 22.

<sup>8</sup> It also parallels many other state collapses worldwide, where the statistical probability of revolt has been shown to be highest following a sharp dip in standards of living. See Ted Gurr, *Why Men Rebel* (London: Paradigm, 2010); James Chowning Davies, “The J-Curve and Power Struggle Theories of Collective Violence,” *American Sociological Review* 39, no. 4 (1974): 607-610.

the Tajik people struggled and achieved independence all on their own, much as Gorbachev has been heralded for bringing democracy to Russia with little concern for events in the periphery.

Yet neither story is complete without the other. When the two halves of the narrative are paired, moreover, a quite different picture emerges from the perspective of Moscow and Dushanbe alike. This is, first and foremost, an image of a messy and sudden collapse: a race over the precipice of economic degradation, which took all of three years to complete once reforms came into effect. When the collapse came, it involved mass violence and the destruction of established expectations about daily life. In Tajikistan and across the USSR, people were simply unable to feed their children or support their families. Their world had utterly collapsed, leaving them with few apparent choices other than to take to the streets. Gorbachev and his advisors refused to see this collapse and destruction until it was too late – and having seen it, blamed it on the Soviet system, not their own actions to undermine the system. In Tajikistan, politicians saw the perniciousness of the collapse all too well, but remained powerless to stop its worst consequences. Resisting for as long as they could, they ultimately saw no option but to go along with Moscow's paradoxical plans.

Rather than a drive for independence led by peripheral elites, moreover, the efforts of Tajik politicians like Kahhor Mahkamov point to the very opposite. Independence and even economic sovereignty were essentially imposed on the Tajik SSR from the outside, as its politicians and institutions struggled to remain in the Soviet shadow. While it is inarguable that some republics did in fact struggle against Moscow for independence, most notably the Baltic States, Tajikistan's alternative path should call into question many of the monolithic accounts of "nationalism's rise" leading the USSR to the dustbin of history. Motivated not by a sense of wounded national pride, ethnic identity, religious fervor or other non-Soviet sense of identity, when Tajik politicians finally turned to "stealing the state" and cannibalizing what was left of the Tajik economy in 1991, it seemed at most out of a sense of basic desperation. These politicians, along with a large portion of the Tajik elite, had come to age and flourished as *Soviet* citizens. Without this identity and sense of belonging it implied to both the Soviet state and Soviet

civilizational project, the leaders of Tajikistan were left grasping at the increasingly tenuous strings tying them to Moscow. Even after the USSR finally collapsed they kept grasping.

By that point, however, Moscow has lost all interest in holding onto Tajikistan or the other Soviet republics. For every step Dushanbe refused to take away from the USSR, Moscow either took two or shoved the Tajik leadership forward, encouraging criticism of the Party, forcing through “sovereign” legislation, and cutting the economic ties that had long bound the Union together. This was not the wave of “freedom and self-determination” seen and celebrated by Western politicians and journalists in late 1991 – it was much rather a desperate attempt by the periphery to hold onto the center.<sup>9</sup> With Boris Yeltsin and other politicians in Moscow convinced of the benefits to be had from jettisoning outlying territories, however, the attempt was foreordained to fail. As the economy came to a literal standstill in Dushanbe, it was only a matter of time until the extremes that Georgii Koshlakov had predicted would come to pass. Tajikistan would survive these extremes, albeit at great cost; many of its citizens would not.

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, 564.

## Appendix I: Cotton Taxes and “Subsidies”<sup>1</sup>

While long a point of heavily politicized public and academic debate, the issue of Central Asia’s “subsidized” status in the USSR has not been quantitatively investigated in any convincing way.<sup>2</sup> Without reference to economic or statistical data, most accounts of the late Soviet period in Central Asia instead tend to rhetorically call the region either “heavily subsidized” or “colonially exploited” on the basis of perception data, memoirs, or other equally unreliable sources.

Using data from the Tajik SSR, however, some initial quantitative answers can be provided. The Tajik SSR serves as a worthy test case in this debate for two reasons: first, it had a reputation as a particularly subsidized Soviet republic, and second, its economy was especially monocultured on cotton. This significantly simplifies the calculations necessary. Comparing the amounts of total transfers made from the Soviet center and other republics to the Tajik SSR against the total tax and export value of the Tajik cotton harvest, it is thus possible to arrive at a more accurate annual “balance of transfers” figure for the republic. If this figure shows significant amounts of value being transferred annually to the Tajik SSR, this may provide evidence in favor of the republic having been “subsidized”; if the transfer of wealth flowed in the opposite direction, this may speak of a more colonial relationship. As the figures will show, however, in fact neither model may be appropriate for the Tajik SSR. Instead, the balance of transfers was in many years close to even, providing support for the Soviet Union’s stated policy of broad economic development and “equalization.”

### I. Monetary Transfers and the “Real” Value of Cotton

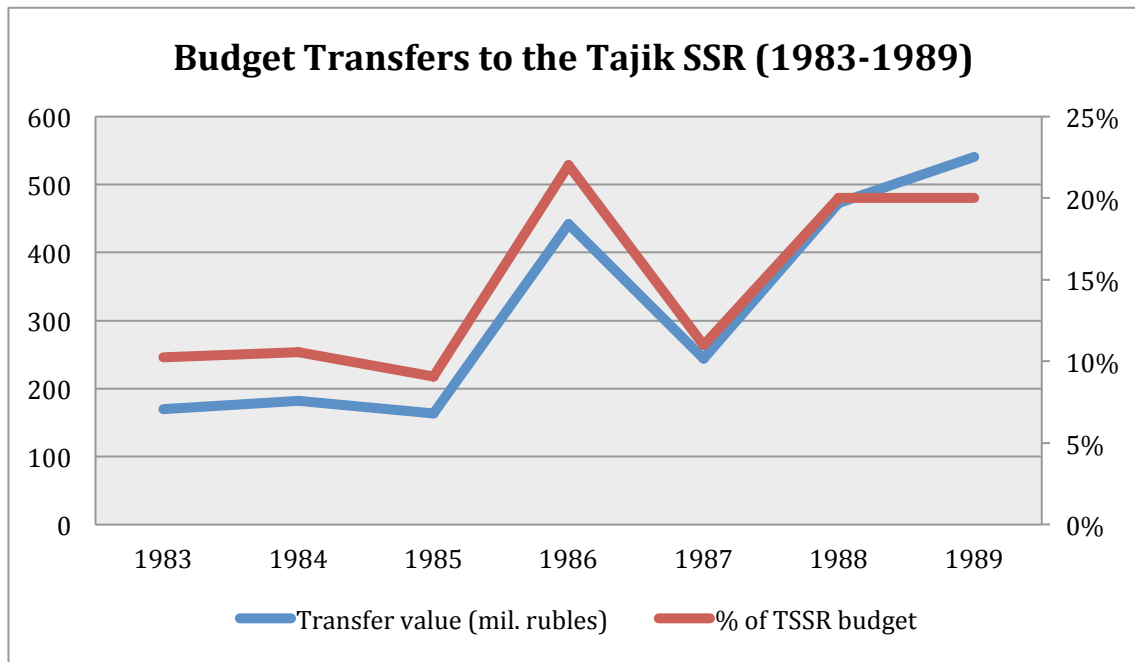
Official budget figures published by the USSR did create the impression that the republic had been significantly subsidized. Each year, “funds from the central budget” made up between 10-20% of the total republican budget. See Figure 4:

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<sup>1</sup> A longer version of this appendix was presented as Isaac Scarborough, “A Union of ‘Subsidized’ Socialist Republics? The Case of Tajikistan’s 1980s Cotton Revenues,” Economic History Society 2018 Annual Conference, Keele University, April 2018.

<sup>2</sup> For discussion on this point, see: Deniz Kandiyoti, “Introduction,” in *The Cotton Sector in Central Asia: Economic Policy and Development Challenges*, ed. Deniz Kandiyoti (London: SOAS, 2007); Sally N. Cummings, *Understanding Central Asia: Politics and contested transformations* (London, 2012), 46; Laura Adams, “Can we Apply Post-Colonial Theory to Eurasia?” *Central Eurasian Studies Review* 7, no. 1 (2008); Khalid, “The Soviet Union,” 133.



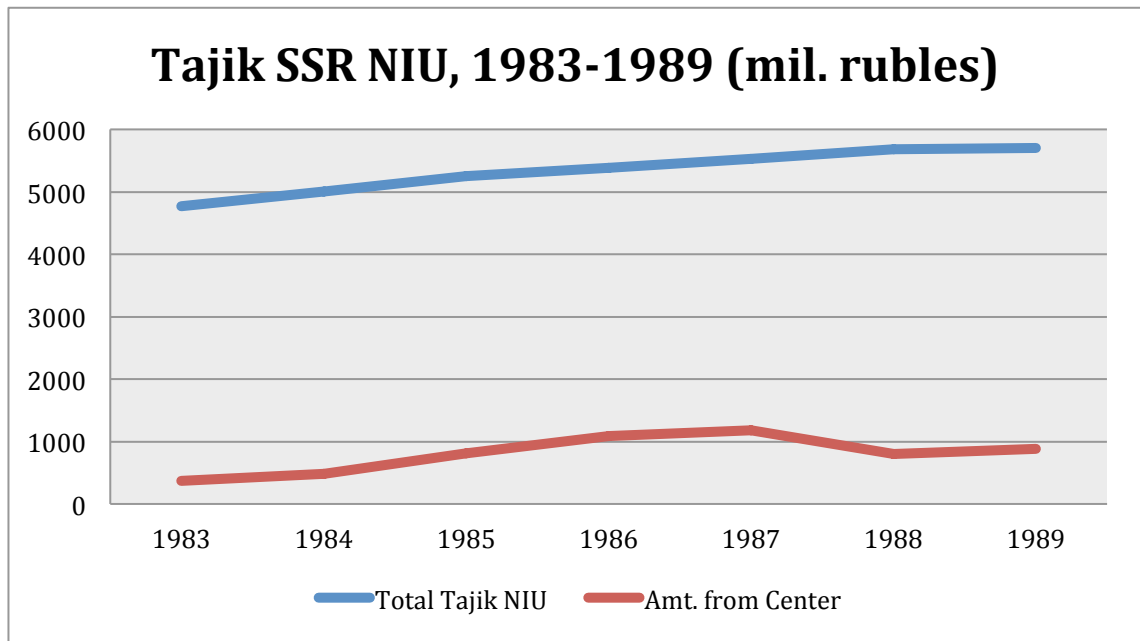


**Figure 4: Budget Transfers to the Tajik SSR.<sup>3</sup>**

These budget transfers did not constitute all of the funds sent from elsewhere in the USSR to the Tajik SSR. In the 1980s, the Tajik SSR's republican budget was equivalent to only 35-45 percent of the republic's National Income Utilized (NIU), the figure the USSR used to represent the total size of the republican economy.<sup>4</sup> The other approximately 60 percent of NIU was made up the industries, salaries, and economic activity outside of the direct control of the budget. Here, too, a notable portion of the total monetary value of the republic's economy came from outside of the republic: on average, around 10-20 percent. See Figure 5:

<sup>3</sup> Calculated from: *Gosudarstvennyi biudzheth SSSR 1981-1985. Statisticheskii sbornik* (Moscow, 1987) (1983-1985); TsGART, f. 18, op. 8, d. 3649, l. 39 (1986); f. 306, op. 40, d. 1146, l. 3 (1987); *Gosudarstvennyi biudzheth SSSR 1990 g.: kratkii statisticheskii sbornik* (Moscow, 1990) (1988-1989).

<sup>4</sup> Rather than use the Western concept of gross national product (GNP), the USSR used the material product system of national accounts. Here, the national income (*natsional'nyi dokhod*) was the total value of all final goods produced or utilized on a particular territory. Final services (e.g. passenger transport) were excluded; intermediate services for the production of goods (e.g. freight transport) were counted as contributing to the value of goods. The net import of goods was added to the "national income produced" (NIP) and insurable losses of goods were deducted from it to find the "national income utilized" (NIU). See: United Nations Statistical Office, *Basic Principles of the System of Balances of the National Economy* (New York: United Nations, 1971); Mark Harrison, *Accounting for war: Soviet production, employment, and the defense burden, 1940-1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), xxvi-xxx.



**Figure 5: Tajik SSR NIU and Net Financial Imports<sup>5</sup>**

In 1985 for example, the difference between the national income produced (NIP) in the Tajik SSR and the total republican NIU was approximately 815 million rubles; this rose to more than 1 billion rubles in 1987 and 1988. Since these figures also included budget transfers, the total potential “subsidy” – or, in other words, all possible net financial imports – for the republic each year could be comfortably represented as this difference between republican NIP and NIU, much as it was in late Soviet statistical analyses. (Here, as in the Soviet calculations, NIU is treated as an upper limit.)<sup>6</sup>

What these official “subsidy” levels failed to take into account, however, was the factual export and tax value of the raw goods produced in Tajikistan. The Soviet pricing system was notorious for under-valuing raw goods. Goods were priced not on the basis of market values, relative scarcity, or demand – but instead taking into consideration long-term planning decisions. The price of Tajikistan’s cotton was kept down to benefit Soviet textile manufacturers and ease the production of clothing. The payments made to the republic for each kilogram of cotton, were also much less than the price at which the USSR’s central economic organs were

<sup>5</sup> Calculated from: GARF, f. 5446, op. 162, d. 176, l. 27; RGAE, f. 1562, op. 68, d. 1773, l. 1-3; Kuboniwa, “National Income,” 69; Belkindas and Sagers, “A Preliminary Analysis,” 635.

<sup>6</sup> Doklad Goskomstata “O proizvodstve i ispol’zovanii valovogo obshchestvennogo produkta po soiuznym respublikam za 1989 god,” GARF f. 5446, op. 162, d. 176, ll. 27-29. Strictly speaking, the difference between NIP and NIU includes both net financial imports and insurable losses; information for insurable losses is not available and is assumed at zero.

able to export it abroad for hard currency. At the same time, the vast majority of Soviet cotton was not exported but instead used internally in the USSR to produce cloth, clothing, and other consumer goods. These goods were then subject to the “turnover tax” (*nalog s oborota*), which was levied against consumer goods. Turnover taxes were then distributed between the republican and federal Soviet budgets. As discussed in Chapter Two of this dissertation, however, turnover taxes were only levied against *finished* consumer goods – and by the republic where the consumer goods were produced. When cotton from Tajikistan was used to produce cotton shirts or suits in other republics, it was these republics (and the Federal Soviet budget) that received revenues. Tajikistan received nothing.<sup>7</sup>

Thus the Tajik SSR was providing revenue to the central Soviet government and other republican budgets in two important – and unaccounted – ways. First, there was the revenue from the export of Tajik cotton, and second, the turnover taxes levied on products made from Tajik cotton. By calculating and adding these two figures together, it should be possible to determine the total value of Tajik cotton production that had been otherwise removed from Soviet balance sheets. This figure can then be compared against the annual level of official NMP “subsidies” sent to the Tajik SSR to determine the factual provision or expropriation of value from the republic in any given year.

### **i. Export**

While it is impossible to know exactly what proportion of Tajik Soviet cotton was exported each year, statistics show that Tajik cotton consistently made up around 11% of the total Soviet harvest.<sup>8</sup> As a result, it would be reasonable to cede to the republic an equivalent proportion (11%) of the cotton export: even if the entire Tajik harvest were processed internally, this would have meant that a greater proportion of other republics’ cotton could be exported. The following equation shows the annual export revenues derived from Tajik-produced cotton:

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<sup>7</sup> RGAE f. 4372, op. 67, d. 9340, l. 253. Up to 95% of cotton from republics like Tajikistan was processed and taxed elsewhere; see: RGAE f. 4372, op. 67, d. 7785, l. 54.

<sup>8</sup> Consistent for the years 1984-1989; in 1983 it was 9.6%. See: *Narodnoe Khoziaistvo SSSR v 1984 godu (statisticheskii ezhegodnik)* (Moscow, 1985), 210; *Narodnoe khoziaistvo SSSR v 1985 godu (statisticheskii ezhegodnik)* (Moscow, 1986), 210; *Narodnoe khoziaistvo SSSR v 1987 godu (statisticheskii ezhegodnik)* (Moscow, 1988), 189; Goskomstat SSSR, *Narodnoe khoziaistvo SSSR v 1988 godu (statisticheskii ezhegodnik)* (Moscow, 1989), 426; Goskomstat SSSR, *Narodnoe khoziaistvo SSSR v 1989 godu (statisticheskii ezhegodnik)* (Moscow, 1990); Goskomstat Tadjikskoi SSR, *Narodnoe khoziaistvo Tadjikskoi SSR v 1989 godu* (Dushanbe, 1991), 224.

### **Annual export revenues from Tajik cotton:**

$$= (x/y)(z)$$

*Where x = annual cotton production in the Tajik SSR (metric tons of raw cotton); y = annual cotton production in the USSR (metric tons of raw cotton); and z = annual total Soviet export revenue from cotton (rubles).*

In 1987, total Soviet revenue from cotton exports, for example, was equal to 869,483,000 rubles; the Tajik SSR's portion was 95,643,130 rubles.<sup>9</sup> Throughout the 1980s, approximately 85-100 million rubles of annual budget revenue – and especially valuable budget revenue, which could be used to purchase foreign currency, equipment, or goods – were being provided to the Soviet Union through the sale of cotton grown and harvested in Tajikistan.

### **ii. Turnover Taxes**

Cotton also brought significant revenue in the form of “turnover taxes,” which accrued to the Russian, Ukrainian, and federal Soviet budgets. For many years the exact value of turnover taxes acquired through the processing of Tajik cotton was left unstated, but in 1988 economists in the Tajik Gosplan decided to try calculating the actual amount. Determining that the raw cotton harvested in the republic that year would produce a total of 283,000 tons of cotton lint, they then calculated that 251,000 tons (or 88.7%) would be sent out of the Tajik SSR. This was enough, based on the standard figure of 150.3 grams of cotton lint for one square meter of cotton fabric, to produce 1,670,000,000 square meters of fabric. The economists then cut out the 16.5% of this fabric that would not be directly taxed as part of consumer goods, which left them 1,395,000,000 square meters. On average, the cost of one square meter of fabric carried with it a turnover tax of 78.8 kopeks, which meant that the total taxes would be 1,099,300,000 rubles. Of course, not all of this revenue was due the Tajik SSR – only 57%, based on calculations showing that 57% of the labor involved in producing cotton cloth

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<sup>9</sup> *Vneshnie ekonomicheskie svyazi SSSR v 1988: statisticheskii sbornik* (Moscow, 1989), 28.

occurred before its processing. This left 626,600,000 otherwise uncalculated rubles due to the Tajik SSR.<sup>10</sup>

There were some problems with the Tajik economists' calculations. First, they had failed to account for the percentage of Tajik cotton that would be exported in 1988. This cotton, as argued above, brought revenue, but ought to be calculated differently. Second, the estimates they were using for total cotton production in the Tajik SSR for 1988 were preliminary – final numbers only became available later in 1989. Finally, they had over-calculated the amount of turnover tax due on one meter of cotton cloth, while simultaneously undervaluing the pre-processing labor percentage. Upon review of Tajikistan's calculations, in fact, the central Gosplan office in Moscow had upgraded this latter figure to 66%.<sup>11</sup> If the calculations are adjusted accordingly, however (by removing the cotton that was sent to export and working with updated production, tax, and labor percentage figures), one arrives at the following equation:

**Annual turnover taxes due to the Tajik SSR on cotton production:**

$$= \left( \left( \frac{(x)(1,000,000)}{3} \right) (.887) \left( 1 - \frac{a}{(y/3)} \right) / 150.3 \right) (.835)(z)(.66)$$

*Where x = annual cotton production in the Tajik SSR (metric tons of raw cotton); y = annual cotton production in the USSR (metric tons of raw cotton); z = annually established rate of turnover tax on one meter of cotton cloth using Tajik cotton (rubles); and a = annual total Soviet export of cotton (metric tons of lint cotton).<sup>12</sup>*

Even with the adjusted formula, however, the total amount of uncalculated revenue remains largely the same. For 1988 the adjusted equation arrives at a figure of 541.84 million rubles; if export revenues are added, the total is 637.9 million rubles. If these calculations are applied to the whole of the mid-to-late 1980s, moreover, the following picture emerges:

<sup>10</sup> Spravka svodnogo otdela gosbiudzhetrov Gosplana TSSR, TsGART f. 306, op. 27, d. 1130, l. 79.

<sup>11</sup> On Gosplan's evaluation of the Tajik calculations, see RGAE f. 7733, op. 65, d. 5443, ll. 1-13, 21.

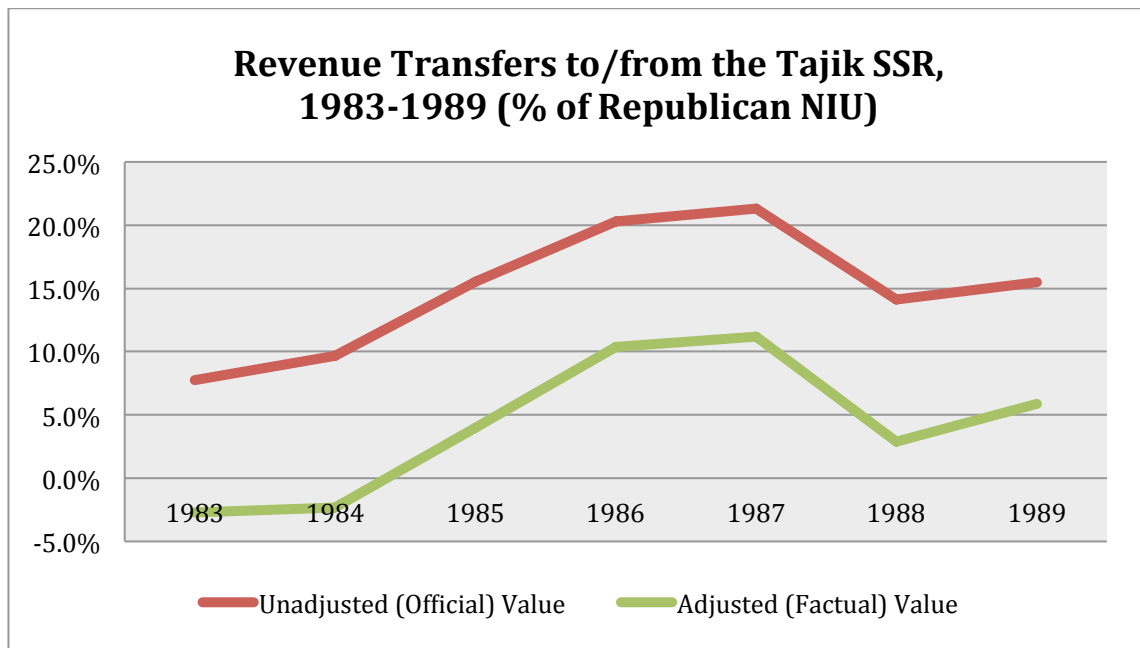
<sup>12</sup> In line with Soviet and international norms, it has been calculated that 3 kilograms of raw cotton (*khlopok-syrets*) are processed into 1 kilogram of lint cotton (*khlopok-volokno*).

	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989
Adjusted outstanding turnover tax	413.51	512.65	522.88	445.79	463.12	541.8 4	447.34
Outstanding export revenue	84.98	89.45	83.36	88.73	95.64	96.06	101.28
Total uncalculated revenue	498.49	602.1	606.24	534.52	558.76	637.9	548.62
Total federal "subsidies"	369.4	484.7	815.4	1092.8	1177.4	802.4	882.6
Difference between subsidies and uncalculated revenue	- 129.09	-117.4	209.16	558.28	618.64	164.5	333.98
Tajik SSR NIU	4766	5001	5248	5388	5532	5680	5700
Difference as % of TSSR NMP	-2.7%	-2.3%	4.0%	10.4%	11.2%	2.9%	5.9%

**Table 1: Outstanding Tajik SSR Revenue.** All figures in millions of rubles.<sup>13</sup>

These adjusted figures clearly demonstrate that the factual divergence between the income produced in the Tajik SSR and the total income spent there (NIU) was far smaller than represented in official Soviet documents. Rather than representing 10-20% of the Tajik SSR's NIU, monetary "subsidies" from outside of the republic made up at most between 3-10%. (See Figure 6, below). In some years, moreover, the Tajik SSR may have even sent the equivalent of tens of millions of rubles to other republics and the Soviet center, equal to 2-3% of its own annual NIU.

<sup>13</sup> Calculated from: GARF, f. 5446, op. 162, d. 176, l. 27; RGAE, f. 1562, op. 68, d. 2104, l. 59; d. 1773, l. 1-3; f. 7733, op. 65, d. 1731, l. 9; d. 2957, ll. 10, 84; d. 3568, l. 8; d. 4639, ll. 65, 67; d. 5056, l. 40, 42; TsGART, f. 306, op. 27, d. 1130, l. 79; Goskomstat SSSR, *Narodnoe Khoziaistvo SSSR v 1984 godu*; Goskomstat SSSR, *Narodnoe khosiaistvo SSSR v 1987 godu*, 189; Goskomstat Tadzhikskoi SSR, *Narodnoe khosiaistvo Tadzhikskoi SSR v 1984 godu* (Dushanbe, 1985); Goskomstat Tadzhikskoi SSR, *Narodnoe khoziaistvo Tadzhikskoi SSR v 1989*, 224; *Vneshniaia trgovlia SSSR v 1984 g. Statisticheskii sbornik* (Moscow, 1985), 22; *Vneshnie ekonomicheskie sviazi SSSR v 1988*, 28; Ministerstvo vneshnikh ekonomicheskikh sviazei SSSR, *Vneshnie ekonomicheskie sviazi SSSR v 1989 godu: statisticheskii sbornik* (Moscow, 1990), 31; I.N. Ustinov, L.A. Feonova, and D.S. Nikolaev, *Ekonomika i vneshnie ekonomicheskie sviazi SSSR: spravochnik. 3-oe izdanie* (Moscow, 1989), 132-133; Kuboniwa, "National Income," 69; Belkindas and Sagers, "A Preliminary Analysis," 635.



**Figure 6: Revenue Transfers To/From the Tajik SSR**

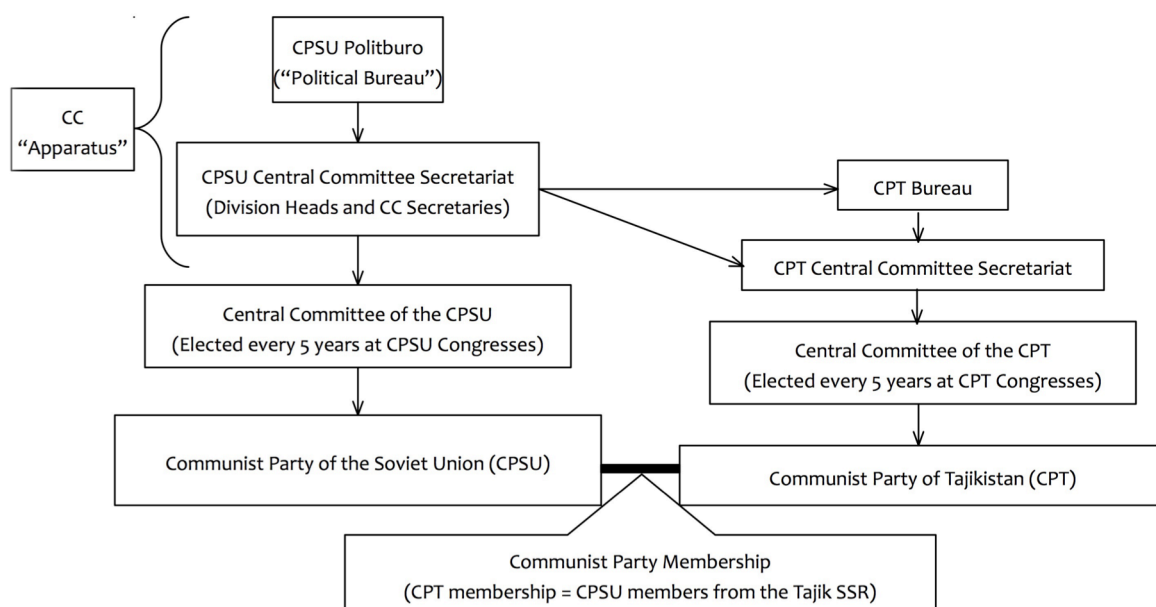
## **II. Implications**

These figures imply some important conclusions for the study of the economy in late Soviet Tajikistan. First and foremost, they demonstrate that the Tajik SSR's economy in the 1980s was neither "heavily subsidized" nor "colonially exploited." Instead, the Tajik economy was provided in some years with a modicum of development funds – on a percentage basis, in fact, less than is provided on average to less developed states in the United States. In other years, depending on the vagaries of the cotton harvest and market, moreover, the Tajik SSR actually provided overall value to the Soviet budget.

In addition, if the republic most frequently cited as a subsidized outlier was in fact far more of a balanced element of the Soviet budgetary system, this may have notable implications for the study of other Soviet Central Asian economies. It should also engender a reconsideration of the much-maligned policy of equalization, which, contrary to academic discourse, seems to have been central to funding decisions made in relation to the Tajik SSR in the 1980s.

## Appendix II: Hierarchical Structure of the Communist Party

The Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) and Communist Party of Tajikistan (CPT) were organized in a hierarchical fashion, whereby the CPSU “Apparatus” – the CPSU Politburo and Central Committee Secretariat – had authority over the equivalent structures in the CPT.



**Figure 7: CPSU and CPT Structure**

In both Party structures, the Secretariat and Bureaus were nominally elected from amongst the respective Central Committees, although in practice the existing members of the Bureaus generally selected and appointed new Bureau members (both full members and “candidate” members) and Secretariat secretaries and Division Heads. Central Committees, large bodies of hundreds of members, were elected every five years at respective CPSU and CPT congresses.

Membership in the two Party structures overlapped. Individual citizens of the USSR could join the CPSU, passing through “candidate” membership in many cases before graduating to full membership. Instead of anyone joining the CPT, however, the CPT membership was simply made up of all CPSU members resident in the Tajik SSR. (This also allowed quick intra-Party transfers, such as when CPSU CC secretaries, such as Petr Luchinskii, were sent to staff posts in the CPT.)



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**RGAE** – Russian State Archive of the Economy, Moscow.

**RGANI** – Russian State Archive of Contemporary History, Moscow.

**RGASPI** – Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History, Moscow.

#### Tajikistan

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## **X. Interviews**

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Anonymous former volunteer on Davlat Khudonazarov's 1991 presidential campaign, Moscow, December 2016.

Davlat, Nurali, journalist, Dushanbe, February 2015.

Dushanbe Residents, Dushanbe, 2013-2017.

Foreign diplomat, Dushanbe, July 2017.

Former and current employees of the Tajik Medical System, Dushanbe and London, 2015-2017.

Former engineer and founder of a cooperative business, Dushanbe, September 2016.

Former Head Surgeon of the Republic of Tajikistan and his family, Dushanbe and Moscow, 2013-2017.

Former Ru ba Ru participants, Dushanbe, February 2015.

Former Soviet Tour Guide, Moscow, August 2015.

Karimov, Buri, former head of the Tajik SSR's Gosplan, Moscow, March 2015.

Khakulov, Rahmat, former Tajik Gosplan employee, Dushanbe, February 2015.

Khudonazarov, Davlat, former member of the Congress of People's Deputies and Tajik Presidential Candidate, Moscow, December 2016.

Koshlakov, Georgii, former Deputy Chairman of the Tajik Council of Ministers, Dushanbe, June and July 2016.

Mirrasanova, Zaragul, former CPT activist and current CPT secretary, Dushanbe, September 2014.

Mullojanov, Parviz, founder of the perestroika-era organization "Sogdiana," Dushanbe, January 2017.

Saifullozoda, Hikmatullo, journalist and former member of "Rastokhez," Dushanbe, February 2015.

Yarbabaev, Alisher, former division head of the Tajik SSR's Ministry of Labor, Dushanbe, February 2015.

Yarbabaeva, Firuza, close family friend of Rahmon Nabiev, Dushanbe, February 2015.