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# Book Review

## Gorbachev's New Thinking

*Edited by Ronald Liebowitz. Cambridge, MA: Ballinger Publishing, 1988. Pp. 215. \$29.95.*

**I**T IS ALWAYS difficult to review a volume of collected papers. The task is much more difficult when current developments with the subject matter are constantly and rapidly evolving, as is the case with the reform movement within the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. This collection, however, reduces that burden considerably. The various chapters are all extremely well-written and informative from a variety of perspectives on the Gorbachev reforms, their chance of success, and their implications for East-West relations. Even though the papers were originally written in 1987, much has changed since then. Increased ethnic unrest, the elections, hesitation on instituting some of the reforms, etc. would change some of the analysis, but the theoretical and historical discussions are very useful.

In particular, the chapters by Gertrude Schroeder and William Odom are filled with important insights for anyone interested in examining the events in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. Schroeder points out that the Gorbachev economic reforms, slow in introduction and inconsistent in application, should not be expected to produce any significant change in the Soviet economy. Even the most enthusiastic supporters of the Gorbachev reforms must admit that the Gorbachev package, "as spelled out in formal decrees as well as in the speeches of the leadership, is riddled with inconsistencies and contradictions that will create serious problems in the process of implementation."

William Odom discusses the inherent paradox within the reform process and how the inconsistencies and contradictions will eventually lead to the disillusionment and alienation of Gorbachev's strongest supporters — Soviet intellectuals. "The changes (Gorbachev) is widely credited with espousing in Soviet economic management," Odom points out, "cannot succeed without simultaneously undermining the power of the political party he heads and the empire it rules." The ambiguity concerning what the reform package is supposed to achieve is the biggest source of caution against optimistic prognostications.

But while the Gorbachev vision of the future is hard to glean, it is easy to see how he proposes to get there — glasnost. By enlisting Soviet and Western intellectuals, Gorbachev hopes to succeed in

introducing his reform package, whatever that may actually amount to. Odom argues that in order to understand the current events within the Soviet Union, analysts need to examine three basic questions. First, what is the basic problem with the Soviet economic system that prevents it from functioning efficiently? Second, by what criteria will we know if reforms have been systematically instituted? Third, what are the forces and pressures that result in systemic change?

A clear conception of the nature of the problem of the Soviet system, i.e., the first question, gives us clear answers to questions two and three. We will know that reforms are succeeding when we see the lines disappearing, the prices of goods first rising rapidly then falling, when enterprises break away from the state, when exports of non-raw materials increase and when the number of joint ventures increases. On the other hand, systemic reform will be resisted by the bureaucracy as their special status within the economy comes to be threatened.

Successful reforms, Odom argues, require a decided shift to market methods of production and distribution, an increase in the flow of information throughout the political and economic system, and the establishment of a rule of law including the right of property. However, such reform could well mean political suicide for Mikhail Gorbachev.

I have concentrated on the papers by Schroeder and Odom because they present the reader with so much to think about concerning the chances of reform and their meaning for social existence for the rest of this century. Several other papers in this volume add considerably to this quest for understanding. The chapter by Ralph Clem, for example, raises questions about the social context of the reform movement and the nationalities problem that takes on added significance after the ethnic unrest this past year following the anniversary of the Stalin-Hitler pact.

Other chapters discuss the possible macroeconomic consequences of Soviet reform, Cold War policies of America and the effect on Soviet development, the history or reform efforts in the Soviet Union, industrial cooperation, the reforms in Eastern Europe, and the Pacific region. This is an excellent collection of papers on a topic that will surely stay relevant for some time to come.

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