1 From communist to postcommunist rule

Mikhail and Raisa Gorbachev on an official visit to India, 1986 (Novosti)

The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics was still growing economically in the Brezhnev years, and expanding its international influence. But growth rates were falling, and social problems were deepening. The Gorbachev leadership, from 1985 onwards, set out a rather different agenda: of *glasnost'* (openness) and *perestroika* (or restructuring) 'We can't go on like this', the new party leader told his wife as he assumed his responsibilities. In the end, for reasons that are still debated, the reform agenda failed to achieve its objectives and the state itself collapsed as its fifteen constituent republics became independent states after the collapse of an attempted coup in August 1991 that had been intended to preserve a viable union. Gorbachev resigned as Soviet president on Christmas Day and the Russian president, Boris Yeltsin, took over the Kremlin as the head of what was now an independent Russian Federation and by far the largest of the post-Soviet republics.

In early 1982 Leonid Brezhnev was apparently at the height of his powers. General Secretary of the ruling Communist Party since October 1964 and, since 1977, Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR or head of state, he had presided over a steady rise in living standards at home and an expansion of Soviet influence throughout the wider world. Under Brezhnev's leadership national income had doubled between 1960 and 1970 and more than trebled by 1980. Industrial output had more than quadrupled. Agricultural performance was less impressive (in 1981 and 1982 the harvests were so poor the figures were simply suppressed), but the real incomes of ordinary citizens had more than doubled over the two decades and the wages paid to collective farmers had increased more than four times. Nor was this simply statistics. By the end of Brezhnev's administration, three times as many Soviet citizens had acquired a higher education; there were more hospital beds, more cars and many more colour televisions. And despite the disappointments in agriculture, for which climatic conditions were at least partly responsible, there had been considerable improvements in the Soviet diet. The consumption of meat, fish and fruit per head of population was up by about half, while the consumption of potatoes and bread, the staples of earlier years, had fallen back considerably.[1]

By the early 1980s, in parallel with these domestic changes, the USSR had begun to acquire an international influence that accorded rather more closely with the country's enormous territory, population and natural resources. Forced to back down in humiliating circumstances in the Cuban missile crisis of 1962, the USSR had since acquired a strategic capability that gave it an approximate parity with the United States by the end of the decade. The Soviet Union had one of the world's largest armies and one of its largest navies, and it dominated the Warsaw Treaty Organisation, which was one of the world's most powerful military alliances. It was the centre of one of the world's largest trading blocs, the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (or Comecon), and a founding member of the United Nations (UN), where it had a permanent seat on the Security Council. The USSR's status as a superpower had been confirmed by a series of agreements with its capitalist rival, the United States, particularly the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (SALT I) in 1972 and its unratified successor, SALT II, in 1979. And it was represented much more widely in international affairs: the USSR had diplomatic relations with 144 foreign states by the early 1970s, twice as many as in the early 1960s; it took part in the work of over 400 international organisations and was a signatory to more than 7,000 international treaties or conventions.[2] The Soviet Union was 'one of the greatest world powers', the official history of Soviet foreign policy could boast by the early 1980s, 'without whose participation not a single international problem can be resolved'.[3] If this was an exaggeration, it was a pardonable one.

Leonid Brezhnev, the symbol of this developing military and politico-economic might, had increasingly become the central element in the political system that underpinned it. Originally, in 1964, a 'collective leadership', it had become a leadership 'headed by comrade L. I. Brezhnev' by the early 1970s. In 1973, in a further sign of his increasing

dominance, Brezhnev's name was listed first among the members of the Politburo even though the KGB chairman, Yuri Andropov, had joined at this point and should, on alphabetical principles, have displaced him. The General Secretary made his own contribution to these developments, complaining whenever he thought he was being neglected by the newspapers (it was 'as if I don't exist', he told *Pravda* in 1975),[4] and taking 'organisational measures' to ensure that his public addresses were greeted with sufficient enthusiasm.[5] By 1976, at its 25th Congress, Brezhnev had become the party's 'universally acclaimed leader' and *vozhd'* (chief), a term previously used to describe Stalin; there was 'stormy, prolonged applause' when it was announced that he had been re-elected to the Central Committee, and a standing ovation when Brezhnev himself announced that he had once again been elected General Secretary.[6] He became a Marshal of the Soviet Union later the same year, and a bronze bust was unveiled in his birthplace;[7] an official biography, published in December, declared the General Secretary an 'inspiring example of selfless service to the socialist motherland [and] to the ideals of scientific communism'.[8]

In 1977 Brezhnev consolidated his position by adding the largely ceremonial chairmanship of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, or collective presidency, at the same time as the dominant position of the Communist Party was itself being acknowledged in Article 6 of the new constitution. He took receipt of the Gold Medal of Karl Marx, the highest award of the Academy of Sciences, for his 'outstanding contribution to the development of Marxist-Leninist theory';[9] in 1978 he received the Order of Victory for his 'great contribution' to the success of the Soviet people and their armed forces in the Great Patriotic War,[10] and then in 1979 the Lenin Prize for Literature for memoirs that had been written for him by an assistant who himself received the Order of Lenin a few days later.[11] At the 26th Party Congress in 1981, Brezhnev was hailed as an 'outstanding political leader and statesman', a 'true continuer of Lenin's great cause' and an 'ardent fighter for peace and communism';[12] his speech was punctuated seventy-eight times by 'applause', forty times by 'prolonged applause' and eight times by 'stormy, prolonged applause',[13] and there were shouts of 'hurrah' when it was announced that he had unanimously been re-elected to the Central Committee.[14] Unprecedentedly, the whole Politburo and Secretariat, Brezhnev included, were re-elected without change; Brezhnev's son Yuri, a first deputy minister of foreign trade, became a candidate member of the Central Committee at the same time, and so too did his son-in-law Yuri Churbanov, a first deputy minister of internal affairs.

Brezhnev's seventy-fifth birthday, in December 1981, brought these tributes to a new pitch of intensity. Seven of *Pravda*'s eight pages on 19 December were wholly or partly devoted to the event, and tributes continued to appear in the central press throughout the following week. Brezhnev himself attended a ceremony in the Kremlin where he was invested with a series of distinctions by the leaders of the East European communist states, who had come to Moscow for the occasion. The Soviet awards, which he had himself to authorise as head of state, included a seventh Order of Lenin and a fourth Hero

of the Soviet Union citation, Mikhail Suslov, a few years his senior, remarking at the conferment that 75 was regarded in the Soviet Union as no more than 'middle age'.[15] Brezhnev's life was turned into a film, *Story of a Communist*; his wartime exploits in the Caucasus, little noted at the time, were presented as all but the decisive turning-point in the struggle against the Nazis; his memoirs became the subject of a play, a popular song and a full-scale oratorio. He had already accumulated more state awards than all previous Soviet leaders taken together, and more military distinctions than Marshal Zhukov, who had saved Leningrad and liberated Berlin, and so many foreign awards that he entered the Guinness Book of Records;[16] when he died more than 200 decorations followed his coffin to the grave.[17] Even a modest poem, 'To the German Komsomol', written when he was seventeen, attracted national attention when it was republished in *Pravda* in May 1982.[18]

Brezhnev's personal and political powers, nonetheless, were clearly failing. According to subsequent accounts, he began to suffer serious ill health at the end of the 1960s, and in January 1976 was clinically dead for a short time following a stroke.[19] For two months he was unable to work, as his speech and writing had been impaired, and thereafter he was constantly surrounded by doctors, with a fully equipped ambulance following his car on trips abroad. His speech became slurred, his breathing laboured, his concentration limited; visiting Baku in one of his last public appearances, he startled his audience by referring repeatedly to 'Afghanistan' instead of 'Azerbaijan' (he had been reading the wrong speech); visiting Prague, he read out some pages twice and asked for a translation when the Czech party leader ended his welcoming address with a passage in Russian (there was a 'deathly silence in the hall').[20] Newspapers did what they could to conceal Brezhnev's physical decline by using a much earlier photograph, adding new medals as they were awarded.[21] But there was no disguising his condition from immediate colleagues, to whom, indeed, he had twice suggested resignation;[22] Politburo meetings, which used to take several hours, dwindled to fifteen or twenty minutes,[23] and public occasions, however formal, left a 'pitiful impression'.[24] Among the wider public, unkind anecdotes were already circulating: his eyebrows, in one of these, were 'Stalin's moustache at a higher level'; in yet another, he was to have an operation to enlarge his chest to accommodate the medals he had been awarded (even his son-in-law had to concede that this was one of the General Secretary's weaknesses[25]).

Perhaps most serious of all, Brezhnev's grip on affairs of state became increasingly infirm. The death of Suslov, in January 1982, seems in retrospect to have been crucial. One of the Politburo's oldest and longest-serving members, with acknowledged authority in both ideology and foreign affairs, Suslov had served as kingmaker in 1964, declining the general secretaryship for himself and backing Brezhnev for the position, and then becoming the 'second person in the party' towards the end of his period of rule.[26] With Suslov gone, the Brezhnev leadership began to disintegrate rapidly. At the end of the same month, the death was reported of Semyon Tsvigun, first deputy chairman of the KGB and the husband of the younger sister of Brezhnev's wife; rumour suggested it was a case of suicide precipitated by his impending arrest on corruption charges.[27] At the

beginning of March 1982 came the arrest of 'Boris the gypsy' and other figures from the world of circus entertainment on charges of bribery and currency speculation; all were close friends of Brezhnev's daughter Galina and their arrest showed that the General Secretary's authority was no longer sufficient to protect them.[28] Later the same month the head of the trade union organisation, Aleksei Shibaev, was replaced amid reports that he had diverted union funds to build dachas for his relatives and friends, and led a disreputable private life; in April the Procurator General announced that a former fisheries minister had been executed for his part in a caviare fraud.[29]

Still more significantly, in May 1982 a plenary session of the Central Committee of the CPSU (Communist Party of the Soviet Union) took place at which Brezhnev was unable to secure the election of his 'faithful Sancho Panza',[30] Konstantin Chernenko, to the powerful position of Central Committee Secretary with responsibility for ideology that had become vacant with the death of Suslov. In a development widely seen as significant both at home and abroad, it was the head of the KGB, Yuri Andropov, who was successful, apparently with the support of the armed forces lobby. Another Brezhnev associate lost his position when in July 1982 the Krasnodar first secretary, Sergei Medunov, was summarily dismissed (he had extracted bribes on a massive scale but deflected all criticism by entertaining investigators to a variety of forms of hospitality including a 'rest home' where they were provided with sexual favours); later still came the arrest of the manager of Moscow's most famous food store and his wife, both of whom were close associates of Brezhnev's daughter.[31] All of this suggested that Brezhnev's political authority as well as physical health were in decline, and reports circulating in the West suggested that it had already been decided he would retain the largely ceremonial presidency, allowing another figure to be elected to the more demanding post of party leader. Brezhnev, in the event, anticipated any changes of this kind by dying suddenly on the morning of 10 November 1982, his health undermined by a two-hour stint in the reviewing box at the anniversary parade in Red Square three days earlier. *Pravda*'s obituary mourned the passing of a 'continuer of the cause of Lenin, a fervent patriot, an outstanding revolutionary and protagonist of peace and communism, [and] an outstanding political and government leader of the contemporary era'.[32]

It had widely been expected that a decent interval would elapse before a successor was named as General Secretary, and indeed that a prolonged succession struggle might ensue. On 11 November, however, it was announced that Andropov was to chair the committee making arrangements for Brezhnev's funeral, and the following day, as was now expected, it was announced that an emergency meeting of the Central Committee had elected him to the vacant general secretaryship. Andropov's main rival for the succession, Konstantin Chernenko, had the task of proposing his candidacy to the Central Committee, where it was accepted unanimously. Brezhnev was buried on 15 November, Andropov making the funeral oration, and a week later the new General Secretary made his first speech as party leader to the Central Committee, a brief but effective review of Soviet foreign and domestic policy.[33] In May 1983 it became known

that Andropov had succeeded Brezhnev as chairman of the Defence Council, which had ultimate authority in military and security matters, and in June he was elected to the chairmanship of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet, thus concentrating in his hands after only seven months the same combination of posts that Brezhnev had taken almost thirteen years to accumulate. A series of changes in the membership of the Politburo and Secretariat, and at lower levels of the party and state, had meanwhile begun to put into place a coalition of reform-minded technocrats who might be expected to support both the new General Secretary and the policies he intended to promote.

Andropov's own health, however, was far from certain. An elderly man (already 68 when he assumed the party leadership) with a history of heart trouble, there were rumours of incapacity from almost the outset of his period of office. The 'Brezhnev mafia' continued to lose influence, but Andropov's rival for the general secretaryship, Konstantin Chernenko, remained prominent, making the opening speech at the June 1983 Central Committee plenum and chairing the Politburo in his absence. Andropov's effective authority in fact lasted for only a few months: he was last seen in public in August 1983, and then failed to attend the anniversary parade in Red Square on 7 November and the Central Committee and Supreme Soviet meetings that took place a few weeks later. It became known that he was receiving kidney dialysis treatment at the Central Committee hospital near Moscow and that Mikhail Gorbachev, the youngest member of the Politburo and apparently the one most closely attuned to the General Secretary's own thinking, was maintaining links between him and other members of the leadership.[34] A series of 'interviews', and an address that was circulated to the Central Committee plenum he was unable to attend, suggested that Andropov's intellectual powers were largely unimpaired; and further changes in the Politburo and Secretariat at the December 1983 plenum indicated that his control over the most important of all the powers of a party leader, that of appointment, was scarcely diminished. Nonetheless, explanations in terms of 'colds' began to wear thin, and it was not entirely unexpected when on 11 February 1984 the central press reported that the General Secretary had died two days earlier after a 'long illness'.[35] Once again the party leadership was plunged into the search for a successor.

As before, there were two principal contenders: Chernenko, whose political fortunes had revived with Andropov's illness, and Gorbachev, who was the youngest member of the leadership at the time but evidently Andropov's own favoured candidate for the succession.[36] Chernenko was named on 10 February to head the funeral committee, which appeared to suggest he was all but certain to secure the nomination; the formal choice took rather longer to arrange because of the divisions within the leadership that it reflected, with a 'Brezhnevite' faction supporting Chernenko and composed for the most part of long-serving members of the leadership like Prime Minister Nikolai Tikhonov, Kazakh party leader Dinmukhamed Kunaev and Moscow party secretary Viktor Grishin, and an 'Andropovite' faction consisting of the younger, more reform-minded members who had joined or advanced within the leadership under the late General Secretary,

including Vitalii Vorotnikov, who headed the government of the largest of the republics, as well as Gorbachev himself.[37] The choice fell finally on Chernenko, partly, it appears, because of his seniority and experience, and partly because a Gorbachev leadership would have been likely to last rather a long time: Gorbachev was just 52 and had been a full member of the Politburo for less than four years.

At all events, on 13 February 1984, four days after Andropov had died, another extraordinary meeting of the Central Committee took place at which Chernenko, proposed by Tikhonov, was elected unanimously to the vacant general secretaryship.[38] It emerged subsequently that Gorbachev had also addressed the plenum,[39] and unofficial reports suggested that he had been installed as a de facto second secretary with the power of veto, on behalf of the younger 'Andropovite' faction, over leadership decisions.[40] Gorbachev's greater prominence was apparent in, for example, his more advanced placing in the line-up of leaders beside Andropov's coffin, and in the ranking he received in pre-election speeches and other formal party and state occasions. In turn it indicated that the Chernenko leadership was a relatively evenly balanced coalition, containing both supporters of the late party leader's reforming policies and those who believed they had been pressed too far. These internal divisions were sufficient in themselves to slow down the momentum of reform, quite apart from what the new General Secretary might have wished, and they persisted throughout his period of office as neither side could allow the other to gain a decisive advantage by adding to the number of their supporters in the Politburo or Secretariat.

The chairmanship of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet and of the Defence Council, as well as the party leadership, had become vacant on Andropov's death. It became known later in February 1984 that Chernenko had also assumed the chairmanship of the Defence Council, and in April 1984, on Gorbachev's nomination, the first session of the newly elected Supreme Soviet elected him to the chairmanship of its Presidium, which made him de facto head of state.[41] Chernenko was nevertheless, at 72, the oldest General Secretary ever to have assumed office, and he had a history of lung disease that caused difficulty in breathing. Perhaps inevitably, it was regarded as a transitional general secretaryship from the outset. Two regular Central Committee plenums were held during Chernenko's period of office: the first, in April 1984, was devoted to the work of the elected soviets and educational reform, the second dealt with land improvement. Neither made any change in the membership of the Politburo or Secretariat or even in the membership of the Central Committee itself, and neither could be said to have initiated any major departure in public policy (the educational reforms, which were of some importance, had been launched the previous year). There was equally little success when efforts were made to develop the significance of Chernenko's service in the border guards in the early 1930s ('there could be no personality cult', it was pointed out, 'in the absence of a personality'); nor could much be made of his undistinguished war record.[42] A series of missed engagements suggested that Chernenko's health was already deteriorating, and official spokesmen had to admit that the recently elected General Secretary was suffering from a serious cold, or perhaps worse.

Chernenko was last seen in public at the end of December 1984. He failed to meet Prime Minister Papandreou of Greece on his visit to Moscow in February 1985 and failed to deliver the customary eve-of-poll address to the Soviet people in the republican and local elections later the same month. Although he was shown voting on television on 24 February and was pictured in the central press receiving his deputy's credentials a week later,[43] rumours of the General Secretary's physical incapacity were strengthened rather than dispelled by his evident infirmity. Finally, on the evening of 10 March 1985, he died, the medical bulletin recording that he had expired as a result of heart failure following a deterioration in the working of his lungs and liver.[44] The following day, with unprecedented speed, an extraordinary session of the Central Committee elected Mikhail Gorbachev as its third General Secretary in three and a half years, Gromyko proposing him in an eloquent speech that had the support of the Andropovite faction within the leadership and of the regional first secretaries, who were 'increasingly determined not to let the Politburo manoeuvre another old, sick or weak person into the top position again'.[45] Gorbachev, who had just celebrated his fifty-fourth birthday, was still the youngest member of the Politburo and apparently in robust good health, which was in itself a considerable change. As one of the earliest jokes put it: 'What support does Gorbachev have in the Kremlin?' Answer: 'None – he walks unaided.'[46]

A changing policy agenda

Gorbachev began his acceptance speech by paying tribute to Chernenko as a 'true Leninist and outstanding figure of the CPSU and the Soviet state'.[47] Although he was later concerned to emphasise the decisive break that had occurred with his election and still more so with the April 1985 Central Committee plenum at which his programme had first been set out, there was in fact a good deal of continuity between the policy agenda that had been established by Andropov and Chernenko and the agenda that Gorbachev came to promote over the years that followed. The decisive break had arguably taken place under Andropov, whose security background tended to obscure his earlier exposure to the East European reform experience while Soviet ambassador to Hungary in the mid-1950s and a penetrating, somewhat puritanical intellect that was completely at odds with the complacency and corruption of the later Brezhnev era.[48] Even Chernenko, despite his background in propaganda and party administration and his career links with Brezhnev, had a number of special priorities that associated him with broadly 'liberal' opinion in the leadership context of the time, among them an interest in letters from the public, an emphasis on the consumer sector of the economy and a commitment to détente.[49] There were, in fact, a number of elements in common throughout the reorientation of policy that took place between the death of Andropov and the accession of Gorbachev, although the reformist impetus undoubtedly slackened under Chernenko and acquired a new scope and urgency under Gorbachev.

One element in that reorientation of policy was leadership renewal, which had already begun in the last months of Brezhnev's term of office but which was now pursued with especial urgency. At the November 1982 meeting of the Central Committee, just ten days after Andropov's election as General Secretary, Nikolai Ryzhkov, an experienced manager who had been working in the state planning office, joined the leadership as a member of the Secretariat.[50] Further changes took place in June 1983 when the Leningrad party leader, Grigorii Romanov, moved to Moscow to become another new member of the Secretariat and Vitalii Vorotnikov, who had been banished to Cuba as Soviet ambassador by Brezhnev, became a candidate member of the Politburo (and shortly afterwards prime minister of the Russian Republic).[51] The December 1983 Central Committee plenum, the last under Andropov's leadership, saw Vorotnikov consolidate his rapid advance by becoming a full member of the Politburo, and Yegor Ligachev, who had been first secretary in Tomsk, became a Central Committee secretary with responsibility for appointments and the supervision of lower-level party bodies.[52] There was no further movement in the party's leading bodies under Chernenko's rather shorter general secretaryship, apart from the loss that unavoidably occurred with the death of Defence Minister Ustinov;[53] the change that had taken place since the death of Brezhnev, however, was already a far-reaching one. In the Politburo that had been elected in March 1981, all but three of its fourteen full members had been born before the revolution, and the average age was over 70; Arvid Pel'she, born in 1899, had taken part himself in the October revolution. In the Politburo that Gorbachev inherited in March 1985, by contrast, just five of its ten full members were of prerevolutionary origin, and four (including Gorbachev himself) were in their fifties or early sixties, alarmingly young by recent Soviet standards. At least as notable, it had become a leadership of much greater technical and managerial competence. Vorotnikov, for instance, was a qualified aviation engineer who had spent the early part of his career in a Kuibyshev factory; Ryzhkov, before coming to Gosplan, had been the successful director of a massive engineering works in Sverdlovsk; Ligachev was an engineering graduate; and the new head of the Committee of State Security (KGB), Viktor Chebrikov, also an engineer, had a background in industrial management as well as party work in the Ukraine.[54]

A further priority, associated particularly with Andropov, was social discipline. In part this meant a firm and sustained campaign against the bribery and corruption that had increasingly disfigured the later Brezhnev years. The late General Secretary's family and friends were among the first to feel the effects of the new policy. In December 1982, just a month after Andropov's accession, Interior Minister Nikolai Shchelokov was dismissed from his position[55]– a close associate of Brezhnev's from Dnepropetrovsk days, he had enjoyed considerable opportunities for enrichment as head of Soviet law enforcement, acquiring a fleet of foreign cars, a photographer, a cook and a 'masseuse', as well as rare books from public library collections.[56] Shchelokov was replaced as interior minister by Vitalii Fedorchuk, an experienced KGB career officer and trusted Andropov associate, and in June he and another Brezhnev crony, the former Krasnodar first secretary,

Medunov, were dismissed from the Central Committee for 'mistakes in their work'.[57] Although his family reportedly celebrated Chernenko's election with an all-night party, Shchelokov continued to lose favour, suffering the humiliation of expulsion from the party and losing his military rank in November 1984 for 'abuse of position for personal gain and conduct discrediting the military title of General of the Soviet Union';[58] his wife had already committed suicide, his son – who had speculated in foreign cars – was dismissed from the bureau of the Komsomol (Young Communist League), and the disgraced interior minister took his own life early the following year.[59]

Brezhnev's immediate family was also affected. His daughter Galina and her husband Churbanov were banished to Murmansk; Churbanov lost his post as first deputy interior minister in December 1984 and then his position on the Central Committee,[60] and in December 1988 he was given twelve years' imprisonment for massive bribe-taking and stripped of his state honours.[61] Brezhnev's son Yuri lost his ministerial post and Central Committee membership, and his secretary was sentenced to nine years' imprisonment for abuse of his position;[62] Brezhnev's books – in nearly 3 million copies – were withdrawn from public sale,[63] and his widow was forced to return his decorations to public custody (his Order of Victory had meanwhile been rescinded).[64] The city of Brezhnev, formerly Naberezhnye Chelny, reverted to its original name in 1988; so too did Brezhnev Square in Moscow, and the Brezhnev – formerly Cherry Tree – district in the capital (humorists unkindly suggested that the Brezhnevs themselves might soon become the 'Cherry Tree family').[65] Brezhnev, according to opinion polls, was already more unpopular than Stalin; the very name, his grandson told a Moscow weekly, had 'become a curse'.[66] The campaign against corruption may have owed something to Andropov's own asceticism: he lived modestly and refrained from any attempts to promote the careers of his own children, although his son Igor became a prominent member of the diplomatic service. More important, perhaps, was the concern of both Andropov and his successor that corruption, if allowed to go unchecked, might reduce the effectiveness of party control and ultimately compromise the regime itself, as had clearly happened in Poland in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

The other side of the post-Brezhnev leadership's campaign of social discipline, which also continued under Chernenko, was an attempt to strengthen discipline in the work-place and law and order in the wider society. One of the first clear signs of this new direction in official policy was the series of raids that the police began to make in early 1983 on shops, public baths and even underground stations in order to find out which of those present had taken time off their work without permission. There was certainly some room for improvement. An official report in late 1982 found that of every 100 workers surveyed, an average of 30 were absent 'for personal reasons' at any given moment, in most cases to go shopping or visit the doctor. Another investigation in 800 Moscow enterprises found that in some cases no more than 10 per cent of the workforce were still at their places during the last hour of the shift.[67] A further series of decrees on 'socialist labour discipline' sought to reduce poor-quality workmanship, alcoholism and