GORBACHEV’S GLASNOST AND THE DISSOLUTION OF THE SOVIET UNION

To what extent did the Glasnost policy implemented by Mikhail Gorbachev cause the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991?

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Abstract

This essay will deal with the 1991 dissolution of the Soviet Union and will determine the extent to which the policy of Glasnost implemented by the last leader of the Soviet Union Mikhail Gorbachev had caused it. The essay focuses on the time period in which Gorbachev ruled, between 1985 and 1991. The essay will investigate how the media changed as a result of Glasnost; the effect of Glasnost in Gorbachev’s political reforms; the feelings of nationalism and independence that arose from Glasnost; and finally how this would all lead to the collapse of the Soviet Union. The first paragraph of the essay introduces the Soviet Union; outlines possible factors of the dissolution of the Soviet Union; introduces Gorbachev and his policy of Glasnost, or “openness”; and briefly attempts to show how it was a factor of the dissolution of the Soviet Union to a fairly large extent. Next, Gorbachev’s reforms of democratization and Glasnost are briefly examined, as well as the limits of Glasnost. The essay then focuses on how Glasnost invoked several reforms in the media that resulted in criticism of the Communist Party. Political reforms that arose in the Soviet Union are also explored, and events are analyzed to show how Glasnost had caused them as well as how they weakened the Communist Party. Finally, the essay explores in detail the feelings of nationalism and desire for independence of the republics of the Soviet Union. Specific events are analyzed to show how Glasnost had allowed them to occur and their significance on the decrease in unity of the Soviet Union. The essay concludes that Gorbachev’s Glasnost caused the dissolution of the Soviet Union to a fairly large extent, through reforms in the media, on the political stage, and through the people’s feelings of nationalism and independence.
Research Question: *To what extent did the Glasnost policy implemented by Mikhail Gorbachev cause the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991?*

The dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 is perhaps one of the most exciting events of the 20th century, marking the end of a seventy year old regime. The Soviet Union was established in 1922 under Vladimir Lenin, and was governed by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), whose first General Secretary, Joseph Stalin, forced the people of the Soviet Union through radical change in order to promote modernization in the 1920s. In the 1930s, Stalin began the purges, where he brutally murdered millions of his people, including CPSU officials, who opposed his authoritarian

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1 Brian Crozier, *The Rise and Fall of the Soviet Empire*. (Rocklin: Forum, 1999) xi. *The Rise and Fall of the Soviet Empire* is a book by historian Brian Crozier, published in 1999 that narrates the history of the Soviet Union from its rise in 1917 to its fall in 1991. The purpose of the source is to inform the reader of the history of the Soviet Empire—its birth, life, and death. The book covers events that occurred in 1917 with Vladimir Lenin, and follows Soviet conquests across the continents of Europe, Asia and Africa. The book describes events up to and during the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, and also touches on the history of the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union. The book has value in that it has detailed descriptions of an extensive collection of events that occurred during the time of the Soviet empire, and also how the Soviet empire came to life as well as its death. The book also has a large variety of sources that were referenced, including several historians, as well as primary source documents related to the purpose of the book that are available to the reader in the Appendixes of the book. The source is valuable specifically to the investigation in providing a description and analysis of the collapse of the Soviet Union, and examines the effect of Glasnost as well as its limitations. The source is limited in that most of the information provided is considered secondary source material; there does not seem to be sufficient evidence to support that the author did personally visit the Soviet Union. Additionally, the author did not seem to have conducted any interviews with people about the events of the book. The author mainly focuses on the Soviet empire and thus is probably not a good source for other topics. Finally, late events that are discussed in the book such as those involving the collapse of the Soviet empire in 1991 have limited information in that there is only a difference of eight years between the collapse in 1991 and the book’s publication in 1999; therefore there could be related information that has yet to be released.

2 Tony Howarth and Josh Brooman, *Twentieth Century History*. (New York: Longman, 1987) 128-129. *Twentieth Century History* is a history textbook written by Tony Howarth, second edition by Josh Brooman concerning history of the world in the 20th century. The book was published in 1987. The purpose of the book is to inform the reader of important events that occurred from 1900 to around the 1980s. The book does not focus on an exact place or event but rather provides information on the significant events of the 20th century worldwide. The source has value in that it gives factual information as well as some primary source maps and photos on the events of the 20th century, including information on the Glasnost implemented by Gorbachev. The source provides brief information about the change in media as a result of Glasnost and also provides a view on the contradiction of Glasnost. The source is limited in that it is not very detailed about Gorbachev and Glasnost; being published before 1991, it cannot provide a clear outlook on the factors of the collapse of the Soviet Union and therefore cannot fully establish the long-term effects of Glasnost on the Soviet Union.
rule. This would set the ideology of communism and the acceptance of the Soviet Union firmly in the minds of the people. 3 How, then, did the established superpower of the Soviet Union fall? There is believed to be several causes for the dissolution, such as an economic crisis; a political system mainly based on the people’s fear; growing feelings of nationalism of the Soviet Union’s individual states; the Soviet Union’s failure in 1988 to conquer Afghanistan; the dual collapse of the Soviet military; 4 Boris Yeltsin’s 5 opposition to Gorbachev and so on. 6 Mikhail Gorbachev served from 1985 to 1991 as the

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3 Neil DeMarco, *The World This Century*, (London: Bell & Hyman, 1987) 62. *The World This Century* is a history textbook by Neil DeMarco, published in 1987 about the world in the 1900s. The purpose of the source is to inform the reader briefly about significant events of the 20th century, including Lenin’s Revolution in 1917 and Stalin’s reign with the USSR. The source is valuable in that it provides brief factual information on events of the world since 1900 and that it is thorough in scope, not focusing on a specific event. The source is also valuable in providing primary source photos and maps. The source is valuable in providing a clear look at the formation of the USSR and how it was operated under Stalin which is significant to the investigation of the essay to compare USSR in the time of Stalin and in the time of Gorbachev. The source is limited in that it has no reference to Gorbachev’s Glasnost nor the collapse of the Soviet Union—it was published in 1987, which is prior to the collapse of the USSR. It is also limited in that it does not provide a detailed analysis or examination of specific events like Stalin’s reign but instead is very varied in its scope of research.

4 Bernard Gwertzman and Michael Kaufman, *The Decline and Fall of the Soviet Empire*. (New York: The New York Times Company, 1992) x-xi. *The Decline and Fall of the Soviet Empire* is a book by historian Bernard Gwertzman and Michael T. Kaufman on the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. The purpose of the source is to provide news articles from the New York Times on events from 1985 to 1991, and to analyze how they led to the collapse of the Soviet Union. The source is valuable in that the timeframe on which it focuses coincides with the time that Gorbachev was in power in the USSR. The source analyzes major events that occurred in the Soviet Union and comments on their significance and their effects on the USSR and if applicable, its collapse. The source also provides an opinion on the underlying reasons for the collapse of the Soviet Union and does analyze the effects of Glasnost on the collapse. The source is detailed in examining the changes in media as well as in politics and the most important events showing peoples’ nationalism. The source is also valuable in showing the views of various correspondents of the New York Times newspaper—hence it has primary source information. The source is limited in that it was published in 1992, a year after the collapse and therefore there may still be information that had not been released at that time about the collapse of the USSR.

5 Boris Yeltsin was a member of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union until 1990. He was sacked from high ranking party positions by President Mikhail Gorbachev in 1987. He then expressed disappointment with the slowness of change and of reforms in society, heavily criticizing Gorbachev while gaining popularity with the people. He would be democratically elected, assuming office as President of Russia on July 10th, 1991 following the collapse of the Soviet Union.

6 Timothy Colton and Robert Legvold, *After the Soviet Union*. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1992) 12. *After the Soviet Union* is a book by historians Timothy Colton and Robert Legvold, published in 1992 that comprises a collection of original essays about the Soviet Union in its late years and the years after the collapse, sponsored by the Harriman Institute at Columbia University and the American Assembly. The purpose of the source is to show these essays and also to assess them in regards to the collapse of the USSR.
last General Secretary of the CPSU, and is believed to have played a pivotal role in the Soviet Union’s collapse. His policy of Glasnost, defined as “openness”, gave the people more freedoms, especially the freedom of speech and expression. The Glasnost and democratization that Gorbachev attempted to implement, as historian John B. Dunlop says, caused Gorbachev to “end up burying the legitimizing ideology of the USSR, destroying the Communist party.” As a result of Glasnost, peoples of the fifteen individual republics of the Soviet Union would express growing feelings of nationalism.

The source is valuable in that it provides different views on major topics concerning the collapse of the USSR since it is a collection of essays by different historians. The source is valuable in providing an opinion on each of these topics and how the collapse of the USSR came to be. For example, the source looks at the national question where there are issues of nationalities and the republics seeking independence from the USSR. The source is limited in that it does not provide many statistics concerning the collapse of the USSR but rather focuses on an analysis of the collapse. It also cannot fully analyze the collapse of the Soviet Union because it was published only in 1992 and therefore some information may be not had been released.

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7 Howarth 245.

The Rise of Russia and the Fall of the Soviet Empire is a book by historian John B. Dunlop published in 1993 as a narrative of the politics of 1985-1991. The purpose of the source is to narrate the events in detail that occurred in the USSR from 1985-1991 and to assess the origins of the collapse of the USSR. The source is valuable in that it provides detail on many events leading up to the collapse, and the collapse itself, including the emergence of Boris Yeltsin and an examination of the Glasnost that Gorbachev attempted to implement. The source also answers the question of why Gorbachev ended up burying communism through Glasnost—an analysis of his actions. The source also focuses on the nationalism that arose from Glasnost as well as new political reforms, and assesses their significance in reference to the collapse of the USSR. The source is critical of Gorbachev and shows how Yeltsin managed to overtake him easily. The source furthermore provides some primary source information such as speeches and analyzes such sources in great detail. The source is limited in that it was not published long after the collapse of the USSR, and cannot provide an exact analysis of the effect on the world the collapse of the USSR would have.


The Changing Soviet Union is a book by historian Peter Dobell published in 1991 that comprises many excerpts from a major international conference held in Ottawa November 26-28th 1990 about the Soviet Union at that time. The purpose of the source is to assess what other journalists, speakers or historians have commented on at the conference about the Soviet Union around 1990, including its collapse. The value of the source is that it looks at a primary source—the conference that was held—and provides an opinion by analyzing specific excerpts from the conference that are related to the collapse of the USSR. The source looks at the significant change that has occurred in the Soviet Union since Gorbachev and is valuable also in providing several different perspectives on the dramatic events leading to the collapse of the Soviet Union since it contains speeches from different people in the conference. The source is valuable to the investigation in the essay in that it provides factual information as well as opinion on Gorbachev’s Glasnost and democratization, nationalism, and more. Finally, the source assesses the implications that the collapse of the USSR has on the world, in particular for Canada. The source is limited in that it is published the same year the collapse of the USSR occurred, in 1991, and therefore may not provide a very well-studied analysis of the collapse of the USSR on the rest of the world.
as well as concern towards human rights, and the media would start to criticize the CPSU and Gorbachev. This would then lead to decline in popular support of the CPSU, and furthermore arising political movements opposing it, as well as competitive elections.

Glasnost weakened the Soviet Union, contradicting the very basis of Communist Party rule, and allowed harsh public criticism of the party. Members of the CPSU saw that Gorbachev was undermining them through his reforms such as those to promote Glasnost or democratization, and so to prevent their fall, they staged a coup d’état on August 19,

10 Gwertzman 53.

*CNN Reports Seven Days That Shook the World* is a book by journalist Stuart Loory, staff of CNN that looks at the August coup of 1991 and at the collapse of the USSR. The purpose of the book is to provide factual evidence as well as analysis of the events that led to the collapse of the USSR, focusing on the events of the August coup led by hardliners from the CPSU. The value of the source is that it is primary source because the journalist had travelled to the place of investigation in order to retrieve information—there are primary source photos and interviews of people in the Soviet Union concerning the August coup and events that had led to it. The source is valuable also in that it provides a different perspective than in the other books—the view of a journalist. The source also analyzes the changes that had occurred in the USSR before its collapse, including major reforms in the media and the fight for nationalism in individual republics. The source is limited as a source of history in that it is not written by a historian but rather a journalist and therefore there could be inaccuracies or that it may not analyze different historical views. However this is not a significant limitation because from the point of view of the journalist the event being investigated is in the present. The source may also be limited in that it is published very close to the event in which it investigates and therefore there may be information that was not released at the time. Furthermore, the major research was conducted in a short period of time during which the journalist was present at the scene of investigation in the USSR and certain information may have been missed.


*The War That Never Was* is a book by historian David Pryce-Jones published in 2005 that narrates and assesses the collapse of the Soviet Union. The purpose of the book is to narrate the significant events that occurred from 1985 to 1991 in reference to the collapse of the USSR. The source is valuable in providing detailed information on different aspects and various events that are related to this specific time period. The source also has primary source information because the author David Pryce-Jones had personally visited the former Soviet Union in order to conduct interviews to ask major political personalities for their reactions and insights. This allows the author to learn more in-depth about the collapse of the Soviet Union. Therefore the source is able to present different perspectives of this topic and also an analysis of the interviews. Certain subjects that the source touches upon that are useful to the investigation of the essay include the contradiction of Gorbachev’s Glasnost, changes in the media as a result of Glasnost and the Nationalities question in the republics of the USSR. The source looks at the policies of Gorbachev such as Glasnost over the last years of the empire and examine how they have changed the empire and have resulted in its collapse. The source also examines the significance of Boris Yeltsin and his rise to power. The source is limited in that it does not focus much on the events that occur after the collapse of the USSR—it does not provide a thorough analysis on the effect of the collapse on the rest of the world—its implications. Basically the source would not be a good one to examine topics that are not related to the fall of the USSR, including a look at Stalin’s rule of the USSR to compare with that of Gorbachev in order to better analyze how Gorbachev had brought the empire to its ruin.
1991 to take control of the Soviet Union from Gorbachev. They would fail, but this historic event would decide the fate of the Soviet Union—its dissolution.\textsuperscript{13} Glasnost was what weakened the CPSU and therefore weakened the Soviet Union, by giving people democracy which fuelled their opposition to the CPSU. Gorbachev’s policy of Glasnost, or “openness”, caused the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 to a fairly large extent.

Where Stalin’s repressive authoritarian regime once ruled, something entirely different was implemented under the same political party—Glasnost or “openness” was introduced by Gorbachev during his presidency in the 1980s,\textsuperscript{14} and this would contribute to criticism of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, and would eventually lead to the dissolution of the Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{15} This democratization largely contradicts with the basis of the Communist Party’s rule.\textsuperscript{16} Why then did Gorbachev implement such a contradictory policy? Was he trying to defeat communism from within the party, or was he simply and foolishly unaware of the possible effects of his democratization? Gorbachev had intended to use Glasnost to reveal the public opinion or public dissatisfaction with certain aspects of the Soviet Union, such as its economy.\textsuperscript{17} To learn of the people’s problems he would even go down to the streets to mingle with them.\textsuperscript{18} He

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{13} Loory 23-26.
  \item \textsuperscript{14} Howarth 245.
  \item \textsuperscript{15} Gwertzman x.
  \item \textsuperscript{16} Pryce-Jones 5.
  \item \textsuperscript{17} Howarth 245.
  \item \textsuperscript{18} Steve Crawshaw, \textit{Goodbye to the USSR}, (London: Bloomsbury, 1993) 12.
\end{itemize}

\textit{Goodbye to the USSR} is a book by historian Steve Crawshaw published in 1993 that narrates events leading up to the collapse of Soviet power in 1991. The purpose of the source is to provide a narrative as well as an analysis of the significant events and aspects in the Soviet Union up until its collapse in 1991. The source is valuable in that the author Steve Crawshaw uses primary source material by personally visiting the Soviet Union on various occasions in order to conduct research for the book, including interviews in the republics of the Soviet Union. The source also has value in looking at major events that occurred in the Soviet Union prior to its collapse and analyzing them. The source analyzes the role of Gorbachev as leader of the USSR and how he led to the collapse of his nation, and also focuses on the role
wished to do this in order to strengthen his own position over the old Communist Party officials, who now saw their position under threat\textsuperscript{19}—he wanted to keep the party obedient.\textsuperscript{20} However, Glasnost got out of his control, leading to, as historian John B. Dunlop puts it, “the complete discrediting of the ruling ideology and to a harsh questioning of the “socialist path” taken in 1917,”\textsuperscript{21} and would eventually lead to the Soviet Union’s dissolution.

Some historians argue that Gorbachev’s Glasnost was not true democracy—that it was not perfect\textsuperscript{22}—historian Bernard Gwertzman suggests that there could be “limits to his [Gorbachev’s] openness.”\textsuperscript{23} In 1986, Gorbachev introduced a Law against Unearned Income to oust the financially corrupted—this led to the resignation of 800,000 salesmen or shop managers.\textsuperscript{24} More of these coercive measures were introduced; none of them were true reforms, for Gorbachev did not want to threaten socialism. For example, measures against alcoholism were enforced through price increases.\textsuperscript{25} In 1989, \textit{Argumenty i fakty}\textsuperscript{26} published the results of a poll about the public’s opinion on Gorbachev’s opposition, and Gorbachev took action to remove the editor-in-chief.\textsuperscript{27}
Furthermore, in 1988 he blocked the Novyi Mir\textsuperscript{28} from publishing Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn’s\textsuperscript{29} writings.\textsuperscript{30} In 1989, to oppose a Georgian movement for independence, Soviet troops were ordered to fire on civilians, resulting in 21 deaths and 200 injuries.\textsuperscript{31} Additionally, there is the issue of the Chernobyl disaster,\textsuperscript{32} where the authorities were slow in presenting news, news coverage was limited to two statements,\textsuperscript{33} and Gorbachev did not address the issue until over half a month later.\textsuperscript{34} It can be seen that contradictorily, Gorbachev did put limits on his Glasnost—his so-called democratization. However, even though there were restrictions on Gorbachev’s Glasnost, there are still other areas where freedom was increased due to Glasnost—in other areas of the media as well as on the political stage of the state. Glasnost still highly contributed to the growing feelings of dissent and criticism towards the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, which is why it is a cause to the dissolution of the Soviet Union to a fairly large extent.

Gorbachev’s Glasnost invoked many changes and reforms in the media that led to harsh criticism of the Communist Party. Before Gorbachev’s rule in 1985, many books, and authors like Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, were frowned upon in the Soviet Union—there was bureaucracy and censorship incited by: the Glavlit, which was the official state censorship organ; by the writer himself, calculating the extent of divergence in his work

\textsuperscript{28} Novyi Mir is a Russian language literary magazine that commenced publication in Moscow in 1925.
\textsuperscript{29} Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn was a Russian novelist who is known worldwide for his writings concerning the Soviet Union’s forced labour camp system known as the Gulag, and for such writings he was exiled from the Soviet Union in 1974.
\textsuperscript{30} Dunlop 78.
\textsuperscript{31} Dunlop 11.
\textsuperscript{32} The Chernobyl disaster was a nuclear reactor accident that occurred in the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant in Ukraine in the Soviet Union on April 26\textsuperscript{th}, 1986. Large areas in the Soviet Union, especially Ukraine, were terribly affected with high levels of radiation. Soviet leader Gorbachev and his government allowed minimal coverage of the incident.
\textsuperscript{33} Gwertzman 33.
\textsuperscript{34} Pryce-Jones 82.
that would still be deemed acceptable so as to prevent his shunning; and finally by the editors. \(^{35}\) Novels in particular were discouraged from the usage of innovative style and language; “negative outlooks” including absurdist themes; divergence from official ideology; and sufferings imposed by the Soviet government. \(^{36}\) However, Glasnost in the 1980s would cause change. The people acted slowly to the new Glasnost that Gorbachev brought with his rule, and then Glasnost started to gain momentum; new ideas and sensations were now being printed and produced, both in the press and on TV, at the cinema, and literary journals announced plans to publish literary works that had been suppressed for years. \(^{37}\) In 1986, Gorbachev gathered editors and writers to give them freedoms to tackle topics that were previously discouraged—topics like abuses of power, fear of exposure, and so on; Gorbachev even said that there would be “no ‘blank spots’ in Soviet history.” \(^{38}\) Previously taboo subjects such as drug abuse, crime, homosexuality, and Soviet history were starting to surface in the media. \(^{39}\) 

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*The Soviet Union Today* is a book by historian James Cracraft that is a collection of articles written by different historians on certain subjects about the Soviet Union around 1983. The purpose of the source is to provide a narrative of different aspects of the Soviet Union of 1983 and to analyze them from different historical viewpoints, as well as predict where they might lead and what problems or issues may arise in the future from the year 1983. The source has value in that there is primary source information—the authors of the articles are historians who have personally stayed in the Soviet Union for a period of time. Having so many authors of the different articles provides various viewpoints on different aspects of the Soviet Union, and information is analyzed closely to look at implications the events occurring in the Soviet Union around 1983 might have. The source also looks in the past—the reign of Stalin is looked at, along with issues like the environment, dissent, literature, and ethnicity. The source is limited in that being published in 1983, it does not focus much on the collapse of the Soviet Union which occurred in 1991. It does not talk much about Gorbachev’s Glasnost because at the time of publication Gorbachev was not leader of the Soviet Union. The source is not directly useful to the topic of the investigation of the essay.

\(^{36}\) Cracraft 275.

\(^{37}\) Gwertzman 50.

\(^{38}\) Pryce-Jones 79.

\(^{39}\) Isaac Tarasulo, *Gorbachev and Glasnost.* (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources, 1989) xv.

*Gorbachev and Glasnost* is a book by historian Isaac Tarasulo published in 1989 and is a collection of articles from the Soviet press prior to 1989. The purpose of the source is to provide the reader with diverse Soviet points of view on the dramatic developments that had and were occurring at the time in the USSR. The source is valuable in providing viewpoints as well as factual evidence on the reinterpretation of history,
of the CPSU, opened its columns to public debate, and in film, Stalinism became a prominent topic with the release of the film *Repentance* in 1987 which “gnawed away at the lies of Soviet history as never before.” People were also allowed to travel more freely out of the country, resulting in the communication of information; the information from outside sources about new technology and different ways of life provided the Soviets with a new perspective of their nation. The statistical yearbook published astonishing information on grain harvests and child mortality, and pushes for the publication of long-suppressed works such as Solzhenitsyn’s *The Gulag Archipelago*, Orwell’s *1984* and even the Bible emerged. The newspaper *Argumenti y Fakti* often published tables of statistics—for example a comparison between the performance of the Soviet Union with that of other nations—and basically it displayed statistical facts, but it also provided unseen historical information on Stalin, Trotsky, and Bukharin, highly

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40 Hélène Carrère d’Encausse, *The End of the Soviet Empire*. (New York: BasicBooks, 1993) 8. The End of the Soviet Empire is a book written by Hélène Carrère d’Encausse in French, translated to English by Franklin Philip. The purpose of the book is to narrate the significant events leading to the collapse of the USSR and also to show the argument that the CPSU became irrelevant to the future plans of the leaders of resurgent republics—the CPSU was losing its grip on the people as political fronts emerged. The source has value in that it provides an outlook on many aspects of the collapse of the Soviet Union, including an analysis of the events that occurred, including the subject of independence and of reforms in the media. In the source, it is argued that Gorbachev was oblivious to the fact that Glasnost would mean the end of the CPSU and the end of the Soviet Union, and that it would allow allegiance and power to be transferred from the CPSU to popular fronts, which created new civil societies, resulting in the collapse of the USSR. The source also examines the implications of the dissolution of the USSR. The source is limited in that it is translated and therefore there may be inaccuracies. Furthermore, the source does not seem to make reference to many primary source materials.

41 Crawshaw 22.
42 Carrère d’Encausse 4.
43 Gwertzman 50-51.
44 Dunlop 78-79.
45 Tarasulo xvi.
influencing public opinion which is observed by the newspaper’s increase in copies from 10,000 in 1979 to 3 million by 1990. Such immense change in the media would in turn incite change in the minds of the people. Many realities were revealed to the people—the film *Repentance* portrayed the terrorism that Stalin had once brought upon the people of the Soviet Union, which prompted viewers to question the “socialist path” taken in 1917, and questions like ‘How did someone like Stalin end up ruling society?’ and ‘Was the October Revolution worth the lives of 60 or 70 million?’ were asked. As Glasnost grew, so did dissidence and opposition to the CPSU. Journalists started to “probe the dark crannies of Soviet institutions… levelling criticism on Gorbachev and his regime,” and investigative journalism would grow, commenting on political issues more and more. Freedom in the media of the Soviet Union had led to the re-evaluation of the past leaders Vladimir Lenin, Karl Marx, Joseph Stalin and Leonid Brezhnev; as well as negative views and questioning on the October Revolution of 1917 and Soviet ideology. Moscow newspapers became fascinating in 1989, and as historian Leon Aron puts it, the “deadly weight of propaganda lies was removed” and the lack of legitimacy of the

46 Pryce-Jones 80-81.
47 Gwertzman 50.
48 Crawshaw 22.
49 Dunlop 9-10.
50 Loory 75.
51 Howarth 245.
52 David Marples, *The Collapse of the Soviet Union, 1985-1991*. (Harlow: Pearson Education, 2004) 19-20. *The Collapse of the Soviet Union, 1985-1991* is a book written by historian David R. Marples that narrates the events that occurred from 1985-1991 leading to the dissolution of the USSR. The purpose of the source is to inform the reader of significant events and their effect on the USSR through analysis. The source has value in that it focuses on many key aspects or events that played pivotal roles in the collapse of the USSR, including Gorbachev’s Glasnost, and the national question. The source also examines the August 1991 coup, and Gorbachev’s rule as the last leader of the USSR. The source assesses the reasons for the collapse of the USSR, arguing that Gorbachev’s relationship with Yeltsin proved to be the most significant factor. The source is further valuable in providing primary documents such as written articles. The source is limited in that it does not focus much on the implications of the collapse of the USSR, nor does it talk about the rule of the Soviet Union before Gorbachev came along.
The sharper criticism imposed by newspapers as well as the approach towards more open debate on socio-economic, political and historical issues has severely damaged the CPSU and Gorbachev himself. People became aware of problems in society, and began to blame the CPSU for them; as historian David Pryce-Jones says, “the more they watched television the more impressed they were at the images of their leaders, their incompetence and dishonesty.” The reassessment of Soviet history and historical figures was so significant that in 1988 some school history exams were cancelled because Soviet history textbooks were now deemed useless. People became aware of the realities of the CPSU and its history, as well as the current and past issues of their society. They grew restless, and this foreshadowed rebellion. Freedom in the media had led to the growth of new political movements, as

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Russia’s Revolution: Essays 1989-2006 is a book written by historian Leon Aron, published in 2007 is a collection of essays written from 1989 to 2006 on the subject of Russia’s Revolution—change that occurred in Russia. The purpose of the source is to provide the reader with a look at the events leading to the collapse of the Soviet Union as well as a detailed focus on Russia after the collapse, up to 2006. The source is valuable in that it shows the path of Russia from 1989 to 2006—how Russia has changed from being a republic of the Soviet Union to an independent state. The source examines the effects of Glasnost—and what it has taken away from the Soviet Union; it also looks at political reform and resurgence of nationalist feelings prior to the collapse. It is limited in that it does not examine events happening prior to 1989—and Gorbachev’s rule of the Soviet Union starts in 1985. The source also does refer to many primary source materials.

54 Aron 12

Gorbachev and Gorbachevism is a book written by Walter Joyce and other historians, published in 1989 about the achievements of Gorbachev in the Soviet Union. The purpose of the source is to inform the readers of what Gorbachev has accomplished during his reign from 1985 to 1991 and the effects of his policies and his reforms. The source has value in evaluating the policies and the actions of leader Gorbachev, and analyzes aspects of Gorbachev’s rule from different perspectives because different sections are written by different historians. The source focuses on reforms in the electoral system, Gorbachev and the CPSU, reforms in the media, the dilemmas of Glasnost and more. The source is limited in that it does not specifically mention the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, and the book was published in 1989 which further supports the lack of evidence in the area of the collapse. Therefore, the book does not directly focus on the effects of Gorbachev’s policies in reference to the dissolution of the USSR.

56 Pryce-Jones 41.
57 Crawshaw 32.
58 Marples 19.
59 Dobell 7.
well as the resurgence of feelings of nationalism. \(^{60}\) Even by 1987, “Glasnost had… reached the level of the common people who were no longer afraid to tell a Russian-speaking foreigner what they thought about Soviet politics past and present.”\(^{61}\) Glasnost in the media would continue to weaken the CPSU and Soviet ideology by replacing rigid censorship with overt criticism; would fuel the public’s growing discontentment and opposition; and would eventually lead to the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

Gorbachev’s policy of Glasnost also brought about political and electoral reform, which contributed to the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The Soviet electoral system has traditionally been centralized where no choice of candidate was permitted—there was only the CPSU as political party. Even though as historian Peter Dobell says in 1990 that there was an “amount of work that still needs to be accomplished in order to fully implement… elements of a democratic and pluralistic system,”\(^{62}\) there have been several impressive political changes that have occurred since Gorbachev’s rise to power that foreshadow the Soviet Union’s path towards democratization. Gorbachev called for political reforms in 1986, suggesting at least an experiment with a choice of candidates.\(^{63}\) In 1988, the CPSU held a conference of delegates to create strategies for political change and the following year saw the first competitive elections at the federal level.\(^{64}\) In the late 1980s, Glasnost had revealed the impotency of the courts in the Soviet Union, with their being manipulated by political authorities.\(^{65}\) This incited their reform—the courts slowly

\(^{60}\) Dobell 17.  
\(^{61}\) Dunlop 81.  
\(^{62}\) Dobell 8.  
\(^{63}\) Joyce 1.  
\(^{64}\) Dobell 10.  
\(^{65}\) Aron 88.
gained authority in the 1990s\textsuperscript{66} to rule on the constitutionality of international treaties, federal laws, and so on.\textsuperscript{67} In July of 1991, the law was passed that created the Constitutional Court of the Russian Federation.\textsuperscript{68} From 1985 to 1990, coercion in political life has been reduced with the Communist Party’s release of control of institutions like universities and churches; and in 1990 there are open elections for representatives at the local and republic levels,\textsuperscript{69} as well as a proliferation of political factions,\textsuperscript{70} clubs, coalitions and political parties.\textsuperscript{71} A major breakthrough in the Soviet electoral system was the elections to the Congress of People’s Deputies in March 1989—there were to be 1500 members drawn from territorial constituencies, with 750 seats spread amongst the country based on population density and another 750 divided equally between the national-territorial regions. All these political changes towards democracy would lead to a weakening of the CPSU. The 1989 elections to the Congress of People’s Deputies led to the repealing of Article Six of the constitution that had institutionalized the leading role of the Communist Party\textsuperscript{72}—the repealing was approved 1771 to 264 by the Congress of People’s Deputies\textsuperscript{73} on March 13\textsuperscript{th}, 1990.\textsuperscript{74} Gorbachev’s program of “democratization” resulted in defection from the Party’s ranks as well as in the forthcoming of anti-communist opposition parties.”\textsuperscript{75} As John B. Dunlop puts it, “events moved with such blinding speed between 1987 and 1989 that… to Gorbachev… only a crackdown of Stalinist dimensions could halt the changes that he had unwittingly

\textsuperscript{66} Aron 87. \\
\textsuperscript{67} Aron 90. \\
\textsuperscript{68} Aron 88. \\
\textsuperscript{69} Dobell 9. \\
\textsuperscript{70} Gwertzman xx. \\
\textsuperscript{71} Dobell 10. \\
\textsuperscript{72} Dobell 10. \\
\textsuperscript{73} Gwertzman 250. \\
\textsuperscript{74} Crozier 430. \\
\textsuperscript{75} Dunlop 9.
unleashed.” The burst of electoral and political reform that occurred in from 1988 to 1989 allowed competitive elections to be held in all fifteen Soviet republics. Through Glasnost, Gorbachev provided the means for opposition of his party, and a September 1990 public opinion poll showed that Gorbachev’s popularity was below 10% and decreasing, while his opposition Boris Yeltsin enjoyed the confidence of 90% of the USSR population. On television on February 19th, 1991, politician Yeltsin gave a speech saying: “He [Gorbachev] has… brought the country to the point of dictatorship, decorously calling it “presidential rule”… I declare myself in favour of his [Gorbachev’s] immediate resignation.” It can be seen that with the political and electoral reforms that resulted from Gorbachev’s Glasnost, the CPSU had been weakened. Such reforms had provided increased political freedom, and subsequently the emergence of opposition to the CPSU—opposition to the ideology of communism. Yeltsin’s televised speech shows that democratization had risen to the level that the rule of Gorbachev, CPSU leader, could be publicly questioned and criticized. Gorbachev’s political reforms succeeded in starting the Soviet Union’s path towards democracy, and as a result the rejection of the CPSU. Political freedom had released the once mighty grasp of the CPSU on the people of the Soviet Union; but now the people had nothing to fear, and they were free in political thought and increasingly in expression, leading to the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

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76 Dunlop 10.
77 Dobell 10.
78 Loory 42.
79 Dunlop 29.
80 Dunlop 31-32.
Nationalist sentiment and the fight for independence in the Soviet Union before its collapse in 1991 was an effect of Gorbachev’s Glasnost that would weaken the unity of the CPSU and the Soviet Union even further. In 1985, there were 15 sovereign socialist states in the Soviet Union, all of which have had proclaimed sovereignty or independence of some form, and over 100 nationalities, many in Russia itself. Historian Peter Dobell claims that the survival of the Soviet Union since its beginning in 1917 was due to “the presence of an all-union ideology,” communism—but during Gorbachev’s rule, “the ideology of unity [has been] overtaken by one of diversity.” As historian Timothy J. Colton says, the feelings of nationalism became increasingly evident when “the Soviet system had failed to build a sense of unity around the goals and the promise of communism.” Stalin had dealt with the nationalities issue by ruthlessly controlling them with the Stalinist Communists, but the issue arose once Gorbachev began pushing for democratic reforms. With Gorbachev’s Glasnost, aspects of linguistics and culture that the CPSU had ignored became methods for nationalist expression. In 1986, Gorbachev replaced the Kazakh Party’s first secretary not with a Kazakh candidate but with a Russian, Gennady Kolbin, which incited riots in the capital of Alma-Ata, Kazakhstan. In February 1988, mass demonstrations occurred in Yerevan, capital of Armenia, and other ethnic and nationalist clashes followed in various places. There were also riots near Romania, where thousands protested against the

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81 Colton 85.
82 Dobell 24.
83 Crozier 411-412.
84 Dobell 26.
85 Colton 88.
86 Crozier 411-412.
87 Colton 87.
88 Crozier 411-412.
89 Crozier 413.
“Russification” of their Republic of Moldavia. But what was most threatening to the unity of the Soviet Union was soon to come with the Baltic Republics. In 1940, Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia and the formerly Rumanian Moldova were annexed by Stalin, becoming union republics of the Soviet Union. The Baltic republics were systematically excluded from decision making in Soviet politics, and nationalists, especially in these places and Georgia, demanded greater autonomy; and ultimately they sought complete independence. In April 1988, Estonia made a popular front having the goal of full independence from the Soviet Union. In November, the Estonian Supreme Soviet declared by a vote of 258 to 1 its right to veto laws passed in Moscow. In addition, Lithuania and Latvia also formed popular fronts in 1988 that aimed for secession from the Soviet Union. Gorbachev’s Glasnost was what had given these republics the freedom to form the popular fronts. As historian John B. Dunlop says, “by the time, apparently in mid-1989, that Gorbachev had decided to apply the brakes on the process of reform, it was already too late.”

In 1987, nationalist Estonians protested against the 1939 Nazi-Soviet agreement that included Stalin’s annexation of the Baltic states, and in August

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90 Crozier 415.
91 Colton 85.
92 The Baltic republics of the Soviet Union were the three republics of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia.
93 Colton 88.
94 Archie Brown, Seven Years That Changed the World (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007) 294. Seven Years That Changed the World is a book by historian Archie Brown that narrates the events that led to the dissolution of the USSR from around 1985 to 1991. The purpose of the source is to describe in detail the changes that were occurring during the period in which Gorbachev was leader of the Soviet Union and to analyze the reforms that he introduced in reference to the collapse of the Soviet Union and especially to analyze the reform of Perestroika. The source has value in that it provides a firsthand account of what was occurring in the Soviet Union during Gorbachev’s rule—the author personally visited the Soviet Union on several occasions in order to conduct research. The source is valuable in examining Gorbachev’s rule and its effect on the collapse—the source also analyzes political change and the dismantling of the CPSU. Finally, the source looks at the implications of the collapse of the USSR. The source is limited in that it only mentions Glasnost in brief context. The source was not intended to be a comprehensive history of events of 1985 to 1991 but rather an interpretation of perestroika, understood as a radical reform initiated by Gorbachev and others.
95 Dunlop 10.
96 Dunlop 10.
two years later, the 50th anniversary of the agreement, over a million people formed a 400-mile human chain across Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania to show their solidarity and their desire of independence. 97 Other nationalist movements were reported in Central Asia as well as in the Ukraine. Later that year, people demonstrated in the streets of Czechoslovakia and Bulgaria—Gorbachev’s response to all this was nonchalant. 98 September 1989 saw the emergence of the Ukrainian Popular Front, and anti-Russian sentiment became apparent in particular minority union republics such as the Baltic republics and in Georgia. 99 Conservative Russian nationalists in the years 1989 and 1990 fought with Gorbachev, pushing for the same institutions—and especially a Russian Communist party—that the minority union republics had. 100 In June 1990, a Russian Communist party was formally created at a founding congress held in Moscow, three months after the repealing of Article Six of the Soviet constitution—the repealing that had resulted from Gorbachev’s democratic reform to introduce elections to the Congress of People’s Deputies. 101 However, at the beginning of 1990, Gorbachev went to Vilnius, capital of Lithuania, to ask Lithuanians to remain within the USSR, 102 but there was a mass rally of 300,000 in the capital’s Cathedral Square, asking for Lithuania’s unconditional independence. 103 On March 11, 1990, Lithuania proclaimed itself a sovereign state, with a non-Communist government led by Vytautas Landsbergis. Subsequently, on April 13, Gorbachev issued an ultimatum to Lithuania saying that if Lithuania did not revoke its actions for independence within 48 hours, he would order

97 Gwertzman xvii.
98 Gwertzman xvii.
99 Dunlop 16.
100 Dunlop 18.
101 Dunlop 19.
102 Gwertzman xviii.
103 Crozier 424.
other republics to cut off necessary trade to Lithuania. However, Lithuania withstood the boycotts and Gorbachev’s ultimatum only made him less popular overseas as well as in other parts of the country.\textsuperscript{104} The Lithuanian, Latvian, and Estonian Supreme Soviets voted on December 7\textsuperscript{th}, 1989; January 11\textsuperscript{th}, 1990; and February 23\textsuperscript{rd}, 1990 respectively to delete Article Six that legitimized the rule of the CPSU, from their constitutions.\textsuperscript{105} On February 4\textsuperscript{th}, 1990, there was an unofficial demonstration of 150,000 people, the biggest ever in Moscow—“an instance of true Glasnost, for it included a wide range of persuasions, from right-wing Russian monarchists and Nationalists to anarchists and separatists from outside Russia.”\textsuperscript{106} It can be seen that from the start of Gorbachev’s rule in 1985, the Soviet Union has witnessed tumultuous feelings of nationalism and the growing need for independence for many of the Soviet Republics. The republics of the Soviet Union felt that they had many differences and the ideology of communism that was once what united them had fallen apart—they no longer had something common that bound them together—which ultimately led to their desire to become independent from the Soviet Union. Many republics spoke different languages and had different cultures and therefore saw no reason as to why they should remain in a union with other different republics. Many also disagreed with their connection to the Soviet Union—the legislation passed in Moscow for the Soviet Union would affect them as well—they sought political and economic freedoms. The Glasnost policy that Gorbachev had implemented had served to start up the opposition to communism, to the CPSU, and to the Soviet Union. Since communism and the CPSU were being criticized, the republics wished to rid itself from its membership with the Soviet Union. Gorbachev’s Glasnost

\textsuperscript{104} Gwertzman xviii.
\textsuperscript{105} Crozier 425-427.
\textsuperscript{106} Crozier 427.
had fuelled the feelings of nationalism and the republics’ fight for independence. As historian Bernard Gwertzman puts it, “once the Eastern Europeans were allowed to choose freely, they would choose to break with Communism and with the Soviet Union”—something Gorbachev failed to realize.\textsuperscript{107} It was Glasnost or democratization that had given the people the choice to reject the CPSU and the Soviet Union. Gorbachev and the CPSU had lost control over the people of the Soviet Union. Gorbachev’s Glasnost gave the people the freedom to rebel, and so they did—they rebelled against the CPSU and the Soviet Union; and their nationalist ideas led to their push for their republics’ independence.

The Glasnost policy that was implemented by the last General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union Mikhail Gorbachev caused the dissolution of the Soviet Union to a fairly large extent. Gorbachev came into power in 1985, and attempted to bring reform to the Soviet Union, including reform that led the path towards democracy. This was done through the policy of Glasnost, meaning “openness” where the people were given more freedoms, for example in the area of speech. However, Glasnost can be seen as contradictory to the rule of the CPSU, which is why it ultimately led to the collapse of the Soviet Union. This opens up an area for analysis of Gorbachev’s policy and his actions—did he not see that Glasnost would mean the end of the Soviet Union he wished to protect? Glasnost gave freedoms to the people in many areas, including the media and the political stage. What this directly resulted in was an increase in criticism of the CPSU and of Gorbachev in newspapers and on television; and elections in all the republics. Such elections led to the appointment of leaders who were

\textsuperscript{107} Gwertzman xvii.
opposed to communism, the CPSU and thusly the Soviet Union itself. The new rebellious leaders of the republics would demand more autonomy and eventually full independence for their individual state—since communism was being rejected and criticized in many republics, what reason was there for these republics to remain with the Soviet Union? Gorbachev’s Glasnost did have limitations to an extent, although uncertain, and there were definitely other factors for the collapse of the Soviet Union that might even be more significant than Glasnost that could be investigated. However, Glasnost was still a major factor of the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Where Stalin once repressed the people in so many aspects, came in 1985 a new era where people were allowed to voice their opinion. Unfortunately for Gorbachev and the CPSU, this meant their criticism. Members of the CPSU, feeling threatened, sought to undermine Gorbachev and replace him to keep their positions in the August 1991 coup; however they failed, resulting in the end of the seventy year old regime, which would of course cause wonder about the effect of this amazing dissolution on the rest of the world.

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Bibliography:

BOOKS


