

Shakeup bodes well for Soviet economy

He found himself confronted with one of the main problems faced by many a country's leader — a failing economy — and apparently he decided to do something about it.

Last weekend, Mikhail Sergeyevich Gorbachev, the General Secretary of the Communist Party, hastily summoned a meeting of the Communist Party's Central Committee. And like a whirlwind, he "retired" five of the party's leaders.

Among those to go were Yegor Ligachev, once the party's ideological chief, now the head of the new commission of agriculture. Ligachev was Gorbachev's chief conservative rival, battling Gorbachev every step of the way in his reform plans.

Also retired, "resigned" rather, was Soviet President Andrei A. Gromyko, who has served under every Soviet leader except Vladimir Lenin. Upon the resignation of Gromyko, Gorbachev himself became the new Soviet President — coupling this duty with his current position of General Secretary.

Gorbachev's actions are not entirely unfounded. The Soviet Union's economy is in a shambles, and a recent trip of Gorbachev's to Siberia uncovered an air of discontent from the nation's people concerning a gap between words and actions in Gorbachev's new reform drive.

Gorbachev has worked hard on perestroika, or economic restructuring. To achieve this perestroika, Gorbachev has allowed glasnost, an openness previously unknown to the nation's people. By permitting glasnost, he seemed to have had hopes that the party leadership would be stimulated into speeding along the economic progress, the perestroika.

Apparently, the pace wasn't quick enough, and Gorbachev decided upon some political jockeying.

But Gorbachev's recent political reforms won't equal the wanted and needed economic progress for the Soviet Union.

At best, Gorbachev has bought himself some time to carry out the plans of perestroika. This latest reform only has moved his supporters into key positions — with his critics out of the way, the path to perestroika is clearer.

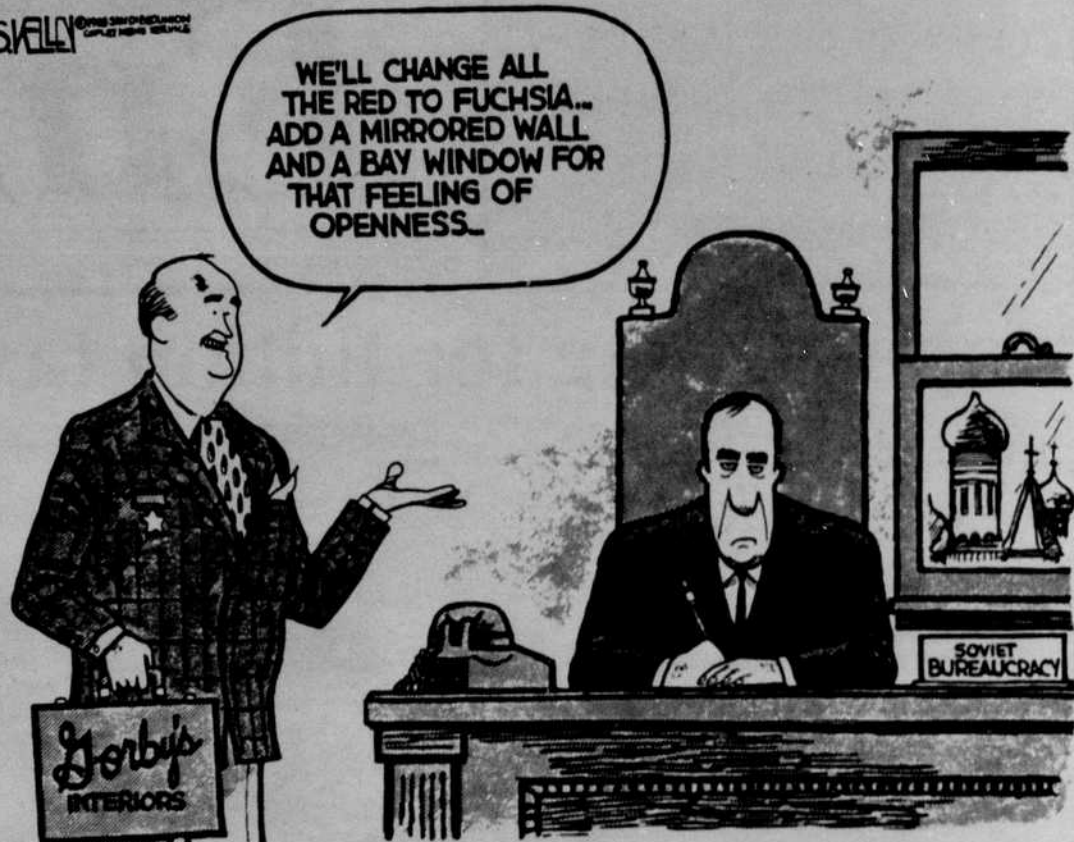
But it's still a long path. This has been just one step on the way to a revived economy. Gorbachev still faces the country's bureaucracy and several years of work habits among citizens that have led to the economic stagnation.

Gorbachev seems to have forgotten, in all his haste to remove his conservative rivals, that cooperative relations among his colleagues and a belief in the work ethic would do more for the economy than the removal of a few bureaucrats.

As he has demonstrated, Gorbachev is capable of shaking up the Soviet system. He is younger, more energetic and more committed to turning the Soviet Union around than his predecessors and conservative nemeses.

But despite Gorbachev's attempts to accelerate the pace of political reform, and despite his more recent breaks with the past, perestroika still seems a distant hope — shining far on the horizon for a nation darkened by a failing economy.

SKELLY



Forum

Public supports national housing policy

Housing trends and national housing policy have been bad news for Americans throughout the 1980s. The negative trends are well-documented. Homeownership levels have declined every year, in every region of the country, from 1980-1986. Young families and first-time homebuyers have confronted

enact new programs to aid homebuyers have exacerbated the nation's housing woes. In recent months, newspaper editorials across the nation have identified this growing housing crisis and called for new solutions.

But if America's serious housing problems and policy shortcomings now seem to be widely recognized, what to do about it is far less consensual. Policy makers, industry groups and housing advocates have produced in recent months a welter of reports, studies, position papers and analyses, with widely varying proposals. While these analyses are impressive, achieving agreement on the many different approaches and recommendations may prove difficult.

Behind all considerations of a new national housing policy is a huge, significant, and until now, unanswered question: "What do the American people really want the federal government to do about housing?" To answer that question, the National Housing Institute, a non-profit and nonpartisan research organization, sponsored a nationwide opinion survey on housing issues. The study, conducted by RL Associates of Princeton, New Jersey, a public opinion research firm, was based on interviews with 1,000 Americans during March and April. The sample is statistically projectable to the distribution of opinion in the population of U.S. adults. The findings are important to the current housing debate and to all who are concerned with housing in America.

Five major conclusions emerged from the survey:

- The American public views the difficulties of homeownership, affordable rental apartments, and homelessness as important problems for the nation.

- Americans support a comprehensive series of programs that are designed to meet the

perceived housing needs of working and middle class Americans. Sixty to 90 percent of the public supported programs including: a down payment loan for young families; a mortgage interest rate reduction fund; emergency loans and grants to prevent homelessness; a program to finance needed dwelling unit modifications for the frail elderly; and public financing to rehabilitate old and vacant buildings for low-income housing.

- Americans are willing to pay for housing programs through increased taxes. A clear majority of the American people say they are prepared to tax themselves to pay for specific new federal programs they support. The survey indicates substantial support for an additional \$12 to \$17 billion in taxes for new federal housing initiatives. By a ratio of 2:1, Americans said they would be willing to pay an additional \$120 a year in taxes to support a package of programs assisting the homeless, the poor and middle-class Americans.

- A substantial majority of the American people would be more likely to vote for political leaders advocating new housing programs. Fifty percent of the public would be more likely to vote for a pro-housing Presidential candidate, only six percent would be less likely to do so.

- Support for a comprehensive housing policy is strong in part because there is a great deal of direct personal housing need among the general public. A near-majority of Americans now experience, or fear that they or someone in their family will soon be confronted with significant housing problems.

A new housing policy for America? The people say "yes!"

Dr. David Schwartz is a professor of political science at Rutgers University, chairman of the National Housing Institute and vice-president of the National Housing Conference.

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Letters to the editor must be limited to no more than 250 words, legible, signed and the identification of the writer must be verified when the letter is submitted.

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