

The Abortive Soviet Coup - 1991 - I

Lead: In late summer 1991, conservative elements of the KGB and Communist Party tried to revive the collapsing Soviet system. For a breathless moment it looked as if they would succeed.

Intro.: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.

Content: For a dozen years prior to 1985 Mikhail Gorbachev was the golden boy of Soviet politics. After law school at Moscow State University, in 1955 he returned to his native region of Stavropol near the Caspian Sea in

southwestern Russia. He held a number of posts in the Communist Party organization and was named a member of the Central Committee of the national Party in 1971. Under the guidance of his patron, the party's chief ideologue, Mikhail Suslov, Gorbachev moved quickly up the ranks and by 1980 was a full member of the Politburo. When Konstantin Chernenko died in 1985, Gorbachev was his logical successor as General Secretary of the Soviet Party.

While consolidating his personal power, Gorbachev embarked on the task that proved to be impossible and which ultimately led to his downfall. His goal was to breathe life into a Soviet system grown increasingly

stagnant and fossilized.

To that end, he began to institute changes in economic, political and social life. With the policy of *glasnost* or "openness" the government repudiated the horrors of Stalinist totalitarianism and gave new freedom of expression and information. Under *perestroika* or "restructuring," the tender shoots of democracy began to appear through cracks in the Soviet political system and the first tentative steps toward a free market economy were taken.

Gorbachev also reached out to cultivate better relations with the non-Communist world. He realized that the world distrusted the huge Soviet

military establishment but also that the economy was melting down under the pressure of military expenditures amounting to as much as 25% of the Gross National Product. He began to cut back.

At the same time he was instituting change he refused to make the decisive shift to full political and economic freedom. He was a half-way man who believed that he could reform a system that was crumbling.

With all the problems facing him, during most of his time at the top he faced the furious resistance of Party and government bureaucrats and military leaders who enjoyed the privileges of office and did not want to

give up their control over national life. In the summer of 1991 they reached out to strike down their tormentor and shut down even his timid attempts at reform. Next time: Revolution by Committee.

At the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.

Resources

Black, Joseph Laurence. *Into the Dustbin of History: The USSR from Coup to Commonwealth, August-December 1991: A Documentary Narrative.* Gulf Breeze, FL: Academic International Press, 1993.

Durgo, A.S. *Russia Changes: The Events of August 1991 and the Russia Constitution.* Commack, NY: Nova Science Publishing Company, 1992.

Gorbachev, Mikhail Sergeevich. *The August Coup: The Truth and the Lessons.* New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 1991.

Copyright by Dan Roberts Enterprises, Inc.