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The 28th CPSU Congress

The Soviet Party Congress is at the half-way stage. It is scheduled to work over the weekend and to finish in the middle of next week.

2. The gathering's mood is not straightforward. The provincial party officials who form a large part of it want a clear lead on renewal of the Party, to get it out of what most feel to be its current humiliating mess. There is no patience for slogans. Stirring declarations of traditional values (such as that from Ligachev), or daring criticisms of the leadership that have vented delegates' own frustrations, have been warmly applauded. But so have unhackneyed, honest speeches from the left (such as those by Yakovlev and Shevardnadze).

3. A lot of steam is being let off. Once delegates have done this, there may be a stronger centrist core to the Congress than its truculent, conservative atmospherics hitherto suggest. When it comes to taking formal positions, as opposed to sounding off about their grievances, a large majority favour reform. It is the nature and pace of reform that is at issue.

4. For Gorbachev, what matters is not the rhetoric but the outcome on:

- the draft Party programme, entitled "towards a humane democratic socialism";
- proposals for a new Party structure and rules (the Party statute);

- above all, perhaps, the elections at the end of the Congress to the reformed Party bodies which the new structure may create.

5. The changes in the Party's structure would set a new post of Party Chairman over an executive First Secretary and deputies, dilute the Politburo into a much larger presidium, and give a possibly smaller Central Committee greater policy-making powers. Such changes would release Gorbachev from day-to-day Party work, reduce the pressure of the collective Party leadership on him, and diminish the Party's ability to compete with the new state bodies for executive authority.

6. Gorbachev managed to slip surprisingly liberal drafts of the programme and statute through a preparatory Central Committee plenum on 29 June. Between them these documents made only one allusion to the Party's "vanguard role", and in their amended references to election politics and to the *nomenklatura* appeared to be preparing the Party for parliamentary life. The conservatives are counter-attacking at the Congress. The extent of movement towards a market economy is under question. And Gorbachev has acknowledged resistance to the proposed changes in the Party's structure.

7. Gorbachev's own election as Party leader looks increasingly safe. There are no signs yet of serious conservative contenders; and both Ligachev and Polozkov, among others, have expressed their support for him. Even hardliners are perhaps realising that his removal would do their own cause harm. But the elections are by secret ballot, and Gorbachev may well find himself saddled with conservative deputies and Party bodies (we know he wanted his close ally, the liberal Yakovlev, as First Secretary). At all events, there will be a heavy turnover. Yakovlev, Shevardnadze and Ryzhkov (the last perhaps disingenuously)

have all implied that they do not expect election to top Party posts. Four other Politburo members and at least one Central Committee Secretary are not standing. Politburo member Zaikov has called for a 90 per cent change in Central Committee membership.

8. The Party's efforts at renewal will not reverse its fortunes. Gorbachev's remark on 4 July that the leadership (Party, not state) had only two more years underlined the sense of time running out. The Congress yesterday rejected an imaginative change of name. The strictures in the draft Party statute against factions (which conservatives may succeed in toughening) seem certain to drive the left-wing Democratic Platform out. This will not be a split in the sense of a division of the Party's property and *apparat*, but it is likely to result in a serious haemorrhaging of the Party's membership over the next few weeks and months.

9. The extent to which Soviet political life is undermining the Party's traditional role and form was vividly brought out by the Congress's strong support yesterday for the rapid completion of a new Treaty of Union, which would convert the country into a Union of sovereign states. There was also sympathy for the insistence of republican Party leaders that their local parties must have genuine independence from the centre - precisely the issue that got the Lithuanian Communist Party into such hot water as recently as last December.

10. Meanwhile, the RSFSR Supreme Soviet has resumed its session (pointedly showing that there are other political games in town besides the Congress). Leading reformers at the Congress have sent an open letter to Gorbachev expressing alarm at military resistance to reform. The miners show no signs of responding to the Congress's appeal to back away from a one-day political strike on 11 July that will call for *inter alia* the nationalisation of Party property, the removal of Party organs from the army and

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KGB, and the dissolution of the official trade unions. And radicals associated with the Democratic platform have called for nationwide mass demonstrations against the Party on 14-15 July. The Congress seems certain to be the last in conditions of a one-party system.



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