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THE SPLIT IN THE SOVIET COMMUNIST PARTY

1. Yeltsin's resignation from the CPSU and the Democratic Platform's announcement of its departure yesterday (both towards the end of the 28th Party Congress), are in a sense historic: this is the first split since the Bolsheviks broke with the Mensheviks at the second Party Congress in Brussels in 1903. But it is typical of current Soviet politics that matters are in fact by no means so clear-cut.

2. Yeltsin's resignation was not part of the Democratic Platform's move. He will not be joining the Democratic Platform or any other political grouping. Having carried out his mandate as a delegate to the Congress, he is now (so he says) fulfilling his commitment as president of the Russian Federation to act above party.

3. The Democratic Platform are dividing the CPSU, but are not exactly leaving it. Their spokesman, Shostakovsky (strikingly, the Head of the Party's Higher Ideological School), announced that they were forming an independent democratic parliamentary party. But at the same time, he called on members not to resign from the CPSU individually, nor to surrender their Party cards. The intention appears to be threefold. By acting as a block, the Platform can lay claim to a proportion of the Party's assets. Secondly, rather than going meekly, they will force the majority in the Party damagingly to expel them. Thirdly, they may hope to attract more of the Party over to their side. They have said that they will continue to work with sympathisers who wish to remain

within the Party, as well as with "democratic forces" outside the Party.

4. But the Democratic Platform are themselves split. At the Congress yesterday, some members denounced the break-away. They vowed to continue to fight for reform of the Party from within. Over 20% of those who attended the Platform's caucus last month favoured this course. Even among those breaking away, discipline is poor: the Mayors of Moscow and Leningrad today announced their individual resignations from the Party.

5. The exact nature of the split in the Party therefore remains uncertain. The Democratic Platform had very few delegates at the Congress: so the split is not yet highly visible. However, they claim to have support from 40% of grassroots Party members: so some haemorrhaging in Party membership is very likely in the coming weeks. But the Platform will not attract anything like 40% to support their line unless they can patch up their own numerous disagreements and form a coherent alternative to the CPSU. On the face of it, they are likely to do better in attracting Party members if they do not cast their net too wide to the many other "democratic" parties now being formed. But they are proposing that all democratic parties and movements should hold a congress this autumn to form a broad political coalition. It is not clear whether this will be the same as the Democratic Platform's own parliamentary party.

6. None of this leaves the remainder of the Party in good shape. The conservative atmospherics of the Congress clashed with the mood in the country. This is likely to have reinforced public disillusionment with the Party and with Gorbachev. Even on Soviet official statistics, over 40% of Soviet mines ignored appeals from the Congress and went on strike yesterday in an impressively disciplined display of hostility to the Party and government. Numerous other enterprises, mostly in mining regions, struck in sympathy.

7. The Party is also again in sharp internal dispute over the freedom that should be given to its republican branches. Like their three Baltic counterparts, the Moldavian and Georgian parties are now insisting that they must have real independence from the centre if they are to stand any chance of remaining significant political forces in their republics. But the Congress, by a narrow margin, has taken a restrictive view in its new rules.

8. In the elections by the Congress to the new CPSU Central Committee, Gorbachev is trying to stack the future political balance somewhat in his favour by nominating at least 85 of the 396 seats up for election. But although he may partially succeed in keeping the Party a centrist one, he may now be asking himself how much longer real multi-party parliamentary politics can be deferred.

9. We shall be writing a paper on the upshot of the Congress for the JIC next week.

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