

Playing for Power: The Agents Who Derailed the Soviet Union

A CARNEGIE ETHICS STUDIO STUDY GUIDE

A series of complex power plays brought down the Soviet Union.

Mikhail Gorbachev's long-term vision of change opened the door to a range of players, from democratic Russian reformers, to hardline Soviet communists, to conservative U.S. activists. These players competed for power and influence. The winners destroyed the Soviet Union and constructed a flawed democracy in its place.

During this hour-long TV show, the Carnegie Ethics Studio introduces the characters who wrestled for control and sets out the lessons the world can take from this turbulent period.

KEY PLAYERS

RUSSIANS

Political Actors



■ **Mikhail Gorbachev**

- General secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union; head of state of the Soviet Union
- Has a long-term vision of reform for the Soviet Union, which he begins to implement in the late 1980s with two programs: **perestroika** (reform) and **glasnost** (openness)
- These reforms are soon seen by the left as an affront to communism and by the right as overly cautious; his policies of openness allow detractors to loudly voice their opinions



■ **Boris Yeltsin**

- 1st president of the Russian Federation, 1991–1999
- Originally a Gorbachev supporter, Yeltsin emerged as a powerful political opponent
- As president, becomes increasingly authoritarian and resigns on New Year's Eve, 1999



■ **Alexander Urmanov**

- Yeltsin campaign manager
- Attends democratization training run by Americans Paul Weyrich and Robert Kriebel of the Free Congress Foundation
- Implements their training in Yeltsin's 1990 campaign for Congress of People's Deputies



■ **Gennady Burbulis**

- Yeltsin chief of staff
- Attends Weyrich and Kriebel training
- Implements their training in Yeltsin's 1990 campaign for Congress of People's Deputies



■ **Mikhail Reznikov**

- Physicist
- Russian political organizer
- Attends Weyrich and Kriebel training
- Coordinates 1990 campaigns for Congress of People's Deputies

RUSSIANS (continued)

Inter-Regional Group (IRG) Members



■ **Andrei Sakharov**

- Eminent Soviet physicist and dissident
- Co-leader of IRG



■ **Gavriil Popov**

- Editor-in-chief of academic journal
- Mayor of Moscow, 1990–1992
- Warns U.S. of 1991 coup
- Resigns as mayor in 1992



■ **Arkady Murashev**

- IRG secretary
- Attends Weyrich and Kriebler training
- Becomes Moscow's chief of police



■ **Evgeny Savostiyanov**

- Scientist
- Becomes head of the Moscow KGB under Yeltsin

The Inter-Regional Group (IRG) formed in June 1989 as a loose democratic grouping in the first USSR Congress of People's Deputies. Its main historical achievements were the propagation of democratic ideas to the Soviet public. Its period of intense activity lasted less than a year, however its functions were superseded, primarily due to the rise of the Democratic Russia movement.

AMERICANS

Government Officials



■ **Jack Matlock, Jr.**

- United States ambassador to the Soviet Union, 1987–1991
- Is alerted in June of 1991 by Gavriil Popov that a coup may be in the works
- Warns Gorbachev and President George H.W. Bush



■ **Thomas Graham, Jr.**

- U.S. Foreign Service officer, Moscow
- Views IRG members as effective political organizers, but ineffective leaders

Free Congress Foundation Leaders



■ **Paul Weyrich**

- Heritage Foundation president; chairman and CEO of Free Congress Foundation
- Creates Free Congress Foundation with goals of electing conservative U.S. legislators to Congress and supporting democracy in the Soviet Union
- Coins the term "Moral Majority"



■ **Robert Kriebler**

- Conservative Connecticut businessman
- Becomes affiliated with the Free Congress Foundation in order to work towards electing conservatives and spreading the message of free enterprise in the U.S. and the Soviet Union



■ **John Exnicios**

- Key aide to Weyrich and Kriebler's efforts at Free Congress Foundation
- Made 40 trips to the Soviet Union, conducted 120 conferences; trained around 5,000–7,000 people at these seminars

“PLAYING FOR POWER” TIME FRAME: LATE 1980s—EARLY 1990s

KEY DATES

- **1985** Gorbachev appoints Yeltsin chief of the Moscow Communist Party.
- **1987** Gorbachev fires Yeltsin after Yeltsin publicly criticizes the pace of perestroika reforms.
- **1988** Gorbachev establishes the Soviet Union's first popularly elected legislation, the Congress of People's Deputies.
- **Early 1989** Gorbachev allows multi-candidate elections to elect more than 2,000 members to this new Congress.
 - Yeltsin is elected to the Congress of People's Deputies as the Moscow delegate with 90% of the vote.
 - The Inter-Regional Group (IRG) forms within the Congress, with the purpose of eroding the Communist Party's political monopoly.
 - The IRG becomes, in effect, an opposition party.
 - Yeltsin becomes affiliated with the IRG.
- **November 1989** Weyrich and Kriebel make their first training trip. They begin in Budapest, Hungary, and continue on to Moscow a week later. They connect with IRG members.
- **1990** Yeltsin is again elected to the Congress of People's Deputies, this time as representative from his hometown of Sverdlovsk; IRG leader Gavril Popov is elected mayor of Moscow.
- **June 12, 1991** Yeltsin wins 57% of the vote in the popular elections for president of the Russian Republic. Gorbachev remains general secretary of the Communist Party and president of the Soviet Union.
- **August 19, 1991** Communist hardliners launch a coup against Gorbachev, who is under house arrest. The coup leaders are some of Gorbachev's closest advisors. Yeltsin climbs aboard a tank in front of the Russian White House and delivers an anti-coup appeal.
- **August 24, 1991** Gorbachev resigns as general secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union but remains president.
- **1991** Yeltsin bans Communist Party activities in Russia.
- **August-December 1991** During this period, the remaining republics declare independence.
- **December 8, 1991** The Belavezha Agreement disbands the Soviet Union and replaces it with a Commonwealth of Independent States.
- **December 25, 1991** Gorbachev resigns as president of the Soviet Union.
- **1992** IRG reformers begin to leave politics.
- **March 1993** Yeltsin assumes “special powers” to implement drastic economic reforms.
- **September 1993** Yeltsin announces his intention to disband the Supreme Soviet and Congress of People's Deputies.
- **September-October 1993** Yeltsin orders the army to attack the Parliament building.
- **Fall 1993** Supreme Soviet is dissolved and replaced by a new popularly-elected Parliament.
- **December 31, 1999** Yeltsin resigns and names his successor, Vladimir Putin.

WEYRICH AND KRIEBLE'S INFLUENCE

- Krieble initially donates electronic equipment to political reformers in the Soviet Union
- He soon begins planning to provide election training sessions
- Weyrich and Krieble design these sessions and take them to the Eastern Bloc
- In Moscow, they meet with the IRG and Popov welcomes them
- The Americans organize their first training sessions for IRG members and their staffs in order to cover basic topics such as polling techniques and how to win elections
- 1989–1991:
 - Weyrich and Krieble crisscross Russia and visit ten Soviet states, moving beyond the political elite and engaging a grassroots population
 - They also hold training sessions in Eastern Bloc States
 - They promote democracy as well as their conservative ideology
 - They bring Russian politicians to the U.S. for further training
 - Within a week of Yeltsin's election as president of the Russian Republic, Krieble and Weyrich help arrange his visit to Washington
- Following the coup, the IRG members, many of whom trained with Weyrich and Krieble, rise to power

DECLINE OF RUSSIA UNDER YELTSIN

■ Economics

- Yeltsin embarks on radical economic reform with the help of his aid Yegor Gaidar
- Implements “shock therapy,” a biting austerity program designed to control inflation by raising interest rates and taxes and cutting welfare
- Russia's GDP plummets, unemployment soars, and hyperinflation wipes out savings

■ Societal Stress

- Alcoholism, drug addiction, HIV-AIDS, and other diseases decimate the population
- Death rates rise while birth rates decrease

■ Politics

- Yeltsin has a power struggle with the Parliament
- December 1992—Parliament vetoes Yeltsin's nomination of Gaidar as prime minister
- March 1993—Yeltsin announces he has assumed “special powers” to implement his reforms
- Yeltsin's actions become increasingly authoritarian
- September 1993—Yeltsin announces his intention to disband the Supreme Soviet and Congress of People's Deputies
- Two weeks later he has the army attack the Parliament building
- Supreme Soviet is dissolved soon after
- Yeltsin resigns on New Year's Eve, 1999

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