

## The Parties, After the Party

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It will take months, even years, for the world to grasp fully the implications of the Soviet Union's most incredible week since the Bolsheviks seized power in 1917. But in all the turmoil, few events matched the drama of Mikhail Gorbachev's renunciation on Saturday of the Communist Party. And few events hold out as much promise for a true turn toward multi-party democracy.

By resigning as the party's chief and calling for the dissolution of its Central Committee, Mr. Gorbachev ratified the rebellious popular judgment on decades of Communist tyranny. Only the day before, he had loyally pleaded the party's cause; hooted down by the Russian Parliament, he abandoned overnight a lifetime's allegiance. His turnabout may enable him to stay on as symbolic head of state in a radically altered union.

As George Bush is already learning, it is far from clear who speaks for this new Soviet Union — Mr. Gorbachev, or Boris Yeltsin, who has emerged as the dominant political figure. What is clear is that the Soviet Union is no longer a multi-ethnic empire dominated by the Communists and controlled from Moscow. And as the party collapses, so too do the impediments to political pluralism and regional autonomy. Already the Ukraine and the Baltic states want out and the list is growing.

This unraveling is happening so fast that there are only proximate answers to new questions. Who

will manage the economy? And who will control the defense establishment? These are questions for Soviet citizens, freed now from the party's yoke, to decide. For this has been their revolution. The collapse of Communism was not brought about by Western military might, though years of patient NATO resolve played a big part. Nor was this revolt spawned at C.I.A. headquarters in McLean, Va.

What undid the Communist Party and Lenin's revolution was massive questioning of inherited ideas and the growing ascendancy of new and predominantly Western values. This, together with the market economy's promise of a more prosperous life, was what emboldened Soviet demonstrators to face tanks in Moscow.

Some hopes of the new revolutionaries may prove as impossible to realize as the dreams of universal justice that invigorated the original Communists. And it's true that the Soviet rebels and their leaders have tasted freedom only briefly, and that in good part thanks to Mr. Gorbachev.

Genuine democrats everywhere have learned that the essential corollary of majority rule is respect for minority rights, and that a multiplicity of factions is the best safeguard against single-party despotism. This is a lesson that enthusiastic Soviet recruits to the fledgling democratic order need, in their moment of euphoria, to weigh.