Svoboda's role in the events of 1968 and his willingness to go to Moscow and sign the agreement that provided what amounted to a formalized acceptance of the Soviet invasion. Again, the parallels are significant, as one revisits, though from a completely different perspective, the events of 1938 and 1968. And it is abundantly clear that these dates, along with the dramatic events of 1989 and the anticipated split of Czechoslovakia into two separate republics, will forever loom large on the calendar of Czechoslovak political history. It is also extremely difficult, given the speed and nature of these most recent developments, to chart the future of what was once Czechoslovakia. Equally significant is the somewhat disturbing realization that for subsequent generations the Second World War will more than likely emerge as but a vague historical remembrance. Still, this work on Czechoslovaks who fought in World War II does provide an account of an heroic episode in the nation's history, and it is presented in such a way as to force the reader to look beyond some widely held and overly simplistic political, military, and national stereotypes.

Anthony DeLuca


Russians reject arguments based on obsolete information: by popular analogy, they are said to be “as old as last year’s snow.” Unfortunately, many political analyses of the final years of the Soviet era fall into this category. Pushing the snow analogy a step further, one might argue that students of Soviet politics have been stumbling around in an analytical “whiteout,” an information blizzard that unexpectedly charged out of a front of rapid revolutionary change. Urban’s monograph is a welcome way station in the storm: he offers a clear, unprecedentedly well-documented overview of Soviet politics in the crucial period between the January 1987 Central Committee Plenum and the end of the first session in August 1989 of the USSR Supreme Soviet. He takes full advantage of the political openness that appeared thanks to glasnost and uses interviews, observation, and a sophisticated eye for the official and unofficial press to sketch the contours of shifting political terrain.

Gorbachev, argues Urban, based his reform program on “the empowering of [the soviets] and the expansion of their representative (or democratic) content.” Democratization, however, rested on a “grand compromise” and a “double sided contradiction”: Gorbachev could not move too quickly because he depended on “consensus within the hierarchy of power,” but also needed to act decisively to attract mass support and convince the public that perestroika was not a sham. A clear understanding of the tension between these competing and often contradictory needs, best seen in Gorbachev’s attempts to control through popular pressure the apparatus of the Commu-
nist Party and force it to work through the soviets, informs every step of
Urban's analysis. Proceeding chronologically from the prelude to the 19th
Party Conference through the conference itself, the constitutional debates in
the fall of 1988, the spring 1989 elections, and on to the first sessions of the
USSR Congress of People's Deputies, the USSR Supreme Soviet, and sessions
of republican and local soviets whose deputies were caught up in the dynamic
of change, Urban constantly draws attention to the reform program's internal
contradictions.

Urban's most important contribution to our understanding of the period
is his discussion of the aftermath of the 19th Party Conference, including the
drafting, publication, discussion, and ratification in December 1988 of constitu-
tional amendments that created the USSR Congress of People's Deputies,
the Supreme Soviet, and a new electoral system. These amendments were the
heart of Gorbachev's political program. Gaining a unique perspective from
interviews of scholars who participated in drafting the changes, Urban paints
an inside picture of the process. His observations on the public portion of
debate over reform are no less trenchant. He emphasizes the "completely new
dynamic in the political system" represented by the "revolutionary" public
participation that was born at the 19th Party Conference. Urban demon-
strates that the 1989 elections to the USSR Congress of People's Deputies
played a key role in defining the conflict between the people "from below" and
the Party apparatus "from above." He draws out the implications of the
institutional tools wielded by the apparatus, but also points out the crushing
losses suffered in many areas by conservative forces.

Urban's report on the first sessions of the USSR Congress of People's
Deputies must be considered little more than preliminary; nonetheless, he
does identify important elements of the changes, particularly the continued
conflict between change-oriented deputies and the apparat. With the benefit
of hindsight, we can say that he was wrong in suggesting that the Supreme
Soviet could develop into a real working legislature. However, if Urban can
be faulted for optimism concerning the federal Supreme Soviet, one should
credit him for recognizing the importance of the rebirth of republican
Supreme Soviets. He discusses, for example, the increasingly radical activi-
ties in the summer of 1989 of Supreme Soviets in the Baltic. In 1990-91, of
course, new republican Supreme Soviets helped tear the Soviet Union apart
as they declared sovereignty and launched the so-called "war of the laws"
against control from Moscow.

This book's principal weakness is, unfortunately, common in discussions
of the politics of this period: we need to define the twin problems of political
power and institutional-procedural democracy before drawing any conclu-
sions about Gorbachev's intentions. Urban did not want to be drawn into an
extended debate over these conceptual issues; instead he offered a timely,
concise contribution to the discussion of reform by following the common
assumption that Gorbachev was a democratizer. We cannot, however, under-
stand fully the breadth of Gorbachev's vision—or the depths of his ignorance
— if we do not show how and why he continued to reject Western-style