The System: An Insiders Life In Soviet Politics

G. A Arbatov


The year was 1938. Joseph Stalin manned the helm of the Soviet Union, and all of its implications, such as the unforgiving purges, were in full effect. Anatole Konstantin, who was ten-years-old at the time, found his father had been taken from Stalin's secret police in the middle of the night. Without any explanation of why he was taken, his family assumed that it was because of the contact they made with their parents back in Romania, during a time when any contact with a foreign nation was suspected to be an act of espionage.

As the subtitle of Georgi Arbatov's memoir states, he was an insider of the Soviet political system from the Khrushchev through Gorbachev eras. Arbatov believes this is perhaps the most important period in Soviet history and dubs the years following the death of Joseph Stalin through the 1980's as a period leading up to the Second Russian Revolution. Arbatov tells us a gap exists in the present scholarship and that historians need to explore this period more deeply.

But before Perestroika and Glasnost in the late 80's, everyday life was pretty liveable. Not luxurious, but, for the most part, the average Soviet citizen would have had a similar life to the average American, but the difference is that almost everyone had this standard, in contrast to the huge and increasing divide in living standards in most capitalist states. There was free universal healthcare (albeit not as advanced as in the West), free education (arguable one of the best education systems of any country at that time), and no unemployment (it was illegal). In addition, in contrast to the