GORBACHEV
AND HIS
REVOLUTION

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PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This is not a learned research work, laden with footnotes and eager to emphasize the differences of interpretation to be found in academe. I make no apologies for that; there are, as I discuss in the Bibliography, many first class heavyweight texts on Gorbachev and his times. Instead, this book sets out to provide an introduction for readers new to the USSR and its final years. Inevitably, this means that often I have swept through very necessary and important debates with cavalier disregard and simply selected the line of argument I felt worth using. My sympathies are with those whose work is thus ignored, but I am afraid that this book does not pretend to do more than provide a simple and readable primer to a complex and much-debated era.

I hope it also conveys some sense of the pace and excitement of the times. My own professional interest in modern Russia coincided with the developments covered in this book, from my first trip as a school-age tourist in the dying years of the Brezhnev era to the research for my PhD taking full advantage of the new openness and freedoms of the later 1980s and just before taking up my present job at Keele University, a trip to Moscow in that fateful month, August 1991. As for so many other scholars of my generation, it was Mikhail Gorbachev who created the enthusiasm which drove me into study of modern Russia. My only hope is that I can conjure up some of that same sense of history being made for a new generation of students. To do this, I have concentrated upon Gorbachev himself. In some ways, this is a backward step. History, thank heavens, is no longer defined as the 'doings of great men'. It is about men, women, countries, organizations, peoples and institutions shaping and being shaped by the great, impersonal forces of economics, of society and of fate. Yet to pretend that Gorbachev's own choices and character played no part in the events here described is to ignore the very necessary human dimension to history. Gorbachev took power at a pivotal moment in Russian history, and the revolution he precipitated bears the stamp of his flaws and his greatness.

In many ways, writing this book has been rather harder than other projects I have undertaken. For dealing with my sometimes irascible concentration on it and for helping me finish it, I owe a particular debt of gratitude to my wife, Mickey. Amidst the long-winded and roundabout conversations of academe, the blunt instruction, 'so write it' proved a refreshingly brutal tonic!

The USSR in 1991

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