

Moscow December 25 1991: The Last Day of the Soviet Union  
by Conor O'Clery.  
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Having been born in the year of the Hungarian uprising and only being 5 when the Berlin Wall was erected, I have no recollection of two events that shook my parents' world after the Second World War. What did impact hugely upon me was the fall of the Wall in 1989 and the implosion of the Soviet Union, events that are unforgettable for many of my generation. When great and nation-shaking happenings such as these occur it is easy to concentrate on the bigger picture and forget the impact that they have on individual lives.

Moscow December 25 1991 tells, hour by hour, the events of the very last day of the Soviet Empire, which was also the last day in office of President Mikhail Gorbachev, the Soviet leader who became a greater hero in the West than to his own people. But the unfolding of that day had many antecedents, as Conor O'Clery fleshes out in enthralling detail over twenty nine chapters, not least the attempted coup against Gorbachev by disgruntled Communist apparatchiks from government and the military, which fell apart largely as a result of their own ineptitude and lack of nerve but also because of the heroism of Boris Yeltsin, the first, post-Communist, President of Russia.

What makes Moscow the engrossing read it is rests on the descriptions of the relationship between Yeltsin and Gorbachev, the slights each threw at the other, the indignities to which Yeltsin put Gorbachev, and the enmity between their families. These human details, particularly as the day came to an end and the last symbols of his presidential power were taken away from Gorbachev, add a powerful poignancy to the narrative.

Moscow December 25 1991 is a beautifully told documentary narrative, and a reminder of events that changed the world, largely peacefully, and which made a huge contribution to the makeup of the 21<sup>st</sup> century world we now inhabit.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh