

Who's afraid of Boris Nikolayevich?

by Webster G. Tarpley

The above question is occasioned by the hysteria and consternation that gripped the upper echelons of the Bush administration and the traveling entourage of the Soviet leader Gorbachov during the Washington summit, as a result of the news that, despite a total mobilization of the Gorbachov machine, Boris Yeltsin had been elected President of the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic (R.S.F.S.R.). The hysteria of the ruling circles of the condominium has much less to do with Yeltsin as a person than with the growing strength of the democratic, anti-totalitarian movement that has allowed Yeltsin to defeat Gorbachov's retainers. The growth of this movement, of the movement inspired by the humanitarian ideals of the late Andrei Sakharov, provides new evidence that, in terms of movements for independence by the subject nationalities of the Soviet empire, in terms of mass strike ferment among workers, and now in terms of a direct political challenge to the apparatus of the Soviet totalitarian state, the U.S.S.R. and the R.S.F.S.R. are among the parts of the world being most deeply affected by the revolutionary transformations of the early 1990s.

During the Washington summit, Gorbachov increasingly snarled through those iron teeth that Andrei Gromyko admired so much, and frequently seemed to be brandishing a Khrushchov-style shoe before the faces of his interlocutors. A significant part of this was caused by the success of his rival Yeltsin, a former protégé for whom Gorbachov now nurtures a consuming hatred. Gorbachov devoted his last evening in Moscow before leaving for Canada and the U.S.A. to caucusing at the Hotel Rossiya with 400 Gorbachov loyalists of the R.S.F.S.R. Supreme Soviet, for the purpose of giving them a pep talk to fight Yeltsin to the bitter end. In the course of his remarks, Gorbachov used a very crude expression to convey his view that Yeltsin is "insane." In his Ottawa press conference, Gorbachov conceded he was "somewhat worried" about Yeltsin, and was very unstates-

manlike indeed, with words to the effect that if the new R.S.F.S.R. president keeps playing games, there would be trouble. In the joint press conference at the end of the summit, Gorbachov accused Yeltsin of carrying on "destructive activities, destructive efforts."

More explicit was the line being churned out by Dmitri Likhachov, boss of Raisa Gorbachova's Russian Cultural Foundation, part of the Gorbachov road show. "I'm afraid Yeltsin is a know-nothing, a crude demagogue of low culture," said Likhachov to the *Washington Post*. Armand Hammer, sporting a KGB lapel pin that allowed him access to Gorbachov's precincts where no other American citizen could venture, told reporters at the White House state dinner: "I'm going to wish [Gorbachov] well and I hope he puts Yeltsin in his place."

The Bush White House was broadcasting on the same frequency. A White House official condemned Yeltsin as an "intellectual lightweight, a real demagogue with an enormous ego." Many columnists found that the Bush White House was not much of a pulpit for charges like that. Think tankers noted that Bush "does not believe in the power of democratic movements: He doesn't understand them and he doesn't like them." Bush had refused to meet with Yeltsin during the latter's U.S. tour last September, and has refused to meet any representatives of the Russian democratic opposition since he became President.

Many observers stressed the dimensions of Gorbachov's humiliation, since he had been unable to put a man beholden to him in the second most important post in the U.S.S.R. Gorbachov's Washington visit was widely compared with Richard Nixon's Moscow summit with Leonid Brezhnev in the summer of 1974. This time, it was Gorbachov who was desperately seeking foreign success to play off against fatal political weakness at home. Gorbachov has often been compared to Czar Boris Godunov, whose ability to stay in power

between 1598 and 1605 was predicated on seeing to it that the boyars were unable to agree on a single candidate to overthrow him. In the closing years of Boris Godunov's reign there appeared a Pretender to the czardom who claimed to be the son of Ivan the Terrible, and therefore the rightful ruler of the land. This figure is known to history as the False Dmitri, who occupied the Kremlin between 1605 and 1606. With the election of Yeltsin, the very least that can be said is that a new and powerful Pretender has emerged from trans-Ural Siberia.

It was clear that the Washington summit had been upstaged by the Yeltsin victory, and that the White House was attempting belatedly to answer the question, "Can Gorbachov deliver?" Especially after Yeltsin's meeting with Lithuanian President Vytautas Landsbergis, the Bushmen were not sure that the enraged Rumpelstiltskin with whom they were negotiating was still in command.

The factors determining the crisis of the U.S.-U.K.-U.S.S.R. "New Yalta" attempt to rule the world all derive from recent revolutionary mass actions. Most important is the process of German reunification, growing out of last November's collapse of the East Berlin communist regime, and spreading thence to Czechoslovakia. Secondly, there is the question of sovereign independence for Lithuania, reflecting the strivings of the captive nationalities of the U.S.S.R. for freedom from Moscow. A third factor is the revolutionary process now at work inside the R.S.F.S.R. itself, among the 150 million Great Russians. The election of Yeltsin is merely a small and preliminary expression of this vast reality.

Gorbachov's alliance with Pamyat

The standard pro-Gorbachov argument heard around Washington of late, is that it is necessary to support Gorbachov because the alternative is likely to be a military coup d'état. Then, it has become customary to cite Pamyat, the fascist, racist, and anti-Semitic movement which this publication has denounced for many years. Now it is alleged by some that the growing strength of Pamyat is reflected in the election of Yeltsin. But this is not accurate. One of the two candidates Gorbachov used in the attempt to defeat Yeltsin, Polozhkov, was actually much closer to being a Pamyat-style Russophile. And Pamyat is currently a part of the Gorbachov machine.

The Byzantine imperial ruling class of the U.S.S.R. is composed of Gorbachov and other top leaders of the KGB secret police, the marshals and generals of the Red Army, the members of the party and government *nomenklatura*, and the prelates of the Russian Orthodox Church. These are the bearers of the apocalyptic imperialist ideology of Moscow the Third Rome. This imperial elite is dedicated to world domination for a militaristic, autocratic, and totalitarian Soviet state, and this commitment has not changed as a result of any recent events.

Pamyat represents to attempt of the Soviet *nomenklatura* to create a fascist mass movement under their own top-down control. Pamyat has always had a very obvious official backing from the KGB and the Defense Ministry. Pamyat grew out of the Rossiya Society, sometimes subtitled the Society for the Defense of Architectural Monuments, founded by Marshal Chuikov. Pamyat spokesmen have always had interviews published in the Armed Forces newspaper *Krasnaya Zvezda*, and have controlled such journals as *Nash Sovremennik*, *Molodaya Gvardiya*, *Literaturnaya Rossiya*, and the cultural programs for state television. Pamyat, in short, is an official fascist arm of the *nomenklatura*. But the problem of the Pamyat leaders is that their fascist agitation has had only very limited success. Pamyat candidates were generally defeated in the spring 1990 elections. In Leningrad, Pamyat fielded 150 candidates and conducted a strenuous campaign, but failed to win a single seat. In Moscow, Pamyat's fortunes were not much better. Pamyat is an integral part of the present Gorbachov machine, with two leaders of the Pamyat milieu, the Dostoevsky-like "village prose" author Valentin Rasputin and the labor agitator Venyamin Yarin, currently holding seats in the Gorbachov Presidential Council. Gorbachov's alliance with Pamyat could not be more blatant.

A grass-roots revolt

The winners in the spring elections in the R.S.F.S.R., especially in Moscow and Leningrad, were quite different social forces, representing a grass-roots revolt against the communist totalitarian state and its economic failure. One of these is the Leningrad Democratic Movement, a non-communist formation which now administers the city of Leningrad. On May 14, Elena Zelinskaya, a Leningrad political activist and spokeswoman for the Democratic Movement, described conditions in her city to an audience at the Kennan Institute for Advanced Russian Studies of the Woodrow Wilson Center in Washington. In Leningrad, the Democratic Movement captured 68% of the seats in the city Soviet, and 32 of 34 seats representing Leningrad in the Supreme Soviet. Some of the winners were from the strike committees set up in summer 1989. "For the first few days we were in a state of euphoria, because people who for the past few years had to meet in cellars and had their arms twisted behind their backs by the police were now in one of the best palaces in town, having received the legal power to act," said Zelinskaya. She added that one of the first official acts of the new city Soviet had been to appeal to the Jewish population to stay in the city and to pledge that any anti-Semitic actions would be prosecuted to the full extent of the law. The city Soviet is fighting the Kremlin authorities for control over the Leningrad TV broadcasting facilities.

Zelinskaya also described the struggles of the Democratic Platform tendency within the Communist Party against the party leadership. Leningrad regional party first secretary Boris Gidasov, who had distanced himself somewhat from

Gorbachov, was reelected to his party post with 610 votes, against 303 for the Democratic Platform candidate. It is expected that Democratic Platform will not remain inside the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) beyond the party congress in early July.

The Democratic Movement is associated with the Inter-regional Caucus of the Congress of People Deputies, which was founded by Sakharov. These are the Sakharov and *samizdat* networks and political clubs, which elected some deputies in the spring of 1989 and which now control the Moscow and Leningrad city councils. Some of the better-known personalities of this democratic ferment include the historian Yuri Afanasyev, chess champion Gary Kasparov, and Sakharov's widow, Yelena Bonner. The program of these circles is the dismantling of the totalitarian state, including the curbing of the KGB, the abolition of the power of the *nomenklatura*, and free elections.

The obvious, glaring weakness of all of the Russian pro-democracy ferment is its lack of a coherent grasp of capitalist dirigist economics, as represented today by the LaRouche-Riemann method of economic analysis and program. Elena Zelinskaya predicts that Anatoli Sobachak will soon become president of the Leningrad Soviet and that he will seek to establish a "free economic zone." When asked why Leningraders would support economic reform that could cause higher prices and unemployment, Zelinskaya replied, "Because they're fed up with everything else."

Political pluralization

A process of genuine political pluralization is now unfolding in the U.S.S.R. and in Russia in particular, with some 1,000 political groups, associations, organizations, party initiatives, and parties in the process of formation. These cover everything from the numerous shades of anarchism, through parliamentary parties reflecting the German political landscape, to hardline Stalinists and fascists. Some of these groups have been founded by the KGB, and it is safe to say that the KGB is attempting to infiltrate all of them, but it would be blind and reckless to assert that the KGB is the motor force behind this pluralization.

Generally speaking, the Democracy Movement and its counterparts in other Russian cities appear to have made a tactical decision to support Yeltsin. Yuri Afanasyev, on a pre-summit visit to Washington, said that he had supported Yeltsin, although he also suggested that he was aware that the decades-long formation of a communist bureaucrat like Yeltsin is baggage that cannot be jettisoned overnight.

Reservations about what Yeltsin personally might represent today and what he might be seeking are justified, but they are not the matter of rhetorical style, ambition, or other idiosyncracies which preoccupy the Anglo-American press. Such reservations are based on the obvious fact that Yeltsin is officially a communist, a member of the Central Committee of the CPSU. Yeltsin is not just any communist. He was

for many years the party boss of Sverdlovsk, and then became the boss of the Moscow party machine and a candidate member of the Politburo as a client of the KGB-Gorbachov power cartel. In the autumn of 1987, Yeltsin attacked Gorbachov and was ousted from the Politburo. Since then, he has profiled himself as a tribune of the people against the *nomenklatura*, drawing new strength from every new attack by Gorbachov. There is no doubt that the KGB has leveled a massive campaign of vilification against Yeltsin: Gorbachov attacked him as a fascist last fall. There have also been reports of KGB attempts to assassinate Yeltsin. Under these circumstances, we must judge Yeltsin on the basis of things that he has said or done, and not on whatever adjectives pop out of the superpower propaganda mill.

Yeltsin: not just any communist

The fact remains that by meeting Landsbergis and opening talks on economic cooperation between the R.S.F.S.R. and independent Lithuania, Yeltsin has done more to break the encirclement of that nation than any leader of a Western European government, to say nothing of Bush, who is an enemy of Baltic self-determination.

As far as Yeltsin's program is concerned, it remains blurred. His notion of Russian sovereignty against the "dictates of the center," which drew another foaming attack by Gorbachov the week before the summit, appears to reflect, on the one hand, the widespread awareness of Yeltsin's base that if Russians maintain a totalitarian state to crush the subject nationalities, that totalitarian state will always crush the Russians as well. To be a true nationalist is incompatible with being an imperialist. At the same time, there is also an implicit argument that the empire does not pay; this sounds something like an American congressman arguing against foreign aid. Yeltsin has also attacked the technocratic Prime Minister Nikolai Ryzhkov and his plan for Schachtian price increases, including the planned July 1 tripling of the bread price, which is sure to lead to food riots if implemented. The Ryzhkov approach, according to Yeltsin, is "tantamount to suicide." Yeltsin says he is looking for "another transition to the market economy that does not lead to a deterioration of the standard of living."

Now that Yeltsin is in power, he will be expected to put some food on the shelves of Russia. To do that, Marxism and the free market are equally useless. The viability of the democracy movement in Russia will depend to a large degree on breaking out of the current provincialism of their economic theory in favor of a modern dirigist approach. Russian history has not been kind to Westernizing, pro-democracy movements of the type now unfolding. Unless starvation and shortages are alleviated, with the dismantling of the Soviet military machine, the despair and suffering of Russians and other Soviet peoples will turn into militant irrationalism of the "red fascist" stamp, and this will make possible the affirmation of Pamyat and similar movements down the road.