

Soviet reforms seek to stop 'dissolution'

by Konstantin George

The internal crisis of dissolution confronting the Russian Empire is coming to a head this winter, and Soviet leaders have decided to grant dictatorial powers to Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachov in an attempt to keep the situation under control.

On Nov. 16 and 17, emergency sessions of the U.S.S.R. Supreme Soviet were called to adopt drastic measures, and were addressed by Gorbachov. A situation, which until mid-November could be described as "anarchy within limits" in the economic, social, and political sense, is in a phase change. The October successes of the "Peaceful Revolution" in Ukraine, opening the perspective for future freedom and independence for the biggest of the non-Russian republics, pushed the elite of Imperial Russia to the wall.

Moscow is preparing to lash out against the breakaway republics. In this context, a major unpublicized agenda item of Soviet diplomacy at the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) in Paris the week of Nov. 19, was to nail down renewed commitments from Bush, Thatcher, and other Western leaders giving Moscow a free hand against the republics.

In short, a dirty condominium deal is being fashioned redefining the Yalta demarcation line along the Western border of the U.S.S.R.

The new alliance

Moscow's latest internal response to the crisis has been to fashion a new dictatorial presidential system, based on an alliance and unity of the Empire's three main Russian institutional pillars: the Soviet state structure under Gorbachov, the Russian Federation state structure under Boris Yeltsin, and the Army. The support for this alliance was clearly expressed by Marshal Sergei Akhromeyev, Gorbachov's presidential adviser, in a *Sovetskaya Rossiya* article Nov. 14, where he declared the Army's full support for a new system of a President and a "coalition government of national unity" crisis cabinet, as agreed to by Gorbachov and Yeltsin in a five-hour meeting Nov. 11.

Akhromeyev also gave the military's *raison d'être* for the alliance of Russian state institutions, calling it the "last line of defense" to prevent "dissolution." Should this fail, a

bitter and bloody power struggle at the top is expected.

The new presidential system, proposed by Gorbachov on Nov. 17 in an address to the U.S.S.R. Supreme Soviet, would place the cabinet of new ministers, "thinking in accordance with the times," directly under the President. Gorbachov called for "without delay, a radical reorganization of the Center's executive authority," and for placing it "directly under the President." The U.S.S.R. Supreme Soviet approved the plan "in principle" by an overwhelming vote of 316-19 with 31 abstentions.

Immediately after Gorbachov's return from Paris Nov. 23, a Supreme Soviet session was scheduled to vote up the proposals. Their final formal approval is expected at the Dec. 17 session of the Congress of People's Deputies, which is expected to ratify the corresponding changes in the Constitution.

One of the biggest winners is the Soviet military. Under the radical reorganization, the U.S.S.R. Presidential Council has been abolished, to be replaced by what Gorbachov called "a Presidential Security Council," thus placing a Defense Council-type institution at the top of the state power pyramid.

Gorbachov also proposed strengthening the Federation Council, and the creation of what he called "a Control Chamber of the President, with authorized representatives in all regions." This is connected to the parts of his Nov. 16 speech where he blamed hoarding by "some republics and regions" as being responsible for the horrendous shortages, accusing them of failing to provide the Center while trying "to save themselves."

Fear grips the non-Russian republics

The Gorbachov speech was read appropriately in the empire's Captive Nations, and fear and alarm is now gripping the non-Russian republics of the U.S.S.R. The pro-independence leaderships in the Baltic and Ukraine know that the men in Moscow are desperate to stop or slow down the process of dissolution, and nothing, including use of the Army, can be ruled out.

The leaderships of all the non-Russian republics striving for independence fear that the Gorbachov Nov. 16 speech denouncing "destructive forces" in the republics and demanding a "moratorium" on all anti-Center measures, marks the beginning of a crackdown. The Soviet turn in this direction was apparent with the Nov. 7 holding of provocative military parades in the three Baltic republics, and the Nov. 10 ultimatum by Prime Minister Nikolai Ryzhkov to these three republics to accept Moscow's rules on negotiating a so-called "transition to independence," or face a total economic blockade.

Soviet charges—timed with the Moscow emergency session, that Lithuanian "extremists fired on" Soviet Army troops in the Lithuanian capital of Vilnius on Nov. 17, are seen by anti-Bolshevik leaders in the Baltic, Ukraine, and elsewhere, as the prelude to a crackdown.