

Soviet chief purging his own appointees

by Rachel Douglas and Konstantin George

In his July 28 speech at Vladivostok, where he presented the U.S.S.R.'s great-power policy for the Pacific, Mikhail Gorbachov reported that the Soviet government will soon unveil the details of a program, now in draft form, for a transformation of the Soviet Far East through industrialization and massive infrastructure projects.

The Soviet leader outlined a seven-part program: 1) industrial infrastructure development, 2) energy self-sufficiency for the area, 3) use of science and technological advances to modernize industry, 4) maximal development of non-ferrous metals and lumber resources, 5) increase in agricultural investment to reach regional self-sufficiency, including by an upgrade of the Pacific fishing industry, 6) improvement of ports, bridges, and roads to exploit "export possibilities" from the Soviet Far East, 7) improvement of "quality of life" and accommodations for a growing population—housing, schools, hospitals, etc. The program envisions a big population increase in the Soviet Far East, by means of resettlement from European Russia.

Gorbachov went on to visit Komsomolsk on the Amur, site of production facilities for nuclear attack submarines and jet fighters, and Khabarovsk, headquarters of the Far East Military District. As on tours of other provinces, Gorbachov took the opportunity to meet with the military officers in the region. TASS reported July 30, that he conferred with "the military leadership of the Far East," which suggests that not only Far East Military District commander Army Gen. Dmitrii Yazov was there, but also Army Gen. Ivan Tretyak, commander-in-chief of the Far East High Command.

The economic program previewed by Gorbachov at Vladivostok, indeed, fleshes out a perspective that was evident in the military's planning, since the creation of High Command Far East in 1979. The first of the new Soviet wartime commands, High Command Far East (subsuming Eastern Siberia and the Soviet Far East) was designed to function independently of Moscow, if cut off; this military purpose necessitated planning for economic autonomy as well. Concurring in this plan, Gorbachov declared on June 11, 1985, "The State will further stint no money for the development of Siberia."

According to Radio Moscow, Gorbachov remarked to a crowd in Khabarovsk, that he had "never met anyone any-

where in the Soviet Union" who had told him to give up defense spending and "use the money for consumer goods!"

In Politburo proceedings concluded before his Far East tour, Gorbachov exhibited wartime ruthlessness, directed inclusively at his own appointees, on the matter of economic leadership. The occasion was the post-mortem on the Chernobyl nuclear plant disaster.

Pravda's July 20 report on a special session of the Politburo, which discussed the findings of the government commission on Chernobyl, announced the removal of officials who have played key roles in the U.S.S.R.'s post-Brezhnev military-industrial leadership. The guilty parties can also look forward to criminal prosecution, the report said.

The men "removed from their posts for major mistakes and shortcomings in their work, which led to this accident," included:

Yevgeni Kulov, chairman of the State Committee for the Safe Conduct of Work in the Nuclear Power Industry. Kulov headed that committee since it was formed in August 1983, under Gorbachov's mentor, Yuri Andropov. Kulov, as part of a shake-up of the nuclear industry, came from the Ministry of Medium Machine Building, which not only operates nuclear power-plant fuel cycles, but also produces nuclear warheads and bombs. This followed a disaster at Atommash, the plant for mass-production of nuclear reactors, part of which sank during construction.

Gennadi Shasharin, Deputy Minister of Power and Electrification, in charge of the nuclear power section since July 1983. Like Kulov, Shasharin replaced Brezhnev-era officials, blamed for the Atommash blunders.

A. G. Meshkov, First Deputy Minister of Medium Machine Building since 1983—another post-Brezhnev appointee.

On July 14, Minister of Machine Tools and Tool-Making Boris Balmont was retired, without reference to Chernobyl, but at the early age of 59. He, too, was a key figure in the military-related industrial hierarchy, with a long career in the Ministry for Medium Machine Building. On July 20, Minister of the Electrotechnical Industry Gennadii Voronovsky, a defense electronics specialist and a Gorbachov appointee, suffered the same fate at the age of 62.

The first government minister Gorbachov ever appointed also came under fire in the Chernobyl report. "It was observed," at the Politburo meeting, "that U.S.S.R. Minister of Power and Electrification Comrade Maiorets, deserves to be removed from his job, on account of serious shortcomings in the management of the Chernobyl AES. But taking into account that he has occupied this post for only a short time, the Politburo has given him a severe party penalty and has warned, that if he does not draw the appropriate conclusions from what has happened, he will be subject to more severe punishment."

We have only seen the beginning of this qualitatively new phase in the Gorbachov purges.