

## Editorial

# *What is the Soviet Union?*

Now that Mikhail Gorbachov is officially President of the Soviet Union, the first stage of a dramatic leadership shake-up seems to be winding down with a major apparent consolidation of power by Gorbachov. Many in the West are already wishfully trying to see these moves as indications of a further "liberalization."

In this, they can point to the transfer of Gorbachov's opponent, Yegor Ligachov, to head a commission of agriculture as an indication of Gorbachov's strengthening. Approximately one-third of the policy-setting Central Committee has resigned from office, including the former Soviet President, Andrei Gromyko. But while Gromyko at 79 was known to be ailing, the resignation of Anatoly Dobrynin was more of a surprise.

Dobrynin has played a key role in shaping Soviet policy toward the United States since he assumed his Washington embassy post in 1960. It was assumed that his recent recall to Moscow under Gorbachov's rule meant an extension of his already significant power. Certainly he is a major architect of the New Yalta arrangement which has been consolidated through the Gorbachov-Reagan summit meetings. What then does his ouster portend for a shift in Soviet policy?

Not only are the Soviets suffering from a disastrous food crisis, but as a result of shortages of food and other essential consumer commodities there has been an upswelling of national discontent throughout the extended Soviet Empire. Indeed, in spite of their attempts to maintain a liberal facade for Western consumption, they have been forced to impose martial law upon the Armenian and Azeri populations of their country, and they have stiffened police powers throughout the country.

The East bloc as a whole is in turmoil, and the appointment of Mieczyslaw Rakowsky as prime minister of Poland is a signal of political repression to come in that country. Similarly, the Soviets have indicated that they do not intend to give up either military or political control of Afghanistan.

Those wishful thinkers who would see confirmation

of their thesis that the Soviet Empire is crumbling and the KGB being dissolved, are in for a series of rude shocks. Unfortunately, these shocks will have a crucial impact on the future of our entire civilization. The present leadership shake-up may well be a preliminary to a far more openly aggressive policy toward the West. Certainly, under present circumstances, there will be no question of reducing the power of the secret police. Indeed, the replacement for KGB head Chebrikov, Vladimir Kryuchkov, appears to outrank him in political clout.

While there is always a certain friction between other sections of the Soviet leadership and the KGB, and a leading faction may well seek to use the military to curb KGB power should it pose a threat at the top, the military can never replace the secret police as the glue which holds the Soviet state together.

The essence of the Russian Empire has always been that of a "captive house of nationalities," as Lenin labeled the Czar's Russian Empire, and as the populations of the East bloc think of themselves. Whereas, in Western European culture, most groups of different ethnic origins are assimilated into the general population, the anti-Western culture of the Russian empire tends to preclude this. Under intense pressures, such as the acute food crisis now escalating there, the natural tendency of Soviet society to fracture along lines of traditional ethnic and religious differences, comes to the surface.

In a situation which threatens to get out of control as in Nagorno-Karabakh today, the Soviets do not hesitate to bring in the military. However, to sustain the pacification process beyond that point, if they are able to bring insurgency under control, they rely upon quieter methods of secret police infiltration of every aspect of popular life.

So, today, despite shifts in personnel, the leading item on Moscow's agenda remains the interrelationship between the food crisis and the resulting tendencies toward eruption of intense degrees of nationalist unrest.