

# Gorbachov elections a purging circus

by Konstantin George

The results of the March 26 "elections" to the new Soviet "Parliament" will provide the pretext for a large-scale purge of regional party figures. Much has been written in the Western press about what a "new" phenomenon these elections are. More to the point: These elections constitute a new method of continuing a very old Soviet tradition—purges of the party apparatus. In fact, the elections give the Soviet leadership and KGB the pretext for continuing, on a far broader scale, the purge of regional party leaders noticeable since September 1988, in the period leading up to the Sept. 30 Central Committee plenum. That plenum marked the consolidation of power by the "Andropov Kindergarten" in the Soviet leadership overall, and an increase in the political power of the KGB and its leading figures.

The upcoming purge was announced in a press conference given by Soviet Foreign Ministry spokesman Gennadi Gerasimov March 27. Gerasimov declared, "Party leaders must have not only the confidence of the party, but the confidence of the people," and decisions on whether the losers are to be removed from their party posts will be taken during the course of this spring by the city and regional party organizations.

The Soviet government newspaper, *Izvestia*, stated in a commentary March 29, "Each loser must now stop and think why he was voted down." Radio Moscow on the same day reported that besides the cases where party leaders had lost to an opponent, in over 160 electoral districts, no candidate had secured the 50% of the vote required to gain a seat. In these districts, to cite Radio Moscow, "New elections with new candidates will be held in two months."

Of the candidates who were CPSU members, about 20% were defeated. Big losers and thus leading candidates to be purged include: Yuri Solovyov, a candidate Politburo member who is head of the Leningrad regional party; Anatoli Gerasimov, head of the Leningrad city party; Yuri Prokofyev, number-two man in the Moscow city party; Konstantin Masik, head of the Kiev city party; the city party heads of the Belorussian capital of Minsk, the Kazakhstan capital of Alma Ata, the Moldavian capital of Kishinyov, five regional party heads in the Ukraine, and four regional party bosses in the Soviet Far East.

With these results, the process of wholesale elimination of regional party leaders will be continued. For example, in the period between Sept. 1 and Dec. 31, 1988, six party

leaders of regions in the Russian Republic and a total of 21 regional party leaders in the non-Russian republics were removed.

This has meant growth in the Central Committee category known as "Dead Souls," i.e., persons who remain on the Central Committee as full (voting) or candidate (non-voting) members, but who no longer hold a party function entitling them to such rank. By last summer, 70 of the 300 full members were "Dead Souls" and this figure should cross the 100 mark by summer.

The devastation in the Central Committee reflects a process under way since the summer of 1988: The party as an institution has been subjected to a process of creeping de-thronement, to the gain of the praetorian institutions of the Russian Empire, the KGB and internal security apparatus, the military, and a party leadership core closely tied to these institutions.

- Since August, the Central Committee Secretariat, which had functioned as the most powerful body after the Politburo, has ceased altogether holding regular weekly meetings. In short, it is defunct.

- Following the Sept. 30 plenum, more than half the 20 Central Committee departments have been abolished, and the personnel assigned to staff the CC apparatus reduced by some 40%.

- Since Gorbachov's hasty return to the Soviet Union from the United States in early December, the Politburo, which used to hold weekly meetings, has been meeting on an average of every three weeks.

- The latest Central Committee plenum, March 15-16, broke the rule in force since the founding of the Bolshevik state that only full members of the Central Committee may vote. At this plenum, all those invited, including candidate members who attend but never vote, the lower ranking Central Auditing Commission, and scores of attendees not on any of these bodies, all voted.

It is too early to tell whether this break with tradition, and the changing institutional power structures it embodies, will continue at future plenums. The next test is not far off: The next plenum is set for April.

## The circus and the cry for bread

The election results were otherwise a barometer of high popular anger over the extreme shortages of food and consumer goods, especially in the non-Russian republics. In Armenia, nationalist calls for a boycott were a huge success. Less than 30% voted there. In the Ukraine, with 50 million people by far the most populous of the non-Russian republics, those who voted did so to protest intolerable living conditions. In the Ukrainian city of Zhitomir, of five candidates, the only non-party candidate won with 90%, running on a "platform" demanding housing and food. In the western Ukrainian city of Lvov, 36,000 ballots were ripped up and then cast.