

Kremlin unites to crush Baltic hopes

by Konstantin George

The Aug. 26 Soviet Central Committee declaration which threatened the peoples of the three Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania with extermination, should they pursue the goal of national independence, not only had the explicit support of Mikhail Gorbachov, but was co-initiated by the Soviet President. This was announced by no less an authority than Politburo member Yegor Ligachov, in a Soviet TV interview Sept. 2. Ligachov, after dismissing Western press claims that Gorbachov either didn't know or didn't support the CC declaration, declared: "The CC declaration was drafted at the initiative of Mikhail Gorbachov." Conforming to the Western media attempt to portray Gorbachov as a liberal, besieged by a gang of hard-liners, this passage of Ligachov's interview was censored in the Western press.

Whatever other differences may exist, the Soviet leadership is united around a policy of crushing the Baltic independence movements this autumn, as proven since Aug. 26 by a string of tough statements and an unending wave of Soviet media denunciations of Baltic and other "nationalism" and "separatism."

Though officially silent, Gorbachov's role in this campaign also emerged via an interview given by Algirdas Brazauskas, the Lithuanian Communist Party leader, at the beginning of September, to the newspaper of Sajudis, the Lithuanian Popular Front. Brazauskas disclosed portions of telephone conversations he had held with Gorbachov on the Baltic crisis. Gorbachov, he reported, "underlined [the danger of secession] several times. No republic will leave the Soviet Union, but within the Federation, the republics will have everything."

Moscow's strategic problem

Faced with a Solidarnosc-led regime in Poland; the prospect of mass unrest in the populous Ukraine (the early September mass protests in Kiev, Lvov, and three other Ukrainian cities were only a foretaste); and proto-inter-ethnic civil war conditions in Moldavia (Bessarabia) and the Transcaucasus, Moscow cannot afford to let the Baltic move out of control.

On Sept. 1, by Viktor Chebrikov, the Politburo's key power-broker, ex-KGB head, and since Sept. 30, 1988, the man in charge of Soviet internal security and nationality

policy, sounded the alarm in an address to the U.S.S.R. Academy of Social Sciences in Moscow, portions of which were carried on Soviet TV. Chebrikov said that it was necessary to strike *now* against "nationalist extremists," pursuing "anti-Soviet and separatist" policies, because their influence has already become "alarmingly large."

Chebrikov stressed that no effective drive against "separatism" was possible without conducting a massive "renewal" of party ranks and leaders, i.e., a purge. He began his denunciation of weaknesses and problems in the party, by citing what Gorbachov had said in his July 18 speech to party leaders in Moscow, that "the party is lagging far behind the rest of society" in pursuing *perestroika*. Chebrikov complained bitterly that CP members had "stopped being political fighters," and had failed to counter "nationalism and separatism." He called for "decisive actions," and announced: "Additional measures will be taken to strengthen the organs of justice and the forces of order."

Twenty-four hours later, Yegor Ligachov appeared on Soviet TV and ominously declared that it was the "holy duty" of the population, clearly meaning the Great Russians, and of the Army, to crush Baltic nationalism. He accused the Baltic movements of "attacks on the Party, the glorious Army, the security organs, the Soviet Union itself. . . . It is our holy duty, through political means and the force of the law, to ensure the security of each and every person."

October showdown

The countdown to an October confrontation in the Baltic states has begun. The time-frame has been determined by: 1) the Sept. 5 decision of the Latvian Popular Front to hold a Congress in Latvia's capital, Riga, Oct. 7 and 8, to ratify a new draft program, calling for secession from the Soviet Union and the creation of "an independent and democratic Latvia," and a Latvian referendum to decide the matter; 2) also on Sept. 5, the decision by Lithuania's parliament to convene on Sept. 20 and vote during October on a new Lithuanian Citizenship Law, in defiance of warnings and threats from Moscow. An autumn agenda of mass inter-ethnic conflict and violence between the Baltic region's large Russian immigrant population and the native Estonians, Latvians, and Lithuanians, is fast coming together. The mood and policy of the Great Russian leadership in Moscow is to teach the Balts a lesson. This was expressed in undiluted form, at the National University of Mexico, Aug. 29, where the Soviet ambassador to Mexico, Rostislav Segeyev, was present to answer questions.

Responding to a query on the Baltic, he said: "We [Russians] are not the chauvinists. The chauvinists are the Estonians and Lithuanians. We are the majority; they are very few and have lived well at the expense of the Russians. . . . They have attacked the civilized order; with that electoral law they passed [in Estonia] . . . The U.S.S.R. Supreme Soviet has ordered it quashed, and that is what we will do."