

KGB strengthens its hand in Soviet Politburo shakeup

by Konstantin George

Shortly before midnight, Sept. 20, the Soviet media reported that a late evening session, devoted to "organizational questions," which featured "frank and open discussion," had concluded the two-day Communist Party Central Committee Plenum, with startling results. Two leading factional opponents of Mikhail Gorbachov were removed from the Politburo, while KGB chief Vladimir Kryuchkov was promoted to full Politburo membership, strengthening the role of the security service in the top Communist leadership body. Several of his henchmen also received promotions.

The shakeup boosted Gorbachov's power in the short term, although his rule will become increasingly in jeopardy as the manifold crises that are wracking the Soviet Union continue to deepen. If the point is reached that Moscow's collective leadership decides that the ultimate scapegoat is needed, Gorbachov's head will certainly roll—as indicated by the dark warnings and coup rumors that are currently circulating even in the public press (see article, page 32).

The official report of the shakeup read as follows: "The Central Committee relieved Viktor Nikonov, Viktor Chebrikov and Vladimir Shcherbitsky from their posts as members of the Politburo, Yuri Solovyov and Nikolai Talyzin from their posts as candidate members of the Politburo, as they applied for their retirement. . . . The Central Committee appointed Vladimir Kryuchkov, chairman of the KGB, to full membership on the Politburo, promoted Yuri Maslyukov, chairman of the State Planning Committee, from candidate to full membership on the Politburo . . . and promoted Yevgeni Primakov and Boris Pugo to candidate membership on the Politburo."

This announcement concluded an extremely tense and acrimonious Central Committee Plenum Sept. 19-20, held

against the backdrop of the economic crisis and national/ethnic unrest sweeping the Soviet Union. The plenum, whose main agenda item was the "nationality question," had been repeatedly postponed since June.

The ouster of three full Politburo members and two candidate members was the climax to a series of quick preemptive actions taken by Gorbachov, to forestall a rapidly growing coup or overthrow potential. He has succeeded, for now, only through the decisive support given him by the KGB.

In the weeks preceding the CC Plenum, Gorbachov used his powers as President to:

- 1) Take personal charge of the U.S.S.R.'s internal crisis control system, wresting it out of the hands of the General Staff;

- 2) Assume personal control of the Interior Ministry's 300,000-plus Interior Troops, including the Interior Troops component of the Moscow Garrison, ending the Defense Ministry's jurisdiction over the Interior Troops.

- 3) Take personal charge of the U.S.S.R. Railway Troops, which had previously been under the control of the General Staff.

While no firm predictions regarding personalities are possible regarding the wars in the Soviet leadership, the plenum's outcome presages a brutal Stalinist resurgence. The plenum's decision to move the date for the next Soviet Communist Party Congress from March 1991 to October 1990, defines an outer time limit when the final moves will be taken to define the leadership for the early 1990s.

Gorbachov's gamble

Gorbachov's power bid—and the promise of more purges to come—were openly declared in his keynote speech to the

plenum, the day before the leadership shakeup was confirmed. He announced that the "Politburo has proposed" that the October 1990 Party Congress undertake "a complete reorganization of the party and its ways of working. . . . We must bring in the most creative people and those who are most in support of *perestroika*." He called for an "injection of fresh blood" into the party, making clear that, should he get his way, many of the party's present leaders, will not be around come October 1990: "Several decisions made at the 27th Party Congress [March 1986] and at the 19th Party Conference [June-July 1988]" have already become "obsolete. . . . A political and ideological struggle will be waged on core questions of our development. . . . The Party Congress must ensure a reorganization of the party and ideological unity on the basis of *perestroika*."

He stressed that the purge process would begin well before the Party Congress, since "preparations" for the Party Congress "must serve to renew the Party Committees at all levels," including the "Central Committee, which is growing in importance."

Gorbachov has won this round, but only, as so often in the past, through the decisive intervention of the KGB. As in his prior "victories," this time too, he has paid a high price to his KGB benefactors. The institutional power of the secret police unit, already immense, was further strengthened.

Through the KGB, Gorbachov was able to remove from power **Viktor Chebrikov**, the extremely powerful Politburo member who, since Sept. 30, 1988, had functioned as the overall head of internal security. By ousting Chebrikov, Gorbachov scored a very important short-term gain, as Chebrikov was the key anchor man on the Politburo in any short-term coup plot against Gorbachov. The other Politburo victims, Ukrainian Party chief **Vladimir Shcherbitsky** and **Viktor Nikonov**, would also have joined a coup attempt.

Of the four promotions, three went to the KGB and its associates in the military-industrial complex, leading with KGB chief **Vladimir Kryuchkov**, now a full member of the Politburo. The second promotion to full Politburo membership went to **Yuri Maslyukov**, a central figure in the military-industrial complex. Gorbachov was unable to promote a single loyalist party personage, such as Soviet Vice-President Anatoli Lukyanov, who remains in the limbo of candidate, or non-voting, status on the Politburo.

Kryuchkov's career in the past 12 months marks the most meteoric rise of a secret police chief since Lavrenti Beria during the Stalin regime. It was only last Sept. 30 that a CC Plenum had named Kryuchkov, one of the closest protégés of the late Yuri Andropov, chairman of the KGB and later General Secretary and President. Before that, Kryuchkov had served since 1974 as head of KGB foreign intelligence. Thus, it took Kryuchkov barely a year to make the jump from KGB chairman to full Politburo membership. In comparison, his predecessor, Chebrikov, required two years and four months, and Andropov required a full six years.

Buttressing Kryuchkov's promotion, two pedigree KGB

figures, **Yevgeni Primakov** and **Boris Pugo**, were elevated to candidate membership in the Politburo. Primakov had been, successively, the head of two KGB-linked think tanks, the Oriental Institute and the Institute of the World Economy and International Relations (IMEMO). Pugo, the offspring of a thoroughly Russified Latvian secret police family, dating back to the post-1917 Cheka of Feliks Dzhzhzhinsky, is a career KGB officer, who headed the KGB in Latvia till 1984, when he was appointed Communist Party chief in that republic. As with Kryuchkov, Pugo was given a hefty promotion at the Sept. 30, 1988 CC Plenum, when he was appointed head of the Party Control Commission, a key vehicle for overseeing party purges.

'Resolute measures' threatened

The record of the plenum proceedings, beginning with Gorbachov's keynote speech, mapped a brutal future for Soviet policy—with or without Gorbachov. To wild applause, Gorbachov announced that a law would be passed to ban "nationalist, chauvinist, and other extremist organizations," adding that "the entire force of Soviet laws will be applied" to deal with national unrest. Similarly, stormy applause interrupted him when he denounced those "who shout rubbish about independence," or, as in the case of Lithuania, talk about "party federalism," or "independence."

Concerning the stormy situation in the Baltic republics, which were forcibly incorporated into the U.S.S.R. as a result of the Hitler-Stalin Pact and World War II, and are now demanding freedom and independence, Gorbachov did not mince words: "There is no reason to call into question the decision of the Baltic republics to join the Soviet Union, nor the choice made by the people of these republics. Only adventurers could propose to leave the Soviet Union."

Gorbachov's warnings to Armenia and Azerbaijan—where a near-civil war situation is currently raging—were no less blunt. He said that the crisis in these two republics had reached a point where "unpredictable consequences" could occur: "We face the need to adopt resolute measures. We cannot permit anarchy and bloodshed."

Speaker after speaker then rose to demand tough actions against "nationalist extremism." Absamat Masaliev, party boss of the Central Asian republic of Kirgizia, said, "The time has come . . . to bring to order those who openly speak out against our structure, our unity, sabotage *perestroika*, and abuse democracy."

Yuri Yelchenko, a Ukrainian Party CC Secretary, demanded action against a "series of independent formations which have clear anti-socialist platforms, the basis of which often lies in bourgeois nationalism." He charged that such groups are "especially active" in the Catholic Western Ukraine, and then accused the newly formed Ukrainian national Narodni Rukh ("Popular Movement") of planning to "seize power" from the Communist Party. Yelchenko demanded laws to ban "nationalistic or chauvinistic organizations and groups."