

Gorbachov bans strikes, warns that Kremlin is 'losing control'

by Konstantin George

On Oct. 2, Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachov addressed the U.S.S.R. Supreme Soviet to demand a 15-month total ban on strikes, with the following words: "We cannot wait any longer. Every additional day brings terrible consequences. We have started to lose control of things. New methods have not taken root. The old ones no longer work. . . . We must avoid anarchy."

It is too late, however, for Gorbachov or anyone else to "avoid anarchy" in the Soviet Union. A physical breakdown of the Soviet civilian economy, compounded by national unrest, has generated a devastating crisis of confidence and a constantly expanding strike wave.

Glimpses into the breakdown were provided by Lev Voronin, first deputy prime minister of the U.S.S.R., who addressed the Supreme Soviet after Gorbachov. Voronin reported that strikes in 1989 had resulted in the loss of 5 million working days, including 2 million working days in the Transcaucasus area (the republics of Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan) alone. During September, rail freight "disorganization" affected 600,000 tons of food and industrial supplies, while September rail strikes in Moldavia blocked 130 freight trains bringing badly needed consumer goods from Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Romania.

The Soviet trade union daily, *Trud*, revealed Sept. 21 that the threat of a nationwide construction strike also loomed over the Soviet leadership deliberations on what to try to do about the crisis. Cutbacks in cement supplies to central construction organizations, due to an overall shortage and the allocation of 153,000 tons of cement for sale to non-centralized construction cooperatives, could put 150,000 construction workers, especially in the nuclear power industry, out of work. In the face of this, their union warned the government of "a possible mass strike by the [power] sector's construction industry workers," according to *Trud*.

At the Supreme Soviet session, Voronin described the catastrophic situation of energy stocks. Winter weather is already at hand, as Moscow temperatures plummeted to near freezing in early October. Strikes by coal miners last July left coal stocks at thermal power plants 4.5 million tons below target, he said, down to a near-record postwar pre-winter low of less than 3 million tons. Any renewed miners' strikes would lead to crippling power shortages and failures in many parts of the Soviet Union.

This is a particular serious lack, as *Pravda* reported Sept. 26, because "today, when the nuclear energy program has been noticeably cut back, thermal power stations have to bear the main load." The past summer's drought in Central Asia and Siberia worsens matters, because the reservoirs behind hydroelectric stations are not full.

Pravda on Oct. 4 reported bluntly that the country was completely unprepared for winter, and would face likely power cuts, fuel supply shortages, and inadequate and broken heating equipment. "Preparations for winter are being carried out extremely unsatisfactorily," the paper wrote. "The aftermath of Chernobyl, accidents on the railways, the earthquake in Armenia, and mass disruptions of law and order have taken their toll. All this has left a negative stamp on preparations for the cold season."

According to *Pravda*, there is a 13 million-ton shortage of coal supplies, and supplies in regions with the bitterest winter weather are well below normal. Another 20 million tons of coal has failed to be moved from the mines by the railways.

The situation with food is equally bleak. A winter of hunger, and possibly famine in some areas, is approaching, and the population knows it. Pre-winter hoarding had begun already in September. A Sept. 29 Soviet TV interview by economist Tatyana Zaslavskaya, saying that given severe food shortages, the Supreme Soviet would "have to" adopt strict "food rationing," transformed the panic-buying trend into a torrent.

LaRouche predicted a bloody crackdown

The process that would lead to a Soviet economic breakdown by 1989 was foreseen by Lyndon LaRouche as early as 1983, when Yuri Andropov was in power, and restated in detail in LaRouche's introduction to *EIR*'s July 1985 "Global Showdown" Special Report. Then a year ago, following the Sept. 30, 1988 Soviet Central Committee Plenum, LaRouche forecast that Moscow, in response to the crisis, would expand its elite security forces, as the means for executing a bloody crackdown. In a statement released on Oct. 3, 1989, LaRouche warned again, "They're going to propose a crackdown . . . on the wave of strikes inside various parts of the Soviet Empire—a bloody show is coming up there."

Within hours of that most recent statement, on Oct. 3,

the U.S.S.R. Supreme Soviet passed a law inaugurating just such a crackdown. Although ostensibly a more moderate version of Gorbachov's demand for a 15-month total strike ban, in fact the law banned all strikes in four key sectors of the economy, and was worded loosely enough to define almost the entire industrial, transport, and energy economy within those four categories. The four sectors are: transport; metallurgy; raw materials, raw-materials processing, and manufacturing industries; and the energy sector.

The strike ban was coupled with a Gorbachov ultimatum, adopted by the Supreme Soviet, that "emergency steps" employing forces of the Interior Ministry and the Defense Ministry "to normalize the situation on the railways" would be taken, beginning in Azerbaijan and Armenia. This constituted the last warning to end the total rail blockade, in effect since August, imposed by Azerbaijan on the neighboring republic of Armenia and the Armenian-inhabited region of Nagorno-Karabakh, located within Azerbaijan. The blockade, which has cut off all non-military fuel deliveries to Armenia and Karabakh, has caused a total shutdown of production and transport in these areas. The new law also signaled the intent to use the military to end the rail strikes in the republic of Moldavia, bordering on Romania, and in such sporadic rail and port strikes and slowdowns as have hit the Ukraine since August.

The ultimatum to Azerbaijan gave that republic until Oct. 9 to end the blockade. An earlier ultimatum had been delivered by Gorbachov on Sept. 25, and expired on Sept. 27. The blockade was maintained, and that time, Gorbachov did nothing. But the fuel blockade of Armenia must be broken before the onset of the harsh Armenian winters, and Gorbachov cannot and will not risk losing face a second time around. He knows the fatal penalties that can strike in the brutal world of Kremlin politics.

On Oct. 6, Azerbaijan's Supreme Soviet upped the ante, passing a law proclaiming the republic's "sovereignty within the U.S.S.R." and asserting its "right of secession," with any decision to secede to be reached by a popular referendum.

With every passing day, the crisis deepens and grows. In early October, ethnic clashes in the Georgian Muslim region of South Ossetia were disrupting Georgia's rail links with Russia, threatening to create another blockade situation in the Transcaucasus.

Radio Moscow reported on Oct. 5 that units of the Interior and Defense ministries have arrived to guard certain sections of the railways in the region.

Shevardnadze: massacres to come

Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze, in a speech Oct. 2 before the Foreign Policy Association in New York, compared the present Soviet crisis with the crisis America experienced during the years of the Great Depression, and underlined that the Soviet Union will not be spared bloodshed. "Let me . . . draw some parallels between, for

example, the current situation in our economy and the Great American Depression," he said. "In Washington troops were fighting the Bonus Army . . . people were dying in demonstrations, strikes, and riots."

Such words have already been matched by deeds of butchery:

- On Oct. 1, in the western Ukrainian city of Lvov, several hundred troops of the Interior Ministry's dreaded Special Units, composed of elite former *spetsnaz* commando and airborne veterans of the Afghan War, attacked a group of 100 Ukrainian nationalists, marching with Ukrainian flags. Attacks had happened in Lvov often before, in the form of beatings with clubs. This time, the troops, who outnumbered the marchers, fired plastic bullets at close range and even point-blank. Fifteen people were taken to the hospital in serious condition, and one person in very critical condition. Several women marchers were shot in the eye with plastic bullets.

- On Oct. 2, in the small Russian town of Sielsto, 120 miles northwest of Moscow, a food riot broke out and a crowd tried to storm the local police station. According to *Pravda* on Oct. 3, "warning shots" were fired—but the "warning shots" killed 1 person and wounded 11.

- On Oct. 4, the U.S.S.R. Supreme Soviet passed "urgent measures" called for by Gorbachov to "considerably beef up" the "special units of Interior Troops," to far more than their present strength of 36,000. Gorbachov had called for this in his concluding speech to the summer session of the Supreme Soviet Aug. 4, when he emphasized the need for Interior Ministry forces, which he has since placed under his personal command, to combat what he called "mass insubordination."

The new laws passed provide for increasing the Interior Ministry's budget "by two- or threefold" over the next two years. In an interview with the Soviet government newspaper *Izvestia* published Oct. 4, Gen. A. Griyenko, the commander of the Interior Ministry special units, stated directly that the increases were required to suppress outbreaks in the Transcaucasus and other regions.

The crackdown that has begun, bloody as it will be, will not succeed over the short term in establishing anything approximating order or stability within the empire. The breakdown in the economy, and the consequent total lack of confidence in the Moscow regime, have become so ensconced in the population, justifiably so, that massive repression not only will not succeed, but will generate new escalations in anti-Soviet resistance.

The Ukrainian response to the Lvov massacre proves the point. In former times, such a demonstration of brutality would have worked. But on Oct. 3, some 30,000 people in Lvov defied threats and warnings and staged a demonstration to protest the massacre. In the Nikopol and other regions of the Ukraine, the first coal miners strikes began, ahead of schedule, in enraged protest over what happened in Lvov.