

Soviet state dictatorship tries to curb revolution

by Konstantin George

During the March 12-13 extraordinary session of the U.S.S.R. Congress of People's Deputies, Mikhail Gorbachov will be duly ratified as President of the U.S.S.R. and given by far the greatest collection of powers ever held by any single ruler in Russian history. The coronation of "Czar Mikhail," the inauguration of what is intended to be the rebirth of one-man absolutist rule in the footsteps of Ivan Grozny ("The Terrible"), Lenin, and Stalin, is occurring in the context of a revolutionary process that is shaking the Russian Empire to its foundations and bringing to an end the Bolshevik period in Russian history. The process of imposition of an absolutist "presidential" system, includes the demise of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) as the country's principal ruling institution.

The significance of the increased power of the presidency, is that the demise of the CPSU has left Moscow no choice but to create a state dictatorship as the alternative structure. The Communist Party's Central Committee as a power is dead and buried. The Party Politburo, which now meets only once per month, will soon follow. The Party across the country is in a shambles.

The very composition of the emerging state dictatorship structure, dominated by the state security organs and the military, under President Gorbachov, shows that it was created in response to the threat of revolution and civil war. Its highest body is the Presidential Council, consisting of President Gorbachov, Prime Minister Nikolai Ryzhkov, the defense minister (currently Dmitri Yazov, a transitional figure who will not survive this year), KGB chairman Vladimir Kryuchkov, Interior Minister Vadim Bakatin, and Justice Minister Veniamin Yakovlev. The personalities are not the important matter; the posts are.

The very attempt to impose a presidential dictatorship in

the Soviet Union response to revolutionary developments, has ironically but lawfully caused an acceleration of the underlying social revolutionary process. Following the mid-February unveiling of the planned Gorbachov presidential dictatorship coup, the largest demonstrations since the 1917 February Revolution swept the U.S.S.R.'s three core Slavic republics: Russia, Ukraine, and Belorussia. On Feb. 25, one week before the March 4 elections in these republics, demonstrations involving a total of more than 1 million people were held in no fewer than 340 cities and towns in these republics. They were called to protest the imposition of a presidential dictatorship, demanding the President be elected democratically, by direct vote, and not rubber-stamped by the Congress of People's Deputies.

These demands illustrate a fascinating dynamic under way in the Soviet Union. Until mid-February, angry demonstrations in Russian provincial centers, and in early February, a huge throng in Moscow itself, had targeted the Communist Party apparatus on the regional and local levels; wittingly or unwittingly, the mass movement was functioning as a battering ram for accelerating the demise of the party hierarchy as such, to create the political precondition for the transition to the emerging post-Bolshevik state dictatorship.

Then, after mid-February, when Gorbachov's intentions became clear, the mass movement also took on the character of a popular movement against the presidential dictatorship. This dynamic continued into the March 4 elections, whose results guaranteed the demise of the CPSU as a ruling authority before the end of this year.

The March 4 elections

With very few exceptions, those Russian and Ukrainian regional party leaders (Belorussian results are still too incom-

plete to analyze) who dared to run as candidates (most did not even try) in the March 4 elections were either defeated outright, or failed to get a majority, thus being accorded the humiliation of having to face an opponent in the March 18 run-off elections. In the Russian Federation, of 24 regional party leaders who ran, 15 were defeated. In Leningrad, the party leadership simply didn't run, and in the Leningrad City Council, the local offshoot of the Democratic Russia movement, called Democratic Elections '90, now has a solid majority. The Moscow City Party chief, Yuri Prokofyev, failed to win a majority on the first round, and must run again in the run-off. Prokofyev's fate was a common one. The majority of seats in the Russian Federation parliament will first be decided in the March 18 run-offs.

As expected, Boris Yeltsin, a Russian nationalist with populist trappings, won a resounding victory, with 85% of the vote in the Ural city of Sverdlovsk. He campaigned for the immediate introduction of "maximal autonomy" for each republic in a "new federation," beginning with the "rebirth of the Russian Federation." Yeltsin is already a proclaimed candidate for the post of President of the Russian Federation, and now, in the wake of his victory, is likely to get that post. Yeltsin's mix of Russian nationalism—not chauvinism, as is sometimes thought in the West—and the demand for autonomy to Russia *and all* non-Russian republics, is neither contradictory nor mere rhetoric. It is a serious call for a "revolution from the top," to assuage national demands, to secure the crucial goal of preserving as much of the U.S.S.R. as possible, above all its Slavic core, before the growing revolution "from below" fractures it, and civil war and what Yeltsin calls "total chaos" ensue.

Yeltsin is not opposed to strong presidential rule as such, nor to Gorbachov being President, conditional on what policies Gorbachov pursues, but does oppose the imposition of presidential rule *now*. In Yeltsin's words, it must not occur before "maximal autonomy is granted to the republics in a new Treaty of Association defining the rights and powers of the center and the republics." This is based on the sober estimation that strong presidential rule in and of itself, without a strengthening of the republics, will provoke a radical acceleration in the Slavic core's disintegration.

Rukh victory in Ukraine

How fast the revolutionary process is growing in the non-Russian Slavic republics is dramatically seen in the March 4 Ukrainian election results. The Ukrainian national movement, Rukh, first legalized as an "informal association" only on Feb. 9, won an impressive 30% of the vote, and all its leading figures won seats in the Ukrainian parliament, including its chairman Ivan Drach, its leading pro-independence spokesmen Anatoli Lukyanenko, and the brothers Horun. Rukh had campaigned on a platform calling for "real sovereignty and independence for the republic." The head of the Ukrainian Communist Party,

Vladimir Ivashko, who is also a full member of the Soviet Politburo, was humiliated, failing to win a majority in his Kiev election district. Ivashko will have to face a Rukh opponent in the March 18 run-off.

These run-offs, as in the Russian Federation, will be decisive in shaping the overall composition of the new parliaments. In Ukraine as a whole, more than half of all seats will be decided in the run-off elections, and no fewer than 20 of 22 seats in the capital of Kiev. In the eastern Ukrainian Donbass region, the coal-mining area that spearheaded last summer's mass strike movement, every single party functionary was defeated on March 4.

The Baltic states

Gorbachov's drive to have himself crowned as czar-dictator by March 13 has also dramatically moved forward the Baltic states' timetable for proclaiming independence. On Feb. 27, three days after the Lithuanian elections gave an overwhelming majority to the candidates of the pro-independence Sajudis, or Popular Front, representatives of Lithuania, Estonia, and Latvia, demanding Baltic independence, met with Gorbachov in Moscow. Gorbachov's response was: full autonomy, yes, independence emphatically no.

The stage was set for a showdown. Overnight, Lithuania announced that its run-off elections for 51 seats where no candidate received a majority, would be moved up from March 10 to March 3. This will allow the pro-independence Lithuanian parliament to convene before the March 12-13 U.S.S.R. Congress of People's Deputies session. The Lithuanian Parliament will convene March 10 and 11, and is expected to proclaim national independence.

On March 3, the same day as the Lithuanian run-offs, leaders of Lithuania and Estonia convened in the Estonian capital of Tallinn to hastily coordinate a joint strategy in negotiations for their independence. Estonia's own independence proclamation is expected soon after elections are held there on March 18.

However, *proclaiming* independence and *achieving* independence are not synonymous. The question of Western support is crucial. These three small republics are totally dependent on the U.S.S.R. for oil, natural gas, coal, and nearly every category of raw materials. Until Western aid upgrades and modernizes their industry, most of their output would remain unsaleable on Western markets. Finally, hundreds of thousands of Russian troops are stationed in these republics as occupation forces.

The first glimpse of how rocky the road to independence will be was provided by the Lithuanian press of March 7, which revealed that Gorbachov had told Lithuanian leaders that the republic, if it wanted independence, would have to start by paying Moscow 21 billion rubles in "compensation" for 17 billion rubles worth of Soviet "investments" in Lithuania since 1940, and 4 billion rubles for "non-delivery" of goods to the rest of the Soviet Union.