

Will the West hear Lithuania's appeal?

by Konstantin George

The Soviet state leadership, in an agreement worked out between President Mikhail Gorbachov, the Army, and the KGB, is preparing a potentially bloody confrontation against the three Baltic republics and Ukraine. The confrontation is expected to peak in January, timed with the Persian Gulf crisis coming to a head.

The tone for the confrontation was set in two addresses, one by Gorbachov on Dec. 10 to a Central Committee Plenum of the Soviet Communist Party, and the second on Dec. 11 in a nationally television speech by Soviet KGB boss Vladimir Kryuchkov.

Gorbachov thundered that the individual republics have achieved their current enhanced "weight" only because the U.S.S.R. is a "powerful state" and forms a "reliable guarantee" for their stability, the basis for their "international prestige," and "the present world order."

Kryuchkov spelled out the threat veiled behind those words, accusing "nationalists" in the non-Russian republics of getting material and financial support from foreign intelligence agencies. He stopped just short of directly accusing the pro-independence forces in republics such as the Baltic states and Ukraine of being part of a foreign-directed plot to destroy the Soviet state:

"The growth of some ultra-radical movements is not at all accidental, but deliberate. Some of them have material and financial support from abroad. The KGB personnel sees as its duty not to allow interference by foreign specialized services and those foreign organizations which, with their support, have been conducting a secret war against the Soviet Union for decades. Forces are striving to achieve power. . . .

"Today the question is this: Will our great state exist or not? There is no doubt that every honest reasonable Soviet citizen will answer decisively, Yes! . . . The threat of the Soviet Union's collapse has emerged, national chauvinism is being funneled and mass disorder and violence are being provoked."

The KGB, he concluded, will "firmly guard security, legality, law, and order. It has acted and will act as a barrier against those forces which seek to push the country toward chaos."

Lithuania appeals to the West

The main focus of the crackdown in progress is the Baltic republics and Ukraine. Moscow's drive for a showdown was brought to the world's attention through appeals to the West issued by Lithuanian President Vytautas Landsbergis, during his visit to Canada and the United States Dec. 9-10. Meeting President Bush on the Dec. 10, Landsbergis declared that independent Lithuania is faced with the imminent "threat of a military intervention" and/or renewed economic blockade by the Soviet Union.

A day earlier, after meeting with Canadian Prime Minister Brian Mulroney, Landsbergis had disclosed that the Soviet government had issued a behind-the-scenes ultimatum to Lithuania, giving that Baltic republic until Jan. 1 to agree in principle to the so-called new Union Treaty (i.e., to agree to remain in the Soviet Union, while "negotiating" over a several-year period the "transition" to independence), or else face an economic cutoff. Landsbergis called on the West to supply Lithuania with food in the event of a Soviet blockade, adding,

"We were told that we wouldn't get any more grain. Please, don't let your aid [the food aid to the Soviet Union] be used as a weapon."

As Landsbergis was making his appeals, it was clear to the average Soviet television viewer that something big was in the works. On Dec. 8, Soviet television gave extensive coverage to a minuscule anti-independence demonstration that day in the Lithuanian capital of Vilnius. The broadcaster read out the demonstration's demand for the creation of a "transition government representing all the democratic forces," whose task would be to "restore order." The broadcast further accused President Landsbergis of having "betrayed the people" and having set up in Lithuania a "totalitarian, nationalist system based on the pre-war model." The broadcast amounted to support for a coup to overthrow the government of independent Lithuania.

The White House's response to the intimidation against Lithuania was to say that it hoped the Soviet Union would not use "threats, intimidation," or military intervention against Lithuania. Then, ever so careful not to blame Moscow for anything, the White House "regretted" that "tensions still exist between the Baltic states and the central government." A more calculated insult against Landsbergis could not be imagined, by backing Moscow's illegal claim that it is, for Lithuania, a "central government," rather than an occupying power.

The timetable for Moscow's confrontation with the Baltic republics is now shaping up as follows. Gorbachov will deliver a report to the U.S.S.R. Congress of People's Deputies when it convenes on Dec. 17, and in it will demand the "constitutional" ratification of presidential emergency powers. He will demand that all republics commit themselves in principle to accepting the new Union Treaty. He will then allow about two weeks for a reply, and come January, the confrontation with the Baltic and other republics will be on.

Outrages in Ukraine

Moscow is coupling its assault against the Baltic republics with a phased escalation against the pro-independence forces of Ukraine, centered in the Ukrainian national movement, Rukh. The attack on Ukraine's patriots took a very ugly turn with the arrest in early December of Stepan Khmara, a Rukh member of the Ukrainian Parliament. Khmara had begun a hunger strike on Nov. 26, in protest against new laws passed by the Parliament's Communist majority, banning demonstrations in the center of Kiev, the capital, and banning any demonstrations on weekdays.

The arrest resulted from a staged "incident" at the site of his hunger strike, when a colonel of the Soviet Interior Troops, in civilian clothes and thus not recognizable as an officer, began beating a woman supporter of the hunger striker. Khmara and others rushed to her assistance, and police showed up and arrested him for attacking the colonel. Now Khmara, through the combined effects of the hunger strike

Ukrainian appeal to the parliaments of the world

Here is the full text of the appeal issued on Dec. 5 by the Ukrainian Parliament's bloc of anti-Bolshevik deputies, the Narodna Rada.

The Narodna Rada, the opposition in the Parliament of the sovereign Republic of Ukraine, turns to all parliaments of the world with an appeal to help us in our striving to secure the release from prison of **Stepan Khmara**—a fighter for human rights, a former prisoner of conscience, an initiator of the Helsinki Human Rights Movement, who has been imprisoned as a result of an illegal decision of the Supreme Soviet of Ukraine.

The unprecedented arrest of this parliamentary deputy within the walls of Parliament we view as a return to neo-Stalinism, to the infamous trials of Daniel and Sinyavsky, Bukovsky and Yuri Orlov, Dzhemilev and Vasyl Stus, Mirab Kostava and Zviad Gamsakhurdia, and the trampling of Andrei Sakharov's testament.

We ask you to help in saving the life of this person, who declared a hunger strike on Nov. 26, 1990, and is now close to death.

Democracy in Ukraine is in peril! Help defend human rights!

and prison, is reported close to death.

If Moscow gets away with the arrest of Khmara, it can and will act likewise against other parliamentary deputies in the non-Russian republics.

Moscow's next escalation in Ukraine was not long in coming. A demonstration of 5,000 in Kiev on Dec. 9, called to demand the release of Khmara from prison, was forced to disperse through intimidation by over 1,000 police and Interior Troops, complete with armored personnel carriers, water cannons, arms, and clubs. Faced by such force, the crowd, which included many women and some children, decided to end the demonstration.

Moscow's ability to get away with such brutality is a direct function of the dirty deal that it has struck with Washington and London, both of which have granted Russia's leadership a free hand to do as it pleases against the freedom-fighter victims of Yalta in the non-Russian republics. No better proof of the betrayal of freedom and the hypocrisy of the Bush administration can be provided, than contrasting its neocolonial policy in the Gulf and its policy concerning the Baltic and other independence-seeking republics.