

Results of surprise Soviet plenum are shrouded in secrecy

On Oct. 21, the very day that U.S. Secretary of State George Shultz arrived in Moscow for discussions which were supposed to finalize the "Munich II" arms-control treaty for disengaging the United States from Europe, the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party held a surprise meeting, which was extraordinary in several respects:

- There had been no advance announcement of the plenum or hint of any such meeting in the Soviet media, since the conclusion of the last plenum in June.
- The plenum was announced only the day before, by the *foreign ministry*—a quite unusual development, since the plenum was an affair of the Communist Party apparatus, not the government.
- The Soviet media devoted almost no coverage to the meeting, and did not report the content of the report delivered there by General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachov.
- The meeting confirmed the "resignation" of Politburo member Geidar Aliyev, one of the most powerful men in the Soviet Union.

These developments take place amid a fierce factional battle within the Soviet leadership, over how fast and how far Gorbachov's twin policies of *glasnost* (openness) and *perestroika* (reconstruction) should be allowed to go (see *EIR*, Oct. 9, 1987, "Gorbachov joins the ranks of the undead," by Lyndon H. LaRouche, Jr.). Gorbachov's policies are aimed at overhauling the Soviet economy and bureaucratic structure, to facilitate a war build-up of unprecedented proportions. But in so doing, he is attacking the institutionalized form of internal stability of the post-Stalin order, causing growing alarm from a "neo-Stalinist" faction within the Soviet bureaucracy.

Radio Moscow's short summary of the Oct. 21 Central Committee plenum openly admitted a raging fight: "The Plenum met at a critical point in *perestroika*, at a time where forces opposed to *perestroika* are continuing to resist the process of *perestroika*."

The factional issues will necessarily surface publicly during the Nov. 6-7 celebration of the 70th anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution, when Gorbachov is scheduled to give a major speech. Rumors are rife that he will choose that occasion to denounce the errors of the Stalin period and "rehabilitate" such leaders of the anti-Stalin opposition as

Nikolai Bukharin and Leon Trotsky. Such a move has been publicly rejected by top Kremlin figures like Politburo member Yegor Ligachov, who have opposed Gorbachov's "focusing on the negative," and who want an anniversary celebration that dwells instead on the "positive achievements" of the Soviet Union.

The Soviet media greeted Gorbachov's report to the plenum with a deafening silence: Contrary to past practice, no Soviet media reprinted the text nor any quotes from his speech. Soviet radio reported tersely: "The Central Committee approved a report delivered to it by General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachov, on matters related to the 70th anniversary of the October Revolution, and to some current tasks."

The tense situation manifested at the plenum, has been evident in speeches by Gorbachov, following his late September reappearance. At a speech in Murmansk, he had urged Soviet citizens not to "panic," a word only used once before by the Soviet leadership, when the death of Stalin was announced on March 5, 1953. He admitted that *perestroika* had not yet "turned the corner." In Gorbachov's next major speech, in Leningrad in early October, he stressed the need to be on guard so that the "mechanism" of *perestroika*, in "all spheres . . . above all in the economic," does not "break down."

Aliyev's ouster

Another issue which has been the subject of heated debate concerns policy toward the U.S.S.R.'s nationalities. It is here that the "resignation" of Geidar Aliyev becomes particularly significant. According to the Soviet press report, Aliyev, 64, "resigned from his functions . . . at his own request . . . due to the state of his health." Aliyev had disappeared from public view from May 11 until early September.

Is there more to it than ill health? It is premature to say for sure, but consider the background:

Aliyev was the only Muslim on the Politburo. His portfolio includes special operations—including terrorism—in the Mideast and Asia. Before coming to Moscow, he operated for 15 years out of Soviet Azerbaijan, first as its KGB chief and then as first secretary of the Communist Party there. He tore the party and state apparatus apart from top to bottom, replacing nearly 2,000 officials with KGB men, in order to carry out a pilot project that became known as "the Azerbaijan experiment." His special formula—the model for today's *glasnost*—was a sweeping anti-corruption purge and attention to the "spiritual needs" of the population.

But now, there's trouble in Azerbaijan: Rioting broke out this summer, and on Sept. 26 *Pravda* reported that the Politburo had reviewed "shortcomings" in the work of the Azerbaijan Institute of the National Economy, and had decided to "liquidate" the institute.

Aliyev's policies are also called into question by the U.S. military deployment in the Persian Gulf, which forces Moscow to choose between its traditional Arab alliances, and open backing for Khomeini's Iran.