

# Yeltsin ouster flags neo-Stalinist era

by Konstantin George

The decision to remove Boris Yeltsin as first secretary of the powerful Moscow City Party Committee, puts a spotlight on the neo-Stalinist surge in the Soviet Union, and the growing difficulties confronting Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachov. Yeltsin's ouster sheds more light on what happened at the Soviet Central Committee Oct. 21 Plenum, from which neither Yeltsin's nor any of the other speeches were even summarized in the Soviet press.

Yeltsin's expulsion was announced at a meeting of the Moscow City Party Committee on Nov. 11, attended by Gorbachov, and the number-two man on the Politburo, ideology boss Yegor Ligachov. Gorbachov accused Yeltsin of doubting the "leadership's and Party's work," and said that he "even went so far as to claim that *perestroika* [restructuring] had done nothing for the people." The language used that day, in both the denunciations of Yeltsin and Yeltsin's "confession," was identical to the language of the Stalin show trials of the 1930s.

Moscow City Party functionaries accused Yeltsin of having "stabbed the Party in the back," "servicing the [Western] diplomatic corps," and having "put the Moscow Party organization into opposition to the Central Committee," threatening to "split" the leadership. That latter charge is an almost verbatim repetition of Stalin's accusations against 1920s Moscow Party boss, Lev Kamenev, who was first ousted and disgraced, and then in the 1930s tried and executed.

As for Yeltsin, had he substituted the name "Stalin" for "Gorbachov," his confession would have been identical to a 1930s show trial "confession": "I am very guilty personally before Mikhail Sergeyeovich Gorbachov, whose authority is so high, in our Party organization, in our country, and in the whole world."

Gorbachov's difficulties, at least for the short term, should not be overestimated, provided that the Dec. 7 summit sticks and its accompanying INF treaty is signed. If that happens, Gorbachov, presiding over the greatest sell-out by free nations since the 1938 Munich conference, will stay in the saddle. The Soviet collective leadership places a priority on achieving this "Munich II" and if possible, going on from there to reach further accords on strategic weapons reduction, provided Washington moves to cripple the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) program. This strategic priority was underscored in the resolution issued from the Politburo's Nov. 12 weekly meeting:

"The Politburo approved the results of the U.S.-Soviet

talks . . . and sees a constructive dialogue emerging. . . . The Soviet leadership intends . . . to sign a first Treaty to remove and destroy medium-range systems of greater and shorter range . . . and go from there to reach agreement on reducing strategic reductions, and sign it, provided the ABM Treaty is adhered to." Moscow is in a hurry. First Deputy Foreign Minister Yuli Vorontsov, after two days of meetings in Geneva with U.S. chief negotiator Max Kampelman, announced on Nov. 18 that he expects the draft treaty text to be "ready by Nov. 23."

While the summit and the INF treaty appear to be set, many other things are not, and the Soviet leadership knows this all too well. In the United States, opposition to the INF treaty is growing. Moscow's main concern is, no one knows what will follow the Reagan administration, and therefore whether any "New Yalta" agreement reached with the Reagan administration can stick.

## The Yeltsin affair

Yeltsin had embodied the all-out *glasnost* (openness) campaign, to emphasize the "negative" concerning Soviet society. He was appointed by Gorbachov to run the Moscow Party in December 1985, and then elevated to candidate member of the Politburo. Through a series of speeches over the past two years, he had emerged as an *enfant terrible*, publicly flinging undifferentiated criticism against the ruling strata, the *nomenklatura*. No Soviet leading functionary has ever gotten away with this—as Yeltsin has now discovered.

At the 27th Party Congress in 1986, Yeltsin denounced the functioning of the Central Committee apparatus, which meant an attack on Ligachov, who ranks second not only in the Politburo, but also in the Central Secretariat, responsible for the day-to-day running of the Central Committee apparatus. Last June, Yeltsin delivered the speech before the Moscow Military Air Defense District Council, where he scathingly reported the expulsion from the CPSU, in disgrace, of four generals, after young Matthias Rust of West Germany landed in Red Square. The tactless way he attacked the military earned him yet another powerful institutional enemy.

How was he then able to stay in power so long? Some of the answer was provided, ironically, in Gorbachov's speech denouncing him, where Gorbachov indirectly conceded a raging struggle in the Soviet leadership throughout this year. Gorbachov admitted that the fight against Yeltsin had begun "during the preparations for the January [1987] Plenum," and stated that at Central Committee Plenums, criticism of the Politburo, the Central Committee Secretariat, and "of individual persons," is "normal."

As important a signal as Yeltsin's removal was the naming of his successor in the Moscow Party post, Politburo member Lev Zaikov, a protégé of the late Yuri Andropov, and, since July 1985, Central Committee secretary in charge of the huge military industry sector.