

Ligachov disputes Gorbachov's reforms

by Rachel Douglas

The power struggle in the Soviet Union erupted with new force in the early days of August, when General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachov left on his summer vacation and Politburo member Yegor Ligachov used a tour of the provinces as the occasion to open fire on Gorbachov's changes in domestic and foreign policy. It was evident from Ligachov's speeches and from the crisis atmosphere at a Communist Party Central Committee plenum held July 29 (see article, p. 10), that the battle goes far beyond a clash of personalities or their fiefdoms. What drives the factional brawl is the increasingly dire condition of the Soviet economy; a central matter of dispute is how best to buy or take what the Soviet bloc will need from the West, while maintaining military advantages achieved.

It is dawning on more people in the West that, as English Sovietologist Peter Reddaway commented to the BBC on Aug. 6, Gorbachov could "stumble" in the event of "a total breakdown of order inside the Soviet Union, a crisis in the economy, unrest in Eastern Europe, or some combination of these."

Speaking Aug. 5 in the Volga River industrial city of Gorky, Ligachov warned against "Western models" of economic practice, which would bring "chronic unemployment" and undermine "the achievements of the Soviet people and the [Communist] Party in building socialism." In a swipe at the limited forms of private ownership favored by Gorbachov's economic team, Ligachov said, "Copying of Western market models based on private ownership is totally unacceptable for a socialist system."

A July 29 article by economist Tatyana Subbotina, printed in the Central Committee economics daily *Sotsialisticheskaya Industriya*—Ligachov controls much of the CC staff—attacked reform legislation with which Gorbachov has associated himself closely, the Law on the Cooperative System. This permits private enterprise on a cooperative basis, chiefly in the service sector. Subbotina sharply questioned whether the coops would "really contribute to the improvement of socialism." So far, she said, they offer high prices and poor-quality goods. "Are there any real grounds for fearing a *capitalist deformation* of our cooperative system?" Yes, she concluded, since the coop law has features which "could enter into conflict with the principles of socialism."

Ligachov, in the Gorky speech, also complained that the vaunted *glasnost*, or press liberalization policy, had led to

worse discontent among workers (in the absence of real economic improvement, that is), and even strikes. Ligachov used an old-school Soviet claim, that since "socialism is a system of the working people . . . striking against themselves is absurd."

While visiting Gorky, Ligachov also sought to rally hardcore Russian chauvinists. On Aug. 3, he met Gorky activists of the Society for the Protection of Historical and Cultural Monuments, a mass-based movement of which the anti-Semitic Pamyat society is the militant wing. Too many Communist Party organizations, he told them, "do not support the initiatives taken by the Society for the Protection of Historical Monuments. . . . Try stripping our society of its memory [*pamyat*—ed.] and of all works of material culture created by our people. One would feel uncomfortable in that society."

According to an article by Alexandre Adler, in the French paper *Libération* of Aug. 8, Ligachov's speeches were preceded a few days earlier, by rallies of Afghanistan war veterans from various Siberian towns, including Ligachov's hometown of Novosibirsk. Some veterans reportedly booed every time Gorbachov's name was mentioned, because of the party chief's "policy of abandonment in Afghanistan."

'Class character'

The other explosive element in Ligachov's Aug. 5 speech was his insinuation that Soviet foreign policy was abandoning the class struggle. On July 26, Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze said at a foreign policy conference: "The new political thinking views peaceful coexistence in the context of the realities of the nuclear century. . . . The struggle between two opposing systems is no longer a determining tendency of the present-day era." Ligachov rejoined: "We base ourselves on the class character of international relations. Any other presentation of the question just sows confusion among Soviet people and among our friends abroad."

On July 26, Cuban leader Fidel Castro had become one of Moscow's irate friends. He devoted one section of a speech to "current differences with the Soviet Union," and proclaimed, "We must not flirt with capitalist things." Fidel also accused the U.S.S.R. of having botched military operations in Angola, one area covered by Soviet-American "regional matters" agreements.

The Afghanistan war is another regional conflict, hotly debated in Moscow. Gen. Maj. K.M. Tsagolov was recently quoted in the weekly *Ogonyok*, on the errors of Soviet policy in Afghanistan, including reliance on an Afghan Communist Party that he said was incapable of leadership. On Aug. 3, he was the target of harsh criticism by a former commander of Soviet forces there, Gen. Col. V.A. Vostrov, in the military daily *Krasnaya Zvezda*. Tsagolov participated in Shevardnadze's Foreign Ministry conference, on the panel about "Policy Toward Developing Countries and Settlement of Regional Conflicts."