

Soviets ratify war powers to Gorbachov in 'reforms'

by Konstantin George and Chris White

On Dec. 1, the U.S.S.R. Supreme Soviet's extraordinary session ratified by, according to Radio Moscow, "an overwhelming vote," a series of amendments to the U.S.S.R. Constitution.

Drafted by the former KGB chief Victor Chebrikov, who now heads a special central committee section on legislative and administrative organs, the reforms, through draft Article 119, give war powers to the new executive body of the Russian state, to deploy armed forces, whether internally or externally, in "defense of the socialist brotherhood."

The coverage in the Western media on this subject has fallen for the noise created by Soviet propaganda, which has spread the line that the supposed "central" issue involved concerns amendments that would increase the powers of Moscow at the expense of individual republics. The Western media then accepted, gullibly, Moscow's propaganda that some of the offending increased centralization passages had either been deleted or changed. All of these nominally true "facts" are less than irrelevant.

The cold-blooded reality that defines the new Constitution just ratified as perhaps the most hideous document in Russian history lies in the Articles which grant the State President, i.e., Mikhail Gorbachov, far greater powers, in the spirit of Russian absolutist rule, than ever enjoyed, at least on paper, by either Josef Stalin, or for that matter, any of the pre-1917 Czars. The new Constitution is in fact a War Powers Act which establishes the legal framework for one-man rule under Gorbachov as a modern-day Stalin.

It is clear why the Western media had to censor the truth about the new Soviet Constitution. To have honestly covered it would have exploded the myth they have created of Gor-

bachov the "liberal reformer," and would have exploded it on the eve of Gorbachov's big December swing West to the U.S. and Britain.

Gorbachov sets the stage

The stage was set for passage of the "reform" package on Nov. 26 in Moscow, when the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet convened in the midst of the latest violent uproar in the Transcaucasian republics and the growing movement for autonomy in the Baltic republics. Gorbachov's Saturday speech, carried over Soviet television, presented the reformer beloved by his Western sycophants, as a snarling, abusive bully of the recalcitrant. According to wire service reports, the same blunt message was delivered as the opening speech to the Supreme Soviet session.

On Saturday, Gorbachov singled out the Estonians, whose Soviet had recently passed a declaration of independence from Moscow. Gorbachov pointed to Aarno Ruutel, head of the Estonian Soviet, to attack vote "illegality."

If reportedly in lower key, the message laid before the Supreme Soviet ought to be more bloodcurdling to Western ears not seduced by the siren song of perestroika, glasnost, and democratization. Gorbachov told the delegates that the bloody developments, whose latest phase is unfolding in Armenia and Azerbaijan, are the result of his perestroika. "Perestroika breaks up a false illusory peace which people had believed in during the period of stagnation," is the way he put it, elaborating on a theme struck during a French television interview aired on Nov. 26, in which he identified his perestroika restructuring as the cause of the recent renewed bloodbath in the Transcaucasian republics.

The new Constitution

Under the new Constitution, the U.S.S.R. Supreme Soviet will rubber stamp Gorbachov's continuing as President, in the form of the new State President, who will chair the National Defense Council and be commander-in-chief of the Soviet Armed Forces, with the power to declare a national mobilization, and to declare war.

Under the new Constitution, the President, again Gorbachov, can individually order the "deployment of contingents of the Soviet Armed Forces to fulfill international treaty obligations." No General Secretary has had this scope of power on paper, and in reality, only Stalin had such a capability.

The extent of Gorbachov's domestic powers under the new Constitution is no less awesome. For example, the Constitution's Article 119, paragraph 13 gives him the power to, "for the protection of the Soviet Union, declare martial law or a state of emergency in individual regions, or in the entire country, and as required, impose extraordinary administrative measures."

Here one sees the full scope of the fraud presented to the West concerning the Soviet "debate" on the "rights" of the Republics. Under Article 119, whatever paper "rights" are granted national republics elsewhere in the Constitution, can be taken away at a stroke by Gorbachov. For that matter, with his power to "impose extraordinary measures," not only can a Republic's government be dissolved, but the Republic itself, if absolute ruler, "Czar" Mikhail so desires.

Military rule in the Transcaucasus

This picture of emerging brutal absolutist rule is not some future horror. Moscow has used the latest crisis of ethnic conflict between Azerbaijanis and Armenians in the Transcaucasus to begin the first de facto implementation of Article 119, *before* the new Constitution was ratified. Azerbaijan and Armenia are under *military* rule. Both Republics are under martial law, with troops patrolling city streets, curfews imposed, and with the troops having orders to shoot violators on sight. Roadblocks exist on all the roads, and airports, train and bus stations, telephone exchanges, other utilities, and government buildings are occupied.

The huge military deployments into the Transcaucasus, however, are not merely for the purpose of "maintaining order." Under martial law, the permanent institution of a military government for the region is being established in the following way.

Each of the main cities of the two republics, as well as whole regions, are directed, since Nov 24, by *military commandants*, the exact same model employed by Moscow in the past when it occupied *foreign* territory. In Azerbaijan, there is a military commandant for the capital of Baku, for the city of Kirovabad, for the Agdam District, for the Nakhichevan region on the border with Iran, and for the Armenian-inhabited region of Karabakh. For Armenia, the capital

of Yerevan is under a military commandant, as are the other main cities. The military, besides its patrol duties, physically runs all communications and utilities.

Article 119 can now be invoked to make permanent and give legal cover to the "extraordinary administrative measures" already imposed on Azerbaijan and Armenia. The same measures can, and will if required, be extended when expected eruptions strike in other Captive Nations, whether in the Baltic Republics, the Ukraine, or the Muslim Turkic republics of Central Asia.

The "reform" package and the accompanying military crackdown show how the Kremlin has chosen to deal with unrest within the enslaved nationalities of the Soviet empire and the prospect of difficulty in ruling the even larger empire they envisage: by imitating the imperial model that goes back to ancient Mesopotamia and was copied, subsequently, by the Romans and then the Byzantines. This is to enflame racist hatred among the various subjugated peoples, so that they hate their neighbors more violently than they hate their oppressors in Moscow.

It would be wrong to only stress the new powers granted Gorbachov by the new Constitution. The articles from which we have quoted above also vastly increase the powers of the *military* and the KGB, the pillars of internal security within the Russian Empire. The vast increase in powers for the KGB was already manifested by the personnel decisions taken at the Sept. 30 CC Plenum, which made "former" KGB boss Viktor Chebrikov a virtual "czar" for internal security, by promoting him to the powerful CC Secretariat, with responsibility for internal security.

The added powers for the Military High Command are clear from the new Constitution's emphasis on the extraordinary powers of President Gorbachov in his function as head of the National Defense Council, which means a War Powers Act "executive" composed mostly of Gorbachov and the military leadership. The on-the-ground situation in the Transcaucasus we described earlier, further attests to the growing political-administrative role of the military in the Soviet Union.

There is yet another striking demonstration of the high profile of the military now surfacing. Since the Azerbaijan-Armenia crisis began, the most detailed and informative coverage of what happened there can be read in *Krasnaya Zvezda*, the Defense Ministry daily. In total contrast to the central Soviet civilian media, which during the week of Nov. 19-26, carried stock phrases of "clashes between Azerbaijanis and Armenians," *Krasnaya Zvezda* graphically portrayed the hand grenade attacks by Azeris against soldiers. While Moscow's Foreign Ministry was issuing tortuous denials of martial law, *Krasnaya Zvezda* was detailing how rule by military commandant had been established in the cities and regions of Azerbaijan and Armenia. While the civilian Soviet media was describing the situation as "tense" and "complicated," *Krasnaya Zvezda* emphasized it was "alarming."