

# Ethnic unrest still plagues Soviet bloc

by Konstantin George

The Soviet Union continues in a crisis of national unrest. In the time-frame Feb. 15-28, the Baltic republics again exploded; the "reprieve" granted Gorbachov by the earthquake in Armenia came to an end; protests began again in neighboring Georgia; mass protests erupted in Belorussia; Moldavia, recently the scene of huge protests, continued to simmer; and, by far the most important, the Ukraine with its 50 million people, accounting for about one-third of Soviet economic output, is on the verge of upheaval.

For Moscow, a Ukrainian explosion must be averted at all costs. From Feb. 20-24, Gorbachov made a secretive tour of the Ukraine, with extremely heavy police and security measures. Whole areas of the Ukrainian capital of Kiev and the cities of Lvov and Donetsk, which Gorbachov also visited, were sealed off by police and the KGB, to ensure that no nationalist demonstrations occurred. Known nationalist leaders were jailed for the duration.

Elsewhere:

**Feb. 16,** the anniversary of Lithuania's 1918 independence. 200,000 people demonstrated for independence in both the capital of Vilnius and the city of Kaunas. The Kaunas rally was addressed by Lithuania's pre-war foreign minister, Urbysys, who called for Lithuania to leave the Soviet Union, and by Cardinal Sladkevicius, who expressed the hope that his Catholic homeland would again become an independent, sovereign state.

**Feb. 17.** Professors from Armenia's Yerevan University requested permission of the city's military commandant for a mass rally on Feb. 28 to commemorate the first anniversary of the pogrom in Sumgait, Azerbaijan, when KGB-inspired Azeri mobs slaughtered Armenian men, women, and children. The request was refused under martial law stipulations. Thus, a confrontation with the military authorities is set for Feb. 28.

**Feb. 18.** A crowd of several thousand Georgian nationalists demonstrated in the capital, Tbilisi. The KGB and police intervened, beat up many participants, and detained several nationalist leaders.

**Feb. 21.** Belorussia suddenly erupts for the first time, when a crowd of 50,000 demanding autonomy march through the streets of the capital, Minsk. They demanded the same language and autonomy rights granted to the three Baltic republics, and the legalization of a Belorussian "Popular Front," which had been suppressed last autumn.

**Feb. 24,** Estonian Independence Day. Mass demonstrations broke out, and calls were heard for national independence and sovereignty.

Moscow's response has been a crackdown reminiscent of the Stalin era: part of the dual tactic reported in last week's *EIR*. While roundtable talks and a reversion to the original post-Yalta "multi-party system" formulas have been instituted in Poland and Hungary to postpone explosions there, Russia is moving to crush national movements inside the U.S.S.R.

The signal came in a Feb. 22 *Pravda* broadside against Sajudis, the Lithuanian "Popular Front," which has moved from an "autonomy" program to a struggle for independence. *Pravda* admitted, "A section of Sajudis . . . has openly moved closer to the slogans of the clearly anti-Soviet [Lithuanian Independence] League and to the Lithuanian Democrats' Party." Both organizations demand the repudiation of the 1939 Hitler-Stalin Pact, and complete restoration of independence to Lithuania. *Pravda* added that these forces "are idealizing the bourgeois model of society," and even within the Lithuanian party Central Committee, "some senior members" are "hostile to Soviet Lithuania."

It is probably only a matter of time before Moscow imposes the same martial law "solution" in the Baltic republics as has been imposed on Armenia and Azerbaijan.

The Feb. 22 TASS announcement that the Moldavian interior minister has been sacked portends a similar crackdown there—bordering on Romania.

## Moscow's Polish dilemma

The facade of the roundtable talks in Poland cannot hide the fact that the situation remains explosive.

A looming food supply breakdown is accompanied by an inflation rate bordering on hyperinflation. Compromises and strike-breaking have brought Lech Walesa's and Solidarity's popularity to an all-time low. Walesa drew very small audiences at most stops on his mid-February national tour. The Polish government has just announced that "the market for food could collapse" in a few months, and by the summer the supply of meat and other key food items would no longer be sufficient to cover even the modest amounts allocated on monthly ration cards.

Food prices, centering on meat and dairy products, margarine, and cooking oil keep rising, often without warning. On March 1, all rail and long distance bus fares will rise by 50%; on April 1, all local transit fares will at least double, while in Warsaw, the price for a monthly fare card, a must for most people, will rise from 1,500 to 4,800 zloty—7% of a skilled worker's wage and 12% of a teacher's wage.

The inflationary spiral has caused a wave of small strikes, including many called by the official trade unions. On Feb. 15, Moscow summoned Alfred Miodowicz, the head of Poland's official trade unions, and forced him to agree to join Walesa in preventing strikes.