

# Gorbachov postpones reform agenda

by Konstantin George

While maintaining a deceptive, superficially liberal or "hands-off" mode toward the revolutionary situations in East Germany, Poland, Hungary, and elsewhere in Central and Eastern Europe—because it has no choice for the time being—Moscow is taking an iron-fisted approach towards national freedom movements inside the U.S.S.R. itself. The cutting edge of this crackdown, which the Soviet military has been demanding for months, has struck in the republic of Moldavia and the three Baltic republics. Along with mass repression, the Soviet leadership, with Gorbachov spearheading the move, has put the brakes on the so-called domestic package of "economic reforms" that was supposed to be passed this winter by the U.S.S.R. Supreme Soviet.

The internal crackdown began Nov. 10, the same day the Berlin Wall was coming down. A mass protest in the Moldavian capital of Kishinyov was violently suppressed, with hundreds injured, some critically. Two thousand interior troops, from elite units composed of *ex-spetsnaz* Afghan veterans, were flown into Moldavia. A state of emergency with a strict curfew was proclaimed, putting the republic under de facto military rule. The repression was the bloodiest since the April 9 "Bloody Sunday" massacre in Tbilisi, Georgia. Moldavia was given a new party boss, a Russian, who replaced Semyon Grossu at a Moldavian Central Committee Plenum convened on Nov. 16. This was the first time that a Russian had been installed to rule a non-Russian republic, where the indigenous population, in this case Romanians, form a majority. (In Moldavia, Romanians are 64% of the population, while Russians are a mere 12%, and Slavs some 26%.)

After that, Moscow moved to begin a showdown with the national movements of the Baltic republics. The popular support in these republics for independence is so overwhelming that in the last month, the Lithuanian, Latvian, and Estonian parliaments all passed legislation creating the basis for popular referenda on all crucial questions, including that of leaving the U.S.S.R. The first of the ruling Communist parties of these republics, Lithuania's, declared its intention to "secede" from the Soviet Communist Party and become an independent party, no longer tied to Moscow. The Lithuanian

move was in direct violation of an edict from the Sept. 19-20 Central Committee Plenum, personally announced by Gorbachov, forbidding any republic Party to undertake such a move.

On Nov. 14 the entire Lithuanian Party leadership was summoned to Moscow to appear the next day before the Politburo.

The crackdown will not be confined to suppression in the non-Russian republics. A national emergency, featuring state-enforced strict rationing of food and consumer goods, could be declared as early as December, as the hardships and privations caused by the winter become unbearable. The stage for this has been set by little-noticed Gorbachov speeches in early November, comparing the present crisis to the hardships faced by civilians during and immediately following World War II.

The winter crisis has already caused the abrupt cancellation of the Soviet Parliament's "economic reform law" agenda. On Nov. 14, Gorbachov rammed through the Supreme Soviet a resolution dumping the entire package from the agenda of the Congress of People's Deputies, which convenes Dec. 12. The resolution, which passed by a narrow majority, bans any discussion in the Parliament's session of the proposed new laws governing property relations, land ownership, and leasing. The People's Deputies will instead focus on discussing the 1991-95 Five Year Plan and unspecified step-by-step interim measures for the economy. The new agenda opens the way for Parliament to approve emergency measures proposed by Gorbachov, including across-the-board rationing.

Gorbachov also forced through a companion measure banning any parliamentary discussion over the "leading role in society of the Soviet Communist Party." Gorbachov declared, "Another power, which could replace the Soviet Communist Party in Soviet society, is not in sight."

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