

## Gorbachov, Yeltsin move toward 'Third Rome' model

by Konstantin George

A strategic shift has occurred in Soviet domestic policy, motivated by Moscow's urgent need to prevent the grave internal crisis of mass unrest, both in the Slavic core and in the non-Russian republics, from going out of control in the near future. The shift is denoted by four singular events during the first half of June, three of them compressed into a 48-hour time frame, June 12-13: first, the election of Russian-nationalist populist Boris Yeltsin as President of the Russian Federation; second, the near-unanimous vote on June 12 by the Russian Parliament declaring Russian sovereignty; and third, a meeting right after that vote of the U.S.S.R. Federation Council, composed of President Gorbachov and the presidents of the 15 Soviet republics, which decided to create over this summer a new structure of empire, discarding and replacing the "Union of Soviet Socialist Republics."

Finally, on June 13 the U.S.S.R. Supreme Soviet voted not to implement on July 1 an extremely unpopular plan for food price rises, which would include a tripling of the price of bread. On Gorbachov's recommendation, the rejection took the form of demanding that the plan be "re-drafted," thus preventing an outright rejection, which would have forced the immediate resignation of the prime minister and his government.

The backdrop to the Moscow decision to implement this strategic shift now, is the speed by which the situation in the Slavic core is threatening to move out of control. Popular discontent, following the mid-May announcement by the Ryzhkov government of its plan to raise prices, is at an all-time high. Strikes that could cripple the vital energy sector could erupt at any time. As the Federation Council was meeting, the news arrived from Ukraine's Donbass mining region, that the Donbass strike committees which had spearheaded

last summer's nationwide coal strike, had now formed the Soviet Union's first independent trade union, modeled on the Polish Solidarnosc.

News from the "oil front" was no less alarming. A symbolic slowdown in production had begun in the West Siberian Tyumen region, which produces some 75% of Soviet oil. Tyumen oil workers had announced that on June 15 they would be holding a mass meeting which would decide whether to begin an oil strike. Thus, the "waste no time" move to kill the July 1 price increases.

### New arrangement for the Soviet republics

The most dramatic component of the ongoing strategic shift is the June 13 announcement by Gorbachov's presidential spokesman Arkady Maslennikov, that Gorbachov is preparing to terminate the "U.S.S.R.," and replace it with a "Union of Sovereign Socialist States." Each state will be linked to Moscow, which would function as the hub of the empire's power, but each would have differing degrees of "independence," ranging from federated to very loosely confederated status. Maslennikov made no attempt to disguise the fact that the shift in strategy had been forced on Moscow by the Baltic republics' declarations of independence, and the growing independence movements in the non-Russian republics: "We're no longer talking of renewing the union, but of creating a new one. The situation is different from what it was, not just five years ago, but even last year."

Maslennikov stressed that any republic desiring it could have a loose, confederative link with Moscow, employing as examples the complete domestic "sovereignty" status that had been granted to Finland and the Central Asian Khanate of Bokhara in the pre-1917 Czarist period: "We're talking of a multiplicity of options, taking historical, cultural, and

economic circumstances into account." Maslennikov's remarks left the clear impression that the broad outlines of the policy involve a loosely affiliated "outer tier" of the Baltic, Transcaucasia, and Central Asia (not including Kazakhstan), with in some cases, as in the Baltics, total independence (albeit only after some years) would not be ruled out. The Slavic core of Russia, Ukraine, and Belorussia would be more tightly federated.

### **The Volodin Plan**

The Maslennikov press conference confirmed that Gorbachov has adopted the content of what is known as the Volodin Plan to save the empire with the least territorial and economic losses. The plan is named after its author, Eduard Volodin, co-founder and director of the Slavic Culture Fund and one of the leading behind-the-scenes policy-shaping personages in the Russian elite. The plan was presented in an article by Volodin in the Jan. 22 issue of the Russian literary weekly, *Literaturnaya Rossiya*.

Volodin argued that the systemic crisis had already gone too far for Russia to totally avoid some losses in the form of some republics achieving independence. He stressed that Russia had no recourse but to adapt, quickly before it was too late, to the process by establishing a mixed confederation-federation scheme. The counterpoint to his program was for rapid enactment of Russian sovereignty, to achieve a political-psychological regeneration of Russia, as the only means of stabilizing the crisis over the longer term.

*EIR* and its founding editor Lyndon LaRouche had predicted such a course of events back in 1983, when the Soviet Union's violent reaction to the U.S. adoption of LaRouche's Strategic Defense Initiative indicated that the Soviets were dumping the old "Brezhnev model" for good, and were launching on a new course which would probably involve the dumping of the Communist Party and the establishment of Moscow as a "Third Rome" which would rule the world forever on the model of ancient Rome and Byzantium.

This is what has come to pass. During the spring, the content of this Volodin Plan became the platform for Boris Yeltsin's successful acquisition of the Russian presidency. And now, the contents of the Volodin Plan have become policy of Yeltsin's erstwhile rival, Mikhail Gorbachov. The time, which Moscow buys through the avoidance of outright confrontations with non-Russian republics, will be used to foster a regeneration of Russia, without which no future re-consolidation of the empire from disarray is even possible. That is at least the intent of Gorbachov, Yeltsin, and the Russian leadership of his Presidential Council and the Russian Federation.

Intent and reality, however, can be two quite different matters, as the extremely volatile and unpredictable Soviet crisis situation has demonstrated time and time again in the recent weeks and months.

The "sovereignty" formula being presented is, as Maslen-

nikov himself confirmed, a return to the imperial model of the last period of pre-1917 Czarist times, where, in terms of all domestic affairs, certain entities, such as Finland and the Central Asian Khanate of Bokhara, enjoyed complete "sovereignty," leaving defense, foreign policy, and certain areas of economic relations in the hands of the Russian center. Such a formula had also existed in earlier periods of Czarist Russian history, such as in the Transcaucasus, where, from 1783-1803, the Kingdom of Georgia was domestically "sovereign" with a protectorate status within the Russian Empire.

### **The economic core of the crisis**

The cardinal question that will determine Gorbachov's fate is the question whether the Slavic core does or does not go totally out of control. This has led to considerable embarrassment for Gorbachov, who had been attempting to suppress the emergence of Yeltsin, the front-man for a broad spectrum of non-Communist political currents which are now experiencing rapid growth within the Russian Republic. But by the time of Gorbachov's return from the Washington summit earlier this month, adopting Yeltsin's policy had become a matter of sheer survival.

The hard facts of the days leading up to the June 12 Federation Council meeting document the curious symbiotic relationship which has developed between the two. Gorbachov, faced with a potential crippling outbreak of mass strikes in Russia and Ukraine, wasted no time in utilizing Yeltsin. He authorized Yeltsin to make a nationally televised live address to the Soviet population, which was delivered June 9, directly after the main news program.

Yeltsin's address was presented as "an appeal for national unity," in these times of crisis and turbulence. The watchword of that address was, "Be patient and things will get better, you have *my* assurance," as he announced with great fanfare—though with no details—his own economic program that would set everything right: "We have a program for two, at most three years, that will not only stabilize the situation, but also raise living standards. . . . For that we need your trust in us."

It is possible that with political-demagogic operations of this sort, a certain amount of time can be bought strictly for the short term. But these rhetorical maneuvers contain one and the same fatal flaw: They provide no solution to the economic breakdown crisis in the Soviet Union, which is underlying the systemic crisis. If Moscow follows the same course as Poland and adopts free market "shock therapy" à la Adam Smith—and there are many indications that this is precisely what the Soviet leadership has in mind—it is doomed. With no sane economic policies coming from the West, a point of maximum instability could easily be reached—not immediately but sometime in the future—in which some military faction would attempt to solve the empire's crisis through military conquest of new imperial realms.