

by 24 hours the arrival of French President François Mitterrand in Moscow.

The entire political spectrum in Moscow is echoing Zorin's call for a "new government based on a centrist orientation," or admitting that such a government is coming. On March 15, figures ranging from Congress head Khasbulatov to National Front leader Dukin endorsed the idea of a new centrist government. Telling in this regard was the admission on the same day by former Prime Minister Yegor Gaidar, the shock therapy maniac, that a "centrist political government" is "likely to emerge." Dukin told *EIR* two days before the Russian Security Council meeting that "plans for a centrist government" are in the works. The Khasbulatov statement of March 15 tells volumes: "Now it is necessary to concentrate solely on the economic reforms. In this question, the govern-

Solzhenitsyn warns that Russia is up for grabs

Aleksander Solzhenitsyn warned in a March 7 letter to Russian ambassador in Washington Vladimir Lukin that a strong government was necessary to defend Russia. Excerpts follow.

The Russian Federation . . . cannot exist without a strong presidential power, a power which is at least as strong as that in the United States. . . . What is at issue is not just President Yeltsin or the current composition of the Supreme Soviet; at issue is a long-term policy, an agreement which prevents Russia from tottering from every gust of wind. . . . The alternative which will be adopted now . . . will decide the future of the country, probably for one century ahead, when the present politicians will long be dead, but the burden of a wrong decision will be still tied around Russia's neck. . . . When people have been thrown into the abyss, is it really the time for garbled referendum questionnaires on clauses of the Constitution . . . to organize elections into a Constituent Assembly, or have meetings, month after month, working out an 'ideal' constitution? During the whole of 1917, ideal electoral laws had been elaborated, and finished just in time for the October coup. . . . Hasty politicians, who wage furious battles in the stratosphere . . . in the meantime the pillage has assumed a massive, unprecedented scale, Russia's riches are sold out for a song, the country in chaos is irreversibly up for grabs.

ment must have the last word. The decisions of the last Congress have deeply strengthened their [the government's] importance as the highest organ of the economy."

The indications that the Russian elite had reached a consensus for a "strong presidency" and a "strong government," with or without Yeltsin, as the only alternative to an impending chaos without end, were evident before the Congress session began. This was clear on March 7 when a letter from Aleksander Solzhenitsyn to Russian ambassador to Washington Vladimir Lukin was read on Russian TV by Yuri Karyakin, a member of the consultative Russian Presidential Council. "I agree completely" with Solzhenitsyn's demands, he told viewers. He urged them to "listen to the voice of the man whose contemporaries we are proud to be."

The Solzhenitsyn letter provides a unique window into the thinking of the Russian elite (see box). Notably, Solzhenitsyn denounced any return to communism as leading to the death of Russia, and equally denounced the idea of restoring the U.S.S.R., whose only result would be "a bloody war in a dozen republics." He concluded with a call for "the only real formation which offers us any hope . . . a union of the states of Belarus, Russia, and Kazakhstan."

Social explosion brewing

An early resolution of the Russian political power struggle will be forced by the accelerating economic devolution which has brought the country to the brink of a social explosion. For most of the population, the last "reserves" from savings have vanished after the record hyperinflation rates of 126% for January and 129% for February. The March rate is even higher. For the first time, a hyperinflation, as opposed to "only" heavy inflation, has affected basic foods, the prices for which have increased 74% in Moscow in the first two months of 1993. The great majority of people are now not "merely" living in poverty, but below the minimum for existence, which now stands officially at 6,000 rubles per month. (As recently as last autumn, 6,000 rubles per month was considered a "very good wage"; now it is bare minimum.)

As a result of this non-linear economic crisis, "labor peace" under Yeltsin is now over. The early March warning strikes by the coal miners of Kuzbass in Siberia, and Vorkuta in the Russian far north, were but the harbingers of things to come. New miners strikes could erupt at any time. The next strike wave will be far broader. Tens of thousands of mostly women textile workers from Ivanovo, north of Moscow, plan a march on Moscow in mid-March to protest before the Russian White House the closure of 40 textile plants and the imminent closure of another 46, following the breakdown of cotton imports from Uzbekistan. In the Russian Pacific port of Vladivostok and its environs, a quasi-general strike, involving dock, shipyard, and urban transport workers and foresters, is set for sometime in March to protest plant closures.