

Yeltsin dissolves parliament as Russia's crisis deepens

by Konstantin George

At 8 p.m. on Sept. 21, President Boris Yeltsin appeared on Russian television to decree the dissolution of the country's two legislative bodies, the Supreme Soviet and the Congress of People's Deputies, setting Dec. 11-12 as the date for early elections to the State Duma, or lower chamber of a new two-chamber parliament. Until the elections, and taking effect immediately, Russia is to be ruled by "decrees of the President and instructions of the government." Two hours later, Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin appeared on television to declare the full support of the government for the Yeltsin decrees, adding that in accordance with the dissolution of the parliament, the government had taken over the control of the Russian central bank. Before he spoke, detachments of Interior Ministry troops had taken up positions around the central bank and the state radio and television facilities.

Lyndon LaRouche, commenting on the Moscow developments on Sept. 22, pointed out that Yeltsin's "flight forward" reflects "the fact that none of the policies which are currently popular with the U.S. press in Washington are going to work; as a matter of fact, they're coming to the end of their road." (See interview on page 35.)

The same evening that Yeltsin spoke, the parliament, under Chairman Ruslan Khasbulatov, declared the Yeltsin decrees null and void, and voted to oust Yeltsin from the presidency. Parliament voted to install Vice President Aleksandr Rutskoy as "Acting President," and then "appointed" as its "defense minister," Gen. Vladislav Achalov, and "re-instated" Viktor Barannikov, the man Yeltsin had deposed in July, as "security minister."

These actions by parliament were gestures that could not change anything fundamental. Whether intentionally or not, they served to undermine the popular credibility of Vice President Rutskoy, the one figure of national stature who could have challenged Yeltsin and the coup, by staying clear

of the Khasbulatov clique. The parliament's moves also served to bolster the imperial forces behind the coup process, by naming Achalov as "defense minister" on the eve of the Sept. 24 summit of the Community of Independent States in Moscow. Achalov, a loud-mouthed exponent of using military means to restore the U.S.S.R., and a leading August 1991 coup plotter, was, during the Soviet period, the Defense Ministry official responsible for the Baku massacre in January 1990 and the Vilnius television tower massacre in January 1991.

Western illusions

The western powers, beginning with the United States, knew of the "Yeltsin coup" in advance. This was confirmed in statements by Secretary of State Warren Christopher and Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev; Kozyrev had held long talks with his American counterparts while he was in Washington for the Sept. 13 Middle East peace agreement signing ceremony. In the 24 hours following the Yeltsin television address, western leaders outdid each other in rushing to support Yeltsin, praising his coup—and his Sept. 16 appointment of shock therapy proponent Yegor Gaidar as first deputy prime minister—as a "victory for democracy." What western governments will not publicly say, is that they are supporting Russia becoming a dictatorship. The western leaders will receive a rude awakening, because the Russian dictatorship that is coming is not going to be what they think they are going to get.

Western heads of state and foreign ministers, beginning with President Clinton and Warren Christopher, have no inkling of reality. Russia, the nuclear superpower, is re-emerging to create in the coming months a new Great Russian Empire embracing nearly all of the territory of the former U.S.S.R. This transcends the issue of Yeltsin or any other

personality. An epoch-shaping, and very dangerous, historical process is under way. The West bears the main responsibility for this, through its promotion of two years of shock therapy policies in Russia, which sabotaged the hope of transforming Russia into a nation-state of the western type.

Only hours before Yeltsin made his television appearance, Foreign Ministry spokesman Georgi Karazin announced that Russia had annulled the Sept. 3 agreement on nuclear weapons reached with Ukraine at the Yeltsin-Kravchuk Yalta Summit. In that agreement, Russia, employing the blackmail threat to stop oil and gas deliveries to Ukraine, had forced Ukraine to agree to transfer all its nuclear weapons to Russia. Karazin grounded the annulment on the bogus charge that Ukraine had unilaterally inserted an amendment in the protocol signed in Yalta, after the meeting. Karazin declared that this amendment was designed to allow Ukraine to keep a part of the nuclear weapons on its territory. In response, the Ukrainian Foreign Ministry admitted that there was indeed an amendment providing for a phased transfer, but maintained that this had been presented to the Russians at Yalta, with no Russian objections then.

The imperial message was also conveyed in the shooting down by Russian-backed Abkhazian separatists of two Georgian airliners over the Abkhazian capital of Sukhumi, killing over 100 people.

The incalculables

There is no stability in the coup process at the top, and events could occur at any time that would transform the process in incalculable ways. The three key ministries involved in enforcing the "Yeltsin coup," the Defense Ministry, Interior Ministry, and Security Ministry, are committed to its success. Concerning the Army as an institution, this is broadly true for the higher ranks, the generals. What no one can predict, is what the middle-rank officers will do. This leads to the critical question: Will the coup process stay bloodless, or will it become violent?

These concerns are foremost in the mind of Defense Minister Pavel Grachev. He confirmed on Sept. 22 that "all the commanders" support "Commander-in-Chief" Yeltsin. This is what the western press quoted. They should have read on a bit further in his speech, where he announced that "special units" are being created to prevent any "terrorist acts" aimed at "provoking the Armed Forces." He added that tight security had been imposed at all military installations and facilities, including at the Defense Ministry and other key ministries in Moscow, and measures were being taken to prevent "attempts to split the Armed Forces."

The next day, Grachev warned again of "attempts to provoke" the Armed Forces, including the Defense Ministry, and declared: "The forces of the Interior Ministry are ready to intervene with all necessary force."

In sober contrast to the childish, giggling response of President Clinton to the events in Russia, the incoming chair-

man of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen. John Shalikashvili, expressed the same concern to the Senate in hearings on Sept. 22: "The danger really is if low-level commanders, subordinate commanders, were to begin to change sides. That probably would be the sort of unravelling effect that ought to give us all great, great concern."

The consolidation of dictatorial rule

What is falsely called a "Yeltsin coup" is in reality the opening of a coup process leading to dictatorship, where, concerning the short term only, Boris Yeltsin may or may not be its titular head. The coup process has been boosted, as noted above, by the antics of parliament chairman Ruslan Khasbulatov. Under Khasbulatov's leadership, parliament had never seriously addressed the country's ruinous economic-social crisis, but instead confined its challenge to Yeltsin and the government to an empty power struggle, while destroying its own credibility through endless hypocrisy. During the summer, for example, parliament voted to overturn Yeltsin's plans for sweeping privatization, only on the same day to pass a measure converting the government-supplied Moscow apartments of the parliamentary deputies into their own private condominiums.

Khasbulatov's response to the "Yeltsin coup" is only reinforcing the already strong conviction of many ordinary citizens in Russia that parliaments are inherently bankrupt as institutions.

Barring a policy "about-face" by the West, an abandonment of the ruinous shock therapy policy, the dictatorship will in all probability be in place either by late autumn or during the winter. It may come before the Dec. 11-12 elections. Why can such a prognosis be made?

In case anyone has forgotten, the devastating economic and social crisis is getting worse with each passing month. It will continue to worsen at an accelerated rate during October, November, and December. With winter coming on, and the parliament out of office, rising popular anger will be directed exclusively at Yeltsin and the government. Yeltsin's "popularity" existed only so long as the two Soviet-period chambers of parliament, the Supreme Soviet and the Congress of People's Deputies, existed. These were the two most hated institutions in the country, with the government coming in third. Now, Yeltsin and the government stand alone against the groundswell of legitimate popular anger.

Elections, if they are held at all, will be anything but a Yeltsin victory. The Lithuanian elections last year and the Sept. 19 Polish elections are ample enough lessons of what happens to once-popular Presidents after a long period of shock therapy. In Lithuania, Vytautas Landsbergis, once the hero of Lithuanian independence, was unceremoniously swept from power by the "former" communists. In Poland, President Lech Walesa survived only because the elections were confined to parliament. His electoral bloc received a humiliating 5% of the vote.