

Autocratic rule returns to Russia

An eyewitness report on what really happened on Oct. 3-4 in Moscow, from St. Petersburg journalist Konstantin Chermnykh.

The day I arrived in Moscow, Oct. 2, was sunny and warm, and the streets were empty because it was a regular day off. It was hard to imagine, that a tragedy was about to start in a few hours. I am quite sure that the majority of Muscovites did not expect that the next two days would become another blood date in the gloomy history of Russia. Ordinary citizens believe in the reason of politicians. While knowing what had happened in Stepanakert, Baku, Sergana, Bender, Tbilisi, or Sukhumi, no one could imagine that such bloodshed could occur in the heart of the country.

The White House [parliament building] had been cut off from the rest of the city by the special military service. The people inside felt hope, but at the same time growing desperation. It seemed as if the federal power was waiting for the moment when this desperation would become unbearable, because anything can be expected from people who have nothing to lose. The mayor of Moscow, Yuri Luzhkov, had threatened that if the deputies did not leave the White House by Oct. 4, they would be driven out by force. Several times a false alarm went up, that such an attack would occur, the last time on the evening of Oct. 3. Some opposition leaders were already discussing possible conditions for a compromise, relying on the help of the regions. The deputies hoped that another meeting of the regional representatives would help to bring at least a partial solution.

Buildup to the explosion

But the bloody events had already been developing since the middle of the preceding week, Sept. 24-26. Every day there were small fights between groups of demonstrators and militia or special military servicemen in downtown Moscow. What was the reason? It relates to the old conflict between the Moscow mayor and the Moscow City Council, which has been ongoing for the last two years. The City Council was dissatisfied with the political style of Mayor Luzhkov; many deputies accused him of corruption and had collected a wealth of material to prove their charges. The Moscow City Council had even demanded Luzhkov's resignation, but he refused and was backed up by the federal administration and the city court. The deputies believed that the court had been

bought by Luzhkov.

The Moscow City Council allowed different opposition groups to hold public rallies in the streets, while the city administration forbade them. Several fights broke out near Smolenskaya Square and Barrikadnaya Metro Station, in which the demonstrators used sticks and stones, the so-called "weapons of the proletariat." But the city administration apparently did not seek to prevent those clashes, but seemed rather to encourage them. For example, a rally on Oct. 2 was only forbidden the night before, so the people who came to it didn't know it was forbidden. And afterwards the material used for building barricades was not taken away, but left nearby on the pavement, as if for use in the next battle. And so it happened.

Due to such behavior of the Moscow city administration, the repeated clashes, etc., a group of young people, demonstrators with some fighting experience, came into existence, ready to be used in further fights.

On Oct. 3 there was to be held the so-called *Narodny Vecher*, or People's Evening, a traditional rally, the date of which had been set three months before. Many regions of the country would send their representatives to Moscow on that day. It was only by chance, that it now coincided with Yeltsin's Decree No. 1400, by which he had dissolved the Supreme Soviet. Many people came to town. The Moscow city administration again forbade the event just on the evening before, when everybody was already on his way.

The people arrived, and formed large groups. Forces of the special military service first tried to divide them into four parts. But the mass of people coming from Lenin Prospect, which included people from Abkhazia, Ossetia, and other regions, was too big, and the militiamen did not prevent them from starting the rally. They marched down to the center of the town.

It is important, that the street leading from October Square down to the center was not blocked by militia. They marched freely and were only stopped by a chain of militiamen near the Crimean Bridge. There were about 15,000 demonstrators and three rows of soldiers. The demonstrators were singing a song from before the Revolution, with the

text, "We are not going to be defeated and we will never surrender"; they broke through the chain of soldiers using pieces of wood or rods. The militia did not show much resistance. After only a few minutes, the soldiers divided themselves in two parts and let the demonstrators pass. Some in the crowd even shouted, "Thank you, boys."

Still, some soldiers kept fighting with the demonstrators, and as a result, some lost their shields. The demonstrators took these shields and proceeded to the center of Moscow, across the bridge. After one kilometer, they were stopped again, this time by a larger number of militiamen, who this time used tear gas—the same gas that had been used in Tbilisi and other hot spots before. This stopped the demonstrators for half a minute, because they didn't expect it. This was no longer a romantic experience. They now broke through the chain, beat some of the soldiers who had used the gas, and captured a truck and more shields.

Tumultuous scene at the White House

At that point, the demonstrators decided to move in the direction of the White House. They broke through two chains of soldiers. Some soldiers shot into the air. From Garden Ring [Road] they went down to Kalinin Prospect, passed the Moscow administration building, and came to the White House. Here the soldiers forming the cordon around it seemed shocked and embarrassed in the face of the unexpected crowd. It was really a revolutionary situation. For a while, they didn't do anything.

When a certain part of the demonstrators moved up to the White House, which stands on a hill, somebody began shooting from the Moscow administration building—shots from automatic guns. The crowd had only rods and sticks. When they heard the shots, they became even more furious. But they didn't attack the Moscow administration building yet. They first wanted to speak to Aleksandr Rutskoy in the White House.

After about 20 minutes Rutskoy came out. Not many people know that shortly before, he had received a new version of a message that the White House was about to be attacked by administration forces and forces of the military service. Maybe this was the reason Rutskoy now gave the command for the crowd to attack first the Moscow administration building, then the Hotel Mir, where some government structures were located and from where also shots had been fired, and then to go to the Ostankino radio and TV broadcasting station. If Rutskoy had given another order, if he had ordered them to stop here and build barricades for defense, instead of attack, maybe the outcome would have been different. Certainly it would be much more difficult now to accuse the deputies of a "communist plot against the state." If they had remained on the defenders' side, maybe the ruling structures would not have dared to launch an attack against the White House, and maybe President Yeltsin would have finally come to a certain compromise.

But Rutskoy made another decision, and now the developments could no longer be stopped. Armed groups from the White House were thrown together with the demonstrators at the administration building. Instead of opening the gate, there were shots from inside the administration building. Then two guards were shot. The door was rammed open with the truck that had been captured earlier. The demonstrators went inside. Most officials escaped through the back door, but two were captured and held for some time. I didn't see under what conditions they were held, but they were very soon set free, and already the same evening one of them, Vasily Shchachnovksy, gave an interview.

Battle at the Ostankino station

At the same time, a group of soldiers from the White House started for Ostankino. The crowd marched on foot and arrived later also at Ostankino. They entered through the gate and were rather sure that there would be no battle there, but that they would take the broadcasting station without conflict. But several minutes after the crowd had entered the building, there came shots from different directions. Apparently the shooters inside the station were prepared for that moment. The people outside fell to the ground, and about 30 people were killed right away.

The others were furious. The ones who had weapons shot back. But inside the building they had military equipment and were able to kill many people. At the end of the day it was estimated that 150 people had been killed in this battle alone.

There was a fire on the first floor of the TV building, and also on the second floor some things were broken by the intruders. They were not able to use the station for broadcasting themselves. Still the same evening, the remaining people were driven out of the building. The attack had failed.

At the same time, a small number of people were going to attack the building of the general staff near Arbat Square, but they didn't succeed; maybe they were badly organized.

Coverup of the casualties

Later in the evening, an elite corps arrived from Tula in Moscow. The attack against the White House started early in the morning of Oct. 4. First, guns and machine guns were used; then tanks arrived, at 11 o'clock.

It seems that the officials are not interested in publishing the real number of victims. The victims of the attack on the White House were not taken out, before a special investigations group had finished its work. I don't know what this work was, but when I heard this evening (Oct. 7) that they had only found 49 dead bodies, it seemed incredible. There were about 3,000 people inside the White House, when the attack started, and only 1,800 came out and surrendered. Therefore, a large number of people just disappeared. At the same time, some volunteers counted the corpses that were brought that day into the Moscow morgue: This number was

720 on the evening of Oct. 4. But the storm of the White House continued until the morning of Oct. 5. This fact, however, was only published in one single newspaper. So, even after most of deputies, and Rutskoy and Khasbulatov surrendered, others continued to resist. And we don't know anything what happened to these people. Nothing has been published about it.

As is known, Yeltsin proclaimed a state of emergency over Moscow at 4 p.m. on Oct. 3. However, the same evening, a large rally of Yeltsin supporters—young guys, in part well-armed—gathered in front of the Moscow Soviet. This crowd first gathered near the city council building, then went in and drove all city councilmen out and proclaimed that the Moscow city Soviet doesn't exist anymore. This decision was made official later by President Yeltsin himself. The Moscow city soviet was not involved in the fight between Yeltsin and Rutskoy. Only a small number of deputies supported the Supreme Soviet. But this was no reason to attack that building and to arrest a number of deputies, who spent several days in prison.

Concerning the treatment of the 1,800 deputies and other people arrested at the White House—some deputies have reportedly been badly beaten or even killed—I first want to confirm the reports, before going into that matter.

A new absolutism

In conclusion, I want to say some words about the present legal structures in our country. On Sept. 23 or 24, all the property of the Supreme Soviet was transferred to the Social Production Board, which is part of the presidential apparatus. This means that the legislative branch had lost its financial independence. The same happened to the Constitutional Court. The chairman of the Constitutional Court, Zorkin, was forced to resign, under the threat that otherwise the court would be dissolved. He resigned, and was replaced by a person loyal to Yeltsin, but later the Constitutional Court was dissolved anyway. This means that after the legislative branch, also the third branch, the judiciary, has been removed. A new absolute monopoly of power and property has been established in Russia. The Russian tradition of autocratic rule has been reestablished, and the period of pre-democracy, of a democracy to become, is finished.

We see signs of it everywhere. Those newspapers that tried to oppose the President, have disappeared. The other editors are very much afraid to be closed down, too, and are therefore behaving in a very cowardly manner. They don't dare to publish dissenting opinions anymore. Similar things must be said about the regions, which are behaving exactly as they did in Old Russia. They waited to see who would come out on top, to become vassals of whoever would prove to be the strongest. Maybe it is true that every people gets the ruler it deserves.

This is only my point of view; others might use much harsher terms.

Greater Serbia gets renewed U.N. backing

by Paolo Raimondi

On Monday, Oct. 4, the United Nations Security Council, meeting in New York, made the decision to prolong the mandate of the Unprofor ("peacekeeping") troops in Croatia for six months. So much for respect for national sovereignty. The U.N. mandate was expiring at the end of September and the majority of the people, the Parliament, and the political parties of Croatia had decided they did not want to keep the U.N. troops.

Originally, Unprofor had come to Croatia early in 1992 to be stationed in the so-called pink zone, about one-fourth of Croatian territory, which was to have functioned as a buffer zone between the Croatian forces and the areas occupied by Serbian and Chetnik (Serbian irregular) forces. The original mandate spoke of the U.N. task of stopping the fighting and primarily creating the conditions for the return of refugees to their homes, and reestablishing Croatian authority (with full respect for other minorities) over the territories which had been lost to Serbian aggression.

In fact, Unprofor did not fulfill this mandate in any way, as numerous military experts and observers verified. Instead, it guaranteed with its presence the continuation of Serbian occupation and the consolidation of Serbian positions.

An example of the ineffectiveness of the U.N. troop presence, as reported by the press in Zagreb, the Croatian capital, was revealed by the vice president of the Parliament, Zarko Moljan. In the context of discussions on renewing the Unprofor mandate, Moljan charged that the U.N. troops were responsible for having allowed Russian-built missiles of the Luna 7 type to be transported into the Serb-occupied Croatian territory. Two of these missiles were fired in early September against the outskirts of Zagreb and wounded several people.

In U.N. Resolution No. 871 of Oct. 4, it is affirmed that the United Nations intends to work now to make possible some type of peace treaty between the Croatian government and the "local Serbian authorities." This is the first time that such language has been used, and indicates more clearly than before, the intention of the United Nations to favor the Greater Serbia plot of Serbian fascist dictator Slobodan Milosevic and his Bosnian-Serb sidekick Radovan Karadzic, to annex lands which were formerly part of other republics, through sheer violence.