

## Eastern Europe: in the shadow of Hungary 1956

by Konstantin George

When Soviet General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachov returned to Moscow from London on April 7, he found himself faced with an escalating crisis of national unrest in the Russian Empire's satellite nations and in Yugoslavia, the Balkan powderkeg. With the threat of a 1956-style military invasion always looming, the Kremlin's task is to find right combination of imperial manipulation—of carrot and stick—that will allow it to keep control over its dominions.

Among the Warsaw Pact member states, the most acute situation is Hungary, where four rounds of price increases since Jan. 1 have brought the country to the edge of a strike wave. Added to this is a growing popular mood demanding an end to the presence of Soviet troops and Hungary's membership in the Warsaw Pact.

On April 2, fuel was poured onto the flames when Hungarian state-run radio broadcast without comment, the tape of a 10-minute speech by the late Hungarian primate, Jozef Cardinal Mindszenty, given at the height of the 1956 Revolution, in which Mindszenty demanded the immediate withdrawal of all Soviet troops; that Hungary leave the Warsaw Pact and become neutral; and that there be immediate free elections involving all political parties. Some observers are interpreting the decision by the state to broadcast the speech as a staged provocation, designed to promote a "too far too fast" destabilization, and thus ensure a Russian military intervention.

Such reasoning was supported the next day, when the Soviet Communist Party newspaper *Pravda* broke its silence on the Hungarian "experiment" to establish a 1945-48 model "multi-party system." *Pravda* denounced the Hungarian "opposition" for "seeking not the renewal, but the abolition of socialism," adding in very menacing tones: "The Hungarian Party is facing for the first time since the tragic autumn of

1956 such an intensification of bourgeois ideology fueling a nationalist revival in the society," and "political opponents, especially extremist elements in Hungarian society, want to put into question all the achievements of the past and the proven value of Soviet-Hungarian cooperation."

The *Pravda* commentary implicitly approved Hungary's "multi-party system" policy, but reflected Moscow's concern that the "experiment" might get out of control, as the Budapest regime's extreme austerity program radicalizes the people.

The level of popular apprehension about the economy was visibly demonstrated on April 3-4 (in Hungary a two-day holiday commemorating the country's "liberation" by the Red Army), when no fewer than 400,000 Hungarians took to their cars and drove into Austria, engaging in a furious panic buying-spree, grabbing up every video cassette recorder, stereo, radio, TV, electrical appliance, refrigerator, freezer, or other appliance they could get their hands on. In what amounted to a shoppers' invasion, Vienna and every Austrian town near the border were swamped with Hungarians; many stores were sold out, and a gigantic traffic and parking mess engulfed Vienna and the roads of Burgenland. The reason for this flood: New stiff customs duties imposed by Hungary, which take effect April 8, make such purchases prohibitive at home.

### Poland: the deal with Solidarity

The unstable Hungarian situation shows why Moscow has gone out of its way to ensure that the Polish "round table" talks ended on April 5 with an agreement between the regime and the Solidarity trade union. The agreement is designed to continue the policy of buying time, to postpone the next outbreak of crisis, with the cooperation of Solidarity and its

leader, Lech Walesa. Moscow cannot afford the nightmare of having both Hungary and Poland explode simultaneously.

The final phase of the round table talks was accompanied by a brutal message delivered by Moscow's Warsaw puppet regime to anyone contemplating not playing by the "rules of the game" defined by the agreement. Three days before the accord, a demonstration by 2,000 people in the western Polish city of Poznan against plans to construct a nuclear power plant—such demonstrations had been held almost weekly in Poznan without any police interference—was suddenly attacked by riot police, who engaged in an orgy of beating up hundreds of people. The attack deliberately chose what is considered in Poland a *non-political* demonstration—a demonstration which is not in a formal sense an anti-government demonstration—so as to maximize the effect of terror on the people.

How much time was bought by the round table agreement is questionable. The core to the crucial *economic* side of the agreement is that Solidarity has capitulated to the government's plan to index wages to inflation. Under the formula agreed to, wages will be increased by 80% of the increase in prices; i.e., a built-in guarantee of *declining real wages*, and thus a guarantee that a strike wave will occur; the only question is when.

### **Yugoslavia: calm before the storm**

Potentially most explosive of all, is the situation in the Kosovo province of "non-aligned" Yugoslavia, which, as we reported last week, had erupted into the first armed uprising in Eastern Europe since Hungary 1956. Following the suppression of the ethnic Albanian uprising in Kosovo March 23-30, the Yugoslav authorities have launched a wave of mass arrests. Upwards of 400 Albanian "nationalists and separatists" have been arrested, according to official figures released April 4—and those figures vastly understate the total number jailed to date. Not included in the figures are nearly 1,000 ethnic Albanians facing trial and prison sentences of 60 days for participation in the Kosovo general strike at the end of February. The presence of more than 50,000 Yugoslav Army troops, paramilitary security forces, and police, now patrolling the towns, villages, and roads of the Albanian-inhabited region of Kosovo, has brought a temporary, but extremely deceptive calm to the area.

The Kosovo Albanians are preparing the second phase of the armed uprising. Slowly but surely, armed bands are forming to create a partisan warfare zone in the wild, largely inaccessible, mountainous region bordering on Albania. The partisans can expect full support from Albania, which at the end of March came out in full support for the Kosovo uprising.

Beyond that, the Serbian-directed political purges of the Kosovo Albanian leadership that have followed the region's coming under direct Serbian rule March 28, coupled with developments in the westernmost and anti-Serbian Yugoslav Republic of Slovenia, ensure an escalation in the Yugoslav

crisis this spring.

In Kosovo, 12 Albanians were expelled from the Kosovo Central Committee, and far more important, from the Federal Yugoslav Central Committee. The move, engineered by Serbia and its party leader, Slobodan Milosevic, gave the forces of Milosevic a decisive majority on the Yugoslav Central Committee, and thus brought Milosevic another giant step toward becoming the "Greater Serbia" strongman of Yugoslavia.

The victory scored by Milosevic in Kosovo, however, triggered an anti-Serbian backlash in Slovenia, where for the first time a popular election was held to choose the new President of the republic. The winner was 39-year-old Janez Drnovsek, a liberal economist, an opponent of Serbian policy toward Kosovo, and an advocate of far greater autonomy for Slovenia. Under Yugoslavia's system of a rotating federal President, the next President, to be named May 15, will automatically be the President of Slovenia. As President, Drnovsek will be commander-in-chief of Yugoslavia's armed forces, whose leadership and officer corps is overwhelmingly Serbian and pro-Milosevic. The military will demand that Drnovsek enforce the Yugoslav Constitution, which in March was amended to end Kosovo's autonomy. The minute Drnovsek tries to even moderate a tough policy against the Kosovo Albanians, a confrontation with the Serbian-run military, turning into a constitutional crisis, is pre-programmed. Then, the Yugoslav crisis will no longer be a "Kosovo crisis," but a confrontation between a Serbian-led group of the eastern republics, against the western republics of Slovenia and Croatia, and the danger of a Soviet-backed military coup, under the slogan of "upholding the Constitution," will grow by the hour.

### **The Soviet nationalities**

The picture of unrest is not confined to Eastern Europe. National discontent in the Baltic, the Transcaucasus, and elsewhere within the U.S.S.R. itself is rising, as are Soviet moves in the direction of brutal crackdowns. On the same day as *Pravda's* warning to the Hungarian opposition, the Soviet media carried an ultimatum directed at the Estonian Independence Party, which was told to either abandon its pro-independence demands or face dissolution.

In March and early April, mass demonstrations and strikes have been sweeping the Soviet Republic of Georgia in the Transcaucasus. This unrest was, as in the earlier outbreaks in Armenia and Azerbaijan, triggered by KGB-inspired ethnic clashes—this time in the Abkhazia region of Georgia, which has a mixed Georgian and Turkic population. On March 18, thousands of Abkhazians took to the streets, demanding that Abkhazia secede from Georgia. This was followed on March 25 by Georgian counterdemonstrations, and then April 1, by another mass rally by the Abkhazians. By April 6, all of Georgia was engulfed in strikes and demonstrations, and unconfirmed reports speak of a general strike in the capital of Tbilisi.