

Kremlin leaders face grave internal crisis

by Konstantin George and Luba George

Since the beginning of June, an East bloc-wide wave of eruptions has confronted Mikhail Gorbachov and the Kremlin leadership with their gravest internal crisis since Gorbachov's 1985 election as Communist Party general secretary.

A leadership crisis atmosphere was already evident June 2, when Politburo member Alexander Yakovlev suddenly announced that an emergency Central Committee Plenum had been called for that very evening. Ultra-secrecy, even by Soviet standards surrounded that plenum.

Right before that, a visit by Bulgarian leader Todor Zhivkov, who had been scheduled to arrive in the first days of June, was abruptly postponed.

The delay of Zhivkov's visit was one of a series of sudden cancellations of planned early-June activities involving the Soviet political and military leadership. Gorbachov's military adviser, Marshal Sergei Akhromeyev, and Central Committee member Georgi Arbatov, head of the Moscow U.S.-Canada Institute, canceled their plans to go to the United States to appear before the House Armed Services Committee. A Warsaw Pact summit originally set for June 7-8 in Bucharest, Romania, quietly fell by the wayside.

On June 7, the West German government announced that Gorbachov's program for his planned June 13-15 Bonn visit had been "sharply curtailed," and Bonn could "not totally exclude" a postponement.

In between, on the fateful days of June 3-6, a full-scale crisis erupted inside the East bloc.

● June 3: A leak from a liquid natural gas trunk pipeline east of the Urals, was ignited by sparks from two passing trains, creating an inferno, with up to 800 people killed. The tragedy was a horrendous monument to the incompetence and extremely backward methods of operating inherent in the Soviet civilian system. The liquid gas leak had been under way for hours before the holocaust occurred. Pipeline managers, who had monitored the sudden drop in pressure along the line, knew that something was wrong, yet, instead of simply finding out *what*, tried to correct the pressure drop by *increasing* the gas pressure. This accelerated the flow of liquid gas from the leak, reaching the railway tracks much faster than would have been the case otherwise.

● June 3: There was a similar rupture of a natural gas

pipeline running adjacent to a trunk rail line in Soviet Moldavia, near the Romanian border. Everything points to a major pattern of KGB-run sabotage, and disasters which will be termed sabotage.

It is but a matter of time before the Soviet leadership makes a grand announcement to this effect, and uses this to inaugurate a wholesale purge along the lines of the aftermath of the 1934 Kirov assassination, which triggered Stalin's Great Purge. Gorbachov's speech on the rail disaster to the Soviet parliament stopped just short of citing sabotage as the cause. The Soviets chose KGB chairman Vladimir Kryuchkov to announce in *Izvestia*, June 6, the formation of a "commission of inquiry" on the pipeline disaster.

● June 4: The bloodiest case of inter-ethnic slaughter, surpassing the intensity of last year's anti-Armenian pogroms in Azerbaijan, began in the Fergana region of Soviet Uzbekistan in Central Asia, with mobs of Uzbeks on a rampage against Meskhetian Turkish and Crimean Tatar minority groups. The carnage lasted for four days, with no stop, with hundreds killed and thousands wounded (the official death toll was first 56, then 67 killed and 521 injured—in itself confirmation that many hundreds had been killed) and large sections of Fergana city, the region's capital, and the other towns of the region, in flames.

The militia was incapable of bringing the situation under control. As earlier in the Transcaucasus, the Soviet Interior Ministry troops were called upon to do the job. Their total had climbed to 12,000 by June 7, with the Soviet Army waiting in the wings. Of the Fergana region's 15,000 Meskhetian Turks, 11,000 were brought to camps set up by the troops.

● The Transcaucasus tinderbox was again approaching a flashpoint. TASS of June 5 revealed that the Armenian-inhabited region of Karabakh had been again paralyzed by a general strike and daily illegal mass demonstrations since May 30.

● June 4: A renewed Polish crisis broke out following the massive defeat for the ruling Communist Party in the parliamentary elections.

The election results were significant on two counts: First, the Polish Communist Party's discreditation had become complete; in 254 of 261 races where a Solidarnosc figure had run against a party official, Solidarnosc emerged victorious in the first round, and in the remaining seven are certain to win the run-off. The government's national list of 35 candidates, led by Prime Minister Rakowski, ran without opposition, yet were all defeated by voters who crossed their names off their ballots.

Secondly, nearly 40% of the electorate, despite endless exhortations by both the regime and Solidarnosc, *boycotted* the election.

Portrait of incompetence

These events have portrayed and brought to the forefront

a picture of utter incompetence by the Soviet civilian party leadership in running the empire. Under the shocks of the expanding crisis, one can also witness a growing irritation by the Soviet military over this spectacle of civilian ineptness and indecision in dealing with the crisis.

Even before all hell broke loose, the Soviet military was loudly proclaiming that the time had come to take "decisive measures" against national unrest. The Soviet Defense Ministry daily *Krasnaya Zvezda*, May 25, carried a report on nationalist "extremist" disturbances and "provocations" against the Army in the Latvian port city of Liepaja.

Krasnaya Zvezda reported that a group of youths belonging to the Latvian "Popular Front" had marched through the streets of Liepaja, to the Army's "Officer's Home," and unfurled banners and placards containing "crude insults" against the Soviet Army, calling the Army: "occupiers," "aggressors," and "fascists." *Krasnaya Zvezda* added that this was "not the first" such case in Latvia involving the youth of the "Popular Front," and concluded with a clear message to Gorbachov and the party and state leadership: "Isn't it time to take decisive counter-measures?"

Rallies in the Ukraine

Added to the list of the Baltic, Poland, and Hungary as potential headaches for Gorbachov, is the Ukraine, the larg-

est non-Russian republic.

During the last week of May, demonstrations were held by hundreds of university and high school students in the Ukraine and the Baltic Republics in support of the Chinese students. During this same time, the Ukrainian capital of Kiev briefly took on the character of a mini-Beijing.

That was on May 22, the high point of six continuous days of rallies in Kiev, around the 175th birthday of the Ukrainian national poet, Taras Shevchenko, when over 20,000 people gathered at what began as an official rally. The rally quickly became quite "unofficial" with calls for Ukrainian sovereignty and independence and banners reading, "Long Live Ukrainian Independence!"

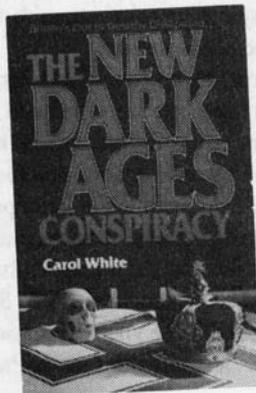
Special units of the Interior Ministry arrived, arrested and beat the standard bearers, putting them into police cars. Then, something happened which had never happened before at such a demonstration. The crowds blocked the street, surrounding the police cars. The vastly outnumbered police promised to release those arrested, if the crowds would let them pass. The crowds refused, and the police had no choice but to release their prisoners on the spot. Only then did the crowds disperse.

How long Gorbachov can keep the lid on in the Ukraine, Poland, Hungary, and the other restive captive nations of the Russian Empire is more questionable than ever before.

'If a black death could spread throughout the world once in every generation, survivors could procreate freely without making the world too full. The state of affairs might be unpleasant, but what of it?'

—Bertrand Russell

This evil is from the father of the peace movement—find out what the rest of them think.



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