

Soviet High Command sounds alarm, as crisis deepens

by Luba George

The Soviet Military High Command has broken its silence to announce that it is fast losing patience with the breakdown of authority in the country.

This breakdown derives from the ongoing discreditation of the civilian Communist Party and state leadership, which has been unable to prevent the empire's shattering economic and social crises from worsening every month.

Throughout October, the alarm was sounded by leading Soviet military figures. The Army is saying it has had enough; that the breakdown crisis in society is spilling over into the military itself, as reflected in the growing number of draft dodgers, pacifists, as well as a growing pattern of physical assaults on military personnel. At Soviet institutions of higher learning, protests and boycotts have been spreading against military preparatory departments on campuses from Riga to Irkutsk. Besides the Baltic and Siberian cities, student protests have been reported in Tomsk, Leningrad, Moscow, Kiev, Odessa, Voronezh, and Tashkent.

The most poignant warning was delivered in the Oct. 18 *Sovetskaya Rossiya* by General of the Army Vladimir Lobov, the Warsaw Pact Chief of Staff: "We soldiers and generals are worried, we are very worried indeed . . . the military press has recently and justifiably raised the alarm . . . the Army must be protected from outrages against its history and desecration of its relics. . . . We must restore the centuries-old principle of honor in service."

This message was also explicit in an Oct. 21 speech by Defense Minister Dmitri Yazov to a military conference on ideology, in which he denounced the growing ridicule and attempts to "besmirch" the Armed Forces. Yazov demanded a restoration of the image of the "glorious army," and an end

to the spread of "pacifism."

The Soviet military is not acting alarmist for propaganda reasons. October has indeed witnessed a qualitative shift in the scope of mass resistance against military service among especially non-Russian populations.

Mass draft resistance

Oct. 17: Mass demonstrations against military service started in cities and towns throughout the Muslim Transcaucasus republic of Azerbaijan and continued for at least six days.

The protests were also against severe mistreatment in the military of Azerbaijani conscripts, most of whom are relegated to hard labor construction battalions. More than one-half of the recruits in the battalions belonging to the Road and Railroad Construction Troops are from Central Asia. Jews and recruits from the Caucasus, Baltic republics, and the Western Ukraine (with its strong anti-Russian, anti-Soviet sentiments) are disproportionately high as well in the construction battalions.

The demonstrators included both youth and relatives of Azerbaijanis serving in the Soviet Army. Azerbaijan Muslim conscripts have been subjected to especially brutal treatment. According to the Azerbaijan Popular Front, in the past year alone, nearly 100 Azerbaijani conscripts died as a result of beatings and punishments they received in the military.

Oct. 11: In the Georgian capital of Tbilisi and other major Georgian cities, demonstrations were held against the military draft. Demonstrators included young conscripts.

Oct. 12: In the Armenian city of Idezhevan, students went on strike in support of Armenian conscripts who have been demanding that they be stationed and serve only in

Armenia. This was followed by a demonstration of 30,000 in the Armenian capital of Yerevan Oct. 19, supporting the conscripts' demands and calling for the establishment of national military forces for the respective republics of the U.S.S.R.

Nov. 1: Hundreds of protesters staged a sit-down strike in Tbilisi at the site of the April 9 massacre, when dozens of innocent Georgian women and children were slaughtered by Soviet troops. The protesters accused Defense Minister Yazov of responsibility for the massacre.

This autumn, 1,000 Lithuanians refused to serve in the armed forces. On Oct. 7 in Kaunas, the republic's second largest city, there was a congress of draft opponents which issued a declaration calling military service in the Soviet Armed Forces illegal, based on the 1949 Geneva Convention, which forbids forced service in an occupation army. Protesters have been filling out printed slips citing the provision, and refusing to serve their terms of conscription in the Red Army. The Soviet news agency TASS charged that the procedure "distorts" the Geneva convention. The demonstrators also demanded the establishment of national military formations.

The West German newspaper *Süddeutsche Zeitung* reported Nov. 2 that in Latvia, young soldiers continued to stage protests. Part of the protest was that members of ethnic minorities were brutally mistreated by Russian nationalists in the military.

In the Ukraine, too, Lviv, Odessa and Kiev were the scenes in October of anti-Soviet military protests and boycotts. Demonstrators protested the barbaric mistreatment of non-Russian Orthodox conscripts—especially Ukrainian Catholics (Uniates) and Jews—in the military. They demanded freedom from religious and ethnic discrimination and the right to be able to attend religious services.

Writing in *Krasnaya Zvezda* Oct. 28, the daily of the Soviet Defense Ministry, Gen. Lt. Norat Ter-Grigoryants, deputy chief of the Ground Forces Main Staff, warned of an alarming pattern of young recruits tearing up their induction cards. "All the more worrying," he said, "is that the geographical map of those refusing completely overlaps the map of nationalist activity." At the same time, there are "frequent violent encounters between soldiers of different nationalities." He added that this was occurring "in the full view of the party and the law enforcement organizations," who "pretend that nothing is happening." In one case, Soviet General Major Arutinian (head of the Military Commissariat, or the draft board military manpower pool agency for Armenia, was nearly beaten to death by a mob: "For more than 20 minutes the enraged crowd beat him. It was just luck they did not kill him."

Following the Ter-Grigoryants article, Gen. Grigori Krivosheyev, deputy chief of the Soviet General Staff and head of its Main Directorate for organization and mobilization, and thus in charge of military manpower, wrote in *Krasnaya Zvezda* warning that "conscripts are being poisoned by all

kinds of pacifist sentiments." Responding to demands of non-Russian nationalists calling for the establishment of national military formations, Krivosheyev said: "The task of defending the Soviet Union is a national task." Moreover, the increasing number of deferments of military service for students was putting undue strain on the rural and industrial working classes to defend the U.S.S.R. In addition, the sudden withdrawal of all mid-term students, he wrote, had deprived the Armed Forces of "crew and unit commanders, radar operators, high-class specialists on surface ships, submarines and in combat units. . . . There are actually no personnel to replace them at present."

Civilian incompetence blamed

On July 11, the Supreme Soviet passed a decree releasing all Soviet students serving in the military. In an interview with *Krasnaya Zvezda* Aug. 31, General Krivosheyev attacked the decree on two counts: for the chaos it had caused in the Armed Forces, which lost in August and September their 200,000 best-educated conscripts. The other reason was "social inequality"; that the new law was creating an army almost solely based on poorly educated youth from the urban working class and rural areas.

The most significant feature about the interview was that it marked a watershed in the military's current resurgence. It was a direct attack on the civilian elite strata which, in one stroke, through the July 11 decree, freed themselves and their children from military service. Krivosheyev attacked by name "representatives of the administrative and governmental apparatus and of the scientific, creative, and technical intelligentsia." He concluded by warning that the civilian elites' interference in the military was forcing a reversion to "the old, romantic designation of the Armed Forces in our society—the Workers' and Peasants' Red Army" of the 1920s. By referring to the army of that day, Krivosheyev was invoking the army of the period before Marshal Tukhachevsky modernized the armed forces in preparation for war—a time, in other words, when the Red Army was puny in size and technically incapable of waging war effectively.

The same precise denunciation, not accidentally, was voiced by General Lobov in *Sovetskaya Rossiya* of Oct. 18: "The military press has recently and justifiably raised the alarm about the Soviet Army's possible transformation into a Workers' and Peasants' Red Army."

These attacks by the Soviet Military High Command come to the very heart of the crisis facing Moscow: that the systemic crisis and civilian incompetence have not only created an abominable mess economically and socially in the empire, but incompetent tampering inside the military's own sphere, which through measures like the July 11 decree are threatening to destroy what is primary to the military leadership: the military's ability to retain a sufficient pool of technically qualified cadres, the precondition to waging and winning future wars of expansion.