

Gorbachov era begins with biggest purge in decades

by Konstantin George

Western media fantasies about a "warming trend" from Moscow were hit with a cold blast on April 23-24, when the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party met for the first plenum of the Gorbachov era, and brought three new members onto the ruling Politburo. All three are "hardline" and military figures, reinforcing a leadership determined to put the economy on a war footing and to achieve world domination by 1988, the 1,000th anniversary of the Christianization of Russia.

The new additions to the Politburo formalize the consolidation of power by the "Andropov Dynasty," party and KGB careerists who advanced to power under the tutelage of General Secretary Yuri Andropov, KGB head from 1967-82. They represent a younger generation, handpicked by old Stalinist "godfather" and decades' long ideological priesthood figure, the late Mikhail Suslov. They symbolize a police-state tightening of the Soviet Union, in which the purges are the means of effecting the transition to a full-scale war economy.

Promoted to the Politburo were: KGB Chief Viktor Chebrikov, 62; Central Committee Secretariat member in charge of party cadres (Mr. Hatchet-Man, for short), Yegor Ligachov, 64; CC Secretary in charge of military industrial production; and Nikolai Ryzhkov, 55. In addition, Defense Minister Sergei Sokolov, 73, was promoted to candidate Politburo member, bringing a professional military figure into such a post for the first time since the death of Defense Minister Marshal Andrei Grechko in 1976.

Moreover, the shifts in the Kremlin are part of a thoroughgoing leadership purge throughout the length and breadth of the U.S.S.R., which has been all but overlooked by the Western "establishment" media.

Gorbachov announced at the plenum that the 27th Party Congress would take place on Feb. 25, 1986, and would

feature a strategic keynote by himself, and a presentation on long-range Soviet "socio-economic" policy "through the Year 2000," now being worked out by the leadership. A new party program will also be drafted for the Congress—the present program dates from the 22nd Party Congress of 1961, under Khrushchev. The Party Congress will mark the highpoint of the current purge by Gorbachov of party and government officials. By conservative estimate, 60-100 of the 319 Central Committee members elected in February 1981 will not be on the CC after February 1986.

Only one group on the Central Committee has not been touched by the purges—the more than 20 CC members who form the Soviet military leadership.

Sabre-rattling toward Washington

Gorbachov delivered the keynote address to the plenum on April 23, a tough speech, with sharp attacks on the United States. Gorbachov said that the conclusion of the first round of the Geneva arms control talks that same day showed "that Washington seeks no agreement with the Soviet Union . . . that the United States is refusing to link the question of preventing an extension of the arms race to outer space, with a parallel limitation and reduction of nuclear weapons."

Gorbachov raised the specter of a Soviet rupture of the Geneva talks: "The United States is violating the agreement reached in January between Foreign Minister Gromyko and Secretary of State George Shultz, concerning the linkage of the three objects of negotiations"—space-based strategic defense, strategic offensive weapons, and intermediate-range nuclear weapons.

This provocative posture was emphasized in the Soviet rude denial of a State Department claim some days earlier, that the Russians had agreed to apologize for murdering Major Arthur Nicholson of the U.S. Military Mission in Pots-

dam, East Germany, and pay compensation to his widow. The Soviet foreign ministry contradicted the State Department announcement that the Russians had pledged never again to use force against U.S. Military Mission personnel.

The same Soviet aggressive posture is evident in events surrounding Gorbachov's April 7 propaganda offer to "freeze" intermediate-range missile deployments. Given the enormous Soviet superiority in intermediate-range nuclear weapons, this "freeze" was a bad joke, even if not one further SS-20 were ever deployed. Western intelligence services have since confirmed that 99 additional SS-20 launchers, located at 11 sites, are now under construction. When Gorbachov's erstwhile "freeze" expires in November, the number of SS-20 launchers stationed will jump from the current 414 to at least 513.

The Andropov Dynasty rules

The biographies of the three new Politburo members underscore that mass purges and pre-war militarization of society are the order of the day:

Viktor Chebrikov became deputy KGB chief in charge of personnel in April 1967, when Andropov was appointed to head the KGB. In early 1982, he was named first deputy KGB director, and then with Andropov's assumption of power he became KGB chief. At Andropov's last CC plenum, in December 1983, he was promoted to candidate member of the Politburo.

Yegor Ligachov, a protégé of Suslov, was named First Secretary of the Tomsk region in Siberia in 1965, and at the April 1983 CC plenum under Andropov was appointed to run the CC Department of Cadres, which executes the purges. At the December 1983 plenum, he was elected to the CC Secretariat with the responsibility to oversee purges. Soon thereafter, a purge of regional party heads was begun, eliminating over 20% of the regional bosses.

Nikolai Ryzhkov is one of the key enforcers of the transition to a war economy. Before becoming in 1975, first deputy minister of heavy machinery building and transportation equipment in 1975, he ran one of the Soviet Union's key heavy machinery complexes in the Urals industrial city of Sverdlovsk. Since 1978, he has been first deputy head of the State Planning Commission (Gosplan), in charge of heavy industry, including production for the military.

The next phase of the purges began in March, when Gorbachov came to power. Now, the biggest purge of Soviet party functionaries and government officials in decades is under way. The opening phase of the purge hit the regional party organizations, but, as the results of the CC plenum show, the personnel changes will not be confined to the regional level.

Across the Soviet Union, the holdovers of the Brezhnev era, the remnants of the "Brezhnev mafia" and allied regional power blocs, are being removed. In the first wave of regional party conferences (165 regions and 15 republics are holding conferences prior to the Soviet Party Congress), the first

secretaries of two regional parties have been dumped: On March 22, Ivan Bespalov, first secretary of the Kirov *oblast* (province), was removed; soon thereafter, Vladimir Mikulich, first secretary of the Minsk *oblast*, was also dumped.

Highlights of the purges sweeping the non-Slavic republics include:

- A purge of "Brezhnev mafia" holdovers in the Georgian Republic. One focus has been on the police and judicial apparatus in the town of Gori, Stalin's birthplace, where the heads of both the criminal police and the patrol police were fired. The state prosecutor was also fired and faces criminal charges.

- In the Turkish-speaking Muslim republics of Azerbaijan in the Caucasus and Kirghizia in Central Asia on the Chinese border, mass purges are under way.

- In Uzbekistan in Central Asia, thousands of Brezhnevite party functionaries, who acquired their positions under the late candidate member of the Politburo Sharaf Rashidov, have been removed or transferred, while 9,000 personnel have been added to the KGB and police agencies.

What began in March, escalated rapidly in April. The CC Secretariat, with Gorbachov presiding, met in Moscow on April 8. Present were Grigorii Romanov (Politburo member, responsible for war industry), Vladimir Dolgikh (candidate Politburo member and CC secretary, responsible for heavy industry), Yegor Ligachov, Ivan Kapitonov (Ligachov's predecessor at the Party Organization Department, another purge hatchet-man), Mikhail Zimyanin (former top lieutenant to Stalin's dreaded secret police chief, Lavrentii Beria), and Nikolai Ryzhkov. The Secretariat presided over a meeting of leaders of industrial and agricultural enterprises and scientific research facilities and complexes.

Gorbachov sounded the keynote, declaring that the Soviet Union "is going through an important phase" where "big deeds and important decisions" have to be taken. He called the 27th Party Congress and the 1986-90 Five Year Plan "the turning point" in the development of the Soviet Union and the Soviet economy. He echoed the themes of Stalin's speeches of the 1930s—massive economic transformations, purges, and war preparations. "It is a time of hard work," and now more than ever it is necessary to "improve organization and constructive powers and resources to boost economic progress. . . . Creative forces and reserves have to be mobilized to improve productivity. . . . Less money will go for new plants. . . . The bulk will go for technological reorganization and reconstruction of existing plants."

Gorbachov stressed that "important measures" would be taken to "improve management" and deal with "subjective problems," such as the "incapacities" and "shortcomings" of people running the enterprises and ministries. He warned that the Soviet Union must stop producing "outmoded machinery and consumer goods that meet no demand." Reviewing first-quarter economic performance, he declared that it had been hurt by complacency, poor organization, and irresponsibility. He repeatedly cited the need for "more discipline."