

# A power struggle rages in Kremlin

by Konstantin George

On Sept. 29, Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachov, after a disappearance of 53 days, reappeared in public to receive a 370-member French delegation. His frenzied actions, pounding his fist on the desk, while proclaiming in an agitated, haughty manner: "There's no political opposition in the Soviet Union, no opposition to Gorbachov," betrayed without the need for any hidden microphones inside the Kremlin, that a power struggle is raging inside the Soviet leadership. Gorbachov's remarks were rebutted on the same day by Politburo member, and spearhead of the Gorbachov "make a New Yalta deal with the Western Trust" faction in the Soviet leadership, Aleksander Yakovlev. Yakovlev confided to Britain's multi-millionaire publisher and Trust figure, Robert Maxwell, that "there is conservative opposition to Gorbachov's policies."

Gorbachov's headlong drive for a "New Yalta," beginning with the INF agreement, coupled with his campaign of *glasnost* and its outpourings of emphasis on the "negative" concerning the past under Stalin, the post-Khrushchov period, and the present, has galvanized a growing, powerful, "neo-Stalinist" opposition into action. The opposition fears that the New Yalta's middle term consequences would be disastrous for the Muscovite Empire, and that *glasnost* has already opened a Pandora's box of internal problems, starting with the disturbances among the captive nationalities: last December in Kazakhstan, the Crimean Tatars this spring and summer, this August in the Baltic Republics, and the potential for much worse to erupt.

There is, to say the least, a cloud of uncertainty as to whether an INF agreement will be sealed, or, if so, whether it will "stick." Gorbachov's failure to utter even a single word about the INF agreement or a summit with Reagan, during his initial reappearance, bear moot testimony to this point. Soviet publications, such as *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, speak carefully about the "probable agreement," and a "possible summit." The director of the Moscow USA-Canada Institute, Georgi Arbatov, writing in *Moscow News* Sept. 30, was explicit, that while a summit is "desirable," it is "by no means a settled matter."

## Mandated power

One crucial fact must be understood concerning Gorbachov. He wields far less power than one generally assumes. His "power" stems from the mandate given him by the Politburo/*nomenklatura* forces that agreed to make him general secretary in March 1985. The majority of these power brokers, of the Suslov ideologist and Russian chauvinism pedigree, either belong to the Muscovite "neo-Stalinist" current, or, under the conditions of Gorbachov's pell-mell rush into sweeping agreements with the Western Trust, will rapidly join forces with the neo-Stalinist core.

The opposition to Gorbachov has taken the public form of articles and speeches, which took off, beginning in March, notably in publications of the *Russian Republic*, and in particular by Yegor Ligachov, the Politburo's and Secretariat's ideology boss, denouncing the *glasnost* attacks on the Stalin period, the *glasnost* fixation on the negative side of Soviet society today, and the attempt launched under *glasnost* to rehabilitate the Trust wing of the 1920s Bolsheviks, in particular Trotsky and Bukharin.

One month after Gorbachov was installed (April 1985), at the first Central Committee Plenum "under" Gorbachov, three new Politburo members were added, including Ligachov and KGB boss Viktor Chebrikov. To state matters bluntly, a new "Suslov" and a new "Andropov" were added to the Politburo, to provide the neo-Stalinist section of the *nomenklatura* with the ability to terminate Gorbachov's rule should the need ever arise. In the current rumblings in Moscow, Ligachov has taken the offensive against the "excesses" of *glasnost*, while Chebrikov, in his Sept. 10 speech commemorating the 110th birthday of Cheka (KGB) founder Feliks Dzerzhinsky, in the midst of Gorbachov's disappearance, quashed any schemes to rehabilitate the Bolshevik's Trust component, personified by Leon Trotsky and Bukharin.

Gorbachov's problems, however, all pointing toward a major shift in the Soviet Union, began well before his 53-day absence.

## The unraveling of a general secretary

A review of the first nine months of 1987 shows the inexorable growth of the storm now engulfing the Kremlin.

**January:** The long-postponed Central Committee (CC) Plenum is finally held with a very noteworthy result. This is the first post-Reykjavik Central Committee Plenum, one month after the riots in Kazakhstan. General Secretary Gorbachov, who should be the "boss," calls for the Central Committee to adopt his resolution that a special Party Conference be held in mid-1988, a conference that would, among other things, be used to settle "personnel questions," i.e., getting rid of many on the Central Committee. Gorbachov stressed that such a conference was necessary to set policy "at crucial stages." The Central Committee refuses to agree.

**March:** The anti-*glasnost* campaign begins in earnest. In

late March, at a meeting of the Secretariat of the Russian Republic (RSFSR) Writers' Union, speeches were delivered denouncing the *glasnost* campaign, and urging writers and editors to pay more attention to the "positive achievements" of the Soviet Union historically. The speeches were printed in full March 27 in *Literaturnaya Rossiya*, the literary weekly of the Russian Republic.

**April:** In a full page article in *Sovetskaya Rossiya*, April 19, little noticed in the West, the first decisive blow against attempts to rehabilitate Bolshevik Trust figures is delivered, in a scathing attack against Stalin's 1920s opponents, Zinoviev and Kamenev.

The long-term significance of the Dec. 26, 1983 CC Plenum, the last under Andropov, comes into perspective. That Plenum brought a core Russian Republic mafia onto the Politburo, Mikhail Solomentsev (RSFSR Chairman of the Council of Ministers, 1971-83) and Vitali Vorotnikov (RSFSR Chairman of the Council of Ministers, 1983- ), and brought Yegor Ligachov to Moscow, placing him on the Secretariat.

**April:** The rumblings reach the outside world through a series of cancellations and postponements concerning Gorbachov's itinerary to visit neutral and Western countries (Yugoslavia, Greece, Italy), and West German President Richard von Weizsäcker is suddenly informed, with no explanation, that his planned May visit to Moscow is off for the time being. One element in the string of cancellations is a shift in Soviet policy toward radically increasing the process of economic integration within the Comecon. Ligachov emerges as a chief spokesman for this tendency.

East German Politburo member Kurt Hager, interviewed by West Germany's *Stern* magazine, is asked about Gorbachov's *glasnost* and "reforms," and responds: "Just because a neighbor is papering his walls, doesn't mean we have to." The East German party newspaper, *Neues Deutschland*, reprints the interview in full.

**May:** The end of May produced what observers in Europe characterized as the most "say nothing, do nothing" Warsaw Pact Summit, in East Berlin, they had ever witnessed.

**June:** The U.S. military enters the Gulf in force. The Soviet military orders an outrage committed during Warsaw Pact naval exercises in the Baltic. The West German Navy Tender *Neckar* is deliberately fired on and hit several times. No apologies are offered.

Ligachov, on June 22, in a speech at the Central Committee building in Moscow, rakes Soviet ministries over the coals for "failing to take proper decisions based on Party directives to expand economic relations" with the nations of the Comecon. He orders the ministries to set up "new forms of cooperation" including "direct production links," science and R&D links, and "joint enterprises."

The Central Committee again convenes a plenum, June 25-26, addressed by Gorbachov, who again presents his proposal for a June 28, 1988 special conference. This time it's

ratified, and three new members are added to the Politburo, including leading Trust link, and Gorbachov associate, Aleksander Yakovlev. Behind these apparent victories, all is not well with Gorbachov. He is forced to admit in his address to the Central Committee that opposition to him is strongest in the Party's leading bodies: "We cannot allow a situation where changes in the frame of mind of the people outpace the understanding of these processes in the Party, the more so in its guiding bodies."

Tactically, Gorbachov commits a serious blunder in his speech. He singles out for attack by name 13 Central Committee members, including Nikolai Talyzin, the head of the Gosplan (and a candidate Politburo member), Demirchyan, the Armenian Party boss, and Lev Voronin and Ivan Silayev, two deputy prime ministers under Prime Minister and Politburo member Nikolai Ryzhkov. The attack on Silayev, boss of the super-ministry Machine Building Bureau, signals that future purges could strike at the military industrial complex, a hitherto sacrosanct entity.

Gorbachov, by attacking influential people and not removing them, has played into the hands of the growing opposition. Similarly, some 30-40 individuals since the 27th Party Congress have been purged from their posts, but remain on the Central Committee.

**July:** On July 1 and again on July 3, Ligachov addressed the editorial board of *Sovetskaya Kultura*, demanding that more attention be paid to "the achievements of the Soviet regime," during the 1930s and now. His statements, reprinted in *Sovetskaya Kultura*, July 7, echoes the *Literaturnaya Rossiya* articles of March 27. He also cites the positive example of *Sovetskaya Rossiya*, thus declaring his stand on the Trotsky/Bukharin rehabilitation question.

Ligachov then fires a shot across the bow of Gorbachov, Mr. and Mrs. He calls for "increased state and party control" over culture. The seemingly innocuous phrase is an attack launched against the two people who run culture in the Soviet Union; Raisa Gorbachova, boss of the Soviet Culture Fund, and Gorbachov crony, Aleksander Yakovlev, the Central Committee Secretary in charge of propaganda and culture. Ligachov denounces moves to publish books by previously banned writers.

The opposite view, Yakovlev's, is provided in *Literaturnaya Gazeta* of July 8, when an article calling for the printing of books by previously banned writers ends by quoting Yakovlev on the "need to be tolerant of different views."

At the beginning of July, the U.S. State Department announces, prematurely, that Shultz and Shevardnadze will meet in mid-July. Moscow is silent, the meeting never occurs. Then, in mid-July, the INF agreement, stalled for months, acquires momentum with the agreement on a "global double zero option." Moscow, ever testing the West for further concessions, promptly adds the removal of the West German Pershing 1-As as a condition.

Gorbachov tries to go for the kill against one of his Politburo opponents, Vladimir Shcherbitsky, Ukrainian party boss. From January-July 1987, seven Ukrainian regional first secretaries are removed from office, along with Stepan Mukha, the KGB chief in the Ukraine. On July 12, the chairman of the Ukrainian Council of Ministers, Aleksander Lyashko, is fired. On July 16, the Ukrainian Central Committee expels Lyashko and Mukha from the Ukrainian Politburo. Then, on July 25, *Pravda* publishes front-page a 1919 letter by *Lenin*, denouncing "abuse of power" by the Party's Ukrainian leadership, with Lenin quoted saying, "All possible measures will be taken to end the abuse." To make sure even illiterates get the message, *Pravda* comments that the letter is "relevant to today," where the "Party is in a struggle against officials driven by petty, selfish interests."

**August:** During Gorbachov's disappearance, the nationalities problems of the Russian Empire come again to the fore, when demonstrations against the 1939 Hitler-Stalin Pact which delivered Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania to Russia, are staged in the capitals of the three Baltic Republics. The demonstrations spark a major, and still raging, debate in the Soviet press concerning local autonomy, relations between the nationalities, etc., with views ranging from liberalism to increasing Russification. In the context of the debate, there is, at least one non-debatable singularity—a Soviet policy upholding the "validity" of the Hitler-Stalin Pact. The mass of Soviet articles in the last month on the subject has unanimously upheld this view, and the heaviest numerical concentration of such articles has appeared in the newspapers of the Baltic Republics.

Under U.S. pressure, the Kohl government capitulates on the Pershing 1-A issue, agreeing to scrap them in the context of an INF agreement, and the way is cleared for the Shultz-Shevardnadze talks in September which produced an "agreement in principle."

**September:** At the height of the drive to secure an INF agreement, the Soviet military launches a string of major military provocations in Europe. A Soviet bomber intrudes into Dutch airspace; a Soviet fighter wings a Norwegian reconnaissance plane over the Barents Sea, nearly causing it to crash; Soviet troops fire on a vehicle of the U.S. Military Mission in East Germany, wounding one American soldier; a Bulgarian patrol craft rams and sinks a Turkish fishing vessel within Turkish territorial waters in the Black Sea; a Soviet SU-24 fighter-bomber with nuclear weapons on board, ostentatiously flies over the West German city of Braunschweig on Sept. 17, the very day the INF agreement is reached in Washington.

The death knell for attempts to rehabilitate Trotsky and Bukharin is sounded. On Sept. 10, KGB chief Viktor Chebrikov denounces Trotsky and Trotskyism repeatedly in his policy speech delivered to honor Cheka founder Dzerzhinsky. Chebrikov also presents the KGB's contribution to the

debate on the troubles among the nationalities. He blamed "Western intelligence services" for being behind the riots and demonstrations, naming the December Kazakhstan riots, the spring demonstrations by Crimean Tatars, and the August troubles in the Baltic Republics.

On Sept. 27, the next major blow is delivered against the would-be rehabilitation of Bukharin and Trotsky, in a full page article in *Sovetskaya Rossiya*. The article, mocking Western media expectations that Trotsky is to be rehabilitated, calls them "groundless." It is titled: "They Want to Rehabilitate Judas." Trotsky is depicted as a "narcissist," who tried to "split the Party," the "opponent of Lenin" who turned traitor. Bukharin is dismissed as a "follower of Trotskyism."

In the last week of September, the Soviet Union can no longer hide the fact that the grain harvest is a failure. A large part of the harvested crop, lying in fields awaiting transport, is destroyed by heavy rains. The harvest disaster will have important political consequences.

One important thing did *not* happen during August and September. Following *Pravda's* July 25 denunciation of the Ukrainian leadership, and during the entirety of Gorbachov's absence, the purge of Central Committee level party functionaries has stopped, with as yet no resumption.

Gorbachov's return has not effected a cooling down in the factional debate raging inside the Soviet Union. If anything, it has been intensified, and, as in March, the position of "point man" in the media has been taken by *Literaturnaya Rossiya*.

*Literaturnaya Rossiya* of the last week in September carries two landmark articles. The first amounts to an endorsement of the Russian chauvinist Pamyat Society, today's racialist and anti-Semitic version of the Black Hundreds of Czarist days. The weekly's editor in chief declares he's willing to "meet with the leaders of the Pamyat Society" to "find common positions."

More stunning is that the March broadsides against *glasnost* as defined by Gorbachov, have now been joined by the first explicit attack against *perestroika* as defined by Gorbachov. *Literaturnaya Rossiya* carries a review of three magazine articles written by old Stalinists, denouncing the Khrushchov era. *Perestroika*, as now being practiced, is blasted as a "continuation of the liberal course" under Khrushchov. No editor would dare allow such a sentence without explicit backing by the *nomenklatura's* power brokers.

Gorbachov is under no illusions that he is heading toward the fate suffered by Khrushchov. In his speech to the visiting French delegation, he candidly admitted his doubts about his future, when he remarked that "without democracy and *glasnost*," reform policies are "condemned to failure," and then, in a look at the haunting past, noted the "failure of earlier attempts, especially after the 20th Party Congress," i.e., under Khrushchov.