

## December eruptions likely to shake Soviet Empire

by Konstantin George

Major eruptions are expected by December inside the Soviet Empire, around the time Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachov embarks on his meetings with President-elect George Bush and British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher during the U.S. transition period. Gorbachov, on his trip to the U.S.A. and Britain, will have on his agenda two prime strategic questions: the pursuit of East-West "New Yalta" arrangements with the Bush administration; and what the West will do to bail Moscow out of the food and national unrest crisis shaking the Soviet Empire.

Gorbachov will attempt, employing military blackmail, to extort the maximum of political and economic tribute to rescue the crisis-ridden Russian Empire. This process began in earnest with the Kohl-Gorbachov summit meeting in Moscow in October, followed by the forced resignation of Bundestag President Philipp Jenninger as a means of further edging the West Germans into strategic accommodation with Moscow. The process will continue next with the arrival of French President François Mitterrand in Moscow on Nov. 25. Then will come Gorbachov's grandstand tour to Great Britain and America.

The backdrop to Gorbachov's westward odyssey in December will be an ever-worsening food crisis in the U.S.S.R., coupled with:

- In Poland, the explosion created by the desperation of a hungry, freezing citizenry, faced with no heating fuel, and an absolute low point in the availability of food and non-food basic essentials. A Russian military intervention is increasingly likely if the Polish puppet regime proves unable to contain the unrest.
- The coming to a head of the showdown that has begun between Moscow and Estonia, and the extension of this confrontation to include the other two Baltic Republics of Latvia and Lithuania.
- Growing nationalist unrest in the Ukraine, where news

of the resurgence in the Baltic sparked a 20,000-strong mass demonstration in the Ukrainian capital of Kiev on Sunday, Nov. 13, for the first time in postwar history.

- The near-certain continuation of mass protests in the Transcaucasian Republic of Georgia (100,000 Georgians demonstrated on Nov. 13, in the capital of Tbilisi) and expectations that this will spark a renewed protest movement in neighboring Armenia.

- Probable expansion of the national unrest by December to Soviet Central Asia, above all in Uzbekistan, where popular anger is expected to erupt over Russian programs to drastically reduce the "high birth rates" of the local Turkic populations. A recently formed Uzbek "National Front" plans demonstrations, not only to protest Moscow's demographic policies, but to demand an end to the cotton monoculture that forms most of Uzbekistan's agriculture, to convert cotton-producing farmland into *food* production.

### Baltic sovereignty movement

In the Baltic region, Moscow and the KGB secret police thought they had "solved" the problem of national unrest through the creation in September of the Communist Party-controlled "popular front" mass movement in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. Moscow had calculated that such controlled-from-the-top "mass movements" could give the illusion of change, while actually serving to motivate non-Russians to work harder, and ensure that any "autonomy" achieved would be a meaningless dead end.

The KGB operation failed, because the intensely anti-Russian citizens of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania had become politicized, and saw through the fraud of the "autonomy" Moscow was offering. The last straw came in mid-October when the details became public of the Gorbachov changes in the Soviet Constitution, due to be ratified by the Supreme Soviet on Nov. 29. Under the changes, which would

create the greatest level of legal *centralization* in Soviet history, Moscow would have full veto rights over any law adopted, no matter how minor, by a Soviet Republic, and the Soviet Constitution's Article 72, which, on paper, "guarantees" a Republic's "right to secede" from the Soviet Union, would be abolished.

What has happened in Estonia, the most advanced pre-insurrectionary situation, is the model for the anti-Moscow dynamic now sweeping the Baltic Republics. The small, recently formed Estonian Independence Party, which had been swept into a backwater by the brief "popular front" euphoria, suddenly acquired mass support. The local Communist Party leaderships were faced with the choice of either endorsing Gorbachov's constitutional changes and surrendering the Estonians into the hands of the national, patriotic opposition, or hastily "radicalizing" their "pop front" by joining the national sovereignty bandwagon against Moscow. They chose the latter course, hoping to ride the wave.

This is the background to the emergency session of the Estonian Parliament on Nov. 16, which issued a "declaration of national sovereignty," and voted 258-1 that no law passed by Moscow was valid in Estonia, unless accepted by the Estonian Parliament; in short, a veto right over Soviet laws was proclaimed. The same vote called on Moscow to draft a "Treaty of Union" governing the relations between the 15 Soviet Republics and the Moscow authorities, adding that until such a "Treaty of Union" was drafted and approved by the 15 Republics, the unilateral proclamation of a veto right against central Soviet legislation would remain in force.

A mere month ago, such an event was unthinkable, that a Republic's *party* leadership would place itself on an open collision course with Moscow. It was the price the Estonian party leadership had to pay to maintain any credibility for the popular front counterinsurgency.

Similar emergency sessions and similar "national sovereignty" declarations are expected soon from the parliaments of Latvia and Lithuania. The Lithuanian Parliament began its deliberations on this question on Nov. 18, and the Latvian parliament goes into session on Nov. 22. The Estonian Parliament has already announced its next session will be on Dec. 5, right before Gorbachov departs for the U.S.A., where it will declare any Nov. 29 Moscow changes in the Constitution null and void.

### **Estonian showdown**

The Estonian "declaration of national sovereignty" provoked an enraged reaction from the Soviet leadership. Gorbachov sent a telegram to Estonian party leader, Vaino Vae-lyas, summoning him immediately to Moscow, after Gorbachov returns from his India visit of Nov. 18-20. Gorbachov declared that the Estonian vote was totally in violation of the U.S.S.R. Constitution, and "cannot be accepted." With this reply, the last illusions in Estonia concerning Gorbachov have disappeared. Large protests, reminiscent of Armenia,

appear to be imminent, and a parliamentary vote to secede from the Soviet Union cannot be ruled out in the near future.

Immediately after the Nov. 10 Politburo meeting, three Politburo members were sent to the Baltic Republics. Viktor Chebrikov, "ex"-KGB boss and the Politburo's "czar" for internal security, was sent to Estonia to deal with the situation most threatening to go out of control. Nikolai Slyunkov was shipped to Lithuania and East European expert Vadim Medvedev to Latvia.

In Estonia, Chebrikov operated in a heavy-handed, threatening manner. In well-publicized speeches, he warned the Estonians that if they went too far with their autonomy demands, "you will lose everything." Chebrikov waved the threat of a mass counter-movement by the Russians who make up about 40% of Estonia's population, when he addressed the KGB-created Russian chauvinist movement in Estonia, the "International Front." On Nov. 11, the day Chebrikov arrived in Estonia, Tallinn (Reval) Radio announced a one-hour "International Front" demonstration for Nov. 15. His Russian contempt for Estonians was further shown when he *barred* Estonian journalists from attending any of the factory meetings where he was addressing the largely Russian workforce.

Chebrikov's billyclub tactics failed. The Nov. 15 Russian demonstration fizzled, no mass rallies materialized, and he only succeeded in further irking the Estonians against Moscow. Ironically, for desperate economic reasons, many of Estonia's Russian inhabitants want autonomy in the belief it would improve their miserable standard of living. The Estonian petition campaign for national sovereignty has collected more than 900,000 signatures. With a total Estonian population of only 940,000, this means that about one-third of these signatures were contributed by *Russians*.

Estonian patriots report that gangs of Russians have been formed, and could soon be deployed into attacks on Estonians, in order to provoke an "inter-ethnic conflict" similar to what has been occurring in Nagorno-Karabakh. The same capability could also quickly be developed in Latvia, where Russians compose half the population.

Gorbachov's latest speech, in the Russian town of Oryol, on Nov. 16, denounced in strident terms "nationalist extremism" in the Soviet Union: "Today, there are people operating from nationalist positions, who are provoking ethnic conflicts, and are attempting to undermine the friendship between the peoples of the U.S.S.R. We find to be most especially unacceptable, political extremism of a nationalist stamp."

Two days earlier, addressing a "mini-plenum" of the Central Committee, when he spoke before five Politburo members and the party leaders of all 15 Republics and all regions in Orel, Gorbachov emphasized the underlying crisis catalyzing the unrest—the Soviet food crisis. Gorbachov underscored that securing "food supplies . . . is the most crucial task" confronting the Soviet leadership.