

Soviet Congress is chauvinists' forum

by Konstantin George

The session of the "elected" Soviet Congress of People's Deputies, which began May 25, has been a staged show of "democracy" from start to finish. The choreography has been managed by Mikhail Gorbachov himself, who has chaired the entire proceedings, and behind the scenes by the Politburo's internal security czar, Viktor Chebrikov, and the KGB. It has featured a solo performance by Boris Yeltsin, who, behind the mask of "opposition," has acted as a stalking horse on policy for Gorbachov.

Beyond that, the televised portions of the daily proceedings served a dual purpose:

- 1) The Soviet media have played up those interventions by deputies that stressed the military and police use of toxic gas in suppressing protests. This is the Soviet policy since the Tbilisi, Georgia massacre, to intimidate future protests by bragging quite openly about their brutality.

- 2) The prime audience for which the show has been presented, however, is the Soviet Union's 150 million Great Russians. What the Kremlin is allowing to be televised is a portrayal of "national extremists" from the non-Russian republics threatening "Russian" rule, followed by Russian speakers denouncing to thunderous applause the "anti-Russian" manifestations in these republics. The Congress is opening the floodgates to Russian chauvinism.

The Congress of People's Deputies, in session since May 25, is an institution created through new laws ratified last Autumn, which amended the Soviet Constitution. Another batch of laws were worked out to govern the procedures of the new Congress. These laws were all drafted by the Central Committee's Legal Commission, chaired by internal security chief Viktor Chebrikov, one of the inner core of protégés of the late Yuri Andropov.

The Congress shows this "Andropov Kindergarten" to be in firm control. Gorbachov was duly "elected" state President, with autocratic powers under the new constitution, which, at least on paper, surpass those of even Stalin. The President chooses the candidate for vice president. The "Andropov Kindergarten" script proceeded with Gorbachov nominating Anatoli Lukyanov, a candidate member of the Politburo, a close associate of Gorbachov since the early 1950s when both were NKVD informants at Moscow University and together ran the Komsomol (party youth) organization at its law school—and like Gorbachov, a protégé of Andropov.

Yeltsin becomes a deputy

On May 30 came the televised proceedings that made Russian chauvinist demagogue Boris Yeltsin a Congress deputy. Yeltsin had previously received a yes vote majority by the Congress deputies for a seat, but since he scored lowest of 12 candidates competing for 11 Russian Republic seats, he apparently "lost." His "defeat" led to "mass demonstrations" of tens of thousands in Moscow on the weekend of May 27-28. With that as backdrop, the May 30 choreography ensued.

A Siberian deputy, Kazanin, solemnly stood up and announced that it was impermissible for a candidate, namely, Yeltsin, who had won the confidence of 5 million Muscovites, not to be a deputy. So, he, Kazanin, was offering to vacate his seat and give it to Yeltsin, if, "comrade Mikhail Sergeevich" (Gorbachov) would, as chairman, agree to such a move. It was grade-B movie stuff.

Gorbachov: "I'm not sure. . . . I don't know. . . . Can we accept the proposal of comrade Kazanin? This is a question of democracy." A number of deputies rose, and each in turn said passionately, "No, No, we have to do it." All eyes are on Gorbachov, who said, "Deep down, I'm in favor of that."

So was the KGB. The next speaker, Fyodor Burlatsky, a KGB officer "journalist" for the weekly *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, announced, "Yes, legally it's all right. We can do it." If a deputy relinquishes his seat, then the seat goes to the candidate who is next on the list of number of votes secured—Yeltsin.

The military and Imperial Russia

The Congress's next Russian chauvinist display came during the "debate" on the April 9 massacre in Georgia. A Georgian deputy denounced the military's use of poison gas and demanded that the commander of the Transcaucasus Military District, Gen. Col. Igor Rodionov, reply. Rodionov's "reply" was a loud declaration that only the military could save "Russia."

Rodionov, a former commander in Afghanistan, proclaimed that the Soviet Union was facing its worst crisis "since 1937." The events in Georgia "started on April 6 when more than 60,000 demonstrators agreed to ask the U.S. President, the Congress, and the NATO countries to 1) have the U.N. declare May 26 the day of sovereignty for Georgia, 2) acknowledge that Georgia had been occupied by Bolshevik troops in 1921, and 3) help get Georgia out of Russia through use of U.N. or NATO troops."

Rodionov shrilly denounced the demonstrations as "anti-Soviet, anti-socialist, and anti-Russian," and the Georgians' use of the following slogans: "The U.S.S.R. is a prison of peoples," "Russian occupying forces must leave Georgia," and "Let us put an end to Russian Communism, to Russian imperialism." All this was televised, as was the thunderous standing ovation from the 2,000 deputies.