

Soviet plenums come and go; breakdown crisis deepens

by Konstantin George

Plenums of the Soviet Communist Party's Central Committee come and go, but the Soviet empire's systemic crisis, highlighted by an economic breakdown crisis, deepens with each passing week. The perspective for the next days and weeks is for a very sharp intensification of that crisis. On every key crisis front, that is the reality, contrary to the euphoria in the Western media about the Communist Party "relinquishing its power monopoly" at the Central Committee Plenum of Feb. 5-7.

Some crucial dynamics:

The crisis of food shortages has not yet reached its peak. That will come first in March-April, when remaining foodstocks will be at their lowest. The horrendous infrastructural crisis, highlighted by the breakdown of the rail system, and with it a collapse of the nation's goods distribution system, is also worsening. On the national unrest front, pre-plenum Soviet media reports that the situation in Azerbaijan was "returning to normal" were pure inventions. As soon as the plenum ended, the truth began to seep out. Radio Moscow revealed on Feb. 8 that the Azerbaijan general strike had never ended, that "only 18% of enterprises in Baku are operating," that "in many cities and areas of Azerbaijan, troops are still being fired on," and overall in the region, "tensions are rising."

The extremity of the crisis was stressed by Mikhail Gorbachov in his opening speech to the plenum, with the words, "The situation in the economy is alarming. . . . We . . . have seen that the crisis in our country is deeper and more serious than we had thought. . . . We had hoped that the high point of crisis-filled developments would have been reached in 1989; however, the events of the most recent period have made it known that no turn for the better has occurred."

The Soviet economic breakdown crisis was predicted in

1985 by Lyndon LaRouche, and the reasons for it were spelled out in *EIR*'s "Global Showdown" Special Report. As the current plenum began, LaRouche issued the following analysis: "The thing to remember, is that the overall reality is clear: The Soviet economy is collapsing and there are no remedies for it in sight. The U.S. could not bail out the Soviet economy; it is impossible to do so. At the same time, the U.S. economy is collapsing. . . . The U.S. economy is spiraling down; the Soviet economy is spiraling down. . . . That will not change as long as the present policy configuration associated with Bush continues."

LaRouche followed this with a warning concerning the Soviet situation, to "expect breaking points": "Both political and economic developments will tend to erupt, not exclusively, but significantly, in places where they are least expected."

Strikes, social explosions

A vast social explosion will occur in February. Three days prior to the plenum's opening, Gorbachov held emergency meetings with Soviet coal miners, in an attempt to at least postpone mass strikes in Russia and Ukraine which could break out at any time and sweep key industrial sectors across the country. This strike wave will be a "united front" of informal strike committees and the official trade unions, desperate to preserve what remains of their credibility and institutional status against the rise of the strike committees. Moscow's nightmare of an out-of-control mass strike wave was prominently featured in Gorbachov's plenum speech: "The danger exists—and the party must consider that—that adventurists can . . . exploit existing difficulties and real problems, to manipulate the dissatisfaction of the work force."

In several regions of the U.S.S.R., the strike committees

and their mass following have achieved a dual power status. In the Siberian coal-mining region of Kemerovo, where the July 1989 mass strikes began, the strike committees have simply requisitioned printing facilities and are publishing their own newspaper. They are on the verge of forming an independent trade union, modeled on the Polish Solidarnosc, and are considering creating a political party. A similar situation exists in the Ukrainian Donbass coal-mining region, which also spearheaded the July strikes.

In at least two major Russian cities, Volgograd (formerly Stalingrad) and Sverdlovsk, mass demonstrations led by local strike committees, enraged over shortages, falling living standards, and the economic privileges flaunted by party leaders, have forced the collective resignation of local Communist Party leaderships.

Just how stormy the situation is, was apparent in an item reported in the official trade union newspaper *Trud*, on Feb. 1. The official trade union leadership had written to the U.S.S.R. Council of Ministers warning of “social tensions” and an imminent explosion among key sectors of the industrial workforce, unless price rises in energy, electricity, and transport introduced on Jan. 1 were immediately rescinded. The price rises have hit the profit margins of enterprises in the steel, chemical, and cement sectors. Under the new laws on “self-financing” of enterprises, these enterprises must either slash wages and reduce their workforce, or face losses and bankruptcy. As *Trud* reported, trade union offices across the U.S.S.R. have been “besieged” by crowds of angry workers, conveying an ultimatum: “Revoke the price increases or face strikes.”

As reported by Radio Moscow Feb. 8, the Central Council of the Trade Unions has given the Soviet government until Feb. 12 to revoke the price rises, or else they will demand an immediate session of the Supreme Soviet to satisfy their demands. Should neither of these things happen, then the immediate outbreak of the largest strike wave in Soviet history is a 100% certainty.

Strikes will be only one component of the vast social explosion. The demonstration of more than 300,000 people in Moscow on Feb. 4, demanding democracy and the end of rule by the Communist Party, was only the first shot in what will soon become a regular feature of the political battle—mass demonstrations against the Bolshevik system.

That Moscow demonstration was a mass outpouring by a population which justifiably fears that all hopes for a change for the better will soon be gone. The Soviet people know, better than anyone outside the U.S.S.R., how often in the past the Russian elite has reverted to brutal terror and repression in response to a breakdown crisis.

This demonstration was a continuation of the hopes and fears exhibited in the mass turnout of people in December to pay their last respects to Dr. Andrei Sakharov. In fact, the core of the Moscow demonstration was the very same people who had turned out at Sakharov’s funeral. The demonstration was

not, as it was misrepresented in the Western media, a demonstration in “support” of any single person—whether demagogue Boris Yeltsin or Gorbachov—nor, for that matter, was it a demonstration in favor of perestroika. Such genuine mass demonstrations, however, can be manipulated. The vacuum caused by the death of Sakharov has left this mass movement without a genuine national figure to lead it, and this vacuum is being filled by populist-fascist demagogues of the Yeltsin stripe. The manipulation game is being played by the Soviet media, in this case attempting to portray the mass movement as a “pro-Gorbachov” phenomenon.

The social explosion formed the backdrop to the Plenum, and showed the utter irrelevance of bodies such as the Central Committee being able to do anything about the systemic crisis.

Structural changes in the party

The striking, though superficial, structural changes in the Soviet Communist Party which the plenum adopted, and the party structural changes expected between the next plenum (at the end of February or early March) and the 28th Party Congress (now set for the end of June-early July), are triggering absurd and premature euphoria in the West. Ignoring the underlying reality of the breakdown of the physical economy and the political crisis that derives from that, headlines and commentaries abound, around the theme: “Gorbachov’s Reform Program Approved,” or “Communist Party Gives Up Its Monopoly of Power.” This euphoria will be short-lived.

The story of “Gorbachov’s victory” is false on two counts. The changes adopted were a Central Committee approval of “proposals” advanced by Gorbachov, as Gorbachov himself said in his opening speech to the plenum, “on behalf of the Politburo.” What was adopted, and the *timing* of the implementation of what was adopted, had been worked out beforehand, and reflected a temporary consensus by the inner leadership concerning the overhaul of the party. The Central Committee has, since the massive purges of last April, become a non-entity, having lost whatever power it had. Gorbachov’s “victory” over the Central Committee can thus be compared to the “victory” of a boxer against a punching bag.

The changes, at first glance, appear impressive. The Central Committee will be greatly reduced in size to less than 200 members, and the entire body of candidate CC members will be scrapped. A Politburo replacement could be created in the form of a Political Executive Committee, drawn from “representatives of all the republics.” With great fanfare, the end of the Communist Party’s “monopoly of power” has been proclaimed.

Looking at the matter more soberly, these “sweeping changes” are at best an adaptation to existing reality; in any case, they will accomplish nothing in terms of dealing with the systemic crisis. The Central Committee has long since ceased to play any effective role in policymaking or power

politics. The big fight will be on the question of scrapping the Politburo. It will be very messy, and no predictions can be made. Those fighting the new structures know that they must win now or never. Should the Politburo be scrapped, its replacement will hold no real power. The new Political Executive Committee, regardless of what "powers" it may have on paper, by its very composition can be nothing more than a debating society.

Whose 'monopoly of power'?

The much talked-about abolition of Article 6 of the U.S.S.R. Constitution, which stipulates "the leading role of the CPSU" in Soviet society, makes good headlines for Western newspapers, but it doesn't mean anything. The real "monopoly of power" in the U.S.S.R. is the monopoly of power held by the leadership of the *state* apparatus, most emphatically including the KGB, security forces, and the military. The plenum, which with the left hand took away the irrelevant party's "monopoly," increased significantly the state's monopoly of power, by voting up a *presidency* with greatly expanded powers,

The plenum's decisions concerning the party marked the recognition of the reality that the party's move toward its demise as an institution of power and authority is irreversible. How rapid the party's collapse has been, was revealed by the Soviet media Feb. 3, when it was reported that in the past two years, over 4 million of the party's 20 million members have quit, with the rate of resignations is climbing every month. The figures, alarming in themselves, understate the case. In the Transcaucasus, the Communists rule in name only: Over half the membership in the Azerbaijan party bolted in the month of January alone. In the three Baltic republics, as the case of Lithuania shows, the Communist parties have survived only by joining the popular pro-independence movements. Another yardstick has been the total collapse in the past year in the readership of the Communist Party newspaper *Pravda*, whose daily circulation has plummeted from 9 million to 4 million, and no bottom in sight.

At the plenum, Gorbachov wasn't kidding when he candidly presented the crisis of the CPSU: "A certain confusion, a mood of defeatism and liquidationism is noticeable. This is a danger not to be underestimated." If the party's immediate situation is bleak, its future prospects are hopeless, as seen in the Komsomol—the party's youth organization—whose ranks have been so thoroughly depleted by resignations, and the apathy of most of its remaining membership, as to render it unsalvageable.

The depth of the crisis came up repeatedly during the plenum proceedings. The most telltale feature of this was contained in the speech of Yuri Arkhipov, a Leningrad city party secretary. Arkhipov reported that in the past months, not one single person had applied for party membership in Leningrad, a phenomenon unknown since the Bolshevik Revolution.

U.S. starts to pull plug on ally Turkey

by Scott Thompson and Joseph Brewda

The Bush administration's no-defense budget, recently submitted to Congress, begins to wave "goodbye" to Turkey, the NATO member directly facing the Soviet Union in the easternmost boundaries of Western military alliance. The budget incorporates a decision to close two air bases there, one of which carried out electronic surveillance for early warning of a Soviet surprise attack. While it is unclear precisely how the new defense policy guidance announced Feb. 7 by Defense Secretary Richard Cheney will be implemented in terms of further cutbacks, the plans for such cutbacks occur at the precise moment when, contrary to Bush administration statements, the threat to the Southern Flank of NATO is dramatically escalating.

This point was driven home by the statements of top Turkish political and military spokesmen at the defense seminar of the American Friends of Turkey held on Feb. 1 in Crystal City, Virginia, a suburb of Washington, D.C. Turkish Ambassador to the U.S. Nuzet Kandemir stated: "There have been remarkable changes in the East bloc, but despite the perception of a diminished threat, there has been little change in the real threat." This fact was supported by Vice Admiral Guven Erkaya, the Chief of Plans for the Turkish General Staff, who said: "The false perception of a diminished threat from the East bloc has undercut NATO's deterrence capability."

It is Turkey's official position, under pressure from Washington to support the Conventional Forces Europe (CFE) talks, because, as former Ambassador Nuri Even told *EIR*, "It reduces the threat of a Soviet 'bolt from the blue' surprise attack upon NATO's Central European flank." But one Turkish official after another stressed that the result of the talks will only be to increase the combined threat against Turkey itself. Vice Admiral Erkaya said, "The post-CFE situation may enhance security in Central Europe, but the stability will get worse in the Middle East."

The Soviets have already given the most modern, MiG-29 equipment to their ally Syria. Even pointed out in discussion that even before the Soviets shift more modern equipment there, Turkey is vastly outgunned by the combined weight of Iraq and Syria in combat aircraft (2-to-1), armed helicopters (18-to-1), battle tanks (3-to-1), and artillery (3-to-1). These figures for two Soviet military surrogates, which do not even take into account the additional, massive forces