

Yeltsin clamps down dictatorship, sets conditions for civil war

by Konstantin George

With the bloody events of Oct. 3-4 in Moscow, Russia has become a military dictatorship, acting through the person of Boris Yeltsin, who rules by presidential decree. Contrary to what you hear from western capitals and the media, what occurred was not a "victory for democracy," in which a coup by a parliament full of communists and fascists was crushed. The myth of such a parliamentary coup was created to justify the real coup d'état by Yeltsin and the military, which ended whatever short-lived democracy post-Bolshevik Russia has experienced.

By no means does the turn to dictatorship mark the end of the Russian crisis. The economic shock therapy policies which are being so foolishly, suicidally demanded by western heads of state and financial institutions will, in the course of this autumn and winter, drive the situation in Russia toward chaos and anarchy. This process will create the conditions for civil war-like conditions. Civil war itself by next spring can no longer be ruled out.

Official myths exposed

There is as little truth to the official version of what has occurred in Moscow as there was to the Bolshevik historiography of the October Revolution of 1917.

The mythology begins with the "storming" of the parliament building, the White House, on Oct. 4, and the Yeltsin regime's claims that the total number killed Oct. 3-4 was 137. First of all, there never was a "storming" in the classical infantry sense. The White House, which had some 2-3,000 people inside it when the attack began, nearly all of them unarmed, was not stormed, but pulverized by tank-fired artillery. According to eyewitness reports, this carnage produced a death toll conservatively estimated at over 700.

The events of the previous day, Sunday, Oct. 3, were staged, or otherwise provoked: The events were set into motion by the large demonstration that was allowed to break through to reach the White House. The day before, the massive police cordons surrounding the White House had been thinned out to skeletal dimensions, allowing the breakthrough to occur. For the Yeltsin regime, the breakthrough was the precondition for initiating violence, so that it could

appear that it began from those at the White House. The shooting actually was initiated by crack OMON units near the White House.

The attack on the Ostankino television center was conducted by a small group of provocateurs. The regime knew in advance that a group was to attack the center, yet it did nothing while the ramshackle convoy of flag-waving desperadoes drove in daylight down broad boulevards clear across Moscow. The smaller bloodbath at Ostankino was precisely what the regime needed to justify the destruction of the White House the next day.

The storming of the White House was preceded and followed by mass arrests, which are still continuing. The myth circulated within Russia and accepted by a credulous West is that those arrested are "extremists" and "armed insurrectionists," and, as nearly everyone in the West believes, that the arrests were limited to those caught at the White House. Ironically, the very data put out by the Yeltsin regime explode this myth. Concerning the 1,500 arrested at the White House, only a small minority was armed. The western media so far are refusing to even cover the news that since Oct. 4, under the nightly curfew imposed on Moscow, a terror wave of arrests, exceeding those of Oct. 4, has been under way. An Oct. 6 report of the Russian Interior Ministry, carried by the news agency Itar-Tass, stated that during the night of Oct. 5-6 in Moscow, 1,700 persons were arrested by security forces on the streets and in house searches. A grand total of 11 weapons was confiscated from these 1,700 "extremists."

Those arrested were either taken to the notorious KGB Lefortovo Prison or to a Moscow sports stadium, in scenes reminiscent of the 1973 Pinochet coup in Chile. More concrete facts are hard to come by, but according to Moscow sources, many of the deputies arrested have been beaten. Among these are, reportedly, Ruslan Khasbulatov, the former chairman of the parliament, and the head of its Committee on Constitutional Questions, Vladimir Isakov. What has happened to arrested former Vice President Aleksandr Rutskoy, also taken to Lefortovo, is unknown.

The next myth to be dispensed with is that the Yeltsin ban on "organizations and parties involved" in the defense of

the White House concerns “anti-democratic” and “extremist” organizations.

In the first place, no state other than a dictatorship bans organizations on the basis of their views, no matter how “extreme,” unless they are committed to the violent overthrow of the state. Lost in the confusion of Oct. 3-4 is the fact that the parliament had voted for a *peaceful end to the crisis through early, simultaneous elections for both parliament and President*. The parliament had met Yeltsin far more than halfway, in agreeing to its own dissolution, provided that Yeltsin, too, would face a free election.

Otherwise the list of banned organizations and institutions includes leading pro-democracy forces, which by no stretch of the imagination could be classified as “extremist.” The Army officers’ pro-reform organization Shield, which played a pivotal pro-Yeltsin role in smashing the August 1991 Bolshevik coup attempt, was banned, and its leader, Col. Vitali G. Urazhsev, arrested and carted off to Lefortovo Prison. On Oct. 5, Yeltsin dissolved the Moscow City Council and all the local district councils in the city of Moscow. These were organs controlled by true democrats, civil rights organizers, men and women who organized the people of Moscow to defend freedom against the August 1991 putschists.

In the evening of Oct. 3, two prominent democrats of the Moscow City Council, Yuri P. Sedykh-Bondarenko, its deputy chairman, and Viktor Kuzin, deputy chairman of the council’s Standing Committee on Legality, were arrested, along with other members of the body, with no charges presented. They have since been released, but the City Council of which they were members no longer exists.

This brings us to the next myth. Yeltsin, in an Oct. 6 television address, promised that elections for parliament would be held Dec. 11-12, and announced the lifting of press censorship. Concerning that, Viktor Kuzin told *EIR* on Oct. 6, after his release: “Yesterday Yeltsin dissolved the [Moscow] councils, so we no longer function as a branch of power. . . . He said there have to be new elections to these [regional and municipal] councils, but he didn’t say anything concretely. I think it is impossible for there to be any democratic, free elections. There is such a mess, such absolutely wild slander everywhere, censorship, banning of organizations. They basically banned communist and nationalist organizations, but they also really want to crush the democratic organizations. There is pre-emptive censorship in the press.”

Western governments and media were quick to hail Yeltsin’s “democratic” promises. Yeltsin announced that elections would proceed for both chambers of a new parliament, the State Duma and a regionally based upper house replacing the existing Federation Council. His original Sept. 21 decree dissolving parliament had called for elections only for the State Duma, and preserving the Federation Council, composed of regional chiefs of administration and regional parlia-

mentary deputies, as the new upper house. In one stroke, he had now dissolved the Federation Council, the sole remaining constituency-based national institution in Russia.

For Dec. 11-12, there are only two possibilities: the farce of Soviet-style “elections” or, far more probable, no elections at all. Taking Yeltsin’s promises of elections at face value is an exercise in stupidity. Before the coup, Yeltsin had promised presidential elections for June 12. On Oct. 6, he omitted any mention of presidential elections.

The dissolution of the Moscow City Council is most telling as a precedent-setter, in that the city of Moscow is one of the 89 regions in the Russian Federation. It is only a matter of time before Yeltsin begins issuing decrees dissolving regional parliaments too. He had already begun, on Oct. 5, to fire regional administration heads who had dared to oppose his coup, sacking the heads of the Novosibirsk region in Siberia, and of the Amur region in the Russian Far East.

The post-coup purge has been extended into the judiciary. On Oct. 6, Valeri Zorkin, chairman of the Constitutional Court, the highest in the land, was forced to resign. It is only a matter of time before the court’s 13 judges either rubber-stamp the decrees of the dictatorship, or are replaced by those who will. In another domain, the Yeltsin announcement that press censorship would be lifted is a cruel joke. None of the newspapers banned—*Rossiskaya Gazeta*, *Sovietskaya Gazeta*, *Pravda*, *Den*—has been allowed to resume publication. Those allowed to publish were told to exercise “voluntary censorship.” The rulers in Moscow demand censorship, but without the embarrassing blank spaces that appeared Oct. 4-6 in leading dailies like *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, *Izvestia*, and *Sevodnya*, in place of articles that were critical of Yeltsin.

The ‘Third Rome’ ideology emerges

The coup in Moscow has made the Russian Army, and not Boris Yeltsin, the decisive arbiter in Russian politics. This fact was publicly acknowledged by Yeltsin in his Oct. 6 television address. The critical passages, not covered in the American or British press, were Yeltsin’s hailing the Army as “the guarantor of the life and death interests of Russia and the bulwark of Russian statehood.” He swore that the state would “devote special attention” to “caring for the needs of the Armed Forces,” and the security forces of the Interior and Security Ministries. He announced that the Armed Forces would complete as “quickly as possible” a “new military doctrine,” ready for signing by mid-October. He added that the new doctrine had been decided on at the meeting that morning of the Russian Security Council. This body, controlled by the three “coup ministers”—defense, security, and internal affairs—functions as a kind of Politburo for a post-Bolshevik dictatorship.

Yeltsin’s first public acknowledgment of the Army’s predominant role was evident in his television address the morning of Oct. 4, after the attacks on the White House had begun.

He termed the opposition at the parliament "revenge-seeking communists" who "sought to get the Army on their side and failed." He then declared, "Russia is looking to you . . . its Army. . . . Russia is counting on your courage."

The enhanced position of the Army coheres with the emergence, since the Sept. 21 Yeltsin decree abolishing parliament, of the Russian Orthodox Church at the center of Russian politics. Taken together, these two institutions are the two Great Russian institutions of empire which have maintained a historical continuity, and together they will play the decisive role in the coming months. They proceed from the Russian cultural matrix associated with a doctrine dating from the fifteenth century, proclaiming the mission of Moscow as the "Third and Final Rome."

What the United States and other western powers do not realize, in lining up behind Yeltsin, is that the institutions actually controlling the dictatorship may support Yeltsin, the autocrat, temporarily, for a number of reasons, including the current lack of a replacement. But given the intensity of the economic-social crisis, the chances for Yeltsin's apparent victory to end in his defeat are very high. The Army is currently loyal to Yeltsin, but not in any personal sense, and the unstable unity within the officer corps could easily fall apart. Its loyalty is premised on the Armed Forces fulfilling what they hold to be their highest duty: to preserve the unity and stability of the Russian state.

As was clear from Yeltsin's Oct. 6 address, this overriding concern of the military will grant Yeltsin the power to attack the regional opposition. He declared that the regional parliaments were guilty of having created "a dangerous factor for the ignition of a civil war in Russia. . . . The games of regional breakaway contradict the interests and the will of the majority of the population." What is needed, he said, is "a unified Russia."

A new foreign policy

Yeltsin is the vehicle, not the driver. He does not control the Armed Forces; he is their captive. This has become most evident in the foreign policy reversal the military forced on him, in the days immediately preceding the coup.

The reversal was signalled in a letter from Yeltsin to the heads of state of the United States, Great Britain, France, and Germany on Sept. 30, warning them not to expand NATO to include countries of eastern Europe. This was a direct reversal of the statements he had made in Warsaw at the beginning of September, over the vehement objections of Defense Minister Pavel Grachev, saying that Russia no longer objected to having Poland or the Czech Republic join NATO. The Sept. 30 letter even declared that NATO is legally barred from expanding eastward, under the 1990 agreements on German reunification.

Russia also informed NATO member Turkey that it would not abide by the treaty on Conventional Forces in

Europe (CFE), regarding Russian forces in the Caucasus. This was followed up on Oct. 1 with a similar declaration concerning Russian forces in the Leningrad (St. Petersburg) military district. Both these moves pertain to Russian military districts sharing a land border with a member of NATO—Turkey and Norway, respectively. By Oct. 6, Russia was formally demanding that Article 5 of the CFE Treaty, which pertains to force limits on the southern and northern flanks, be suspended.

The official response by NATO was catastrophic. The response was given by German Foreign Minister Klaus Kinkel, after talks with U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher in Washington on Oct. 6. Kinkel declared that any form of closer cooperation between eastern Europe and NATO was contingent "on the agreement of the United States and Russia," stressing that in any case, the question of East European countries joining NATO was no longer on the agenda. In effect, under U.S. direction, NATO has accorded Russia a veto right over policy toward eastern Europe. Hours before Kinkel's declaration, the Russian ambassador to Bonn demanded a "co-decision" right for Russia in NATO (see *Report from Bonn*).

The ruinous impact of 'shock therapy'

Internally in Russia, matters will not proceed so smoothly as in foreign policy for the dictatorship. Through the continuation of the shock therapy policies demanded by the International Monetary Fund and the western governments, the underlying basis for anything but fleeting stability is nonexistent. The coming acceleration of shock therapy, as announced in Yeltsin's decree of Sept. 28, creates the basis for the next explosive and dangerous turns in the crisis. The decree, taking effect Oct. 15, will free the bread price and apartment rents, the last two subsidized prices, through which a Russian family was still able to barely survive on its budget. As winter arrives, this will place food and shelter outside the reach of vast number of citizens. By sometime this winter, or spring at the latest, a thoroughly enraged Russian population will no longer be spectators, as they were Oct. 3-4, when new political eruptions occur.

As for Yeltsin, only by breaking completely with the shock therapy policies does he have a chance to remain "on top" beyond the short term. Otherwise, economic and social chaos will force the Army and security forces to usher in a post-Yeltsin regime. By that juncture, however, no action from "above" may succeed in containing, let alone preventing, a descent into a chaotic-anarchic hell of either civil war-like conditions or even outright civil war. The level of rage over the situation among the general population is already close to the point where civil war-like conditions are psychologically possible. Barring abrupt policy reversals, that rage level will cross the critical threshold before the year has ended.