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## The problem

THE changes in the Soviet Union, spectacular and bewildering as they are, collapse into three clear groups: the end of the cold war internationally, the end of communist rule domestically, and straddling both, the end of the Soviet Union itself.

The cold war shaped post-war international power structures as surely as imperialism had done in the century before 1914; a new power balance is in the process of being created, and it goes by the formula of the 'multi-polar' world which, strangely, is sometimes employed in the same breath with the 'uni-polar' world of American domination.

The monopoly rule of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union provided a millennial faith to many and a career to millions, and both are now suffering the effects of spiritual and salaried unemployment. Strangely, or perhaps not so strangely, it was not the brilliance of Karl Marx's critical analysis of capitalism that inspired the millions but the ecumenical church that radiated political power in his name. Their deepest agonies were induced by the heresies of Stalinism, Trotskyism *et al* and the schisms of the Chinese and others: the survival of the pagan bourgeois brought forth only formulaic incantations about their imminent extinction.

As is typical of such confrontations, their opponents (or partners) in the cold war ceaselessly pro-

phesied the doom of communism but did not predict it. They were taken by surprise when it happened and by the manner in which it happened; and they have at times even betrayed the greatest anxiety rather than simple satisfaction that it should have happened at all. Few, except the reformers from within the Party itself, predicted that the reform would be an internal transformation, not the revolutionary disintegration that overtook the *ancien regime* in 1917.

Most of all, the break up of the Union itself has surprised and embarrassed as many. It was assumed that the ex-colonial countries of Central Asia would secede first, for they were culturally Islamic (nearly) and colonial subjects to wit. Instead, the very European Baltic was the keenest to go and the oppressed Central Asians somewhat perversely anxious to remain. But most unexpectedly, the assault on the Union came, illogically as it seemed, from the centre, first from Gorbachev through new Union treaty proposals, and then from Boris Yeltsin replacing Gorbachev and Gorbachev's proposals with yet another set. Yet they all hang together: the whole revolution was carried out from the top and from the centre, and it flowed downward and outward. In this respect, the perestroika revolution faithfully follows the tradition of the Communist Party's statecraft. Many would no doubt like to see it even as a Russian tradition: the only problem with that argument is

that the Revolution of 1905 and 1917 were assaults from below, not initiatives from above.

It is now perhaps possible to consider the Soviet experience without the disturbing crackle of cold war polemic from both sides. The judgement of history will probably be that the Soviet revolution was the former Russian empire's device to industrialize without losing great power status. It could have always receded into a second-rank power like Spain and modernized under the protective wing of a superpower; or it could have descended into colonial status and spun eternally in the vicious circle of poverty. However, even if the empire had broken up permanently, Russia herself was too large, developed and unified by the 20th century to subside either into second rank or into colonialism. A choice of the Stalinist style of industrialization was therefore available, and it opted for it.

There was of course another option for insecure great powers, that of defeat or pyrrhic victory and reconstruction under the aegis of the supreme leader, America. The Germans and Japanese surrendered their great power ambitions through defeat, the British and French through their pyrrhic victory, all in the Second World War. They then recovered their prosperity under the American umbrella. The Soviet Union, despite victory, had to go it alone; and the Party and the Stalinist model acquired another lease of life. It now looks as if, after attaining

the status of a mature industrial society, the ex-Soviet Union is queuing up for the Anglo-French option.

Every aspect of the Soviet experience and of the new experiments is of the deepest interest. The most obvious is the sobering thought of how expensive industrialization is; and every new study shows how shallow it is to ascribe the costs to Stalin's paranoia, to the Russian character and tradition, or to what are called by Soviet colleagues, 'mistakes'. But, for that reason itself, the new experiment at a mixed economy with pluralist political structures will be riveting.

The other and equally arresting, especially for us, is the Soviet manner of creating a single polity and society out of the bewildering multiplicity that faced the Bolsheviks in the 1920s. Their methods are extraordinarily comparable to ours. The roles of the Communist Party there and the political process dominated by the Congress here, merit the deepest comparative research. Even more then, the Commonwealth of Independent States and the numerous internal communalisms (or ethnic strife as they are often called) should be observed with sober attention. Owing to an ideological pre-occupation with or revulsion against Marxism and Leninism, we did not treat the Soviet experience with the depth it deserved: we should not repeat that 'mistake' now.

MADHAVAN K. PALAT

or the green movement. The Soviet system was not allowed to evolve or adopt democratic traditions or political pluralism. All this worked against the individual and in favour of the military industrial complex.

It was these shortcomings which Gorbachev sought to remove. His reforming strategy was uneven and paradoxical. He shifted positions and veered from left to right, resulting in loss of credibility. He did not resort to direct elections in time to acquire legitimacy. He cut into his own support base. But the reasons for this also lie in the circumstances under which he worked and the kind of material he handled. He lacked an agency to carry out the reform. Despite the rise of radical reformers, no viable alternative was offered by anyone else. Gorbachev attacked the institutions which formed the grid which held the system together. This system could not tolerate radical changes, leave alone revolution. History has repeatedly shown that no serious social change takes place without intense struggle between social forces. In the Soviet Union the momentum of change led to systemic collapse.

The independent states which have arisen from the ashes of the Soviet Union, continue to carry the burden of the past. The central position of Russia, the unified structure of the economy, the multi-ethnicity in each republic, the continuation of old structures like bureaucracy, military and consciousness of the Soviet past, mixed with rising ideologies of nationalism and religious revivalism, will present new challenges to these states. In addition, new disputes between these states on territory, joint command of the army and property of the Soviet Union will create the basis for new antagonisms.

The transition to a market economy has never proved to be an easy task. Current trends including Western and Japanese initiatives to dominate multilateral institutions including GATT and the UN, do not augur well for such an effort. Thus the already growing problems of the CIS are likely to be accentuated. The new Commonwealth may well turn out to be an unstable and transitory phenomenon.

## Yeltsin's parliament and Russia's politics

HARI VASUDEVAN

AFTER the events of 19 to 22 August 1991, administrative authority in the Russian Federation passed to the President and the main parties in parliament. Until then, as ex-Russian President Viorotnikov pointed out, these were impotent institutions. But the clear involvement of Union ministers in the putsch placed almost all those who were powerful in Union bodies under suspicion. And it created a situation where public men, who hitherto nominally exerted administrative authority in the Rus-

...sian Republic, could wield real power.

Since September itself, though, actions taken by the Russian President and statements made by the country's officials have raised questions concerning their commitment to the issue so crucial to their justification of assumption of wide administrative powers after 22 August, i.e. the protection of public participation in organs of government. But leading figures in parliament are reluctant to initiate moves against the President's administration on these grounds, despite their regular assertion of democratic principles and their avowed solidarity with the cause of 'the people'.

The crisis faced by the President and his associates at the April Congress of Deputies, and what has happened subsequently, shows that deputies are anxious to preserve the Presidency whatever its flaws, and whatever their democratic proclivities. There can be no other explanation for the capitulation of Ruslan Khasbulatov and other rebel democrats following the threat of resignation by the Presidential cabinet.

At the root of parliament's behaviour is the reluctance of politicians to excite a constitutional crisis in the uncertain circumstances in which Russia has been placed before and after the formation of the Commonwealth of Independent States. There are also differences of opinion among liberals and radicals regarding what is appropriate executive response in existing circumstances. An equally fundamental reason is the acceptance by parliament's most powerful bloc — the Democratic Russia (*Demokraticeskaja Rossiia*) forum and the Movement for Democratic Reforms (*Dvizhenie Demokraticeskikh Reform*) — that members of the public are not the best source of support for representative institutions as they exist.

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Undoubtedly, public participation in government bodies and adequate respect for elected institutions is an important part of the political platform of Democratic Russia, which commands the support of about 45%

of Russian deputies. This is especially true of the core of the bloc, the Democratic Party of Russia (led by Nikolai Travkin and Stanislav Shatalin). Supporters of the bloc were members of dissident groups concerned with civil rights, social activists who began their public life under perestroika. Leaders of Democratic Russia formed popular front organizations in several parts of the country on the eve of the 'primaries' for the 1989 Union elections: in industrial regions of European Russia, in Yaroslavl, Moscow, Kalinin and Leningrad; in Stavropol, in Siberia (in Tomsk and Chelyabinsk), and in remote areas such as Orel. They were prominent in democratic clubs and voters associations (such as the Moscow Association of Voters, with its 30 district clubs).

Through such organizations, they presented non-CPSU candidates at elections, brought voters out to electoral meetings, and raised campaign funds for non-official candidates. They hoped to increase public interest and participation in elections and institutions. In the heavily contested election for the chairmanship of the Russian Supreme Soviet, Democratic Russia was responsible for pressing the candidature of Boris Yeltsin, the anti-CPSU candidate.

Members of the bloc have established separate parties since the elections of 1990 (such as the Social Democratic Party). But their allegiance to the 'forum' still prevails. And when some of these bodies formed the nine-party accord of 28th November between parliamentarians and Boris Yeltsin, it was undoubtedly a reflection on Democratic Russia.

Less committed to political pluralism, the Movement for Democratic Reforms (where Gavriil Popov, Alexander Yakovlev, Eduard Shevarnadze and Anatoly Sobchak are leaders of the executive) forms a good portion of the Russian parliament. Most are reformers of the CPSU who broke with M. S. Gorbachev, Ivashko and other members of the Politburo in July 1991, when the anti-pluralist lobby, hostile to Russia's 'meeting democracy' (in ex-Prime Minister Ryzhkov's words),

began to gain ground in the CPSU. Some figures in the Movement have an even longer history of reformism: Alexander Yakovlev and Gavriil Popov are linked with the Khrushchev reforms. Recently members of the pro-Gorbachev group in the CPSU have joined the Movement after the suspension of the CPSU in August.

The Dvizhenie has considerable influence, and its conference on 14 December was attended by 26 parties, 23 'movements' and social organizations, and 6 trade unions. Stanislav Shatalin of Democratic Russia is a prominent member of the Movement; but most members were less radical and willing to work with a one-party government and evolve means of reform. They regularly expressed a preference, though, for the emergence of a multi-party political system in the former Soviet Union.

Together, Democratic Russia and the Movement for Democratic Reforms have formed the basis of President Yeltsin's support in the Russian parliament since 22 August. And they have continued to do so since the formation of the Commonwealth of Independent States. The Movement for Democratic Reforms is even projected as the President's party. Minor groups in the Supreme Soviet (Liberal Democrats, Social Democrats, Anarcho-Syndicalists and former members of the Russian Communist Party) are not able to provide a counterweight to these blocs. But on the crucial issue of President Yeltsin's decision to send troops into Checheno-Ingushetia (in October), Democratic Russia and the Movement for Democratic Reforms parted ways with the President. Yeltsin's plans for Banking Reform met a similar fate as Democrats argued that the executive was making a bid to control crucial resources to make it independent of Parliament.

President Yeltsin was unrepentant on his views on executive power. Announcing a package of reforms at the end of October, he called for 'harsh measures to deal with actions which hinder economic reform', leaving no doubt about who would take the harsh measures. His First Deputy Prime Minister, and personal friend, Gennady Burbulis, argues

for greater powers for the President. And presidential representatives (vice regents or *namesniks*), faced with opposition from elected local bodies in Tomsk, Tambov, Ulyanovsk and elsewhere, demand firm action against these organs.

**I**n Tomsk, the *namesnik* Sulashkin (a former leader of the Republican Party of Russia, which had some links with Democratic Russia) argues that 'democratic methods of government are possible only when the social system of production, distribution and consumption which goes with them is also democratized', which he does not consider to be the case as yet in Russia. He regards democratic methods in current circumstances as 'simply dangerous': he argues that they lead to 'unruliness, chaos and a lack of control' and that they imply 'ineffectiveness in the implementation of reforms'. Sulashkin feels the country needs, 'a period of authoritarian style of government...'

Critics of Yeltsin's administration occasionally focus on such issues. They parade themselves as the champions of democracy: as witness, for instance, Otto Latsis' legend in *Izvestiia* for an interview of Shatalin—'the people are wiser than politicians think'. But they reserve their strictures for aspects of economic policy and price reform. Vice President Rutskoi's barbs have been aimed at economic policy. And this is substantially true of statements by R. Khasbulatov (Chairman of the Supreme Soviet) in January. Yeltsin's attempts to curb the development of self-government in the provinces and in far-flung regions of the Federation does not attract serious comment, except among a small minority such as Elena Bonner, who argued recently in *Izvestiia* (24 January), that 'the West must recognize the right to self-determination of Osetiia, Nagorno-Karabakh and the Pri-Dniester Republic, to encourage members of the Commonwealth to follow such a democratic course...'

them reluctant to take firm measures against the Russian executive. As Ilya Roitman of the Democratic Party of Russia points out, president and deputies had a common objective, 'the struggle against the totalitarian regime'. 'At that stage, the incumbent Russian President, then the leader of the democratic movement, enjoyed immense credibility. He was neither offered nor expected to produce specific programmes: it was enough to know that he was acting in the spirit of common objectives.' But this has led to problems. The political parties now find themselves 'in the role of hostages to this credibility credit'. Since, at the end of November, they pledged their support to Yeltsin, 'criticism addressed to him is occasionally perceived as "betraying their interests".'

**M**oreover, the public image of parliamentary parties is poor. In-fighting in the Supreme Soviet, a plethora of parties (which, in December, included factions of Democratic Russia, fractions such as 'Russia', 'The Left Centre for Radical Democracy', 'Communists of Russia', 'The Agricultural Union', 'Change', 'Sovereignty and Equality', 'The Industrial Union', 'The All Russian Union', 'the United Fraction of Social Democrats of Russia and the Republican Party of Russia' etcetera) earn parliament the reputation of a lunatic asylum, where parties are made and re-made, and where there is eternal mud-slinging. Deputies were elected in lacklustre elections in 1990, where there was poor voter response. Their measures against the executive might not earn general approval.

The so-called 'Solzhenitsyn' group among radical publicists and parliamentarians (associated with the 'Novy Mir' and with the 'letter of the 14' which appeared in *Komsomolskaya Pravda* and other newspapers in September 1991) is not concerned with issues of specific legal rights and the exact status of self-government and devolution. Sympathizers are preoccupied with 'tradition' and 'spiritual values'. And this has catered to Yeltsin and his vice-regents.

In 'Rebuilding Russia' published in *Komsomolskaya Pravda* and *Komsomolskaya Gazeta* in September 1991, Solzhenitsyn argued that 'a practically strong presidency will be useful' to deal with the country's pressing problems, and that 'it is simply not feasible for us to attempt resolving issues of government structure' in existing circumstances. Stating point blank that 'the structure of the state is secondary to the spirit of human relations', and that 'the more energetic the political activity in a country the greater is the loss to spiritual life', Solzhenitsyn agreed with Sergei Leontiev that the essence of democracy consisted of 'individual freedom and a government of laws' to be distinguished from 'its secondary, non-parliamentary system and universal suffrage'.

Other statements in his discussion of secret ballot, representation and electoral procedures indicated that the author did not hold codes of democratic practice to be sacrosanct since they were all liable to misuse. Hence, the secret ballot 'facilitates insincerity' and is 'an unfortunate necessity born of fear'; voting, 'whatever the method of tabulating the results, does not represent a quest for truth'. Solzhenitsyn expressed contempt for the Russian public, which, he asserted, lacks that 'certain level of political discipline' essential for the functioning of democracy. And in all this, both he and his supporters provide the theoretical and ideological foundations for the tendencies evident in the actions of President Yeltsin and his supporters.

**T**he principles stated by Solzhenitsyn go against the position taken by the 'Sakharov' group of publicists and parliamentarians. This includes the 'Independent Civic Initiative' of Iu. Afanas'ev, L. Batkin V. Bibler, E. Bonner, Iu. Burtin, Vyach Vs. Ivanov and L. Timofeev, who published a statement in the paper *Demokraticheskaia Rossiia*, warning against the Russian government's lack of interest in new civil institutions, and its excessive attention to national policy. They took the stand that the new Russia might be the heir of Tsarist and Soviet 'great power aspirations'. And they expres-

and alarm regarding 'revivalism' and 'tsarist symbols'. Their strength though, is uncertain.

Political figures who do not use the terms and references of Novy Mir or of Solzhenitsyn, justify strong executive authority; and issues clearly go beyond political predilections and principles. In an interview with Pravda, Mikhail Bocharov, once a possible alternative to Ivan Silaev as Prime Minister of Russia, and latterly the head of Yeltsin's Supreme Economic Council, called for 'powerful, forceful executive authority such as does not exist in Russia... a ban on meetings of all Soviets from the Supreme Soviet to country soviets for one and a half years to two years'; he contended that the necessity of the time was 'an economic dictatorship... as exists in South Korea, Singapore and, to a limited extent, in Chile...'. Gavriil Popov considered that the elected Mayor of Moscow should be free of the trammels of the elected City Council; and there are indications that Anatoly Sobchak is inclined to similar views. In February, when Stanislav Shatalin gave an interview, he stated that President Yeltsin was inclined to be too mild in dealing with misuse of demonstrations, the free press and the liberty granted to those of various political views.

The Tomsk vice-regent, Sulashkin, is of the opinion that 'opposition' is widespread in executive institutions: opposition which is equivalent to 'sabotage'. Hence he calls for stern measures from executive authorities in Moscow. Old Russian Communist Party members control key administrative positions in local soviets: a group of 31 in Ul'yanovsk, a group of 23 in Penza, a group of 22 in Kirov, of 11 in Chelyabinsk etcetera. In Siberia, according to Sulashkin, these functionaries are concerned with creating their own enclave; and this is what local demands for devolution amount to. A project for a Siberian Soviet Federated Republic he dismisses as prepared by '...former, still active leaders of the nomenklatura, and, in their imagination, this is only the first step on the road to the political sovereignty of Siberia.'

The intentions are clear: '...tear Siberia from the RSFSR, remove it from the jurisdiction of President Yeltsin, prevent the implementation of reforms...'. Local authorities in the Urals, Siberia and the Far East argue they want powers normally given to autonomous republics to stop the 'rapacious exploitation of the region'. As a popular figure in Krasnoyarsk put it, what is at issue is not a flag or independence, but genuine issues of welfare. Sulashkin and other vice regents disagree. They state that citizens have a touching and ridiculous faith in the President's representatives: and they imply that democrats hostile to them, and devolutionists, are unrepresentative, naive or outright conspiratorial.

Stanislav Shatalin is also guarded about the current use of the conventions and practices of democracy. According to him, the imminent danger is not civil war among and within the Republics of the Commonwealth. Rather, in Russia there is the possibility of a coup: there '... is afoot a careful, all-round, well planned preparation for a counter-revolution...the preparation of an organized attack on democracy...'. President Yeltsin is not fulfilling his functions as guarantor of the constitution and civil rights. 'On every street corner, newspapers are sold that are as fatal as snake poison; they spread chauvinism, racism, and they call for the use of force and for the overthrow of constituted authority... We repeat slogans about the freedom of the press and freedom of speech like little children, without understanding the meaning... Without impunity, they spread propaganda the like of which earns a prison sentence in the most democratic countries of the world...'. Shatalin calls for firm executive action against these 'venomous' opponents.

The march of the hungry organized by the Russian Communist Workers Party and 'Working Moscow' on 22 December and 12 January worries Shatalin. He confesses he fears the aims of the emerging communist leaders, General Makashov and Professor Alexei Sergeev, who clearly command respect in

trade unions of the Urals and in Moscow. Shatalin is disturbed by Sergeev's call for a state monopoly on foreign exchange, and foreign trade; for a halt to the export of raw materials and semi-manufactured and manufactured goods from the country; for control over the exchange markets where speculation has fuelled inflation. Each measure would involve the Federation in autarky; and could quite well herald a new version of the old 'command economy'.

But each problem is also clearly linked to Russia's current crisis, the program has a powerful appeal and Sergeev appears able to coordinate socialist and communist opposition to the government better than Nina Andreeva's 'Unity' group, Alksnis's 'Sotuz' fraction or Roy Medvedev's and Boris Kargalitsky's socialists. For Shatalin, Sergeev's course would be suicidal for the country; but it is popular, and this popularity raises questions concerning the powers of discretion of the public.

Shatalin's stand on Sergeev and on the threat elsewhere of fascism coincides with the sentiment expressed by others that social change within the former Soviet republics has led to shifts in public opinion which are potentially explosive. President Yeltsin's foreign policy advisor, Galina Starovoytova, pointed out in a recent issue of Literaturnaya Gazeta that the Russian government has to take into consideration the phenomenon of displaced Russians coming into the Federation: that these migrants have, in other states, been chauvinists. Russia's multi-party polity could take odd twists, it is implied, in such a situation.

Much of the 'liberal' and 'radical' opinion that is reflected in Shatalin's statements is coloured by responses to surveys of reactions to elections and to other crucial issues which appear to show widespread apathy and indifference to representative institutions. Tatiana Zaslavskaya's evaluations of voter response to the local and republican elections of 1990 concluded that there was little interest in the electoral process; and these surveys received considerable publicity in the 'radical' Moscow

News. Recently, a Moscow News survey has indicated that 80% of correspondents would not have supported perestroika had they known its ultimate cost. This clearly indicates a fickle character to Russia's public, which has, in turn, sparked off disappointment among liberals.

**I**t is against this background that, in the January issue of *Znamiya*, the political scientist A. Migranyan has suggested a possible course for Russia's government, where strong leadership, populism and nationalism should run in tandem. Such a suggestion indicates how a leading commentator conceives the position of Presidency in Russia, and his justification of his views helps explain the conciliatory attitudes of parliamentarians to Boris Yeltsin.

Migranyan's views stress the centrality of Yeltsin in contemporary politics, and he is enthusiastic about this position. 'He is a charismatic leader, he has mass support, and the people simply believe in him.' Migranyan explains that this is not because the President is a democratically elected leader. For only a narrow group of Moscow intellectuals are concerned with democratic principles. He is not important because of 'rational judgements' or a programme. He is important because, '...for Russia and for the people, he is the man who expresses its interest...'

But Migranyan and his co-discussant in the issue, Alexander Tsytko, are also convinced that the democratic side of Yeltsin's programme, associated with privatization, will become steadily unpopular. They are certain, moreover, that the only alternative, i.e. communism, is psychologically unacceptable to most Russians at the moment. The basis of politics, consequently, will have to be promises and nationalism, according to them. And they contend that Boris Yeltsin is the single individual most capable of presenting this package to the public and make it acceptable.

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But it will have to be an unusual form of nationalism that Yeltsin mobilizes. For it will be one part ethnic (*rosskii*) nationalism, which

will appeal to Russians, who constitute over 70% of the Federation's population, and are a dominant group even in areas such as Bashkiria and Yakutia; and it will be one part 'traditional' pre-1917 all-Russian (*rossiiskii*) nationalism, with an eye to the multi-ethnic nature of the Federation and the existence of large Russian minorities outside the country. Whatever the case, there will be more talk of the coat of arms of Moscow and the old name of Leningrad or Kalinin in the politics of the future: there will be less talk of devolution and self-government, except, as recently occurred, for the sake of public posture.

**T**hese are almost inescapable conclusions in current circumstances. And the April Congress of Deputies is probably an instance of what is to come. When the rebel democrat and Speaker of the Supreme Soviet, Ruslan Khasbulatov, threw in his lot with 'hardliners' to force concessions from Boris Yeltsin, harsh words were said concerning the overweening powers of the presidency and about presidential political culture. There was much sound and fury about democracy. But in interviews, Khasbulatov was outraged at the thought of the dissolution of parliament, which, he argued, would be disastrous for the country. And ultimately, he and other rebels backed down when faced with the possibility of a resignation of the Gaider cabinet.

In circumstances of rampant, fear and mistrust, where democrats are constantly wary of a communist comeback, no other solution is possible to this and other similar crises. And if this trend continues, a sad situation may well arise where the country's standard bearers of perestroika acquiesce in a trend where Russians are likely to be read more homilies written by the bearded prophet of Vermont, Alexander Solzhenitsyn; and where they will be taught to shun the more wholesome if simple fare of civil rights and parliamentarism for which Andrei Sakharov spent the better part of his life fighting. All this while Boris Yeltsin smiles benevolently over this circus without much bread.