

Russia's Presidency

Author(s): Hari Vasudevan

Source: *Economic and Political Weekly*, Dec. 18, 1993, Vol. 28, No. 51 (Dec. 18, 1993), pp. 2823-2828

Published by: Economic and Political Weekly

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4400558>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



Economic and Political Weekly is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Economic and Political Weekly*

JSTOR

Russia's Presidency

Hari Vasudevan

This paper attempts an examination of the arrival of the Russian presidency at a position of pre-eminence among the federation's institutions, the ascendancy of Boris Yeltsin and the interests he has come to represent. Proceeding from a discussion of the relative insignificance of the institution at its inception, the paper traces the emergence of the idea of the presidency as the fulcrum of proper government before going on to outline the manoeuvres of the president in his attempt to evoke a new 'state system'. The paper concludes with a discussion of the developments of the last few months culminating in the autumn crisis of 1993.

IN the recent past, publicists and scholars have substantially differed in their accounts of the Russian presidency¹ and the means employed by Boris Yeltsin to advance his policies. Consequently confusion has often prevailed concerning the institution and its incumbent. This, in turn, has contributed to an impression of Russian politics as a vortex of decay, where public institutions and political conventions are slow to take shape and where their development is well nigh doomed.² It has prevented a proper assessment of the presidency and the country's 'post-communist' structures as evolving institutions—a point noted by Václav Havel concerning recent evaluations of most post-communist regimes.³

The events of September/October 1993 have only served to accentuate such a trend, focusing attention on the apparently authoritarian impulses of Russia's president and the accidental course of politics, which took a radical turn as a result of the unanticipated events of Sunday, October 3, when skirmishers attacked the Moscow mayor's office and the TV station at Ostankino. Chance and personality have once again become the key players in accounts of Russian affairs, as they have been in the past, despite lame attempts to view politics in terms of the conflict between reformers and 'hardliner communists'.

Russian commentators have been as susceptible to such an approach as their western counterparts. If they have proceeded further than simple assessments of Boris Yeltsin's capacity to survive, evolving more complex assessments of presidential institutions, they have been concerned ultimately with issues of charisma and manipulation. According to one reading, an authoritative head of state with exceptional powers is a necessary aspect of a 'transitional period' when democratic authorities are unformed. And Boris Yeltsin, by virtue of his popularity, has fulfilled the requirements for such a position. While, in this reading, stress falls on the weakness of the existing representative and judicial system, and the immense duties of charismatic authority, the underlying preoccupation with personality and popularity is inescapable.

Critics of the Russian president, meanwhile contend that he has been exceptionally manipulative, and that with assistance

from abroad, he has attempted to consolidate autocratic authority in a situation that far from requires it. They strongly deny the assertion of democratic sympathizers of the president that his ascendancy is the inevitable consequence of his position as the only 'democratically' elected office-bearer in the Russian federation, i.e. the sole repository of national trust; they are firm that, in the existing circumstances, a proper estimate of where such trust reposes is impossible. In the course of the polemic, 'communists' have placed Boris Yeltsin in a crucial position in the matrix of factors which undermined the CPSU and have served as instruments of capitalism to vitiate social justice in a country where imperceptive leadership had generated a political and social crisis. Despite the Russian president's importance in the CIS, such opinion certainly does not appear rare in member states.

Most such arguments have easily found some substantiation; and there is no doubt that personal impulses, accident and an authoritarian urge often make up the momentum of politics and institution-building in Russia, where conditions of hyper-inflation and a confusion in values is the order of the day. But it is inapposite to conclude from the evidence at hand that the presidency is Peronist in nature; or that it is merely an instrument of international capital. Clearly, a more pointed assessment must evaluate the evolution of the institutions of Russia's Executive and the response it evokes without inappropriate comparison with 'fascist', or 'transitional' regimes which differ from 'post-communist' authorities, and without unjustifiable assertions concerning president Yeltsin's intentions. In an attempt to steer such a course, this paper presents an examination of the arrival of the Russian presidency at a position of pre-eminence among the Federation's institutions, the ascendancy of Boris Yeltsin and the interests he has come to represent.

Section I is a discussion of the comparative insignificance of the institution at its inception. Section II traces the emergence of a powerful idea in Russian polemics: that sound and proper government can only revolve around a strong presidency. In Section III and IV, the paper follows the manoeuvres of the president, against such a background, in his attempts to evolve a new 'state sys-

tem' ('gosudarstvennost'), finding a place for interests which have coalesced around the old RSFSR constitution and the increasing preoccupation outside metropolitan areas with *oblastnichestvo* (deconcentration of authority and decentralisation to regional bodies). Sections V, VI and VII note the failure of these manoeuvres, and Section VIII touches on the autumn crisis of 1993. The reformer/hardliner distinction is given short shrift since it is more an issue of polemics than of real difference.

The paper dwells on indications (even during the events of October 21-24) that the constitutionality of presidential action is a repeated concern in the play of such ideas; that legal and constitutional justification for presidential power has a major significance in Russian politics. This is clearly indicated in the president's actions after March 20, when, having announced the assumption of special powers, he faced parliamentary opposition and sought a compromise with deputies. It was also indicated in the statements of many of his sympathizers and the large place given to his opponents in the constitutional document he approved after August 13. If presidential government is advocated in Russia, it is undoubtedly presidential government within an elaborate constitutional rubric; and, although the events of October 4 may introduce an element of militarism and intolerance in Russian civil and administrative life, the concern with constitutional evolution, comparable with European and Anglo-Saxon practice, will certainly be a major feature of presidential policy.

I

The problem of presidential ascendancy among Russian institutions essentially dates from August 1991. In March 1991, when the referendum in the RSFSR sanctioned the constitution of an elected presidency, it is uncertain whether the creation of a pivotal institution was envisaged; and although much of president Yeltsin's behaviour, after he was elected to this position, indicated his own sense that the post was of exceptional significance, he was undoubtedly isolated and his actions had little political importance in the period April-August 1991. Even if there was a grain of truth in charges from

members of the Russian Communist Party (e.g., deputy Goryacheva) that the position was intended to add substance to the role of Boris Yeltsin in the RSFSR's politics, the consequences, in the short term, were of little worth. It is questionable whether the formation of the elected presidency had more substantial meaning than the assertion of Russia's sovereignty a year earlier. These were devices intended to create constitutional irritants for the tangle of the politics of the CPSU and the USSR's institutions.

At this time, the RSFSR's government had little political weight. Unlike the constellation of local satraps and elites in other republics—who, as Jaques Sapir has argued, were crucial to the workings of the CPSU and the Union ministries—the RSFSR was of little count as a political unit, and its president merely had nuisance value. Certainly, Boris Yeltsin had established himself as a major public figure. But he was still little more. His experience as an administrator and politician was untested. And his sufferings as an anti-establishmentarian were limited. The ambit allocated to him as elected president was vague. His powers were unspecific, since, in letter, the authority of the Russian Supreme Soviet and the Congress of Deputies far outweighed those of the president. Local soviets were a law unto themselves, and susceptible only to the directions of the CPSU. The importance of union institutions, finally, was ubiquitous.

The events of August 19–21 decisively changed this situation. The Yanaev Committee's state of emergency involved the tacit, if not outright, compliance of almost every minister of the union cabinet, and discredited all institutions, especially those concerned with security. During the course of the three days, furthermore, there was no serious statement from CPSU officials condemning the committee's actions. This implied complicity with the conspirators in the reformed party. Boris Yeltsin's courage at the time earned him plaudits at home and abroad.⁵

Of greater political significance, M. S. Gorbachev, on his return to Moscow, accepted practically all the measures suggested to him by Boris Yeltsin to deal with the fall-out of the conspiracy. And it was in these acts that the foundations of the Russian presidency's authority were ultimately to lie. Gorbachev resigned as general secretary of the CPSU, throwing the reformers of the party into complete disarray. The majority of these had little connection with the Yanaev Committee—as in the case of members of the Movement for Democratic Reforms, and a host of individuals including Roy Medvedev. But their institutional strength, and their access to party resources were now brought to an end. Gorbachev also accepted the reorganization of union institutions by Ivan Silaev, the Russian prime

minister and a close confidant of Boris Yeltsin. This ensured that *de facto* the decisions of president Yeltsin to ban the Communist Party faced no opposition from union officials.

Later, as Gorbachev pressed on with a series of measures to strengthen the union presidency, under the institutions of transition, with the public backing of the Union Congress of Deputies who met in September, president Yeltsin undertook a reform of local institutions which gave the Russian president great authority outside Moscow for the first time. In all oblasts, he appointed governors who were primarily responsible to him, thereby undermining the authority of the soviets which had traditionally dealt with provincial affairs through their executive committees and which now had only the right to direct the implementation of by-laws by an official nominated by the president. The measure went against the steps presaged by the union law on local self-government of April 6, 1990, and the RSFSR law of July 6, 1991, which had envisaged elected local executive authorities. It strengthened Russia's elected presidency considerably at a time when the CPSU's local committees were in a state of collapse. The appointment of presidential representatives was a further measure of importance in this regard, as was the creation of the new administrative authority for the Tiumen, in September 1991, subordinating this wealthy region directly to presidential control.⁶

There were objections to the Russian president's measures. While the Congress of Deputies and the Supreme Soviet of the RSFSR (i.e., the main repositories of authority outside the presidency) were mute on the subject, presidential representatives faced substantial criticism in Tomsk, Tambov and Ulyanovsk. The governor of Krasnodar, Vasili Diakonov, and the presidential representative in Tomsk, Stephen Sulashkin, openly discussed their difficulties. Both Yeltsin and his appointees, however, justified their actions in terms of the necessity to control 'communist' influence in local government, while sympathizers pointed to the control of local soviets by old Russian Communist Party members. Here, they were clearly referring to the influence in local affairs of members of the CPSU who had not distinguished themselves by active participation in public organisations formed at the time of the elections of 1989 and 1990 or by their support for the Democratic Platform of the CPSU. These 'communists', unlike Yeltsin himself and other apparatchiki, were clearly not reformers by record, which put them outside the camp of the 'democrats' (a term fast emerging as a crucial label in Russian politics). And even where they had opposed the CPSU's monopoly of power in the past, or subscribed to programmes of radical economic (market-oriented) reform,

they had rallied around the party in August 1991 (like the dissident Communist Roy Medvedev), which made them untouchables.

Press reports in *Izvestiya* complained of the presence of a group of 31 such senior party members in Ulyanovsk, a group of 23 in Penza and a group of 22 in Kirov. Sulashkin, in Tomsk, argued that demands for devolution, the call for the creation of a Siberian Soviet Federated Republic and criticism of the Russian president's local representatives were merely the devices of 'former, still active leaders of the *nomenklatura*'.⁷

II

It was at this time, though, that a more far-reaching defence of presidential authority was enunciated. The presidential representative Sulashkin was explicit about this. A former leader of the Republican Party of Russia, with impeccable pluralist credentials hitherto, he argued that "democratic methods of government are possible only when the social system of production, distribution and consumption which goes with them is also democratised" which he did not consider was as yet the case in Russia or the USSR. Democratic methods in the circumstances in which the RSFSR found itself, according to Sulashkin, were "simply dangerous" and could lead to "unruliness, chaos and a lack of control"; hence, he argued, the country needed "a period of authoritarian style of government".

A similar position had been stated by Alexander Solzhenitsyn in September 1990, when he had argued that "a potentially strong presidency will prove useful to deal with the country's pressing problems"; that "individual freedom" was not to be ensured primarily by political institutions, and hence that excessive preoccupation with checks and balances among state authorities was undesirable in current circumstances.⁸ It was a position which had backing among publicists and deputies. But Sulashkin underseored practical reasons as well as reasons of principle for taking such a position, as did Mikhail Bocharov, once a possible alternative to Ivan Silaev as prime minister of the RSFSR and recently head of Boris Yeltsin's Supreme Economic Council. Bocharov called for "a powerful forceful executive authority, 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...".⁹

Boris Yeltsin, however, made no such assertions and was content to work as an ally of various parties and movements represented in the RSFSR Supreme Soviet and Congress of Deputies. He sought and re-

ceived a pledge of support from a combination of such organisations in November. And at the time that the USSR remained undivided, he made no serious attempts to establish that his own office was of exceptional importance. In constitutional terms, his powers (beyond those he had assumed after the attempted coup) were unspecific, and, legally, his position was to be compared with that of the president of India or the queen of England. But he advanced no complaints about this position.

Important faults, however, were perceivable in Russia's constitutional edifice. The president's public image was systematically reinforced at this time by the division and wrangles that characterised the Supreme Soviet and the Congress, where a medley of more than 13 groups struggled to assert themselves. He avoided the appointment of a prime minister to succeed Ivan Silaev, and prevented the emergence of a centre of authority as important as himself and more legitimate constitutionally. The impotence of the union president at the Novo-Ogarevo talks, and the demoralisation of major public figures in the Union Soviets after the creation of the Council of State in September 1991 worked to his favour. Moreover, a number of Yeltsin's statements, together with the way in which he came to the agreement at Minsk, in December, with Belorussian president Shushkevich and Ukrainian president Kravchuk, without serious reference to other elected bodies, indicated that he had assumptions concerning the presidency that were comparable to those of Sulashkin and others.

III

In the aftermath of the Minsk Agreement, the formation of the ICS and the disintegration of the USSR, surprisingly, despite repeated questions regarding presidential authority in the Russian press, no major crisis occurred over the position of the presidency among Russian institutions beyond the limited fracas in March/April 1992. The institution, however, was undergoing a major change although its constitutional status did not alter.

Internationally, Boris Yeltsin became the prime spokesman for the largest of the political units that emerged from Soviet disintegration. The Russian federation which succeeded the RSFSR did not possess the military or economic Varangian principles. The myth of the CIS combined military command could not mask the division of military stores, military personnel and nuclear arms which occurred in December and January 1991-92. But, in terms of resources and military capacity, it was clear that the Russian federation was the most powerful of the successor states; that the most decisive figure in Russian politics at the time was Boris Yeltsin; that by virtue of his stature, the presidency had an unusual

status in the country's administrative life.

The treatment of Yeltsin by the United States enhanced the Russian president's image. It appeared that for president Bush and secretary Baker, he could do no wrong. Public enthusiasm at the time of the Yeltsin visit to the United States in June 1992, and the signing of the Washington Charter on American-Russian Partnership were further indications that Boris Yeltsin was the sole spokesman for the Russian people as far as the United States was officially concerned.¹⁰

At a time when Yeltsin's first deputy prime minister, Yegor Gaidar, had begun his painful economic reforms, the president's standing abroad was of great importance to his position at home. The liberalisation of prices had begun on January 6, and it was self-evident that the inflation and rampant speculation of the months after required some assistance from the G7 and other developed nations.

In view of the acute economic crisis, moderates in the Russian parliament were content to allow the president to have his way, while carping over the clauses of liberalisation decrees and banking laws. A combination of 'democratic' and 'centrist' forces had voted him special powers in December 1991, to carry out rapid economic reforms and deal with the problems of national disintegration. They did not make any serious plans to rein him in at this time.

In the circumstances, working with a team of close advisors (Sergei Shakhrai, Galina Starovoytova, etc), in his own 'council', the president used decree powers to promulgate measures that were thought necessary by a cabinet in which his friend Gennady Burbulis played a major role, as did Egor Gaidar, Mikhail Poltaranin and his other proteges. No intermediary prime minister, whose first loyalty was to the Supreme Soviet, was appointed at the time, thereby directly linking a presidency which had no major subordinate institutions with the ministries. For his financial needs, the president used special sources (including the State Pension Fund). This ensured that his own advisors were independent of the ministry of finance and of the Supreme Soviet.

IV

Such a situation did not indicate either lackeyism, a lack of decision or a state of anarchy within the Russian Supreme Soviet or the Congress of Deputies. Parliament's record in December 1991 and January 1992 has a number of cases of presidential *ukazy* being questioned and of laws (*zakony*) passed against the spirit of Yeltsin's decrees. An exhaustive survey of voting patterns during the April 1992 Congress shows that there was absolute agreement on the necessity to limit presidential authority. On the Mironov amendment, to introduce presidential administration to the whole of the country, committed supporters and opponents of

Yeltsin stood against the motion, though the depth of opposition varied from 70 per cent in *Demokraticheskaya Rossiya*, to 95 per cent in the *Rossiya*, and unanimous rejection in the Communists of Russia group. In the Congress, the Russian Unity bloc¹¹ of 311 deputies and the Constructionist bloc¹² of 165 deputies could quite easily have become a profound nuisance to the president in circumstances where his supporters¹³ numbered only 248 deputies.

But circumstances compelled almost all deputies (except the 'hardline communist' and nationalist groups) to forbear from extreme measures. And the president himself came to a compromise with a number of parliamentary parties, appealing to them for their support in March at pre-Congress meetings.¹⁴ Backed only by his governors and an ephemeral public opinion, the president could not do otherwise. Groups that were outrightly hostile to him in parliament (former members of the Russian Communist Party and supporters of the *Trudovaya Moskva* and *Trudovaya Rossiya*) and authority that ran into the local soviets of European Russia and the crucial soviets or resource-rich Krasnoyarsk, Tiumen, and Magadan.

The president himself could not rely on the Movement for Democratic Reforms, which had no mass base; and he had to distance himself from the various factions of *Demokraticheskaya Rossiya*, since sections of the movement (associated with Yuri Afanasev and Maria Sal'e) criticised his interest in 'reform from above',¹⁵ while others (associated with former dissident groups and the 'Memorial') wanted stern action taken against public bodies and periodicals linked with a 'hardline' communist position.

In February 1992, Stanislav Shatalin demanded censorship and a ban on a number of organisations—a clear sign of the fear psychosis and intolerance of sections of *Demokraticheskaya Rossiya* that impelled the president to keep its members at a distance. Negotiation and consensus could hardly come from Shatalin's call for firm administrative action against newspapers that were "as fatal as snake poison" and that "spread chauvinism, racism and... call for the use of force and for the overthrow of constituted authority". Shatalin and others like him were of the opinion that in Russia "we repeat slogans about freedom of the press and freedom of speech like little children, without understanding the meaning... Without impunity, they [ex-hardline communists and fascists] spread propaganda the like of which earns a prison sentence in the most democratic countries of the world".¹⁶ Close involvement with them would require a presidency of the type advocated by Sulashkin and Bocharov, for which Boris Yeltsin was not prepared.

After the emergence of Arkadii Volskii's influential 'centrist' Industrial Union, rather,

Yeltsin involved those who had the sympathy of this group in his cabinet. In June 1992, he inducted Grigorii Khizha, Vladimir Shumeiko and Viktor Chernomyrdin to this end. And in the early days of the December 1992 Congress, he also offered to compromise with the centrists (who had now formed the more elaborate Civic Union) through concessions to parliament of crucial ministries, provided that the president's exceptional powers were retained.

V

It was only after the failure of the deputies and the president to come to terms over the latter's exceptional position during this December Congress, and the refusal of parliamentarians to countenance a referendum on public confidence in the presidency (during January/February 1993) that the live-and-let-live of Russia's first year of independence broke down. In the crisis over the referendum, the chairman of the Supreme Soviet, Ruslan Khasbulatov, the Civic Union and the president's critics in the Russian Unity group argued that the proposed appeal was weighted in favour of Yeltsin. They pointed to arrangements that had been made to ensure this end: the existence of a special team headed by the president's faithful supporters, Gennady Burbulis, Sergei Shakhrai and Mikhail Poltaranin, to ensure positive results from the vote when it was held; the president's intention to determine the nature of the questions to be put to the public; the behaviour of *Demokraticheskaya Rossiya* and the analysis unit RF-Politika who were to conduct public opinion campaigns on the president's behalf. Boris Yeltsin dismissed such criticisms and stuck to his demands. He ignored various attempts to meet his position half-way (by parliament's Ryabov and Matiukov commissions).

In the circumstances, during the Congress of Deputies held in early March 1993, deputies refused to go ahead with the referendum and stripped the president completely of his financial authority. Both the 'centrist' Civic Union and the anti-presidential Russian Unity bloc participated fully in this action. The president's reaction is well known. On the night of Saturday, March 20, he assumed exceptional powers, ostensibly to advance the reforms he had initiated and to carry out a plebiscite.¹⁸

VI

It was in the course of this crisis which began in December 1992 and culminated in the events of March that a major shift in Boris Yeltsin's opinions became fully apparent. Whereas at the time of the April 1992 Congress, he had only advanced views that the structure of the federation's central government ought to be changed, abolishing the Congress of Deputies, by December he was speaking of constitutional reforms of a more far reaching nature and a proper

separation of powers. He was adamant that the president required decree powers which carried the force of law, and he refused to countenance their surrender in the immediate future.

The president took this position clearly because he was guided by a desire to protect the institutions that had grown around his office in the intervening months and the elaborate connections between the office and new economic agencies and enterprises. The president frequently asserted that he was acting in the interests of 'reform', but since deputies took the same position, and stated that their more systematic reform programme

was sounder than the president's, it requires to be stated that Boris Yeltsin's sense of 'reform' had its own specifics and links.

The president's own 'apparat' was only one section of the bodies concerned here (the Analysis Units, the Administration, etc. etc.) by the end of February 1993. A number of other authorities were involved: the State Committee on Properties (*Goskomimushchestvo*), headed by Anatoly Chubais¹⁹; the elaborate network of institutions that had grown out of the privatisation of the last six months of 1992; the Federal Information Service, headed by Mikhail

**We
are
like
the
valley.**

We have so much to give.

The valley by nature has so much to give. Water, minerals, vegetation, in short, life.

Though we started in 1954 with mining manganese ores, we have diversified into other areas.

In 1968 we set up a Metal and Ferro Alloys Plant to manufacture pig iron which was later expanded to make ferrosilicon, ferromanganese and silicomanganese.

Then, we diversified into Electronics - Electronic Dosing Pumps, Dot Matrix Printers, Application Software, Data Acquisition and Monitoring Systems and allied products.

It was then natural for us to go into Systems-Software development and training in Advanced Systems and Applications.

Sandur Kushala Kala Kendra promotes traditional arts and crafts.

A Training Institute specialises in in-house training for excellence and imparts skills to others for employment.

Our welfare programmes include supply of essential commodities and food grains at subsidized rates, cloth subsidy, housing facilities and a variety of programmes for better health and education to improve the quality of life.

We care about nurturing and looking after our people. We have so much to give.

Like the Sandur Valley.

With best compliments from:



The Sandur Manganese & Iron Ores Limited

Regd office: Lohadri Bhavan, Yeshwantnagar, Bellary District, Karnataka.

Poltaranin; the Inter-Departmental Committee on Foreign Affairs and the Security Council. Parliamentarians made it clear in debates that they intended to curb the range of all these bodies and the president was deeply sensitive concerning their future.

At the beginning of March, during the course of the Congress of Deputies, president Yeltsin also became aware that the parliamentarians had ceased to represent powerful regional interests in Russia, and that the concern with *oblastnichestvo*, which had rarely attracted his attention until now, was a powerful rallying point of interests outside metropolitan districts. Associated with Vyacheslav Novikov (Krasnoyarsk *krai*), and Grigoriï Shamshin (Tomsk *oblast*), this idea stressed the importance of endowment of *oblasts* and *krais* (regions and territories) with the same levels of autonomy as the ethnically oriented autonomous republics. It was altogether different from the call in Tataristan or Bashkortistan for increasing sovereignty; it was a demand for the recognition that ethnic Russians themselves were divided and that their affairs required to be settled 'in the localities' rather than with reference to Moscow.²⁰ Until March, these impulses had been contained in soviets which were linked to Khasbulatov or to the Russian Communist Party. During the Congress of early March, local leaders stated such a position independently and convinced president Yeltsin that he had allies in his search for a new state structure.

As he moved to take this situation into account, however, president Yeltsin faced advice for caution from those closest to him, who counselled a constant regard for constitutional principles. Among these were the likes of Shelova-Khovedyayev, the well known spokesman on foreign affairs,²¹ and Sergei Filatov (the head of the presidential administration) who, despite his concern that "the state must not become ungovernable", and his desire to constitute a strong presidency assisted by a professional civil service, was fixed on a proper separation of powers within a democratic system of institutions.

The most pointed and perceptive advice to the president came from a sympathiser and a member of his advisory council—the political scientist Andranik Migranyan who, at the beginning of 1992 had already made his views clear that Yeltsin did and should occupy an exceptional place in the Russian government, arguing that the president was important since "he is a charismatic leader, he has mass support and the people simply believe in him".²²

Migranyan was clearly in support of strong presidential government, but he argued, after the political crisis began in December 1992, that attempts to dispense with the importance of parliamentary bodies, however weak those bodies were, in the condi-

tions of Russia's "delegated democracy", could lead to a situation detrimental to the state in the long term. For this gave an opportunity to blame all the ills of the country on the presidency, and excused parliamentarians from a proper involvement in the affairs of state. Following the Argentine political scientist, Guillermo O'Donnell, Migranyan argued that this might not ultimately lead to the fall of a president, but it rendered the incumbent a subject of universal complaint, and destroyed the political instruments for the solution of the nation's ills.

Guided by such opinions, and mollified by the final acceptance by the Congress of Deputies of a referendum (albeit on their own terms), Yeltsin backed down on the issue of a poll on his own terms and attempted once again to deal with parliament over a negotiating table. Parliamentary intransigence had proved less firm than earlier expected and Ruslan Khasbulatov had shown a willingness to make concessions to the president until he was firmly reined in by members of the National Salvation Front, who were bitterly opposed to Yeltsin. The president consequently ignored the warnings of supporters of *Demokraticeskaya Rossiya*, who were now members of his inner circle (in the form of Peter Filippov and Vyacheslav Volkov of the presidential administration)²³ that the 'communist' representation in parliament made the body completely untrustworthy. The results of the plebiscite of April 25 came fully up to his expectations,²⁴ and he summoned a Constitutional Convention to formulate a new constitutional document.

In the draft of this constitution (completed on July 13),²⁵ the presidency was given the position of an independent executive authority which shared legislative initiative with a federation council and a state Duma. Of these public bodies, the council was clearly the more powerful, placating thereby the demands of major local interests. Parliament, however, played a major role in the arrangements for transition to the new system and, if the pretensions of its members are a standard, its leaders would easily have come to dominate the bi-cameral arena. President Yeltsin himself permitted watering down of his own suggestions by the Convention, clearly hoping that he had finally come to a solution that would find consensus among all those who mattered in constitutional debate.

VII

Regrettably, as the politics of July-September clearly showed, such a consensus was impossible. Rather than sympathy and interest, the president's arrangements evoked complete rejection in parliament. Suggestions by Nikolai Ryabov (Khasbulatov's

deputy) that the Federation Council be convened was greeted with catcalls and threats. And such behaviour coincided with a relentless war of attrition which Ruslan Khasbulatov waged with acumen and which, it is now clear, led to the growth of considerable antipathy towards parliamentary parties and their leaders in the president's circles.

Khasbulatov challenged the conclusions drawn by the president from the referendum, refusing to accept that it had seriously improved Yeltsin's standing. He followed up a new law which required the election of local governors, seeking thereby to undermine the advantages that Boris Yeltsin had gained in local government in September 1991. In Chelyabinsk, Smolensk and Vologda, consequently, deputies of *oblast* soviets revolted against the heads of local administration. Khasbulatov also pressed the Supreme Soviet to challenge measures for privatisation and he worked to divide the president's supporters in the cabinet of Viktor Chernomyrdin. He achieved outstanding successes in this regard in August, when security minister Viktor Barannikov began to speak of necessary compromises and economy minister Oleg Lobov quarrelled with the decisions of Yeltsin's protege, finance minister Boris Feodorov.

For president Yeltsin, such steps and the appeals of his supporters in a number of bodies, where Khasbulatov was proceeding with a witch-hunt, were the point of no return. He understood from the crisis over monetary reform in the last week of July, which was a result of bickering in his government, that the situation was becoming precarious. The 'Siberian Agreement' of local authorities in the Siberian *oblasts*, which indicated the growing distance between metropolitan administration and the localities, together with Boris Feodorov's desperation at the lack of remittances from localities to Moscow, clearly demonstrated that the monetary system and all plans for economic reform were in danger. Khasbulatov's attempts to sabotage the Federation Council's meeting on September 18 indicated that negotiations with parliament were coming to very little.

On September 21, consequently, president Yeltsin decided on a firm break of the deadlock. He dissolved the Supreme Soviet and called elections for the State Duma on December 11. It would be the task of this body, together with the Federation Council, to deal with the impasse of the country's state system.

VIII

Developments on October 3 and 4, and during the days thereafter, are more than easily explained against such a background.

For, it is clear that there was an irreconcilable antagonism between supporters of the president and protagonists of the Russian Communist Party and the National Salvation Front (which includes the street skirmishers under Makashov and Alksnis) and that, in case of a confrontation between deputies and the presidency, such forces would press more moderate groups in the parliament to take an extreme stand. The consequent pressures in parliament and the departure of the majority of deputies was an indication of such tensions, and the skirmishes of October 3 were an attempt to generate street violence from the fortress of the White House where there were few parliamentarians left. The resort to military action was an unavoidable necessity.

This is not true of the ban on political groups and the introduction of extensive censorship since October 4. It appears from this that, however concerned with constitutionalism the president may be, he has finally given in to the Sulashkins and Shatalins in order to establish a state system that was excessively long in the making. If so, it will certainly give his office a stability it has long lacked, but in circumstances that are more than ominous.

An alternative outcome to the events of October 3/4, however, would have been intolerable. Not only would this have left the powerful national and international interests that had coalesced around the presidency in disarray: it would have fixed authority in the hands of parliamentarians who lack any unity: deputies who had clearly come to be dominated by groups which are willing to resort to street conflict at any moment and are much at variance with each other. It is unlikely that the likes of Makashov and the leaders of the *Rossiia* and other groups would have been able to do business even in the short term. At a time when Russia's Siberian territories are facing crucial problems of funds and administration, and ethnic conflict there between immigrant Chinese and local Russians has clearly caused alarm, as has ethnic conflict in Tataristan and elsewhere, such confusion in the politics of Moscow would have led to a decay which must have led to the wholesale ulceration of the Federation.

This does not excuse president Yeltsin's methods, which will undoubtedly drive his influential opponents underground, and swell the political violence in his unfortunate country. But it casts these methods in a light that should not be easily ignored.

Notes

[The author would like to thank the Maison des Sciences de L'Homme, Paris, and the Institute of Oriental Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences, for assistance in compiling the material for this paper.]

- 1 This paper assumes a rudimentary sense of the Russian Federation's institutions, i.e., the Congress of Deputies, the Supreme Soviet and the Executive Presidency. Although there are no proper guides to institutions, books such as John Morrison, *Boris Yeltsin* (London 1991) or Anatolii Sobchak, *Khozheniye vo vlasti* (Novosti, 1991) give some sense of government. A number of Soviet pamphlets also provide information concerning the structure of the Congress of Deputies, etc.
- 2 Francois Furet, *Debat* 1991/2.
- 3 *New York Review of Books*, March 1993.
- 4 John Morrison, *Boris Yeltsin* (London 1991), Jaques Sapir, *Feu le systeme sovietique* (Paris 1992).
- 5 Issues of *Moscow News* circulated during the August 19-21 period, together with the issues for the succeeding week, contain several articles concerning the involvement of the establishment in the conspiracy. In the last months of 1991, *Ogonek* had a series on the background to the putsch and the lengthy preparation.
- 6 Marie Helene Mandrillon, *La conquete du pouvoir local en Russie*, Paris 1992, p 4ff.
- 7 Valerii Vyzhutovich, 'Namestnik', *Izvestiia*, October 15, 1991, Mandrillon, op cit, p 16ff.
- 8 Republished in Alexander Solzhenitsyn, *Rebuilding Russia*, London 1991.
- 9 Interview with Mikhail Bocharov. *Pravda*, October 28, 1991.
- 10 The address by James Baker to the Council for World Affairs in Boston (CNN recording June 28, 1992) is fulsome concerning experiments in Russia. The Charter is discussed in Henry Kissinger's article in *Los Angeles Times*, June 7, 1992.
- 11 *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* (NG), April 24. This consisted of Communists of Russia, *Rossiia*, *Otchizna*, Agrarian Union.
- 12 Ibid, *Promyshlenny Soiuz*, *Rabochii Soiuz Rossii*, *Samena*.
- 13 Ibid. The bloc of 'democratic forces', Radical Democrats, Left Centre, *Demokraticheskaja Rossiia*, *Svobodnaia Rossiia*.
- 14 The course of the April Congress is well discussed in NG, April 24, 1992.
- 15 BBC Shortwave Broadcasts (SWB), February 1.
- 16 *Izvestiia*, February 5, 1992.
- 17 NG, June 5, 6, 8, 9 and 10 for the induction of the new ministers.
- 18 I have traced this course of events at greater length in *The Telegraph*, March 25, 1993.
- 19 NG, June 9, 1993.
- 20 *Oblastnichestvo* was already assertive in the last months of the existence of the Soviet state. It was especially important in Siberia and in the Urals and lower Volga. *Izvestiia* covered its development best. See *Izvestiia*, November 18, 1991; January 3, 1992; June 3 and 25, 1993; July 8 and 9, 1993. See also Shamsin's Views in NG, March 20, 1993.
- 21 During the March Congress of Deputies he indicated that forms of presidency varied, and there was no one mould. The criticisms levied against the president that he was exceeding his powers, or attempts to restrain his authority, using US and other models as a norm, were inapposite and incorrect.
- 22 *Znamia*, January 1992.
- 23 NG, March 2, 1993.
- 24 Articles in NG and *Rossiiskaia Gazeta* in the week following the referendum of April 25 show the complex nature of the result.
- 25 *Izvestiia*, July 16.

Important books on

AGRICULTURAL ECONOMICS

1. Agricultural Credit and Rural Development in Drought Regions: A Study of Cooperative Banks of A.P.
C.S. Rayudu Rs. 210
2. Agricultural Development Price Policy and Marketed Surplus in India: Study of Green Revolution Region
Ramesh Chand Rs. 100
3. Agricultural Growth and Equity: A Micro-Level Experience
C.H. Shah, Vimal Shah and Sudarshan Iyengar Rs. 155
4. India's Rural Problems
K.N. Prasad Rs. 470
5. Agricultural Development and Rural Labour: A Case Study of Punjab and Haryana
H.S. Sidhu Rs. 190
6. Technology Options and Economic Policy for Dryland Agriculture: Potential and Challenge
N.S. Jodha (Ed.) Rs. 250

PUBLISHERS:

PHONES: 5504042, 5554042

CONCEPT PUBLISHING COMPANY

A/15-16, COMMERCIAL BLOCK, MOHAN GARDEN

NEW DELHI-110059

SHOW ROOM:

PHONE: 3272187

4788/23, ANSARI ROAD, DARYA GANJ, NEW DELHI-110002