

against proposed legislation which would grant non-Estonian residents the right to choose Estonian citizenship. A group called the Congress of Estonia, which organized the demonstrations, demanded that those who did not hold Estonian citizenship in the interwar period (or have ancestors who did) should have to apply for citizenship. This type of "exclusive" nationalism, even if it does not make its way into government policy, can easily poison the terrain on which new democratic institutions are constructed. It could also trigger large-scale emigration of Russians and other minorities, spreading the tension by intensifying claims to scarce resources in neighbouring countries.

THE PROCESS OF ECONOMIC REFORM CAN MAKE inter-ethnic accommodation even more difficult. Construction of large state-owned industrial plants on Baltic territory was commanded by the Stalinist economic machine as it pursued a "big is beautiful" strategy, interconnecting all regions through a network of semi-monopolistic enterprises. These operations injected large numbers of Russians into the Baltic region as the central economic ministries recruited labour power for the new mammoths. The Russian recruits severely diluted the weight of the titular nationality in Estonia and Latvia, fuelling the commitment of the indigenous populations to fiercely resist assimilation to Russian and Soviet culture. In some localities, Russians now form the bulk of the workforce.

As these factories and enterprises are privatized, rationalized, or split into smaller units, unemployment and dislocation of workers are almost certain to occur, and in some regions, Russians will be the main victims. Thus, the hardships of economic reform could themselves be taken as signs of ethnic discrimination and add ethnic strife to the long list of other suffering involved in the economic and political metamorphosis. In the final analysis, however, the Baltic peoples may well be able to manage these collisions with relative civility, as their non-violent struggle for independence over the last two years has already demonstrated. But in some other parts of the former USSR, tensions are already taking or could take on a more aggressive turn.

If the coup's collapse allowed the Baltics to push forth their long-standing claim for independence, the putsch's radical aftermath provided a different motor for other republican leaders to join the independence train. Two developments were of particular importance. First, if the coup's defeat was a victory for Russia, as is so loudly proclaimed both there and abroad, then it almost immediately raised the spectre of a revitalized Russian nationalism taking unpredictable turns. On 26 August, Yeltsin's office warned that border questions

might be re-opened (except with the Baltic states) if more republics pressed their claims for independence. This statement demonstrated that the hero of August could not wear both hats – protector of Russian interests and protector of all of her neighbours.

Furthermore, officials in the Russian government who had proven themselves loyal to the constitution were catapulted into posts at the centre vacated by the coup's accomplices. At first blush, the new post-coup centre looked like a surrogate for the Russian government. Those non-Russian groups that stayed with the union might well find themselves underlings in a revised edition of the former Soviet empire. Moreover, if they didn't join the independence bandwagon, their bargaining power might later be weakened as Russia tried to lure the defectors to rejoin the union.

A second factor frightened some of the more conservative republic leaders (for example in Uzbekistan, Azerbaidzhan, Tadjikistan, and finally Turkmenistan). The suspension of communist party activities by the USSR Congress of People's Deputies after the coup posed a direct threat to the leaders of these republics, who simultaneously headed the republic communist party organization and the government. Having equivocated or expressed outright support for the coup attempt, these leaders were already on shaky ground following the defeat of the putsch. They tried to save their own political bases by rescuing those same communist organizations and established bureaucracies.

AS THESE LEADERS DONNED THEIR NATIONALIST hats, some quit the party ship; others bailed out into newly-formed parties, republic surrogates for the old communist centre; and some were dumped from power by their parliaments, as their compromising behaviour was too transparent to warrant even minimal credibility. In sharp contrast to the Baltics, here the elite's declared support for independence reflected an attempt to conserve old power relationships, rather than to nurture new ones. The leadership's nationalism had little to do with national self-determination and democracy, and much to do with elite preservation.

In these areas, the social revolution is in its beginning stages or is still to occur, but until then, independence should not be confused either with a clearly conceived strategy for national self-determination or with popular sovereignty. Nonetheless, recent events in Tadjikistan demonstrate that popular protests may force concessions from the communist parties in these republics, but it

is far from clear what the outcome will be. In Kyrgystan, in sharp contrast to the other Central Asian republics, a figure outside the party establishment and with good democratic credentials – Askar Akaev – has been president since October 1990; he also distanced himself from the coup attempt from the start.


Developments in Belorussia (which renamed itself the Republic of Belarus on 19 September 1991) represent a more convoluted twist of events. The Belorussian nation, sharing broad historical and cultural features with the neighbouring Russian population, has long been considered by Soviet-watchers to be one of the least likely candidates for serious separatist aspirations. Opposition movements have, until recently, been strongly controlled. However, popular resistance to the prevailing order surged in April 1991, when the central authorities hiked prices in state stores by, on average, 170 percent; supplies didn't increase and wages went up only 60 roubles per month, on an average monthly salary of 300 roubles.

WORKERS IN MINSK, THE BELORUSSIAN CAPITAL, had apparently had enough and demanded new elections in the republic and the resignation of the central government. Alongside the oppositionist Popular Front of Belorussia, the new Minsk Strike Committee broadened the social range of the anti-communist chorus which had been largely based in the intelligentsia. Independence sentiments were strengthened by central mismanagement of the economy; here, as elsewhere, people began to think that they couldn't do much worse than the Kremlin crew, and might do a lot better. The Belorussian government itself began to feel the strain. By the day of the coup, those who had carried com-

munist party cards on the day of their election (some 85 percent of the parliaments' deputies) were themselves increasingly split over the correct strategy, although the leadership in the parliament was still in party-loyal hands.

When the coup came, the party's central organs expressed support for the Emergency Committee. This made the party's position even more tenuous once the coup collapsed, not only because its leadership was at least passively implicated but also because Gorbachev had ostensibly abandoned ship in re-

signing as General Secretary. In a desperate move, the Belorussian party leader appealed to the increasingly rebellious parliament to declare independence and thus to decouple the Belorussian party's fate from that of the ▷



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