

Volume 3

Number 050

The Abortive Soviet Coup of 1991 - III

Lead: In the late summer of 1991, the KGB attempted to take over the Soviet government. For a time, it appeared it would succeed.

Intro.: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.

Content: Frustrated with the reforms of President Mikhail Gorbachev which were undermining Communist control of Soviet national life and sensing his weakness in the face of deteriorating economic, social and political conditions, hard-line members of the KGB and the military

began to plot to get rid of him. The catalyst for the attempted coup was a series of treaties between the various constituent republics of the Soviet Union. The republics were to have more independence which meant even less power and cohesion for the Soviet Union.

On Sunday, August 18th, 1991, two days before the first of the treaties was to be signed, the hard-liners went into action. At 5:00 PM Gorbachev was in his office at his vacation home at Foros in the Crimea. His chief of security told him that a delegation was outside demanding to see him. When the President tried to call Moscow he found the lines cut. He left to warn his family and returned to the office only

to find that the delegation had forced its entrance. They demanded his resignation and replacement by Vice-President Gennady Yanayev. When Gorbachev refused, he and his family were held prisoner and incommunicado.

Meanwhile back in Moscow, the coup leaders, who called themselves the Extraordinary Commission and who were led by KGB boss Vladimir Kryuchkov, announced that Gorbachev had resigned for reasons of health. The Commission ordered all political parties suspended, protest demonstrations banned and all but pro-coup newspapers closed. They then try to take over the government. Western governments were, at first,

unsure in their response giving timid support to so-called "elected officials," but leaving the door open to working with the coup leaders should they prevail. For a breathless moment it appeared they would succeed, but within 48 hours the coup had collapsed. Next: The Anatomy of a Failed Revolution.

At the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.

Resources

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Gorbachev, Mikhail Sergeyevich. *The August Coup: The Truth and the Lessons.* New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 1991.

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