

Soviets to transfer power to republics

By The Associated Press

Soviet lawmakers, bowing to Mikhail Gorbachev's will, voted Thursday to end seven decades of Kremlin rule and set up an interim government to be dominated by newly sovereign republics.

The 1,900-member Congress of People's Deputies overwhelmingly endorsed the plan to salvage some form of union for the huge but economically troubled country, which is disintegrating in the wake of this past month's failed coup by hard-liners.

Even Vladimir Lenin, the founder of the Soviet state, did not escape the upheaval. Before the Congress adjourned, it was proposed that Lenin's body be removed from its stately mausoleum in Red Square and reburied in Leningrad beside his mother.

The Congress effectively put itself out of business, and Lenin's fate is to be taken up by a smaller legislature set up

under the restructuring plan.

The plan — approved 1,682 to 43 — was rammed through the Congress by a forceful and commanding Gorbachev, who squelched debate and refused to accept proposals from the chamber.

At one point, he threatened to close the session and suggested changing the constitution to eliminate the need for two-thirds approval.

"I will not yield the microphone to anyone from the floor!" Gorbachev said as some deputies tried to speak. "Either make a decision or not. That's all!"

Many lawmakers believed if they had not approved the measures, Gorbachev would simply have implemented them by decree.

The restructuring plan was forged by Gorbachev and the leaders of 10 republics, including Russia's Boris Yeltsin, who emerged as his governing partner after leading nationwide resistance to last

month's abortive coup.

In the wake of the takeover, central power and the Communist Party collapsed.

After lawmakers gave their approval to the measures, Gorbachev nodded and clapped. Yeltsin, seated next to him in the Kremlin's Palace of Congresses, smiled broadly.

Gorbachev has told Baltic representatives he would recognize their independence by decree after the session. Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia have won diplomatic recognition from the United States and most of Europe.

But with Gorbachev's decree, they would become the first breakaway Soviet states to have their independence drives win official Kremlin acceptance.

When it appeared today parts of the restructuring proposal were running into trouble, Latvian deputy Yuri Boyars said, he instructed his delegation to cast ballots

for it. The Latvians usually do not vote in the Congress because they consider their republic independent.

In Washington, the White House termed the lawmakers' actions an internal Soviet affair, but appeared to welcome prospects for an orderly transition of power.

"We've said all along, as long as they continue on the reform path in both economics and politics, as long as they arrive at decisions in a peaceful manner that's mutually acceptable to the center and the republics, the final outcome is something that they have to decide for themselves," said deputy White House press secretary Roman Popadiuk.

The Bush administration has previously expressed concern about keeping central control over the Soviet nuclear arsenal.

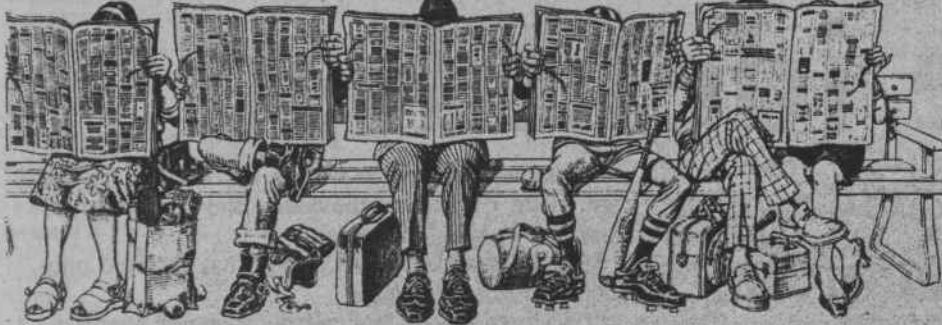
Some details of the Soviet plan remained unclear, but under it:

■ Congress agreed to create a new executive body to run the country that will be made up of Gorbachev and the leaders of the republics.

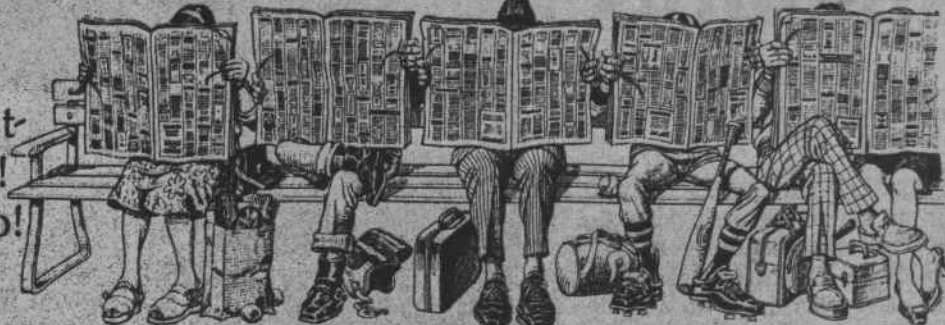
■ Deputies eliminated the vice presidency and formed a second body including Gorbachev and representatives of the republics that will coordinate economic policy and the transition to a market economy.

■ Lawmakers also overwhelmingly approved a resolution pledging to respect "the declarations of sovereignty and acts of independence taken by the republics." All but five of the 15 Soviet republics have declared their independence.

■ Congress, which had been the Soviet Union's highest legislative body, agreed to transfer its power to a smaller, reconstituted version of the standing Supreme Soviet legislature.



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