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EDITORIAL

RUSSIA: BLOOD MONEY FROM THE WEST

THE SHELLS from Boris Yeltsin's tanks destroyed more than Russia's parliament on October 5. They also shattered the illusion that the West had a creative contribution to make in the transformation of the former socialist countries.

The unconstitutional dissolution of Russia's parliament was a disgrace to everyone concerned - to Yeltsin, to his former allies who were leading the opposition in the Supreme Soviet, and to the people from the West who claimed to know best.

• The financial institutions, led by the IMF and the World Bank, insisted on tying loans to a financial austerity programme that was bound to cause unnecessary hardship and discredit the concept of "the market".

• Western governments applauded President Yeltsin when he broke the law and abolished parliament. No effort had been made by western leaders to help Russia's politicians to adopt the process by which consensus can be achieved through the art of democratic politics.

• Western journalists, on radio and TV - with a few honourable exceptions - presented the conflict in a language designed for comics. Yeltsin's opponents were "hardliners" who were "opposed to reform". This was a grotesque distortion of the truth, but it served its purpose: there was no deep analysis of the poverty of the western economic philosophy, which was at the root of the conflict.

There was no chance of a consensus because Yeltsin's administration was tied to a single vision of the future under the tutelage of the economists from the IMF which the people of Russia knew suffered from serious defects - like keeping 35 million people out of work in the leading market economies. Yeltsin's tanks were an indictment of the West, which has tied a $1.5 billion loan to a package of austerity measures which the Russians, with their strong sense of social obligation, could not stomach. The West will be shamed by history, if it now supports President Yeltsin's bid to adopt the market economy in an unmodified form.