

# 'Wedding generals' for sale in Russia

by Konstantin Cherenykh

The struggle of the bulldogs under the carpet in Russia is getting more and more intense, as the country sinks deeper into economic and moral crisis. None of the combatants exploit ideas or even the glimmer of what might be called a point of view, with the exception of several, very similar varieties of Russia's old imperial notion that Moscow is the Third Rome.

The daily *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* reports that Moscow Mayor Yuri Luzhkov, after winning a battle on privatization questions over chairman of the State Property Commission Anatoli Chubais, has gained third place in political influence, just behind President Boris Yeltsin and Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin. Having staked out Moscow as his own domain, Luzhkov pretends to be the great protector of all Muscovites, constantly brainwashing the public to this effect through his TV channel (NTV) and newspapers (*Sevodnya* and *Obshchaya Gazeta*). In reality, his appetites obviously extend beyond the Russian capital.

Recently, Luzhkov signed an agreement with the leadership of Crimea (in Ukraine), for use of the prestigious health resorts there, which had allegedly been the traditional "place of leisure for Muscovites." This action probably has more than a propagandistic purpose. Luzhkov seems to be marking his territory, the way animals do.

In late June, Luzhkov and his closest ally, head of the Most ("Bridge") financial group Vladimir Gusinsky, organized a meeting of the Russian political elite in the Moscow suburbs, under the motto "Dialogue of the Generations." The enterprise was assisted by former Komsomol (Communist Youth League) functionaries calling themselves "Leaders of the Next Millennium." Among the guests were well-known "fathers of the reform" Aleksandr Yakovlev (a member of the Soviet Politburo under Mikhail Gorbachov) and his elder cubs, so to speak, Chubais and former Prime Minister Yegor Gaidar, but also conservatives like Valentin Kuptsov, the former chairman of the Russian Communist Party and now a rival of Gennadi Zyuganov for control over the Communist Party of the Russian Federation, and former Soviet Prime Minister Nikolai Ryzhkov, who now heads Tveruniversalbank, a provincial bank in the city of Tver. The leaders of

Russia's two rival intelligence services, Yevgeni Primakov of the Foreign Intelligence Service and Counterintelligence Service chief Sergei Stepashin, were also present.

As usual, the words said there were not as important as the fact that the entire political *beau monde* had agreed to be manipulated by Luzhkov and the Most group. During this summer, the power rivalry between Luzhkov and Chernomyrdin was in the background of many of the political events in Russia. Chernomyrdin presides over a huge oil extraction and refining empire, the only branch of industry whose workers are well paid, while Luzhkov has his backers at Most.

Luzhkov made sure to stand near Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn when the writer addressed citizens upon his arrival in Moscow after a 20-year exile. Thus the mayor made clear that no matter who you are, a Komsomol activist or a spiritual leader like Solzhenitsyn, you should make obeisance to the new financial oligarchy.

At the same time, Luzhkov was evidently trying to paint himself as a Russian patriot. This intention was more distinctly demonstrated when the President and the mayor visited painter Ilya Glazunov's exhibition. Glazunov, who painted Communist Party leader Leonid Brezhnev's portrait in the 1970s, now was displaying his new allegorical depiction of Russia's national and military spirit, and commenting to his high-ranking guests: "And here are the dark forces desiring to destroy the great Russian power. But we'll not let them, shall we?" "Oh, no, we won't," the President replied. Luzhkov, standing nearby with a stony face, did his best to look like a sure heir to the presidency.

The aforementioned "Dialogue of Generations" was used to discuss the problem of reconstructing the multi-party system. It was made clear that all the politicians, as well as writers and painters, should be tools of the new financial and administrative oligarchy.

Soon after this meeting, Yakovlev was rewarded with a 1,000-square-meter office in central Moscow for his Social Democratic Party, comprised mostly of yesterday's ardent liberals. Yakovlev has already found a charismatic leader for his flock—former commander-in-chief of the CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States) joint forces Gen. Yevgeni Shaposhnikov. Such a figurehead is called a "wedding general" in Russia, after a story by Anton Chekhov.

## Artificial structures

Yegor Gaidar, meanwhile, thinks himself charismatic enough to manage his Democratic Choice party himself, and perhaps not only his party, but an entire Democratic Congress that might unite the Choice with the converted social democrats. This project (the idea was stolen from former co-chairman of Democratic Russia Lev Ponomarev, who accused Gaidar of "oligarchical methods of creating parties") is under attack by Gaidar's rival, Irina Hakamada, leader of the small Liberal-Conservative Union. She is anxious that Gaidar, with

the help of his financial ally Oleg Boiko of the firm OLBI, will profit the most in sharing out the multi-party pie.

In fact, neither Yakovlev nor Gaidar has a real party. These are small, artificial structures made up of people who are interested only in their wages as functionaries—they care for money, not ideas.

But there are many other would-be “wedding generals” in the theater. They have already lost their ability (if some of them had one) not only to come up with ideas, but even to proclaim them. They therefore need much money from officials, to build up party organizations in the regions, which will never work but only “represent.”

If examined not through the glasses of official statistics, but first-hand, the Russian multi-party pie has shrunk rapidly during the spring and summer of 1994. Russians are coming to the conclusion that political parties do not and cannot accomplish any good. (The turnout in local elections in many towns, including St. Petersburg, proved this.) The quantity of true political activists has decreased to such a degree that, after Gaidar, Ponomarev, and Yakovlev have shared all the liberals and Zyuganov and Kuptsov divided the communists between them, leaving a certain crowd of disillusioned young people for radical chauvinists Zhirinovskiy and Limonov, there is almost nothing left.

### **Gorbachov is annoyed**

That is probably why Mikhail Gorbachov looked so offended during a TV speech at the end of July. He even called his former close ally Yakovlev “a propagandist in any regime.” Actually, he is annoyed because Yakovlev has eaten up his piece of the pie. Gorbachov was trying to accumulate from the social-democratic portion, but Yakovlev, with Luzhkov’s support, carried off all the crumbs.

Now Gorbachov is attempting to attract some anti-liberal politicians. Recently the filmmaker Stanislav Govorukhin surprised his radical collaborators by apologizing to Gorbachov, saying he regretted the bad words he had said about the ex-U.S.S.R. President. But Govorukhin, being an author more than a politician, is unable to create any new political party in which Gorbachov would play the role of “wedding general.”

Gorbachov has already declared that he will not run for President in the next elections. Television under Yakovlev’s control commented upon this declaration with some statistics: It showed the results of a public poll where 31% of the respondents stated that Gorbachov personally was to blame for the destruction of the Russian economy and the people’s welfare.

Would-be wedding generals remain alone, sadly waiting until the political climate changes, being quite unable to change it themselves. But when new winds start blowing, they will rather bring waves of political terrorism, strikes, and military coup attempts, than any sort of western-like political activity.

## **A glimmer of hope shines in Sri Lanka**

by Ramtanu Maitra and Susan Maitra

After 17 years of an uninterrupted and increasingly uninspiring reign in the Sri Lankan Parliament by the United National Party (UNP), Chandrika Kumaratunga, the 49-year-old daughter of two former prime ministers—S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike and Mrs. Sirimavo Bandaranaike—led the People’s Alliance to a stunning victory in the parliamentary elections on Aug. 16. Though short of an absolute majority by one seat in a 225-member Parliament, Kumaratunga has since formed her cabinet, claiming a razor-thin majority.

The People’s Alliance, of which the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) is by far the most powerful member, was led by Kumaratunga through the forging of a well-conceived alliance with the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC), which dominates the Muslim-majority east coast and was once a political ally of the ruling UNP. Her campaign promise is to hold unconditional talks with the militant Tamils, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in particular, to seek an end to the decade-long civil war between the Tamils in the north and the Sinhala-dominated Colombo, the seat of administrative power in Sri Lanka. The conflict, which spread in the 1950s following the end of British rule in 1948, is the product of an overt Sinhala racism targeted against the native Tamils, and which resulted over the years in adoption of anti-Tamil legislation. The mistrust grew to a state of alienation and finally took a violent form in July 1983, when the Sinhalese massacred a large number of Tamil civilians in Colombo. Since then, the two ethnic groups have been locked in mortal combat with the Tamils, who dominate the northern peninsula of Jaffna, close to the Indian coast lines, demanding a separate country to be carved out of Sri Lanka.

### **A complex situation**

The Tamil Tigers may not succeed in wrenching out a part of Sri Lanka to establish a new country. Still, the Tigers, who are linked to the merchants of guns and drugs internationally, can continue to be a major disruptive force, destroying human lives and jeopardizing the nation’s security as well as its economy.

Kumaratunga’s sudden rise to become prime minister is a new ray of hope. Prior to the elections, Kumaratunga,