

trade unions proceed with plans to organize a “black week”: Several hundred thousand students demonstrated throughout the country, while a national strike on Nov. 24 was called for by the civil servants and the public sector unions. Another national day of action was set for Nov 28.

The unions are divided in their objectives: The CFDT, one of the three largest federations, is not participating, because it supports the government plan, while Force Ouvrière, the largest, will only participate in the Nov. 28 day of action, despite its opposition to the Juppé plan, because it is very close to Chirac and hopes for another policy shift in six months. However, the trade unions might not be able to control a movement of popular rage which could swell way beyond their expectations. Indeed, many sectors of the CFDT will participate in the protest actions anyway, and have called for the resignation of the federation’s current president.

The French National Railway (SNCF) workers have also announced that they may extend their national strike from Nov. 24 to Nov. 29, which would create havoc in the country. Much will depend on whether the Socialist Party decides to support these strike actions fully or not. Even though Socialist Party head Lionel Jospin has always favored the Maastricht Treaty, such great hostility to the treaty has mushroomed in the party’s left wing that its main spokesman, Julien Dray, and its former president, Henri Emanuelli, have declared that should it become a matter of choosing between the population’s well-being or the treaty, the choice will obviously be for the population.

Effort to silence Cheminade

A final element is crucial to understand this policy shift in France’s government. Throughout the country, there has been only one political force that has consistently polemicized against monetarist policies and the speculative cancer which is killing the world economy, and which has proposed competent policies for real economic growth: That is the movement based on the ideas of Lyndon LaRouche, headed, in France, by former Presidential candidate Jacques Cheminade and the Solidarity and Progress movement.

Symptomatic of the lack of courage of even the better forces in this government, was the unanimous decision of the Constitutional Court of France not to reimburse Cheminade’s campaign expenses, in an effort to bankrupt Cheminade personally and to close down his movement. Even though the majority of the Constitutional Court belongs to the Mitterrand era, such an outrageous decision, violating the very intent of the Constitution, could not have been made without an all-party agreement to eliminate this “outsider.”

Given that Cheminade’s policies represent the very heart of the opposition to the international monetarist insanity, the attack against Cheminade has weakened the possibility of creating a real resistance front against these policies in France.

Interview: Vitaly V. Melnikov and Elena Drapeko

A look at art and culture in Russia

Mrs. Drapeko has a career as an actress. In the first post-communist years, she was responsible for Cultural Affairs in the St. Petersburg City Council, and is now running as an independent candidate for the Russian State Duma (lower house of the national parliament). Mr. Melnikov is film director and artistic director at the “Lenfilm” Film Production Association, and chairman of the St. Petersburg Film Makers’ Association. He is directing one of the few films right now being produced at the “Lenfilm” studio: the historical movie “Czarevich Aleksei,” about the son of Peter the Great. The interview was conducted by Gabriele Liebig and Konstantin Chermnykh on Oct. 10 at the “Lenfilm” studio in St. Petersburg.

EIR: We understand that you are upset about the situation of Russian cinema today. Why?

Melnikov: I think it is important to understand, that cinema in Russia has been one of the most important sources of cultural education. Of course, in the Soviet era it was propaganda in many respects, but still it was important that those “perfect people” shown in the movies, set a positive example of behavior for millions of people.

Then came a period in the late 1980s and early 1990s that reminded me of the period after World War II, when Soviet cinemas showed a lot of German movies taken by the Red Army and brought here. These German movies included a lot of embarrassing things that our citizens had never seen in Soviet films, including the negative sides of the Soviet Union, as an enemy image. In the beginning of the 1990s, something similar happened, but in much stronger doses: We saw a great number of American soap operas and thrillers. Also, Russian cinematographers made films on problems they hadn’t touched before. All of that created an atmosphere that showed: We are bad. It was the opposite message from before. Before, the Soviet Union had been presented as the best of all countries, going ahead of all mankind toward a brilliant future, etc. Now it was the opposite; the Soviet Union was suddenly presented as the worst of all, and the people were blamed for not understanding earlier that the regime was violent and cruel.

At the same time, the West was presented as the *perfect* model to be followed. As long as that was new, people were curious, and for a while couldn’t get enough of western mov-

ies. But during the last year, a new countervailing tendency can be observed.

EIR: Can you give some examples of this new trend?

Melnikov: The main tendency, I see now, from talking to many people, is that people prefer again to see Russian movies, instead of foreign ones. But to bring these films to a Russian audience, is now much more difficult than some years ago, because due to the “reform,” that is now affecting everything in our society, we lost the public film distribution system. This system was very important for our cinema. Indeed, it was used in some ideological way, but still it was a great advantage when every region in Russia had a “Center of Propagation of Cinema Art.” It was State policy to finance and support the dissemination of those films that were considered the best in the last period, all over the country. The idea was, to use cinema for the purpose of making people know more about the country, its history—education. And now we have lost that. It will be very difficult to start restoring even part of that system.

We lost the old system, and didn’t get a new one [to replace it]. But just at the moment when it was destroyed, there was a flow of cheap American and other movies: third-rate movies rejected in the West, cheap in every respect. To buy such films is much less expensive than to make a new masterpiece here in Russia. Even to buy Russian films is more expensive nowadays than to buy a foreign one. And the worst film, of course, is the cheapest. Thus, during the last several years, cinema has turned from a valuable means of popular education into a kind of chewing gum.

The government is starting to understand that something must be changed, if they don’t want to lose the population. People are already bored with the cheap foreign stuff, and just stop going to the cinema.

Under some pressure from public organizations, there was introduced a new structure on the State level called “Roskomkino” (Russian Committee on Cinematography), which gets centralized financing for saving the cinemas and studios. But that cannot undo so easily the tremendous losses we incurred in the meantime in the technical base of cinematography.

For example, this studio—one of several “Lenfilm” studios—produced previously 12 or 13 films a year. It was managed from the very beginning by such famous film managers as Grigori Kozintsev and Leonid Trauberg. But now it is only able to make one film a year. You should have seen how this studio was brimming with people some years ago. Now, so few people are left working here that it is not even worthwhile to operate a canteen. The empty “Lenfilm” corridors have become a shelter for cats. In the “Mosfilm” studio in Moscow, it is worse: They have rats. Maybe we should make their rats and our cats acquainted with each other.

EIR: What about the film you are working on?

Melnikov: Luckily, I am directing the only film which is be-

ing produced here right now. It is the story of “Czarevich Aleksei,” the son of Peter I. [He became entangled in a plot by the boyars against his father, the plot was uncovered and Aleksei eventually executed.] I base the story on different historical accounts. One source, for example, is Dmitri Merzhkovsky, who wrote a novel about Aleksei. But I also take into account the view of others on the same subject, such as Pushkin and Russian historian Sergei Solovyov, who look at this relationship in quite a different way. I have been working for a year on this picture, and I don’t know how long it will take.

One difficulty is, that during the period of destruction we have not only lost the system of distribution, but also the level of technique. In the West it has advanced, and we are lagging behind.

EIR: Why is the *dernier cri* in technique so important? I remember so many marvelous old movies, even in black and white. Isn’t the content of a movie more important than the technique?

Melnikov: The low technological level of old movies has already become an aesthetic element. People like it, if they watch an old movie—like looking at an old photograph—but if you make a new film now, you can’t allow yourself to make it on such a level.

Also, we have to think about exporting our films to the West. Nowadays, our films are shown in France, Germany, Italy, only on TV. The usual film system doesn’t take them because of technical flaws, for example bad recording, or recording which is not synchronous with the movements. Therefore, technique is a very important thing.

EIR: What is the situation of the cinematographers today? And what is your organization, the St. Petersburg Film Makers’ Association, demanding of the government?

Melnikov: We bombard [Prime Minister Viktor] Chernomyrdin with letters. Last year, the government included in the budget 40 billion rubles for the cinema. Only 22 billion rubles were actually paid out. Where is the rest? Nobody knows and nothing was explained. The same situation this year. Recently, we again sent a letter demanding an answer.

One of our colleagues, Yury Mamin, got quite furious about the fact that he can’t get money for his films, and called for a strike. I explained to him that a strike of cinematographers doesn’t make sense. “Who will notice, if you are on strike? A miners’ strike, or a teachers’ strike will be felt, but if you strike, it will influence nobody’s opinion.” “Okay,” Mamin said, “then we make a demonstration.” And they built a big coffin, wrote on it “Russian cinema,” and walked with this coffin along the streets several days ago, looking very sad.

Drapeko: For a certain time, in the beginning of the Gorbachov period, the leadership was interested in means to influence public opinion, because public opinion should support

the beginning of Gorbachov's reforms. At that time, the cinema was still well-financed. But after Gorbachov was removed, and [Nikolai] Ryzhkov [was] replaced by [Yegor] Gaidar, and Gaidar by Chernomyrdin, and so on, the present government is not interested in public opinion, and quite indifferent to it.

In order to demonstrate their sympathy for cinema, they organize once every several years a film festival in Moscow. It is like a great banquet, billions of rubles are thrown out for champagne and caviar, and a group of corrupted cinematographers, such as Nikita Mikhalkov and others, sit there and enjoy themselves. Many cinematographers boycotted that pseudo-festival, in spite of having been invited.

This corrupted cinema elite is used in the election campaign for the Russian State Duma. For example, Mikhalkov is running on the slate of Chernomyrdin's bloc "Our Home Is Russia." That is the only way that the government is showing interest in cinema.

EIR: What about your own candidacy for the State Duma? Also, I heard that you were responsible for Cultural Affairs in St. Petersburg not so long ago.

Drapeko: I began my career as an actress. Later, I worked for ten years in the Trade Union of Actors. In the early perestroika period we founded the "Guild of Actors," first of the Soviet Union, then the name changed to "Guild of Actors of the Newly Independent States."

The system worked until now. I became known as a public figure, because I was vice president of that guild.

Then I was invited by the St. Petersburg mayoralty to head the Committee on Culture and Tourism, which is a very large economic area. Probably it was [due to] our intelligentsia's idealism, characteristic for this period 1990-91, why we tried to create both a State and public management of culture. It worked similar to French dirigism, by the "long leash": The government just works out a general consideration of financing some branch, but the specialists actually formulate the concrete policy. We created several expert councils: on museums, cinema, libraries, music schools, music and art education for children, etc.

I was also an expert for the Supreme Soviet of Russia on the question of culture. During the period of Gaidar in 1992, when everything was thrown on the free market, and privatization started with full force, we managed to exclude from privatization the theaters, museums, etc., and thus we saved them. You must know, that St. Petersburg is one of the largest black markets for antiquities.

This half-private management system of culture was a really democratic system, but it functioned only for a short interim period. Then we saw the return to a very primitive form of authoritarian rule. Nobody asks any longer for the opinion of public organizations, of experts, of creative people. Especially on questions concerning real estate; the cul-

tural organizations had much real estate: museums, theaters, old precious buildings. Since the new Constitution was adopted, a variety of laws and *ukazes* narrowed the influence of the public organization more and more, especially concerning questions of property. In fact, the first decision made after October 1993, in the period when the city council still existed [in December 1993 the St. Petersburg City Soviet was dissolved and reduced from 400 deputies to 49], was to deprive the deputies of any right to decide on property questions.

EIR: I would like to come back to your candidacy for the State Duma. Are you running as an independent candidate, or are you connected with a political party?

Drapeko: I am running as an independent candidate, but I am supported by several public organizations and parties. For example, I am a member of the movement "Women of St. Petersburg," I am also an initiating member of the movement "Spiritual Heritage" [spiritual from Russ. *dukhovny*, linked to the soul, as opposed to material]. This aspect has always been the most important for the Russian people, and this is probably why we have such a rich literature and culture in general. In this movement "Spiritual Heritage," we try to promote national, patriotic values. We demand that our own cultural production get funding. We see it as a priority to survive culturally, to keep our own soul.

I am also supported by the Union of Realists. We are cooperating with other parties of the centrist opposition, such as Zuganov's party, but not with radical groups like the Communist Workers Party. I know many good, fair, energetic people in many parties and try to make them work together for common goals.

EIR: Please tell us about your favorite Russian movies? From the standpoint of cinematic art, and from the standpoint of the cultural values and ideals you wish to promote, what films would you like to be shown in the cinemas and on TV today, both in Russia and in the West?

Drapeko: Most important, I think, are historical films. People must know their history, the tragedies, the victories, the national destiny.

Personally, I like very much the actor and writer Vassiliy Shukshin, author of the film "Red Viburnum." Stanislav Rostotsky directed the film in which I played my first main role: "The Dawn is Quiet Here." It was a very famous film, a screen version of a novel with the same title by Boris Vassilyev. I played one of four girls in a military unit during World War II, who were killed one after another. Rostotsky is a very talented film director. He also made the film "The Land and the People," about the kolkhoz peasants in the Soviet period. Also a film about schools, teachers, and the process of education: "Let's Live till Monday" (1961). Of course, Vitaly Melnikov's film "Hello and Goodbye" was a very kind, gentle, and very popular film. . . .