
Interview: Viktor Yugin

We don't have a free press today in Russia

Viktor Yugin was removed from his post as director of the St. Petersburg TV Company in November 1992, for allowing the broadcast of TV programs disloyal to Boris Yeltsin. He was accused of corruption, but the City Court ruled that he (like former Vice President Aleksandr Rutskoy in Moscow, who was jailed after the October 1993 storming of the parliament on Yeltsin's orders) was absolutely innocent, and that Yugin's dismissal was illegal. The Moscow powers had to invent a trick of re-naming the TV company, to which he could not return as he was judged as having been illegally fired from a company with another name!

As head of the Supreme Soviet's Commission on Mass Media and Information, and as a person regarding himself as a true democrat, Viktor Yugin stayed in the Moscow "White House," the seat of the parliament, in October 1993, though many of his former friends advised him to leave and save his career. His choice was to save his dignity.

At present, Yugin is head of the press department of St. Petersburg's City Assembly. In late 1995, he published a book entitled *A Coup d'Etat for 16 Francs*, depicting the manners and habits of the supreme executive power, and the true history of such episodes of Russian post-Soviet history as the "Rutskoy case," and Dmitri Yakubovsky's role in its fabrication, the Ossetian-Ingushi military conflict, and the siege of the "White House." Gabriele Liebig, Michael Vitt, and Konstantin Cheremnykh spoke with him on Feb. 16 in Mariinsky Palace in St. Petersburg, the seat of the City Assembly.

EIR: Do you enjoy freedom of the press in Russia?

Yugin: Actually, we don't have a free press, today. Not more than in the 1980s, when we progressive journalists struggled for a free press against the control and pressure from the transforming State bureaucracy. This pressure did not originate with the communist ideology as such, but rather was a dogmatic remnant of this ideology, a system of punishment and praise.

For example, the question of private property. A right to private property, actually is important for the freedom of an individual, as it enables him or her to travel, to engage in creative work, etc. Before 1989, as soon as you mentioned private property, you would get a call from the regional

party committee: "You mustn't do that, because this is violating the proletarian conscience, proletarian ideals, and proletarian principles."

But in order to have an evolution, you must have different forces arguing and competing with each other. Otherwise you get stagnation, in which nothing is moving because of a lack of dialogue. We didn't have that dialogue, and therefore no development of thinking. We had no intellectual opposition, because thinking in a different direction was not allowed.

Now, after 1990-91, seemingly the press is allowed to say and write anything they want. Some journalists believed: "Now we can criticize anyone we want." They didn't understand, that every paper, every radio or TV station has its financial base, which is based on certain banking structures. Instead of the Communist Party and the State as general manager, the journalists now got a multitude of such controllers.

Some political parties now have the possibility to speak on TV, they have some financial ability to do this. But the main TV or radio stations are still financed by the State budget. Actually, the top executive power finances these mass media.

Today's leaders are not like communists, but more like Bolsheviks of 1917-18 in the way they act. The main thing they have in common with the Bolsheviks is that they are illiterate, utterly uneducated. They use manipulation through the mass media in the same illiterate manner as the Bolsheviks of 1918.

As a result, when the President or the prime minister says something that makes Europe, the U.S., and Russia tremble—in other words, when he says something stupid—the journalists and editors are often afraid to express their own opinion about that.

For the last five years we had no normal development of the economy, of science or law, including the law concerning the mass media. This State can't guarantee the social condition of the people. For example, a huge number of banks are registered by the State, then half of them or more go bankrupt, their chairmen disappear somewhere abroad, freely, and the people who had put their assets into these banks are left behind. And the State can't do anything.

For example, it is possible here to appoint as general prosecutor a person who takes bribes. [He refers to the recent arrest of former General Prosecutor Alexei Ilyushenko for corruption—ed.] Some officials conducted false criminal investigations based on falsified documents, as in the case of General Rutskoy—they falsified documents allegedly proving that Rutskoy was keeping money in Swiss banks, etc. The person who started this operation didn't lose his position. And the mass media repeat all these officially circulated rumors and accusations.

EIR: What are your own experiences as a journalist?

Yugin: A fair person, who is caring for the people, the town, and his own dignity, can't work in the mass media now.

In 1992 I had a conversation with President Yeltsin, and I told him: "We have political opposition. You as President have to conduct something like a roundtable, you have to talk to these people, including the so-called national patriots, the communists, and so on. The President answered: "We don't have communists any more. We have no national patriots. We just have some dissatisfied people, but this is not significant." But I knew myself such people; some were dogmatic communists, but others were normal people, who could be talked to. But they had certain opinions for example on the privatization of land and property. I said so. And the President said: "You must not give these people access to TV."

The President was informed about specific cases of corruption, very concretely documented cases. He said "Thank you," and put the dossiers in his drawer. He used this information later in another way, in order to blackmail these people. He left the corrupt officials at their posts, but had them on the hook, so to speak. They were now easier to manipulate. He used the charges against them to make them more obedient.

Two years later, the journalist Vadim Poegli from *Moskovski Komsolts* wrote about the corruption in the Western Group of the Army in Germany. He presented undeniable facts, all documented; none of these facts was officially rejected. But Poegli was brought to trial and convicted by the court for calling Defense Minister Grachov a "thief." Actually, the court didn't reject any of his facts, but based the conviction just on the insulting word.

EIR: We know that practice all too well. . . But I have another question: Was there a specific reason, why you left your post as head of the St. Petersburg TV station?

Yugin: I am a romantic democrat. We are four persons here in this discussion. I am sure, each of us has his or her own opinion on certain issues, for example, if it is useful to smoke or not. I had a program called "Politics," in which many different parties could express their positions and proposals. There was a topic given for the discussion on which representatives of different parties could express their views. We also gave speaking time to people who were not "in favor" at a certain time. We gave the floor to opposition parties, to such politicians as Yuri Vlasov, Mikhail Bocharov, Sergei Andreyev, Vasili Starodubtsev; we showed the Russian Supreme Soviet, not in the enemy image, as Ostankino did, but as it was in reality. This became dangerous for Yeltsin, as he was preparing his April 1993 referendum to ask the people whom they trust more, him or the parliament. Since they did not succeed through psychological pressure, the only thing they could do was to call for my resignation.

So, my "fault" was, that I was against dictatorship under a democratic cover, but for real democracy.

Documentation

To set the context, we quote from our own coverage of Moscow events, in an article by Konstantin George in EIR's Oct. 15, 1993 issue, regarding events on Oct. 4 of that year: "The White House [parliament building], which had some 2-3,000 people inside it when the attack began, nearly all of them unarmed, was not stormed, but pulverized by tank-fired artillery. According to eyewitness reports, this carnage produced a death toll conservatively estimated at over 700." On the previous day, Sunday, Oct. 3, George reported, there had been a smaller bloodbath at the Ostankino television center, providing the pretext which the "regime needed to justify the destruction of the White House the next day."

The following excerpts from Viktor Yugin's book, recounting the events of Oct. 3, A Coup d'Etat for 16 Francs, were translated from the Russian and edited by Konstantin Chermnykh.

Ostankino

The Ostankino Co. [now transformed into ORT] has always been and will always be an empire of officiousness. This is its nature. . . .

In the tragic minutes of the country, I happened to be in Ostankino, and two episodes, in 1991 and 1993, appeared to be almost equal. The only difference was that Leonid Kravchenko [head of the company removed on Aug. 22, 1991—ed.] was a high-ranking professional, and Bragin was nothing [Vyacheslav Bragin, Ostankino director in October 1993, later removed, ex-first secretary of Lipetsk CPSU committee].

. . . . On Aug. 19, I took Yushenkov and Bragin [who, in 1991, were both members of Yugin's committee in the Supreme Soviet], and we went to Ostankino. We could not come in, as a strict-looking lieutenant stopped us and said that entrance was allowed only for members of the Presidium of the U.S.S.R. Supreme Soviet. [Only some days later this Union parliament was dissolved on Yeltsin's initiative, without any resistance.]

Next day I managed to reach Leonid Kravchenko by his car number:

"Hullo, Leonid Petrovich."

"Hullo."

"About the TV. . . . The Russian company is closed, but Ostankino is working. . . ."

"Yes. . . ."

"Fulfill the will of your President [Yeltsin, President of R.S.F.S.R. since June 12, 1991—ed.]. Tell about the real situation at the White House. . . . He needs your support now. . . ."

"I understand, but I don't make decisions."

"Who does?"

"Lazutkin." [Valentin Lazutkin is now the executive

director of the ORT!—ed.]

“Should I call him?”

“Useless.”

“Who makes decisions?”

“The Committee members [i.e., the putschists—ed.]”

“Can you talk to them?”

“I’ll call back.”

I understood Kravchenko’s position: He could end his career immediately if he did what I was asking him. But he might also become a hero.

In five minutes, he called back.

“We can’t give you the TV time. . . .”

“Whom should I call?”

“Call Yanayev [head of the putsch, vice president of the U.S.S.R.—ed.]”

“Leonid Petrovich, you have an opportunity to become a legend. Tomorrow you’ll be resigned, in two days appointed again. . . .”

“I can’t. Good bye.”

* * *

. . . In October 1993, I also came into the Ostankino hall. But I was the only person from my committee there. All the others had already hurried to Yeltsin’s team, queuing up for the wages and getting posts. [Those councilmen who agreed to leave Khasbulatov and Rutskoy, immediately got their wages for half a year ahead, and were offered posts in the executive power—ed.] Yushenkov was already heading the Federal Information Center, and Bragin was the director of the First Channel. I was immediately stopped by a policeman:

“Councilmen are not allowed here!”

I called Bragin’s office. A security person said, “He is busy.” Then, “He is on a visit.” Then, “He’s having dinner.” I called my friend, a TV official. He told me that Bragin is at his place, and the phones are “managed” by the government security officers. In some minutes, my friend came down.

His first question was:

“You need [you’d like to put on TV] Khasbulatov?”

“Why Khasbulatov? . . .”

“Everything will come to an end with all of you.”

“Petrovich, and what about honor, and law?”

“What are you talking about? You should save yourself, and the rest you’ll get later.” He turned around toward the police. “See, they have already reported you came here. So, let’s go out through the back gates.”

Through the glass, I saw that the hall of the building was quickly occupied by men in bulletproof jackets. They were checking the documents of those who were coming in and going out. . . . My friend hurried back.

I was standing near the Ostankino ponds, and thinking about the reverse in history, about the court psychology, about thievery and baseness, about the essence of the power and that it does not need us at all. . . .

[On Oct. 3], the squads for storming Ostankino were formed in a stupid and nervous way. All those who had arms could place themselves in one van. The others could rely only upon their fists. . . .

They could be understood. All the time, since evening Sept. 21, all the TV channels were telling lies about the situation, picked up and filtered by Bragin and Poptsov. From lengthy cassettes brought by dozens of cameramen they cut out what they needed and with the language of Svanidze, Sorokina, Pravdyuk, Radzikhovski and others, told *their own* truth, and not what was really happening.

. . . On Oct. 2, in the evening, I managed to connect with Oleg Poptsov [head of the Russian Radio-TV Co., RTR, at that time and till February 1996]. He recognized me immediately:

“Where are you?”

“I’m in Moscow. Don’t worry, not in Petersburg [meaning: not at the St. Petersburg TV Company—ed.]. Oleg, could you come to the Congress tomorrow, and tell about the concept of TV covering the events?” [The Tenth Extraordinary Congress of the Russian Supreme Soviet was still going on in the besieged White House—ed.]

“No. . . . There is no quorum at the Congress!”

“If you come, it may have a quorum.” [Poptsov also was a councilman, but disappeared from the White House immediately after Yeltsin’s Order 1400, Sept. 21, 1993—ed.]

“I have other tasks.”

“But still, can you show what is happening in the White House?”

“We show everything.” [How they were doing it, the author already said.—ed.]

“Still, Oleg, please, try to come.”

“I’ll not come. . . .”

* * *

. . . We hardly managed to convince Khasbulatov that he should not follow us to Ostankino. We [journalists from the Supreme Soviet—ed.] came there in two groups. At the Ostankino pond we saw a burning car and heard shooting. We realized that we’d be unable to get to Bragin. In the crowd of several hundred people nobody was armed. Right near the crossing, beside a burning bus, a group of young strong men were carrying away the dead bodies. . . . Three armored cars [the Supreme Soviet people had none—ed.] were shooting at the Ostankino office building, at the level between the 4th and the 6th stories. Nobody was shooting back from inside; it was silence in the building.

Then the armored cars would turn and start shooting at the crowd. People fell down, some of them staying on the ground motionless. . . .

Then, suddenly, ten more armored cars with switched-on lights appeared from out of the corner, and also started shooting at the building of the radio station, then at the TV building. . . . We fell down, expecting they’d shoot at us.

Andrei covered me with his body.

"Everything all right," he said.

"... And these bitches will lie today about alleged guerrillas. . . ."

"We have to get out of here alive," Andrei said. . . . The power was attacking its people already, not just with TV lies, but with lead. Those who came here saw the real face of the power and not the surrogate demonstrated by Poptsov. They did not know that a trap was ready for them. Those who had prepared this trap were real provocateurs. . . .

We came back to the White House. The crowd near it had become much smaller. The House, with no electricity, was swimming into an unknown land.

I came into my office. Father Nikon [an Orthodox priest, deputy editor of the *Patriarchy Journal*—ed.] had just come from his duty. Olga, Yakov, Igor, and two Pavels came in. We told what we saw there. Andrei and Pavel went back to Ostankino. . . .

* * *

Half a year before, on the eve of the April referendum, at the peak of the conflict between Ben [Yeltsin—ed.] and Joe [Dzhokhar Dudayev—ed.], Joe was writing to Ben:

"I'd like to offer you a strategy of behavior before the referendum, and after it. . . . If we have to choose one of the bad alternatives, the best of them, to my mind, would be dissolving the Supreme Soviet and simultaneously setting the day for the new parliamentary elections, together with the referendum on the new Constitution."

Joe could give such advice to a person like him. All this was already carried out in his republic. This experience was studied by Poltoranin, Burbulis, Yarov, Grachov, and other specialists in creating revolutionary situations.

Nowadays, the situation in the Caucasus is bound into a dead knot. Joe's and Ben's methods to untie it only hide the ends which could loosen it. The power structures assist them, playing with the ambitions of both.

Throwing their armies into the battle, they continue with the disintegration of the country which was begun by communist Gorbachov and communist Zavgayev. . . .

Commemorative Schiller calendar released

A beautiful 1996 calendar, "Friedrich Schiller, Poet of Freedom," was published in early 1996 as the result of a political determination by the Schiller Institute, to reverse the decision of the Weimar Classics Foundation in Germany to indefinitely close the excellent exhibition of the Schiller Museum in Weimar. The calendar, in German and English, includes 12 color pictures from Weimar and Marbach on the life and works of Friedrich Schiller, with a statement by Schiller Institute founder Helga Zepp LaRouche.

In her statement, Mrs. Zepp LaRouche writes, "The Schiller Institute was founded in 1984 to stand up against 'the spirit of the times.' The new Renaissance, which we urgently need, will be possible only if we learn how to reestablish the ideal of humanity for Schiller and of Classical art. That is why we have decided to publish an annual Schiller calendar. We hope it will bring you joy and will encourage you to read the works of the great poet."

The calendar can be purchased for \$20, plus \$5 for shipping and handling. Virginia residents add 4.5% sales tax. Order from:

Ben Franklin Booksellers
(800) 453-4108
(703) 777-3661
fax (703) 777-8287

