

EIR Strategic Studies

Western leaders must come to their senses on Russia

by Viktor Kuzin

Viktor Kuzin, a member of the Moscow City Council, visited EIR's offices on July 30 after spending a week in Washington, D.C. Mr. Kuzin is vice chairman of the Moscow City Council's Committee on Law, Justice, and the Defense of Civil Rights, and chairman of its Subcommittee on the Defense of Civil Rights. He was a founder of the Democratic Union party in 1988.

We are pleased to publish Mr. Kuzin's presentation to EIR staff, including questions and answers, as a guest commentary. His remarks were translated from Russian by Rachel Douglas. We have supplied subheads.

I greet all of you. I was very happy to see that there exists in the United States an organization which exhibits a greater understanding of our difficulties and the problems of Russia, which is attempting to become free and democratic, than do some official circles in the western countries and even, as became clear to me in the course of numerous meetings in Congress, in the United States.

I know the great deprivations which you have experienced. I deeply respect this and am struck by the fact that each of you, who would have had the possibility to live quite calmly and to limit yourself to taking care of yourself and your own family, rather has dedicated yourself to the service of lofty ideas, to the search for harmony in the world, and is taking serious risks on this account.

This is very close to my heart. And perhaps, as other people might not be able to, I can value such a selflessness on your part.

When, in 1988, we created the first party in opposition to the Communist Party Soviet Union (CPSU) in 70 years, openly proclaiming as our goals the overthrow of the commu-

nist regime in the Soviet Union and the creation of parliamentary democracy, we didn't know what would happen to us the next minute, after the attempt to create such an organization. From May 7-9, 1988, we held the Constituent Congress of our party in Moscow. In taking this step, we tried to take into account the totality of conditions as they had matured in the Soviet Union at that time and had come to pass internationally.

Soon after the point at which we planned to conclude our party congress, then-U.S. President Reagan was expected to visit Moscow. We took advantage of this factor, and the Constituent Congress was able to end successfully. The organization was created, and its first program was adopted. Everything ended well, if you leave out the fact that on the last day, the KGB and the police attacked the location where the final session of the Congress was taking place, and several people were arrested. I was one of them.

They loaded us into a special prison vehicle, and took us somewhere. None of us knew at that time where we were being taken, and what it would end in for us. It could have meant years of deprivation of freedom; but evidently the situation was such that they decided not to resort to such harsh repression, and rather limited themselves to arresting us for short periods of time.

In the course of my visits to your congressmen, I repeatedly stressed our gratitude to the administration and the people of the United States for the moral and political support given to the democratic human rights defense movement in our country. Indeed, this was weighty support; and objectively speaking, it actually did help make it possible that, with a certain liberalization of the communist regime under Gorbachov, the opposition was able to consolidate fairly rapidly,

and relatively quickly and successfully to disseminate in the Soviet Union political ideas which were totally banned before.

Ultimately, the communist regime, in its orthodox form, collapsed. After this, however, it became clear that the policy conducted earlier by the western states, of support for the democratic, human rights defense movement in the Soviet Union, was above all a policy designed for the national interests of the countries that were carrying it out, and that these governments really had no intention to act out of concern for the fate of the citizens of Russia and to try to create for them the necessary economic and social guarantees.

This is very natural, but we didn't understand this right away. For a period of time, there reigned the sense (which some people still have) that from abroad some kind of help would be coming, which would have a miraculous effect and make it possible, without efforts from inside Russia, to ensure a high standard of living, and would help create a properly working machine of state, directed toward providing for the equal rights of citizens before the law.

But when we confronted the real consequences of the influence of western countries on the processes now unfolding in Russia, in both the political and economic spheres, we discovered that a model of economic development was being applied to Russia which still further aggravates the objective difficulties of the transitional period. In essence, the character of the influence which the U.S. government exerts — and the fact that this is extremely closely linked with the policy of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) is well known to all of you — is helping to liquidate Russia as an independent economic power.

The George Bush administration relied on supporting the former communist *nomenklatura* [power hierarchy] in the person first of [Mikhail] Gorbachov and his entourage and now [Boris] Yeltsin and his entourage, and made assurances that these were the people who could carry out a process of creating the basis of a capitalist economy in Russia. Once again today, in a conversation with a representative of the commission on monitoring the fulfillment of the Helsinki agreements, I learned that the same approach is being continued.

The goals of the ‘nomenklatura’

I tried to explain to congressmen that, in reality, the grouping headed by Yeltsin is pursuing the goal of defending the narrow, egoistical interests of the former communist *nomenklatura*. They never had any interest, nor do they now, in the fate of the whole people, which suffered under the yoke of communism for 75 years. At present, the Yeltsin regime is prepared to sacrifice, for the sake of implementing the barbarian plans of the IMF, a huge number of citizens of Russia, placing these people literally on the brink of physical extinction.

I provided many examples of the fact that the Yeltsin

policy in the area of economics, the so-called policy of market reforms, in reality is not directed toward creating a numerically strong layer of private entrepreneurs in Russia; but rather it benefits monopolism and the transformation of the major ministries that existed under the communist planned economy, into proprietors of whole branches of industry. And this is precisely the reason why the policy of price liberalization proclaimed by the former prime minister under Yeltsin, Yegor Gaidar, without there existing any significant layers of private entrepreneurs or enterprises, led to nothing but a totally capricious price policy, and to a situation where these gigantic monopolies were able to sharply increase prices for their products. There was immediately a marked tendency for the abrupt rise in prices at the same time that you had a sharp decline in production.

These processes at first caused a slight, and then a sharp, increase in inflation. Many enterprises which were producing useful goods were not able to stand such a sharp hike in prices, because the cost of labor and the cost of raw materials grew correspondingly abruptly. Enterprises began to collapse. This situation thus was aggravated even more.

At the present time, these processes are continuing; and the collapse of industrial production is progressing headlong in Russia. Insofar as it has become unprofitable to invest in production — purposely unprofitable — and the sharp growth of inflation has gobbled up whatever profit was being made, all available capital was thrown into the trade sphere and into banking.

These are the two flourishing branches of the economy in Russia today, trade and banking. But only they; so it's a relatively insignificant, small group of people working in these areas who are doing well at all.

The steep collapse of domestic production of consumer goods is compensated by an influx of goods from abroad. As a matter of fact, we have a lot of everyday consumer goods in Russia, which are imported. They are extremely expensive. Even including those who receive a salary which is relatively high by Russian standards, 80% of the population of Russia does not have the minimum considered necessary to live.

Poverty and demoralization

By the most conservative estimates, over 80% of the population of Russia lives below the poverty level. In our opinion, and in the opinion of many people in Russia, who share my evaluation of the matter, this situation arose precisely from the erroneous orientation to following the recipes of the IMF, according to which the so-called economic reforms in Russia are being carried out.

In my view, with regard to the ruling circles of Russia today — and it's Yeltsin and his close entourage who really exercise power, although they're constantly complaining about the fact that they don't have enough power and that somebody's depriving them of power — all the ruinous consequences which we are experiencing, are conditioned by the

fact that Yeltsin and his group are acting against the national interests of Russia and against the interests of the majority of citizens.

In Russia today, laws in effect are not obeyed. One can commit a lot of crimes in Russia today, and not be called to account. In particular, there is a large array of unpunished crimes in the area of property relations.

The law about privatization, which was worked out and adopted bearing in mind the tasks and the complexities of the transitional period in the economic system, is virtually not obeyed by the Yeltsin administration. The state agencies that are supposed to monitor the observance of this law, do nothing. Instead of all citizens of Russia receiving an equal chance to relatively painlessly enter into the new system of economic relations, which would be impossible without a certain regulating role being played by the state (with respect to formerly state-owned property), what is being aided and abetted is the illegal appropriation, by the former *nomenklatura* and the criminal bourgeoisie, of the relatively most valuable and profitable properties.

A policy like this, of course, cannot fail to lead to serious disenchantment on the part of the bulk of the population. Disillusionment is growing in fundamental democratic values, because Yeltsin and his people are associated by official propaganda with genuine democracy. And those who criticize Yeltsin, regardless of what standpoint they do this from, whether it's criticism by communist reactionaries or by democrats who don't agree with this course of thievery in Yeltsin's policy, are all declared to be fascists and so-called "red-brown forces."

Criminality moves in

In a state where laws do not function—and Russia is such a state today—not a single entrepreneur, no normal civilized would-be entrepreneur, from among the Russian citizens themselves, not to mention western business partners who might want to invest their capital into Russian industry, will make any such investments. Not only are profits not guaranteed, but sometimes even the lives of the entrepreneurs are not. In the kind of vacuum that is created because of the failure to function of either the prosecutor's office or the police or the judges, who are subject to powerful pressure from criminal groupings, through corruption and intimidation, there is an influx into Russia of criminal capital, earned through narcotics sales, the proceeds of the casinos, and such.

One gets the sense that parallel to these processes, where there is laundering of mafia capital, there's also a selling-off of some consumer goods at dumping prices. Take cigarettes, for example. We have virtually no more domestic cigarette production. That's one example. Mafia groups which have penetrated the Russian economy are now making their way onto the political scene, and are seeking support from high officials of the government and the presidential staff.

Take prices on the products of some enterprises in Russia, for example, from the defense industry, which is the most technologically advanced industry that Russia has had. It was from the sale of the products of these relatively high-technology defense sector factories, that Russia intended to accumulate the capital to invest in the conversion of the defense industry. But the sale of these products on the international market is, in effect, regulated by western capital acting together with Russian mafia groupings. And these goods are sold at totally unprofitable prices. So virtually the only benefit from the sale of such products is received by the employees of the bureaucracy who are engaged in this practice, taking advantage of the fact that the system of law enforcement in Russia doesn't work.

Huge quantities of valuable raw materials—oil, gold, precious metals—are exported from Russia. The proceeds acquired from the sale of these goods stay in the West. According to the calculations of some economists in Russia, the volume of capital that has fled as a result of the sale of these items is \$60-80 billion.

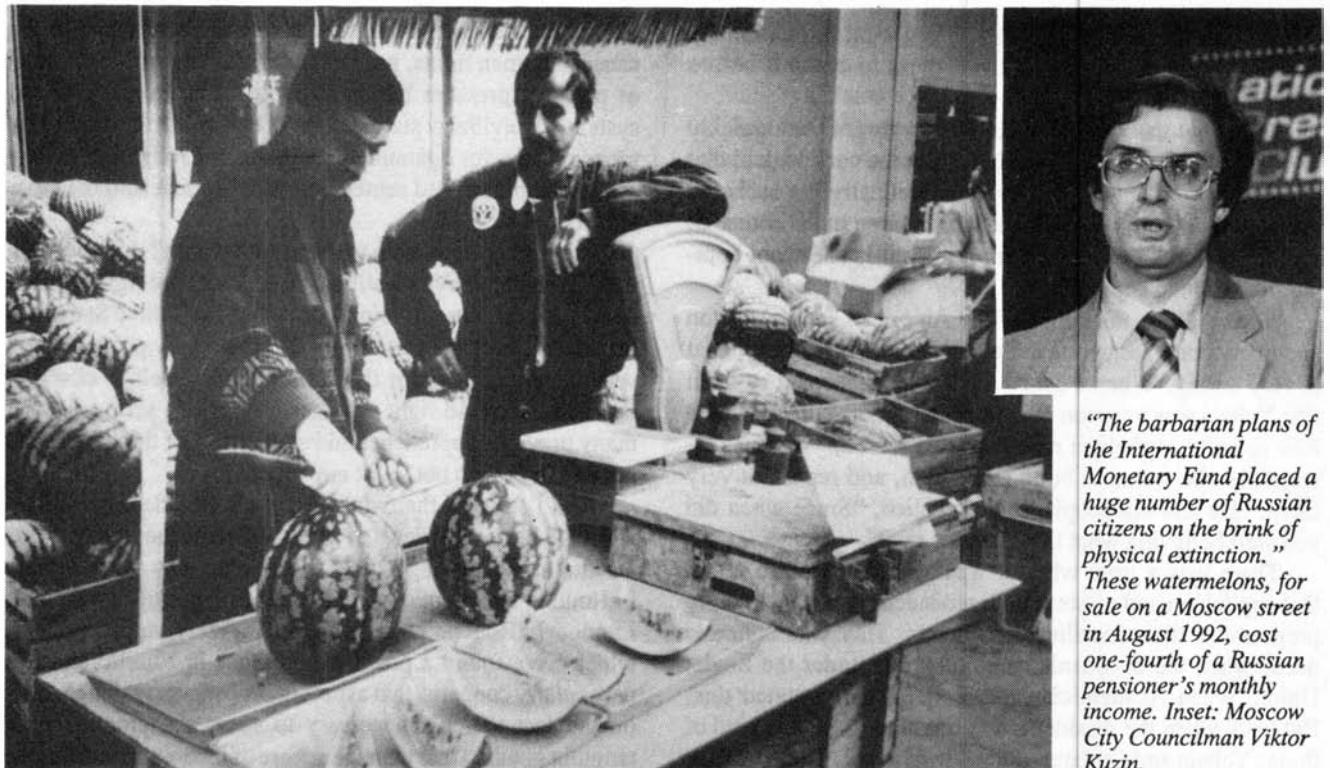
At the same time, Yeltsin pretends that Russia doesn't have means and needs help, that the IMF should fork over \$24 billion. We have a constant fight between democratic forces, for whom such policies are absolutely unacceptable, and that segment of functionaries loyal to Yeltsin. People from Democratic Russia who are loyal to Yeltsin, and the forces of the former *nomenklatura*, strange as it might seem, are acting together. This fight is constantly going on around this same \$24 billion that's been discussed.

The democratic forces' position actually is more expressed by the Supreme Soviet these days—the Supreme Soviet is not anywhere near as reactionary as it is customary to think. It simply can't be reactionary, because it has to function in the full light of day and in a collegial fashion; and each deputy experiences very strong pressure on the part of his constituents.

By the same token, the activity of Yeltsin's presidential apparatus is by no means as democratic as it is customary to think. If you look at the structure of Yeltsin's apparatus, and the apparatuses in the localities which are subordinate to that central one, the resemblance with the former structure of the CPSU is very close. This is no big surprise, because the main positions in Yeltsin's apparatus are occupied by former secretaries of the *obkoms*, *raikoms*, and other regional committees of the CPSU, with very rare exceptions.

If you analyze in-depth these processes in the political structures in Russia, you can understand that essentially very little has changed. The *nomenklatura* has simply shed the ideology that it doesn't need any more, and is trying to enter the kingdom of capitalism as the bosses. And as they do this, these people are indifferent to what will happen with the people of Russia.

That would be a general sketch of the situation that has come to pass in connection with our reforms.



"The barbarian plans of the International Monetary Fund placed a huge number of Russian citizens on the brink of physical extinction." These watermelons, for sale on a Moscow street in August 1992, cost one-fourth of a Russian pensioner's monthly income. Inset: Moscow City Councilman Viktor Kuzin.

And your movement is doing something very important, when you provide your critical analysis of the real processes that are unfolding in Russia, assembling reports from your own sources and other independent sources.

This holds not only for the former republics of the Soviet Union, but also countries in eastern Europe, because as far as I know, something very close to what I have described is happening in all those countries. It's extremely important to do everything possible to bring this correct information to the ruling circles in your country, to Congress, to the President of the United States.

The wrong kind of miracle

To tell you the truth, I was floored by the statement of a congressional staffer today who, having heard what I had to say, which was approximately what I just went through here, stated, "Yes, we know about all that. It's definitely bad. And we understand that the aid that we're extending, actually does not help movement toward those goals that it's supposed to. But we're hoping for a miracle."

Your people have been telling me constantly that the typical behavior and outlook of Americans is pragmatism, especially in politics. I remarked to this gentleman, that what he had said was not very pragmatic, and that as a result of this flippant attitude, miracles could occur in Russia of a very dangerous nature.

Probably I don't have to go on at great length here about the fact that the 80% of the population which has become

disenchanted with this policy, are not a social base of reform at this point, and that these people do not support Yeltsin, no matter what manipulation with respect to votes were employed in the [April 25] referendum.

And what that means is that you could have an explosion at any moment in Russia, of a very sharp social conflict, and political destabilization. Russia at any moment today could turn into a second Yugoslavia, because people's patience is already just about at the limit. There probably wouldn't be anything terrible about that for the United States, since you're located so many thousands of kilometers from Russia, if it weren't for the fact that Russia is a nuclear power. Therefore, even the sense of self-preservation means that policy toward Russia should be formulated more soundly.

I would like to remark here, that the leaders of the United States for a long time funded the study of the totalitarian state, of communist regimes, and many American Sovietologists did make a big contribution to studying the sociology of this regime. This same sociology characterizes the *nomenklatura* in quite some detail, as a criminal class functioning according to the same laws as the mafia.

Everybody knows that the former communist leaders constituted a consolidated group of people who enjoyed total power, who stood above the law. They put themselves higher than anything else, higher than the interests and even the lives of many millions of people. The people who managed to claw their way to the top of the pyramid of power of the CPSU did not get there accidentally. The system sifted and

sorted them for many long years. They went through many crimes, which the system obliged them to commit before they could head the state.

Somewhat the American leadership forgot very quickly that both Gorbachov and Yeltsin were at the very peak of that pyramid of power, and that even theoretically it's probably impossible for any person in the world, even in the course of a year, to transform himself from a dyed-in-the-wool communist to a total capitalist.

Nevertheless, the belief of the American administration and many congressmen that Yeltsin is a convinced capitalist is very strong. When I asked them why it seemed to them that Yeltsin was a person who wants to understand and know how to build capitalism right, they answered, "Well, he always says he wants to build capitalism, and repeats it very often." He and his people. And I replied, "Since when did you start believing what these people say?"

There was a time when it was a heroic deed to assert that capitalism and western bourgeois democracy were more progressive than socialist democracy. This was a heroic deed, when the dissidents would say this under the Soviet Union, when Academician [Andrei] Sakharov stated this. But back when the dissidents and Sakharov said this kind of thing, Yeltsin and Gorbachov sent them to jail. They did this, as did the other members of the Politburo of the CPSU.

Now, you can say whatever you want. We have complete freedom of speech and precisely for this reason, merely verbal assurances of a commitment to the capitalist system aren't worth very much. Now you have to look at what people are doing; and the concrete acts of Yeltsin show that, having put the interests of a narrow layer of the *nomenklatura* as his top priority and ignoring the civil rights of the majority of the citizens of Russia, he is actually taking things toward the failure of the process of reforms, which in fact never even have been able to get started.

The ideas of LaRouche

The main purpose of my trip here, of course, was not explaining the situation in Russia to Congress and the State Department; rather, the main goal of my visit, was to communicate the point of view of a group of deputies of the Moscow City Council to President Clinton and to congressmen concerning the case of the leader of your movement, Lyndon LaRouche [see EIR, Aug. 13, p. 60 for their letter to President Clinton].

I tried to give my analysis and evaluation of the most essential circumstances of the prosecution, which I am deeply convinced is political, of your leader and his co-thinkers. As you know, two of them, Michael Billington and Rochelle Ascher, are in jail at the current time.

I stated that for such things to be happening in the United States today, completely contradicts what we have been accustomed to understand as American democracy. I stated that these repressions should be stopped, and that President

Clinton and congressmen who are really committed to the cause of human rights, not merely as some kind of instrument of political pressure but as a higher value in any political system of civilized states, should create all the necessary preconditions for a genuinely dispassionate, objective review of the conviction and sentencing of LaRouche and the other leaders.

I attempted to explain to those with whom I was speaking that the right to have a political opposition, the right to dissidence, are the very principles on which the United States has insisted all over the world; and that these very principles are very beneficial also for the United States itself to observe, because the world right now has changed so seriously, that many previous approaches and stereotypes of thinking might not and in fact do not work any more.

And I stressed that whatever one's attitude might be toward the ideas and views of Lyndon LaRouche, today this is an alternative strategy; and nobody can say what service LaRouche's conceptions might be able to provide tomorrow. Lyndon LaRouche puts forward extremely valuable ideas, which have found a positive resonance in Russia, and this particularly concerns that aspect of his concept which touches on the fact that it's necessary to stress the production of tangible goods rather than the sphere of monetary circulation, which can lead and does lead to the illusion of well-being or at least stability in Russia now, while in fact there actually is no such stabilization.

(I'd like to give a glaring example of this. Two months ago, the dollar-ruble relation was 1,250 rubles to the dollar. Right now, the rate has improved a little bit in favor of the ruble, so that it's 1,000 rubles to the dollar or a little less. Yeltsin declares that there are signs of stabilization. If we actually look at the state of prices in Russia, however, and compare, say, prices on the most essential food products and consumer goods now and two months ago, we find that in those two months, prices have increased by 50%, 100%, or even 200%.)

In discussions with the congressmen, I again stressed the ruinousness of any attempt to persecute dissidents. I felt very awkward in saying this, because not long ago, the American President and Congress were trying to convince the leadership of the U.S.S.R. of what I am now trying to convince the U.S. congressmen.

The food crisis in Russia

Q: What is going on agriculture? Are there outside investments?

Kuzin: I've given a general answer to that, insofar as I indicated that right now, investment in the productive sector is not profitable. And if you apply this fact to agriculture, you have a particularly tragic situation, because despite the fact that agricultural production as a branch of physical production is not at all profitable, people do have to eat and industry does have to have raw materials.

I think that this summer's harvest will be catastrophically low, because it probably will not be possible to bring in the harvest, even where something was planted. The machinery for agriculture is broken down in many cases; it's inoperative. There are not enough spare parts. There is a severe deficit of fuel; the prices for gasoline are extremely high, by our standards.

Here I'd like to note again that on the one side, everything's being shipped abroad, and on the other hand, there are shortages within Russia. This is one of the manifestations of the extent to which the policy conducted by the Yeltsin regime does not aim to meet the national interests of Russia.

Two weeks ago, the leadership of the Moscow mayor's office sent a letter to the Russian government signalling that food was running out for Moscow, and demanded that the government adopt emergency measures for requisition, for purchasing and supply of food to Moscow.

There is an absurd situation here, which shows the whole criminality of the policy followed by the regime. In an attempt to obtain full authority to conduct market reforms in Moscow, by which is meant the privatization of enterprises and trade, small factories that are inside Moscow, under the pretext of wanting to do this without administrative interference in the government of the city, and to be able to supply and ship goods for the city according to market practices, the Moscow administration of Luzhkov was saying earlier: We want everything to run by the market. But now, showing that they're completely incapable of feeding Moscow, they're appealing to the Russian Federation government.

Q: I just wondered, if there were motion toward the creation of small family farms, or whether the big collective farms still dominate.

Kuzin: There is such movement. A small group of people, like a family or a few families, who have freely united to create a private farm, is completely deprived of the necessary conditions to be able to do this. Agricultural equipment is exceedingly expensive; fertilizer is exceedingly expensive. Credits are extended at absolutely robber interest rates. It's extremely difficult to market food, because it's very expensive.

Yeltsin constantly talks about the need for private ownership of land, but today, not only can you not own land, but you can't properly lease it.

As for owning it I'd like to add that, in my opinion, the whole question of property rights should be approached very cautiously in Russia today, above all out of consideration for the national interests of Russia. Yeltsin's supporters propose to institute the free purchase and sale of land not only by Russian citizens, but also foreigners. It's not hard to imagine who could buy up this land today: the same *nomenklatura*, the same mafia capital of Russia, and also foreign capital.

Q: Do you have anything to say about the ruble reform?

Kuzin: The most well-informed country in the world, the United States of America, has put me in a position where,

having arrived here a week ago, I am absolutely deprived of the possibility of having the least idea of what's going on in Russia. The major hotels in the center of Washington don't have TV news programs that report on Russia. The American TV news programs are somewhat truncated—short. All attempts through a borrowed shortwave radio to get the channels that we use in Russia for getting news, like Voice of America or Radio Liberty, were unsuccessful in Washington. So I can't say so much about that.

The place of the Army

Q: Do the Armed Forces represent any kind of coherent view, at least at the level of the higher officers' corps, that might in some positive way affect politics—not necessarily by a coup, but in some way, because only the military power would seem capable of countering this influence of organized crime together with the *nomenklatura*?

Kuzin: As far as I know right now, the leadership of the Armed Forces, as the leadership stated its position during the March crisis when Yeltsin threatened to resort to anti-constitutional methods with respect to the Parliament, and then right on the eve of the April 25 referendum and again after the referendum, has announced that it would not interfere in political processes, that it would act by the current constitution, and that it would protect that current Constitution from attack, no matter from what quarter.

That means that if Yeltsin tries forcibly to overthrow the Supreme Soviet, the Parliament, in Russia, he will meet resistance, including from the Armed Forces.

There is a whole array of specific and very serious problems which arise for the Russian Armed Forces right now, in connection with the reduction of said Armed Forces and the transition to a mixed Army—mixed in that it will be part volunteer and part conscript. There is an extraordinarily difficult situation with respect to quartering troops who served in units that were withdrawn from eastern Europe and the Baltic. To a large extent, this problem exists because the local Army leaderships are characterized by the same vices that characterize the leadership of the Executive branch in Russia: corruption, thievery, the attempt to make money from the illegal sale of weapons and other special military matériel.

In essence, the Russian Army today is not preoccupied with the type of concerns that normally surround the institution of the army in a civilized society.

In some areas, they don't have enough up-to-date weapons. In other areas, the military men don't receive adequate salaries to live decently; and many of them, they and their families, simply have nowhere to live.

This leads to a certain state of mind toward Yeltsin on the part of both the rank and file and the officer corps. According to a recent poll, 70% of the officer corps is hostile to Yeltsin.

But I would stress again, that there does not exist a possibility for the middle and lower ranks of the officer corps to

carry out some political initiatives. They remain loyal to their oath, and they do what their commanders tell them.

The shadow of the KGB

Q: Were the people you met with at all impressed by the fact that the city councilmen that you represent from Moscow might be credited with ensuring President Clinton's election because of what they did to counter the KGB black operations?

Kuzin: The logic of our deputies' appeal to Clinton in defense of LaRouche was to be found in certain associations with the events of October of last year. A few weeks before the election, the foreign intelligence service of Russia circulated disinformation about Bill Clinton, alleging that he supposedly was mixed up with contacts with the KGB. They were referring to his trip to the Soviet Union in his youth, which, as far as I know, was a tourist trip. This was a rather unprecedented attack, which was par for the course, however, for our KGB.

What really upset us, was the fact that there was no official reaction by the Russian leadership. Many of the congressmen with whom I was speaking had thought that the initiative for this story being circulated came from the Republican Party. But one way or another, the statements were put out by KGB people, regardless of where the initiative came from.

For purely human reasons, we were very disturbed by such accusations being thrown at Clinton. It was obvious interference in U.S. internal affairs.

We decided to do as much as possible to clarify the situation. For this purpose, a group of deputies of the Moscow City Council sent to the Prosecutor General of Russia a letter, and using our right to do this, we demanded that they either give us the proof that the accusations circulated against Clinton were true, or call to account those responsible for circulating them if they were slanders.

We demanded an answer within 12 hours. Well, of course, there wasn't any answer, because, of course, there wasn't any proof. And so we issued a political statement which apologized, in the name of the people of Russia, to Americans for such crude behavior on the part of the Russian government.

Contemporary Russian politics is very unusual, so it might seem strange to you that a group of deputies from the City Council would suddenly do this. We understood that our statement was not going to have any juridical results; but at the same time, we couldn't do otherwise, because the deputies who signed this statement were people who came to work at the Moscow City Council to represent our constituents, with the probably naive belief that politics should be conducted with clean hands.

We issued our political statement, and sent it to the U.S. State Department, on Oct. 29 of last year, by fax. And we also conveyed it to the headquarters of the Democratic Party through its Moscow office.

In the letter, which we now have addressed to Clinton in defense of Lyndon LaRouche, it was very appropriate to recall this story to Bill Clinton's attention, because, as you know, the KGB did not exactly play the most insignificant role in the jailing of Lyndon LaRouche.

Q: You probably heard that we intend to stop some of the educational restructuring in the United States that's based on some of the worst experimental examples in Soviet early education, and I wondered what was going on in Russian education?

Kuzin: What I have been able to hear in discussions this week about the innovations in pedagogical practice in your country, is rather more horrifying than even what we had. I had the opportunity to talk with the president of the Schiller Institute, Webster Tarpley, and between us, we could only find one analogy, and that was the laws of Sparta. For us, in our scientific study, the Spartan state is put forward as an ancient example of a totalitarian regime. And in this connection, I would like to share a thought.

I've already mentioned what great dangers are connected with the transformation of any power into absolute power. When power becomes absolute, it loses any ability to be stimulated to be good power, with respect to those for whose sake it is being exercised. Therefore, having become bad, it becomes afraid, and attempts to destroy sources of criticism of itself. And therefore, it's always bothered by thinking and creatively developed people. And I'm very afraid lest these processes in your pedagogical thinking be some reflection already of your state administration's concept, its self-consciousness of its place in the world, as a system of absolute power. Maybe there's a little exaggeration there, but I felt it was necessary to share this thought.

How the Democratic Union was built

Q: I would like to know more about the Democratic Union party, whether you have a newspaper, how you politically organize?

Kuzin: The destiny of the Democratic Union is atypical for a political party. Actually, what's called a party today in the former Soviet Union is not much like a party in the proper sense of the word. Society is in an unsettled state. Above all, you don't have the properties which are normal for different classes and layers in a society. For example, we have not yet formed a class of property owners, while the *nomenklatura* elite, which has pretensions to be the property owners, is still not so sure of its future, and is often afraid of being exposed.

Therefore, there do not exist proper organizations which would express the interests of the groups which have come into existence. What we call parties in Russia are usually groups of people that are grouped around deputies of the Supreme Soviet or around individual past dissidents, or around individual representatives of the old *nomenklatura*.

Amongst all these organizations, Democratic Union has a special and I would call it perhaps a non-political role.

When, in 1988, we were forming the party, we of course understood that we would not be able to launch activity as a party, first of all, because there was no procedure for doing this. Parties were not recognized at that time. We had no legal basis for activity as a party. We proceeded without prior permission.

In the program which we issued, we approached this question of the legal basis for our activity as follows. We rejected Soviet laws and the Soviet Constitution, insofar as they contradicted international pacts on human rights. We declared ourselves to be a party for the purpose of creating a precedent, so that people who would be looking at us from the outside would understand that one could act in this way, and that one should not be afraid to act in this way, in order for people, in some sense, to look at us as examples of independent behavior.

From everything that I'm saying, it's clear that the Democratic Union viewed itself above all as a moral factor. As I already said, we actually didn't have real possibilities on this basis to take part in politics. We couldn't count on having a large number of open supporters, because people were frightened. And therefore, our activity mainly consisted in writing articles, publishing memoirs, which exposed the nature of the totalitarian regime.

'We kept on organizing'

In order to have contact with people, we went out on the squares and we conducted demonstrations and public meetings. As a rule, the authorities broke up all of these meetings. But nevertheless, we kept on organizing them. Gradually, the ideas that we were preaching — these were not new ideas, we weren't inventing new ideas, we were simply trying to bring the ideas of parliamentary democracy onto Russian soil — were disseminated, and gained more and more sympathy.

The more or less liberal papers amongst the communist press, which had started by cussing us out, had to switch over to commentaries and analysis of our program. And so gradually, we were able to expand our influence. We had independent branches of our organization not only in Russia but in the other republics of the former Soviet Union, in the Baltic states, for example, in Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Georgia.

These were not numerically strong organizations. They mainly were comprised of the dissidents, and new leaders of the democratic movement. They were acting under very difficult conditions. Where the organizations were relatively larger, they basically were engaged in distributing the newspaper we published.

For a long time, from 1988 up to somewhere in 1990, the newspaper of Democratic Union, *Svobodnoye Slovo* (*Free Word*), together with the human rights defense newspaper called *Ekspress Kchronika*, which was put out and still is put out by the long-time human rights fighter in Russia, Aleksandr Podryabinek, were practically the only opposition

papers which came out in the U.S.S.R. — meaning mass-circulation papers.

Having no substantial funds and no printing equipment, no computers, through the illegal use of government printing facilities (Lithuania helped us a lot in this regard at one time), we published what for those times was a huge run for our newspaper, 40-50,000 copies. We had a whole distribution network of couriers taking it all over the country — almost like Lenin for the distribution of *Iskra!* But we were acting in a somewhat different direction.

So that's what we did. None of us counted on communist ideology falling so fast. Nobody believed it at that time, and many were afraid to have anything to do with us. A lot of people told us: "You've begun too soon. Decades will have to pass." And that the current generation has a slave mentality and they're not going to do anything. We objected, and replied, "The majority of people are no different from us. And in quite a short time, some change is going to happen anyway," that the intensification of the economic crisis didn't really leave much time for introducing necessary reforms.

And, of course, the most important thing, is that it was written into the program of our party, that the party is to function for the transitional period from totalitarianism to democracy.

The main thing that we warned the democratic movement about, with respect to the transition from totalitarianism, was not to let the *nomenklatura* get the initiative back by passing themselves off as the real democrats, which is exactly what has now happened.

We devoted a lot of attention to criticizing Gorbachov, and we didn't consider him progressive in the least, but rather a leader who was trying to give a second wind to this system which had outlived its time. It seems that this warning was also not off the mark, and events went along this very dangerous road. Things came around in such a way, that organizations like Democratic Union and many organizations of Christian Democrats, many patriotically inclined democratic organizations in the country — their patriotism is found in their belief that the Russian state should take care of the interests and rights of its own citizens, rather than some other state — all these organizations have been declared by Yeltsin to be reactionary, and even fascist sometimes.

And Yeltsin and his entourage — among the people who are very close to him is the former professor of scientific communism from Sverdlovsk, Burbulis, and the former Moscow University professor of the theory of the economics of developed socialism, Gavriil Popov — are now democratic liberals Number One, and anti-communists Number One. But the saddest thing, is that they're taken seriously in the West, as democrats and anti-communists. Therefore, a coming to the senses in political consciousness, for the leaders of the United States, and on the whole a closer understanding of what's happening in Russia, needs to be really helped a lot, very intensively.