
Russia

The less hair, the more chance

by Roman Bessonov

On March 26, Yuri Boldyrev, member of the Federation Council and vice chairman of the Counting Chamber (Shchotnaya Palata), held a public meeting in St. Petersburg. Boldyrev is also co-chairman of the "Yabloko" movement (the name means "apple," but it is an agglomeration of surnames: Yavlinsky, Boldyrev, Lukin, or "YaBL"), founded on the base of the "YaBL" faction in the State Duma. In St. Petersburg, the movement is represented by the Regional Party of the Center (RPC), headed by Igor Artemyev (former chairman of the ecology commission of the dissolved St. Petersburg City Council). Almost all the other RPC members were also members of the dissolved Council. The explanation is that Boldyrev sharply criticized Russian President Boris Yeltsin for dissolving the federal, municipal, and local representative bodies on a quasi-ideological pretext ("we have to get rid of the Soviets and the Soviet era"), even though these councils ("Soviets") were elected in 1990 in a much more democratic and legitimate way than the new "Dumas" formed in late 1993 and 1994.

Boldyrev, a deputy of the U.S.S.R. Supreme Soviet in 1989-91, had been one of the most active members of the Democratic Platform in the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, and did a lot for the disintegration of that party. This was appraised by Yeltsin, who appointed him chairman of the Control Department. But Boldyrev appeared to be too honest and not obedient enough to retain this post, so, in 1992, the whole department was dissolved. In October 1993, Boldyrev sharply criticized Yeltsin for dissolving the parliament. That's why Yavlinsky, who was trying to make up a "democratic anti-Yeltsin opposition," decided to form an alliance with him.

The Yabloko faction was later used as an instrument by the Moscow Mayor Yuri Luzhkov-Vladimir Gusinsky people, who tried to take over power, launching their "heavy artillery" mass media campaign against the President in 1994. Actually, these efforts had been under way since autumn 1993. In December 1993, the "YaBL" election block was financed by Gusinsky's Most Bank.

In 1993, Boldyrev was elected to the Federation Council, the upper house of the new Russian Parliament, from St. Petersburg, his native city. Despite the efforts of the Yegor Gaidar people to push their candidate, Nikolai Arzhannikov,

Boldyrev gained the biggest rating in this election campaign.

In 1994, Boldyrev was elected vice chairman of the Counting Chamber. At the public meeting, he said he was doing everything possible to make this structure an analogue to the former Control Department. Boldyrev's relations with Yavlinsky have been rather tense, especially in periods when Yavlinsky was about to make compromises and yield to Yeltsin's pressure. Now, he was again asked if he would support Yavlinsky in the 1996 race for President, and Boldyrev said he was not quite sure. Some of his supporters (they are mostly women, Boldyrev being a rather handsome young man) tried to assure him that he is more popular than Yavlinsky, and he could try to run for President himself. He was also encouraged to run for mayor of St. Petersburg. "Not with this President," he answered. "If I am elected mayor now, Yeltsin will establish an economic siege of the city."

Boldyrev very seldom speaks on geopolitical issues, but this time he had to, for he was asked many questions. He said that, in his opinion, Russia and Belarus have to be reintegrated both economically and politically. It is a different situation with Ukraine, he said, because that country consists of two parts; if we try to impose its reintegration, there will be a civil war in Ukraine.

At the same time, Boldyrev does not approve of the liquidation of Crimean autonomy by Kiev. Surprisingly, several members of the "YaBL" faction, including Vyacheslav Igrunov, former manager of the Soros Foundation in Russia, supported Konstantin Zatulin, chairman of the Duma commission on Community of Independent States affairs, criticizing Ukraine President Leonid Kuchma's policy and the indifference of Russian Vice Prime Minister Oleg Soskovets in his talks in Kiev. The fact is that Gaidar's Russia's Choice party is the only faction in the State Duma that does not protest against the liquidation of the Crimean peninsula's quasi-statehood.

The argument over Crimea again proves that the liberals will be unable to make up a "united block of democratic forces" for the December 1995 parliamentary election. This fact was also demonstrated in another hearty argument dealing with the question of Ostankino, the main state television company.

The Ostankino question

On March 21, Igor Yakovenko, co-chairman of the Democratic Alternative Party that had joined the Yabloko Movement, and also head of the Duma subcommission on mass media, spoke at the hearings on the Ostankino issue in the Duma. He drew the attention of the audience to the fact that Sergei Blagovolin, the newly appointed director of the Russian Public Television, is also head of the Moscow organization of Gaidar's Russia's Choice party. So, the Ostankino tower can again become the "ideological syringe" it has been in the past.

Yakovenko said, "I was sure that the fact of Sergei Ka-

lashnikov's membership in Vladimir Zhirinovsky's faction would be used against the Ostankino company by the eight financial groups that have monopolized the broadcasting on the 1st TV channel." Indeed, the criticism of "Berezovsky and others" ("others" including Oleg Boiko's National Credit Bank) by Sergei Kalashnikov, chairman of the commission of labor and social support, was followed by an article in the Boiko-financed *Izvestia* newspaper that not only emphasized Kalashnikov's membership in Zhirinovsky's LDPR, but also accused him of speculating with state pension funds. Yakovenko said that not only Kalashnikov but also the other Duma factions were protesting against the monopolization of Ostankino's Channel 1 by Gaidar's lobby.

So, Yakovenko broke Gaidar's game, in the same way Boldyrev did during the December 1993 elections. Unfortunately, Yakovenko did not notice (or did not pay attention to) the fact that Blagovolin was not only (or not so much) a Gaidar agent, but London's agent. The Institute of National Security and Strategic Research headed by Blagovolin is a daughter structure of the International Institute of Strategic Studies in London. That's whose "syringe" the Ostankino "needle" is to become.

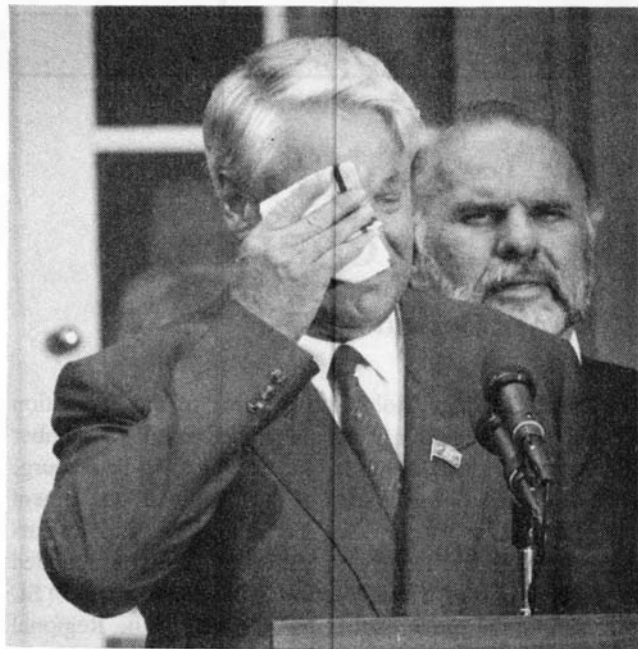
No longer dangerous

But there is another side of the coin in this polemic. Yakovenko and Kalashnikov's opposition against the eight financial structures of public TV can be used at will by those who didn't get a share in this deal, primarily by Gusinsky's Most Bank. Yakovenko is known as an honest politician (a rare case in liberal circles). Still, his pathetic indignation may be used as an instrument, just as happened with Boldyrev, who was only given one opportunity to be published in *Izvestia*, i.e., last November, when both Gusinsky and Boiko were interested in discrediting Pavel Grachov, the defense minister. The subject of that interview with Boldyrev was corruption in the Western Group of Russian Forces.

After his March 20 talk with Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin, who guaranteed that Moscow will get budget subsidies for purchasing food and for some other primary needs, Moscow Mayor Luzhkov seemed to be satisfied. He does not speak of retirement any more, and he also does not object to the resignation of two top Moscow officials, Prosecutor Ponomaryov and former head of Moscow militia Pankratov. Right after the Luzhkov-Chernomyrdin talks, Sergei Gerasimov, who previously refused to replace Ponomaryov, agreed to.

So, a superficial glance gives the impression that Luzhkov has already given up, and is not dangerous to the President. However, Luzhkov's mass media (NTV Co., and *Sevodnya* and *Moskovsky Komsomolets* papers) seem to be starting another fierce campaign aimed allegedly at security officials Korzhakov and Barsukov, but actually aimed at Yeltsin.

On March 26, the NTV "Itogi" program served up a new dish from the "pocket" sociologists of the Public Opinion Foundation. According to the latest "objective" poll, only



Russian President Boris Yeltsin: How much hair will his successor have?

6% of respondents wholly trust Yeltsin, while 78% don't believe him at all! "Itogi" also presented a new version of the politicians' "weight scale" (it does not include the President). As usual, Chernomyrdin was the first, but it was also emphasized that his position had become much stronger after he signed the agreement with International Monetary Fund Managing Director Michel Camdessus. Then came Korzhakov (still second but allegedly losing weight), Ilyushin, Chubais (allegedly gaining influence), Speaker of the State Duma Ivan Rybkin, Soskovets, Luzhkov, Shumeiko, Filatov, and . . . Communist Party leader Zyuganov!

Speculating on the prospects, Yevgeny Kiselyov, Luzhkov's chief propagandist from "Itogi," with his usual black-mailing smile, drew some "historical parallels," imposing similarity between Grachov and former U.S.S.R. Defense Minister D.T. Yazov; Korzhakov, with former U.S.S.R. KGB Chairman Vladimir Kryuchkov; and so on. Any TV spectator could understand the hint that Yeltsin is today's Mikhail Gorbachov. Luzhkov's mouthpiece just forgot to add who is today's analogue of the 1991 Yeltsin.

Luzhkov himself tries to make it clear, appearing here and there with workers, pensioners, artists, and priests, with a very modest and quite innocent expression on his round face. And the Russian intelligentsia, threatened by the images of Korzhakov and Zyuganov, quite naturally recollect that the leaders of the country used to change in a specific sequence: with few exceptions, every other one was bald. So, the next one should be either Zyuganov or Luzhkov. And Yavlinsky or Boldyrev, with their thick hairdos, have to wait for their turn.