
The Russian Elections

IMF 'reformers' go down to defeat

by Konstantin George

The Dec. 17 elections to Russia's State Duma, the lower house of Parliament, gave a popular mandate for Russia to stop being subjected to foreign humiliation and reassert itself as a strong power. A majority of Russians voted for parties that have profiled themselves as opponents of the failed "reforms." Thus, the results can be seen as a serious, if not yet decisive, defeat for the radical free-market "reform" policies, conducted on behalf of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) by the government of Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin.

Results released by the Russian Electoral Commission on Dec. 18 broke down the vote, based on 62% of returns tallied. Four parties cleared the 5% hurdle to enter the Duma:

1. Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF), led by Gennadi Zyuganov: 21.9%
2. Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR), the party of Vladimir Zhirinovskiy: 11.1%
3. Our Home Is Russia, led by Prime Minister Chernomyrdin: 9.6%
4. The "Yabloko" bloc, led by Grigori Yavlinsky: 8.4%
5. Russia's Democratic Choice, led by Yegor Gaidar: 4.8%
6. Women of Russia: 4.5%
7. Congress of Russian Communities (KRO), the slate of Gen. Aleksandr Lebed, Yuri Skokov, and economist Sergei Glazyev: 4.3%
8. "For the U.S.S.R.," a Communist splinter party: 4.2%
9. Party of Workers' Self-Management: 4.1%
10. Agrarian Party: 3.0%

Besides the majority vote against the failed "reform" policies, the voting pattern for parties reflects which forces control the electoral machinery: The CPRF has relatively strong regional machines, while in the major cities, power is dominated by the regime and allied "reformist" parties. The former showed in the scope of the Communist Party's victory, and the second-place showing of the party of extremist Zhirinovskiy. These results occurred at the expense of the KRO.

On the government side, there was the surprisingly high vote for Chernomyrdin's "Our Home" and the Yavlinsky bloc, which summed to 18% of the vote nationwide, and the 4.8% for former Prime Minister Gaidar's group, which the regime may still try to boost over 5% in the final tally.

Their showing was strictly due to the regime's control of the voting in the large cities. In Moscow, "Our Home" received 19.5%; Yabloko, approximately 15%; the CPRF, 15%; and the Gaidar bloc, 11.5%. In St. Petersburg, the Yavlinsky bloc led with 16.5%, followed by the CPRF with 13.5%, then Our Home with 12.5%, and the Gaidar bloc at about 12%.

Leaving aside the question of crude vote-rigging, the Russian financial and "business" oligarchy threw huge sums of money into the campaigns of the Chernomyrdin and other "reform" slates. The future of this monied caste depends on the continuance of comprador interests in power, and they mobilized accordingly. But despite the financial infusions, the "reformists" went down to a crushing defeat in the party list section of the vote, throughout Russia outside the big cities.

With 215 of 225 single-seat constituencies counted as of Dec. 20, the reported totals were: CPRF, 57 seats; Agrarian Party, 20; Yabloko, 14; Our Home, 10; Democratic Choice, 10; Power to the People, 7; KRO, 5; other parties, 23; independent candidates, 73.

KRO caught in the pincers

The new Duma will probably not be in a position to act in a coherent and responsible manner, despite its popular mandate. The key to such a capability lay in the Congress of Russian Communities (KRO) bloc, led by patriots of national stature: General Lebed, Yuri Skokov, and Russia's leading dirigist economist, Sergei Glazyev. The KRO's chances to clear the 5% hurdle as late votes come in were diminished by the regime's commitment to keeping them out, in which the regime has the assistance of its "Trojan Horse" in the opposition, Zhirinovskiy's party. Beyond that, at least elements of the Communist Party were complicit, if for no other reason than to pad their own vote, in keeping the KRO's vote below 5%.

The western media contention that this was a "defeat for General Lebed," the KRO's star candidate and a 1996 Presidential contender, is absurd. Lebed won his district race with 60% of the vote in the city of Tula, an indication of what can happen in an election, like the Presidential one, where the name "Lebed" appears on the ballot and not initials like "KRO." Tula is the base for one of Russia's elite Airborne Divisions, and Lebed received votes from soldiers and their families, as well as from industrial workers. As a center of military industry, Tula is a bellwether for the mood of this largest single component of the Russian industrial workforce.

General Lebed charged, after the vote totals came in, that the results were "clearly a falsification." He said he would investigate "this terrible trickery against myself."

The failure of the KRO to enter the Duma as a party will have serious near-term consequences. Had it become the number-two party in the new Duma after the CPRF, a

coherent force anchored on a KRO-CPRF alliance could have used the Duma as the forum for presenting sound economic reconstruction and modernization policies. This would have guarded against the danger of the popular mandate against the regime being exploited to launch Russia on an imperial course based on geopolitical axioms, an alluring "solution" to the country's existential crisis.

What the lack of a strong KRO fraction means can already be seen in Duma acts before the elections. Zhirinovskiy's support was crucial to passage of the Chernomyrdin government's 1996 austerity budget. For all his noise as an oppositionist, Zhirinovskiy to date has backed the regime on all crucial questions, especially concerning economic and financial policy.

Another pre-election Duma act was the Dec. 8 resolution, sponsored by CPRF leader Gennadi Zyuganov, calling for a referendum on restoring the Soviet Union. It failed by 17 votes, but Zyuganov has pledged to re-introduce it in January in the new Duma. This exercise typifies the extent of British manipulation of those in the Russian opposition, who are inclined by prejudice and nostalgia, to be led to believe that a "Third Rome" road of geopolitical expansion should take priority over national reconstruction.

During the election campaign, Zyuganov (somewhat moderately) and Zhirinovskiy (in the extreme) engaged in populist anti-western attacks, chiefly aimed at the United States. The contrast of these postures with those of the KRO highlights another aspect in which the KRO's absence in Parliament will be felt. It is a tribute to General Lebed, that he did not succumb to the temptation to engage in America-baiting. He rather stressed that Russia's problems with the "West" would disappear once Russia cleaned its own house and rid itself of the comprador groups now in power. He denounced western policies that have humiliated Russia, but did not attack western nations.

Overture to the 1996 power struggle

Russian Presidential elections are set for June 1996. The British oligarchy already has its candidate, Chernomyrdin, as attested in the Dec. 18 London *Times*, which editorially called on Yeltsin to step down in favor of the prime minister: "The man who should draw the main lesson of the election is President Yeltsin. He should step down. . . . The future of Russia is no longer bound to the political survival of Mr. Yeltsin. His own health is still uncertain, and he could now hand over, with honor, to his protégé Mr. Chernomyrdin."

Speaking on election day, Yeltsin said that Chernomyrdin would remain as prime minister. But personnel changes, likely to be portrayed as "reshuffles" or "shakeups" in the weeks ahead, will portend the ultimate demise of the government sometime later in 1996, through either a profound policy shift, or chaos.

Besides the anticipated departure of Foreign Minister Kozyrev, Deputy Prime Minister Sergei Shakhrai is likely

to leave; he has become an outspoken opponent of the Chernomyrdin government, and has Presidential ambitions. Also likely to go is First Deputy Prime Minister Anatoli Chubais, known and hated as "Mr. Privatization," for his role in the bargain sale of Russian firms to domestic and foreign private interests.

Demagogue Zhirinovskiy slanders LaRouche

Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, the unstable Russian demagogue who heads the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia, slandered American economist and political figure Lyndon LaRouche, in a book released on the eve of Russia's parliamentary elections. His publishing a smear of LaRouche has deepened the conviction in Russian opposition circles, that Zhirinovskiy functions as a provocateur for hire. Zhirinovskiy is already widely known as "the Le Pen of Russia," after the French racist radical.

On page 48 of Zhirinovskiy's book *The Last Blow Against Russia*, released Dec. 13, 1995, he writes: "The outward prosperity of the U.S. is the formal entrance hall of a bankrupt, who is being chased by his creditors. Its astronomical debts could not be paid off by honest work. So, what are they counting on? They are counting on the U.S. being able, having first liquidated our military-political system, to seize our country—first economically, and then politically—and turn it into a source of profit. In an interview in early 1995, U.S. Presidential candidate L. LaRouche, the founder of an international network of research centers, stated that 'their [the centers'] goal is to destroy Russia.' . . . If these plans for destroying Russia's economy, liquidating its sovereignty and turning it into a motley bunch of regions 'on their own' are implemented, ours will be the lot of colonial appendages for covering the above-mentioned debts of the U.S. Ultimately, America could seize and sell our land and property to its creditors, the world industrial-financial oligarchy."

The quotation from LaRouche, "Their goal is to destroy Russia," appeared as a headline over excerpts from an interview with LaRouche, published in the Moscow newspaper *Oppozitsiya* on March 1, 1994. Zhirinovskiy and his editors attributed to LaRouche and his "research centers," the goal that LaRouche in the interview had accused leading British figures and the International Monetary Fund of pursuing, namely, the looting of Russia.