

WHOSE PICTURE SHOULD BE ON THE WALL? By Sergei Baimukhametov,  
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You get a strange feeling when you look at today's communists. It was *their* government that arrested dissidents who demanded compliance with the constitution and made a fuss about voting rights and electoral integrity for all. But nowadays, the Russian Federation's Communist Party (RFCP) is doing exactly what it used to arrest dissidents for.

The RFCP is running protest demonstrations all across Russia. The communists are claiming voting fraud during the December 2 elections to Russia's parliament – the Duma – and demanding fairness and transparency in the upcoming presidential elections for their candidate, the RFCP leader, Genadi Zyuganov..

“We are declaring December 2 a Day of Shame and we demand that the results of that election be declared null and void, declared Vladimir Kerzhentsev, the leader of the Khakassian communist party during a mass demonstration in the capital of the Khakassian republic, a constituent member of the Russian federation. .

“It was a political joke ... The old ladies voted for Putin's ‘One Russia’ party that never represented them or cared about their needs,” added Valery Luzhnikov, the deputy of Khakasian Supreme Soviet. “There aren't enough letters in the alphabet to list all the violations that took place”

In the Far East, Stanislav Chechaev, secretary of the Khabarovsk city council, declared that the RFCP would continue its protests, with our interruption, until the presidential elections. “We will not stop until there is a recount and fraud is exposed. The struggle for seats in the National Duma has shown that the “One Russia” party can stay in power only by using lies and falsehoods.”

The “I didn't vote!” campaign in Ingushetia uses a different strategy. It is based on the official claim that 98.35% of eligible voters had voted. However, by January 10, over 57,000 citizens certified that they had not! Since the Mordovan region has a total of 164,756 voters, of whom 57,000 – more than 30% - apparently didn't vote, it isn't quite

clear how the 98.35% figure was arrived at. It also isn't clear what the government intends to do about it.

The pre-election gatherings are also stressing the probability of fraud during the upcoming presidential elections and the need to elect Zyuganov and there already have been mass demonstrations of support for him in Moscow and the provinces. It should be noted that the RFCP has not adopted the cult of personality policy that has usually been a trademark of communist regimes. Zyuganov is modestly presented as an honest and compassionate champion of the people in terms that may not be considered excessive in American election campaigns. On the other hand, Putin's "One Russia" party has apparently much of the rhetoric that had been used by the communists in the past.

"Dear and incomparable, Vladimir Vladimirovich," the editor of the Vladivostok newspaper "Narodnoe Veche" addressed Putin.

"Putin can't be wrong," said Vladimir Churov, the chairman of the Central Electoral Committee.

"Putin is our everything!" said the vice-chairperson of the Duma, Liuybov Sliska.

"Putin is Russia!" corrected her the Duma chairman, Boris Grizlov

"For the first time there is among us a human being who makes us more than simply proud – he makes us passionately enthusiastic!" gushed musical producer Yosif Prigorin.

"Putin is involved in all our successes in filmmaking," enlightened moviegoers the director Fedor Bondarchuk.

"We are lucky. We have a strong, clever, talented leader," TV personality Vladimir Soloviev appreciated Putin.

"For me today, Putin's name means the return of dignity to our country, as well as to me personally," said famous film director Nikita Mikhalkov.

"A superman! He was selected by God himself. In one of his former lives he was the apostle St. Paul," said Mother Fotinia, the head of the Most Holy Mother of God association.

In the early 1970s, when most speeches acknowledged the “personal participation of our comrade Leonid Brezhnev in all our successes”, the more decent Soviet people were somewhat discomfited. I used to ask the party members, “How can you?” And the party members (!) blushed. And then, overcoming their embarrassment, they’d say, “No, no, this isn’t a cult of personality, it isn’t bootlicking, it’s just that, you know, it’s the political atmosphere at this time, and this is the way it has to be now...”

Now no one is embarrassed, no one is making excuses. And it isn’t comparable. Brezhnev has far to go to catch up with Putin. Very far. All the way to the sky.

And so I think: if Ziuganov is elected President there will be no problem in the governmental offices with whose portrait should be on the wall, Lenin or Ziuganov. But what if Medvedev is elected President and Putin becomes the Prime Minister? Will all the offices – from Moscow to the remote frontiers – take off Putin’s pictures and replace them with Medvedev’s? Or will Prime Minister Putin hang up Medvedev’s picture in his office? And will Medvedev hang up a picture of Putin in his presidential quarters?

Sure is a complicated story. It was simpler under the communists.