

Russian Elections

Boris Gidasov*

Boris Gidasov is the Secretary of the CPSU Central Committee, People's Deputy of the USSR. He is a major political figure noted for his unorthodox, independent and bold judgements. A well placed academic (PhD in Chemistry, Corresponding member of the USSR Academy of Sciences). He embarked on the thankless political career of a party functionary a year and a half ago and headed the Communist Party organisation of Leningrad and the region where the Communist had been defeated in the last local elections.

The election day June 12th will be a very important date in Leningrad's life. Unlike other regions in Russia, three important events will coalesce in Leningrad - elections of the Republic's President and the City's Mayor and an opinion poll on the restoration of the City's original name St. Petersburg. It is my conviction that the last issue - that of restoring the City's name is neither here nor there. It is a political action recommended by a small group of city Managers in order to attract to the Police Stations thousand two hundred and fifty thousand of the city's veterans who hold dear the current name of the city. Despite a certain political stand off, it is very hard to gather half of the voters at the polling stations. The name change action will of course attract many people to vote in groups. However, the organisers of this action will not achieve their primary objective and the whole scheme is doomed to failure. The very idea of the poll is an anti constitutional move.

As for a likely winner in the race for the Mayor's office, I think that Anatoly Sobchak will win although other candidates also have been tipped as likely winners. As for the idea of transforming the region into a free enterprise zone, this is a problem of the future. It is necessary to develop infrastructure first, which will call for investments worth many billions. The state cannot afford such expenditures at the moment. Therefore I am very sceptical about such programmes though I am a convinced advocate of foreign investments in Leningrad.

I am not very enthusiastic about the Russian Presidential election. I personally don't like the approach of any of the candidates to those problems affecting us, their views and most important their entourage. I guess it is on the challengers entourage that the implementation

of their election programmes will depend. Russia's first President must be essentially a unifier and a creator able to rally the people of the multinational and tormented republic.

I particularly favour Nikolai Ryzhkov over the other five candidates though I am aware of his weaknesses. But he has two qualities which give him an edge over the other challengers. First he has a broad economic vision and can organise economic activities. Second I like his personal qualities - tolerance, ability to listen and adjust his own opinion. These qualities are to be respected. My appraisal is based on my special relationship with Ryzhkov. We were together in Chernobyl. I saw him working on the second day after the earthquake in America where we also went together. I realised he was a man of effective and quick decisions. He can act energetically and work day and night. Openness and progressive ideas are among his major assets as well.

I am very much concerned over the disintegration processes affecting the Russian federation. As for whether the Presidential election can result in the consolidation of the peoples of Russia, the debates and discussions on this matter have not inspired me with optimism so far. The vote counting procedure will deliberately ignore the opinion of residents in autonomous entities where only the total number of votes considered. We know full well why this happened. This political action is designed to clear the way for Boris Yeltsin. I am not against him as a person, but I am against such approaches.

As to how Yeltsin would act, should he be elected Russia's President, he will have to adjust his viewpoint. As a realistic politician he cannot ignore the processes unfolding in the Russian federation. Otherwise he will remain President only in down town Moscow.