

'THE MILITARY SECRET' OF THE MAYOR OF MOSCOW

Natalia Serova

The first thing that puts everybody on edge about the campaign that has been mounted 'here and now' against Moscow Mayor Yuri Luzhkov is not just that it is a joint movement that has managed to unite politically motivated businessmen, sophisticates, 'solidarists' and other 'bereaved' elements, but that there has been a change in sentiment of a significant part of the educated Moscow public. Something very significant had to happen either inside the government or in the public sphere in order to make people joyfully give their approval after they had seen that 'a lion had lain down next to a ram'. Russian politician Zhirinovskiy has lain down next to Milov and Nemtsov; and Marat Gelman, the art gallery owner, started to talk about 'love' and 'vegetable beds'.

Why has everybody decided that they are already allowed to do this here and now? **Why has it suddenly become possible to hand the prime minister a folder of dirt, and to deliver a speech with a flavor of anti-Semitism during the parliamentary session that is being broadcast across the country?** Why has Levichev, the leader of faction *Spravedlivaya Rossia (Fair Russia)*, not usually associated with scandals, decided to move outside the scope of the session agenda and attack Luzhkov for the destruction of Moscow's architectural look? And why has an ironic and typically jokey Putin-style answer been immediately taken as a 'final word'?

On the surface, one of the answers to all of these questions is policy. It is all about the forthcoming Fall elections and about the future of the United Russia party, the list of leaders of which includes Luzhkov. It is about the echo of winter attempts to consolidate everything 'progressive and innovative' under the slogan 'Down with the party of the bureaucrats!' It is also about those Fall attacks on Luzhkov, when even a special web site was registered to collect signatures to oust the mayor of Moscow; today, this web site advertizes clothes. Another answer is that a sort of 'modernizing elimination' is to get underway, and it looks like Luzhkov is doomed to become the first victim of progressive innovations.

All of these events have a lot to do with politics, but for Moscow inhabitants the task of saving their city as a cultural artifact and as a living environment has become a priority. It seems that this is precisely the point where Luzhkov begins to lose Muscovites' support. The main blow was struck by Levichev and Gelman, instead of Zhirinovskiy and Nemtsov, with their 'bags of dirt'. Indeed, **attempts to stop the Moscow reconstruction plan that will turn the city into a place inadequate for living just about amounts to the same thing as the hysterical slogan 'Luzhkov must leave because everyone is sick and tired of him'**. While a debate concerning Moscow's future represents a struggle for this or that decision, a campaign under the slogan 'We are tired, go away!' is just trivial defamation.

However, there is one alarming fact — both of these trends have already converged with one another. Moreover,

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there's an alternative which allows us to suppose that Luzhkov's theoretically possible resignation would not improve the situation in the city. This is firstly true because successors will most probably consider the investment projects reasonable after looking into the details; in other words, profitable. Secondly, because Luzhkov's critics are hung up on his mania for giant projects, this may turn out to be even more mutually exclusive with our ideas of normal life.

Luzhkov was one of those few, who — at his own risk, not because he had to stick to the party line — criticized the policy of 'young reformers' and the Chubais privatization at the very beginning of 1990s. Under Luzhkov, Moscow became the first city to support impoverished people — pensioners, state employees, young mothers and students. It is clear that he did not give the people what could be called his last crumb. But, anyway, he

shared with them instead of attempting to make them vanish so that they wouldn't cramp the construction of better tomorrow.

As for the loss of Moscow's historical look and feel and other obvious consequences of Luzhkov's often unwise management, one should 'slap his wrists' for this. The thing that Moscow City Council is going to adopt is not a plan for the development of a huge and historically unique city; it is an action plan for Moscow's construction sector. Yet, at the same time, **one shouldn't be under any illusions concerning Luzhkov's critics. The majority of them mourn the disappearance of Moscow's historical appearance, but do not consider the improvements that have been made to Muscovites' living conditions. They only consider the great Moscow redivision.**

Finally, let me say a few words about

purity of taste, which is unfamiliar to the mayor of Moscow and to the members of his crew responsible for construction and provision of urban amenities. What they have brought is cheap eclecticism, vulgarized by commercialism. However, at least they have not made their mission to challenge common sense and public morality. This idea has been strongly respected by the City Mayor's Office. In this situation it is enough to recall the case of gay parade.

Intellectually Luzhkov's opponents work in an absolutely different way, and, while criticizing his 'extremes', we can speculate that the bigger battles to maintain the historical appearance of Moscow and the opportunity to live in Moscow will begin after the city has been handed over to the supporters of the new style. ■

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