

## NEEDLES FOR THE AUTHORITIES



**MAXIM KONONENKO** is a Russian journalist, publicist, popular blogger, and author of the political and satirical project, 'Vladimir Vladimirovich.Ru.' He has also authored the novel 'The Day of an Excellent Pupil' (2008), which criticizes the liberal political circles in Russia.

Exclusively for Yaroslavl initiative

The opposition, even if it thinks of itself otherwise, became a systemic opposition a long time ago and at present forms as much of an intrinsic part of the political landscape as parliamentary opposition parties. This year, the traditional opposition made one more attempt to group together. It is perhaps too early to speak about the success or failure of this attempt, but it seems to me that their moment has passed. While they were negotiating, new, and much more interesting, leaders emerged who have actually become popular among the general public, such as Chirikova and Navalny. At the moment they haven't voiced any political ambitions, but it seems to me that it is only a matter of time before they are forced to become political leaders. Indeed, they seem to be more attractive in this capacity than the annoying Nemtsov, Milov, or even Yashin, who a year ago were once promising figures in politics.

We are essentially dealing with the same people as ten years ago. It is boring, and people have stopped paying attention. However, it is true that the existence of an opposition holds the authorities to account. Such scandals as the one surrounding 'Transneft' should occur every now and then,

**because, if we stop poking at the state machine with a needle, it will, undoubtedly, begin to decay.**

New leaders of public movements have emerged who have learned to talk to modern society in a clear language that it understands and can relate to. It is not that the ideas are important — nobody knows where this Khimki forest is located — it is people that are important. If certain comments were made by someone other than Navalny they would never resonate the same way in society.

But personal charisma by itself does not elicit trust. Victor Stepanovich Chernomyrdin was a very charismatic person, but I think he would fail as a public politician. It was fun to listen to Chernomyrdin, but one had no desire to follow him. It seems to me that the most important trait of the new leaders is that it is them alone who seem to have found the right words. Society, which has listened to many people during the past years, has selected only two leaders it truly likes. But this is how we learned to win 'Eurovision' — by making many mistakes. Maybe their example will be learned from and copied. Let's wait and see if it works out. ■

## SOCIETY WILL SOON BEGIN TO SEETHE



**EVGENIA CHIRIKOVA** is a Russian ecologist, activist, and a leader of the Khimki forest protection movement.

Exclusively for Yaroslavl initiative

The biggest problem in Russia is corruption. And it continues to exploit our resources more and more every day. Any civilized society should aim not just at using its natural resources, but also at applying its intellectual potential to produce something valuable and something that improves our lives.

An economy based on natural resources alone resembles that of prostitution. It is clear that any one of us can become a prostitute, but any one of us can also train our mind and earn a better living. Unfortunately, our state resembles those unfortunate girls who have chosen the 'easy way.' Instead of earning money with our heads, we are earning it through 'other parts of the anatomy' — our resources. It's a shame, because along with our resources our nation's potential dwindles every day.

Further down the road the state power system will devour even more resources — it is simply incapable of anything else. But as a result, the number of movements like 'The Khimki forest' will grow. It is a movement of regular citizens who have realized that the existing system is one that is simply after their resources. **To us, a forest means nature, but to the state it is just another resource.** If the number of

such movements increases, there will soon be more opposition activists in this country.

Public movements will hardly merge with or be a substitute for political opposition. Those who protect the Khimki forest do not view their movement as belonging either to the liberal or to the systemic opposition. We are people with different views. Some of us are not liberals, and there are even monarchists among us. We exist as an absolutely separate phenomenon. However, at a certain point in time, public and political movements inevitably join ranks. Public movements in Europe have already joined the political struggle in a very civilized way. It is hard to say what will happen in our country, but it is likely that society will soon begin to seethe one way or another. The recent events in Manezhnaya Square are just one example of such seething. But these riots in Moscow should not in any way be compared with the protests in Europe. In Brussels we marched in a column and demanded environmental fairness. There were over 10 thousand people, mainly from the middle class and intelligentsia, and so largely from a different age group entirely. Most importantly, our march was free of any nationalist slogans. ■