

# COMPASS

## MUNIST LEAGUE

### ON THE RUSSIAN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

#### Marxist-Leninist Electoral Tactics

It is important for Marxist-Leninists to have correct tactics in relation to elections in bourgeois countries. Naturally, therefore, those in Russia who regard themselves as Marxist-Leninists had serious discussions on whether to participate in the recent Presidential elections held there and, if so, whether to support the candidate of the united left-patriotic forces, Gennady Ziuganov, leader of the 'Communist Party of the Russian Federation' (CPRF).

Marxist-Leninist tactics in bourgeois elections are simple and straightforward: to utilise them to raise the revolutionary political consciousness of the working class and to expose the illusion that the working class (except in extraordinary circumstances) can establish its control over society through parliament.

Thus, Marxist-Leninist tactics normally involve participation in parliamentary elections with the aims stated above, and only rarely involve their boycott. They see a boycott is correct only

- 1) where political restraints prevent progressive organisations from effectively presenting their views; and
- 2) where participation would hold back and not advance the development of a developing revolutionary situation.

As Lenin wrote in 1920:

"Participation in parliamentary elections and in struggle in parliament is obligatory for the party of the revolutionary proletariat precisely for the purpose of educating the backward strata of its own class. . . . As long as you are unable to disperse the bourgeois parliament and every other type of reactionary institution, you must work inside them. . . .

Russian experience has given us one successful and correct (1905) and one incorrect (1906) example of the application of the boycott by the Bolsheviks".

(V. I. Lenin: "'Left-wing' Communism, an Infantile Disorder' (April/May 1920), in: 'Selected Works', Volume 10; London; 1946; p. 100, 103-04).

Thus, Marxist-Leninists hold that to reject participation in elections as a matter of principle, regardless of the correlation of forces, is a serious mistake.

#### The Situation in 1993

The State Duma elections of December 1993 took place just right after the bloody October events in Moscow, in which many patriots were murdered, most opposition leaders arrested and most anti-Yeltsin organisations declared illegal. They took place at the same time as a referendum on



the proposed new constitution -- a constitution which embodied a highly centralised and dictatorial presidential power, under which institutions like the State Duma and the Supreme Court would be virtually powerless in the face of an all-powerful president.

In these circumstances, the correct policy was clearly for progressive organisations to boycott both the elections and the referendum on the constitution, and such a boycott was observed by all organisations calling themselves 'communist' except for the CPRF -- which thereby isolated itself from all the other opposition organisations. The participation of the CPRF in the elections in these circumstances not only legitimised the bloody assault upon the Supreme Soviet and the subsequent mass killing of patriots, but made possible the 50% turnout of voters needed for the adoption of the fascist Yeltsin constitution.

After the 1993 events, Ziuganov's leadership faced severe criticism from the rank-and-file of the CPRF as well as from a large number of intellectuals. However, Ziuganov has been able to stay in the leadership of the CPRF thanks to bureaucratic manoeuvres.

#### The Changed Situation since 1993

The political and economic situation in Russia has changed substantially since the bloody events of October 1993, making it necessary to answer anew the questions: should those who regard themselves as communists have participated in the 1996 presidential elections, and, if so, should they have supported Ziuganov.

The economic conditions of the Russian proletariat and toiling masses in general have fallen dramatically as a result of the profound economic crisis and the liquidation of the productive forces. Non-payment of wages has become widespread. The Yeltsinist plans for the so-called 'stabilisation of the economy' restrain the government from subsidising the industrial and agricultural sectors, in which production has fallen to absurd levels. Industrial output has fallen to almost 60% of the 1991 level, and official figures for the first months of 1996, recently released, bear witness to the continuing fall in industrial production. Indeed, industry has virtually collapsed over large regions. The Gaidar plans for reduction of the productive forces have taken effect at the dictation of the IMF and American imperialism, and as a result of the phenomenal reduction in industrial production (particularly heavy industry), the internal consumption of energy has dropped severely. There were government plans for the gradual closing of mines, but as a result of present economic conditions, the coal industry has become obsolete sooner than was expected and is on the verge of collapse. Now the situation in the coal industry is like that in the rest of Russian industry: miners rarely receive wages, and yet the mines are not closed and the workplaces are nominally preserved.

Many workers believed in the illusion that the privatisation of factories, with the sale of part of the shares to the workers, would bring them prosperity. This illusion has vanished into thin air now that workers have been compelled to sell their shares to buy food. In most of the privatised factories the workers' collectives now control only 5-10% of the shares.

In a country where 70% of the population is working class with a history of having enjoyed working class power and socialism, it has so far proved



politically impracticable to reduce the working class component of the Russian population to the level demanded by the IMF. Hence we do not observe the massive shut-down of factories which would be expected from the tremendous reduction in the forces of production which has taken place. Instead, bankrupt factories are kept open -- with workers left unpaid -- in an effort to evade the social unrest which would result from massive redundancies.

Workers are either not paid at all, or receive only a tiny part of their wages. Often workers are offered goods in place of money wages -- at prices 50-100% higher than in the open market. Even though the average wage of a qualified worker barely reaches \$150, the prices of goods in the open market are of the same magnitude as in the West. Therefore, even those who receive wages are not in a position to meet their most basic living expenses, such as nurseries, health care, apartment services (water, electricity, gas, etc.), public transport -- workers are thrown off buses because they cannot pay their fares. The situation is worse in the regions and medium-sized towns. In these conditions the objective basis clearly exists for the passage of economic strikes into political strikes.

In addition to all this, the massive Western investment promised by Yeltsin has largely failed to materialise. The Western imperialist powers have little interest in financing the development and modernisation of Russia's economy, so that Russian imperialism has largely been compelled to limit its ambitions -- apart from the sale of Russian oil and gas -- to the importation of Western goods. Moscow has become a centre of trading companies which import such goods for distribution to the regions of Russia and other republics of the former Soviet Union.

Since the output of Russian light industry and agriculture has also shrunk to incredibly low levels, Russian shops are filled with imported products. Official figures released by the Moscow local authorities admit that 75% of the food and other consumer goods sold in Moscow are imported. Furthermore, it is planned to import grain from the US for the coming winter as a result of the disastrous harvest this year. It must be remembered that even during the Great Patriotic War, when Nazi Germany occupied the vast grain-growing areas of the European part of the Soviet Union, the country did not have to resort to the importation of grain.

In the main, three sectors of the Russian economy remain profitable in the present conditions of deep crisis -- namely, the arms, oil and gas industries. In the case of arms industry, Russian state monopolies are making deals with countries like India and several states in the Arab world -- deals which have become a major concern to the Western imperialist powers. The Yeltsin administration has been accused of breaking international arms agreements, and thereby jeopardising the supremacy of the US and German arms industries. There has been a great deal of criticism of the Clinton administration from the more conservative Republican elements on this issue. Since the Russian state monopolies have refused to share oil and gas extraction with Western companies, we find such companies making deals with Azerbaijan and Turkey to use oil pipelines that avoid Russian territory.

Russian economic relations with other republics of the former Soviet Union are based, as we have said, largely on the export of Western goods and Russian oil and gas, not on the sale of means of production. In fact, the Russian government long ago agreed to implement the IMF demands to liquidate the high technology sectors of the machine industry, so that it is now, for the most part, incapable of developing industry.



This is evidence of the subordinate position of Russian imperialism, which to a large extent functions as an instrument by which American and German imperialism plunder the republics of the former Soviet Union.

#### The 1996 Presidential Elections

The tactics of boycotting the December 1993 Duma elections were, as we have said, undoubtedly correct.

But since then, conditions have radically changed. The working class is still concentrated and, due to the present socio-economic conditions described above, the political activity of the masses has undergone a qualitative change. Thousands of strikes took place in 1994, and the figure for 1995 was even higher. Furthermore, the conditions for the transformation of economic strikes into political strikes have greatly increased. The political consciousness of the masses has grown significantly.

This development was reflected in the December 1995 Duma elections in which, according to the official figures, more than 3.3 million workers voted for 'Workers' Russia' (WR). Thus, despite the existence of a large revisionist -- essentially social-democratic -- party in the shape of the CPRF, more than three million workers voted for an organisation that operates under banners of Lenin and Stalin, that calls for socialist revolution and openly fights the parliamentarist and revisionist CPRF!

The accumulation of contradictions in Russia made it possible to carry out virtually free agitation for socialist revolution. In such conditions, where there is no country-wide revolutionary party and where the level of political consciousness and organisation of the working class has not yet developed far enough to begin armed struggle against capitalism, communists are obliged to participate in elections. In such conditions, a boycott of the elections would have prevented communists from utilising the elections in a revolutionary way, to prepare the masses for revolutionary struggle.

In fact, the call for a boycott of the parliamentary elections came from those who assert that Russia cannot be considered a revolutionary centre, that the centre has moved far to the East! These people praise 'the great Comrade Deng Xiaoping' for 'building socialism' (in fact, 'market socialism') in China. It must be noted that these concealed Brezhnevites do not claim that an electoral boycott was called for because a 'revolutionary situation' existed in Russia. On the contrary, they proclaim that the revolution has moved to Asia. It is clear that their call for an electoral boycott was merely a liquidationist refusal to work with the masses.

#### The Character of the CPRF

As we have said, the attitude of the CPRF in the 1993 elections drove a considerable rift between the leadership of the party and its honest rank-and-file members. Since then, this rift has widened.

Communist workers understand the social-democratic character of the CPRF and the anti-Marxist character of its leadership. This is clear even to many members of the CPRF. When Ziuganov speaks about 'socialism' he means state capitalism of the Brezhnev kind. This is natural, in view of where he comes from. The CPRF is composed mainly of former Soviet middle-class elements whose standard of living has fallen dramatically following the Yeltsin 'reforms' -- even lower in many cases than that of the working class.



It is true that, as a result of the restoration of the historic figure of Stalin in the Russian communist movement -- praise of Stalin now gains votes! -- the CPRF has been obliged to moderate its anti-Stalinism and is sometimes even compelled to recognise publicly the great historical role of Stalin. But this is mere words.

The real pro-Western orientation of the CPRF leadership came out clearly in the months leading up to the presidential elections. Ziuganov tried hard to convince the Western imperialists that his programme was even more pro-Western than that of Yeltsin. He supported the enlargement of NATO and promised to create a 'better atmosphere' for foreign investment.

A further weakening of the CPRF has been brought about by the chauvinist position adopted by Ziuganov towards Russia's aggressive war in Chechnia. Refusing to proclaim either the unjust character of the Russian army's aggression or the right of self-determination of the Chechen people, Ziuganov is continuing the chauvinist stance of the revisionist leaders of the old CPSU.

Yet Russian workers have expressed strong condemnation of the invasion of Chechnia, in which the Yeltsin administration has shown its fascist face by massacring tens of thousands of unarmed Chechen civilians, including women and children. The Russian army, unable to defeat a few thousand bold and well-organised freedom fighters, has resorted to the use of weapons of mass destruction in an effort to avoid impending military humiliation. The war in Chechnia has become fiercely unpopular with the Russian population, forcing Yeltsin to make 'peaceful' sounds.

In conditions of increasing rift between the leadership of the CPRF and its rank-and-file, Ziuganov found it extremely difficult to convince the last party congress in early 1995 to recognise private property, and in the end was obliged to retreat on this question as a result of rank-and-file opposition. Nevertheless Ziuganov published his own electoral programme from which anything vaguely reminiscent of socialism has been deleted. The main theses are: support for a 'mixed economy' in which all forms of property enjoy equal rights, and the view that the revolutionary road to socialism has exhausted its historical potential!

There can be no doubt, therefore, that the CPRF is not a Marxist-Leninist party, but a social-democratic one masquerading under a revisionist banner. Yet in spite of the strong criticism of Ziuganov from the rank-and-file of the CPRF for his flagrant anti-Marxist, pro-capitalist and pro-Western stance, for his acceptance of the fraudulent election results, etc., he remains in the leadership of the CPRF. There can, therefore, be little room for illusions that it might be possible to radicalise the CPRF into a genuine party of revolutionary socialism.

#### The Attitude of the Western Imperialists

Despite Ziuganov's efforts to persuade the Western imperialists that they should support him in the 1996 presidential elections, they finally decided to give their support to Yeltsin.

This was not because they doubted that Ziuganov would serve their interests if elected. But they feared that the increasing contradictions between Ziuganov and the rank and file of his Party were too deep to permit the CPRF to form a stable government. Furthermore, Yeltsin had given them



clear warning that he and his generals were not prepared to leave office peacefully, so that any attempt to replace Yeltsin by Ziuganov would result in a bloody civil war. And in a vast country like Russia, with its vivid communist traditions among the working class, they feared instability of any kind.

Again, one of the concerns of Western ideologists was Ziuganov's reluctance to rename his party a 'socialist' party, as has been done in all countries of Eastern Europe and most of the former Republics of the Soviet Union. Even now, after the 'defeat' of the CPRF in the presidential elections, the party's leadership continues to resist the renaming of the party as 'socialist'. The structural weakness of social-democracy is one of the features of the present political situation in Russia.

While social-democracy has served as a vehicle for the restoration of orthodox capitalism in a number of countries in Eastern Europe and in the Baltic States, in a number of other countries -- such as the former Soviet Republics and Albania, where the social basis for social-democracy is extremely weak, Western imperialism has preferred to support openly fascist regimes. (In Albania where to attempt to organise a Communist Party is punishable, under the Constitution, by more than five years' imprisonment, social-democracy was almost deprived of representation in Parliament at the last elections). All these issues made the West, particularly the American imperialists, doubt the wisdom of supporting Ziuganov.

Thus, as a result of pressure from the Clinton administration, the IMF granted the largest loan in its history -- \$10.5 billion -- to the Yeltsin government, together with \$0.5 billion in cash to assist the expenses of Yeltsin's election campaign, which was characterised by a scandalous monopoly on TV and radio. The Clinton administration was particularly keen to support Yeltsin, despite his image -- fearing the effect on its forthcoming election campaign of Republican attacks if Clinton could be shown to have supported the election of a 'communist' regime in Russia. In fact, American pressure was a factor in persuading the CPRF to retain its 'communist' name precisely in the hope that this might drive some voters away.

This IMF loan was granted despite the opposition of top IMF officials, who were critical of the Yeltsin administration for its failure to meet its huge external debt obligations despite the profitability of the Russian arms, gas and oil monopolies -- for example, the state gas monopoly recorded a profit of \$4 billion in 1995.

#### The Tactics of 'Workers' Russia'

The February congress of 'Workers' Russia' (WR) resolved that 'Ziuganov means the construction of capitalism under red banners' -- a slogan which succinctly sums up the essence of the analysis given above. Indeed, its last congress of WR splendidly demonstrates the steady ideological development of WR towards genuine Marxist-Leninist positions. In particular, its restoration of the historical figure of Stalin and the significance of his works has led to a radical critique of the whole post-Stalin period among many workers.

WR was fully aware of the role played by social-democracy in Eastern Europe and the Baltic Republics and therefore at first took the stand of supporting the candidacy of its own Viktor Ampilov.

However, by February it had become clear that the Western imperialists

had decided against supporting Ziuganov and were backing Yeltsin. The Western media became more and more critical of Ziuganov, drawing ever more shocked attention to his 'communist' views.

In this situation, WR correctly recognised that Yeltsin was 'enemy no. 1' of the Russian working people and altered its line to give critical support to the united opposition candidate, Gennady Ziuganov. These tactics helped to expose the CPRF and social-democracy, as well as the manipulation of the election results by a government which is hated and despised by the whole country, with the exception of Moscow and Leningrad.

In our view, the tactics adopted by 'Workers' Russia, led by Viktor Ampilov, were correct. Although WR should not be considered a Marxist-Leninist Party, but a broad anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist organisation composed largely of workers with strong pro-Stalin tendencies, compared with other organisations that call themselves 'Marxist-Leninist' WR displays a far more critical stand towards post-Stalin revisionism in the Soviet Union. In our view such an orientation represents a sound basis for the positive ideological development of the Russian communist movement.

THESE DEVELOPMENTS WILL UNDOUBTEDLY HELP TO DEVELOP  
THE COMMUNIST MOVEMENT IN RUSSIA.

The International Committee for the Restoration of the Soviet Union,

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