

# From the Archive: President Draws Criticism From All Political Camps

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President Boris Yeltsin took a beating across the political spectrum for his decision to trade in Sergei Stepashin for Vladimir Putin.

"This is an agony, a total insanity," Communist Party leader Gennady Zyuganov declared in a radio interview. "Who will take a prime minister seriously if they change them like gloves?"

Few expressed much surprise, though, at the sacking of Prime Minister Stepashin or expected it to bring a change in Kremlin policy.

"There is no difference between Putin and Stepashin," Zyuganov said in televised comments. "They are from the same team, both are from Leningrad, coming from law enforcement agencies, and both have had no real government work experience."

The Kremlin's most feared opponents — Moscow Mayor Yury Luzhkov and former Prime

Minister Yevgeny Primakov — remained conspicuously silent. Luzhkov's press service said he began a vacation Monday and saw no need to interrupt, Itar-Tass reported.

Some of the most biting comments came from Boris Nemtsov, a former deputy prime minister and one of the leaders of the Right Cause bloc of "young reformers."

"It's hard to explain madness," Nemtsov said on Ekho Moskvyy radio. "The people have grown tired of watching an ill leader who is not capable of doing his job."

Regional governors, who are seen by the Kremlin as key allies in the upcoming elections, took the news more quietly than the Moscow political elite.

Tatar President Mintimer Shaimiyev and Samara Governor Konstantin Titov said Stepashin was aware that he might be sacked and discussed it with them during his trip along the Volga river last weekend.

Titov, whose Union of Governors is considering an alliance with the right-wing parties, invited Stepashin to join their electoral bloc.

"We think he [Stepashin] has to lead the Union of Governors," Titov said.

Yeltsin's brash announcement that Putin is his chosen successor provoked very little comment from politicians.

In part, it was explained by Duma speaker Gennady Seleznyov, who said that all those who had been named Yeltsin's heir apparent in the past were eventually fired. Yeltsin has "put a cross on Putin's career," Seleznyov said.

Another reason behind politicians' reluctance to discuss Putin's electoral chances was that many of them are intently calculating their own chances as part of various alliances.

Hence the carefully worded statements from many local governors, such as Eduard Rossel of the Sverdlovsk region and Vladimir Yakovlev of St. Petersburg, who tried to describe how well they relate to both Stepashin and Putin.

Putin is likely to be approved by the Duma next week, Seleznyov said.

Sergei Mitrokhin of the liberal Yabloko faction said the Duma would under no circumstances allow Yeltsin to dissolve the parliament, which he would have to do if the Duma rejected his candidate three times.

"The Duma will make it so that Yeltsin fired and missed," Mitrokhin said. "It will indifferently vote for Putin, especially since Zyuganov already said that it's all the same whether it's Stepashin or Putin."

Or, as one of Vladimir Zhirinovskyy's Liberal Democratic Party deputies, Sergei Mitrofanov, put it: "One of the president's men is changed for another one. Nothing has changed

politically."

Melissa Akin contributed to this report.

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