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LOL at Luzhkov's Ouster

By Victor Davidoff

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Tragedy and comedy are definitely in the eye of the beholder. Yury Luzhkov had barely vacated his office at City Hall when the Russian blogosphere was filled with commentary.

Human resources managers are discussing the recent changes at the top:

- I wonder whether Luzhkov registered on some site like Job.ru. He better update his resume: "Experienced manager with 20 years' seniority. Married. Hobby: beekeeping."
- The reason he left his last job: "My boss was a despot!"

Some jokes sound like rumors:

Did you hear the latest? Yelena Baturina has divorced Luzhkov and married acting Mayor Vladimir Resin.

Others think that the cause of Luzhkov's troubles was his homophobia:

Did you hear about Luzhkov's ouster? Medvedev sacked him so he can see a gay-pride parade

in Moscow.

The Young Guard, the youth wing of the United Russia party, made itself the target of jokes again by switching sides. It seems like only yesterday that the Young Guard was lavishly praising Luzhkov and ferociously defending him from his critics. "It's an honor to stand next to Yury Luzhkov," posted one of the staff writers on Molgvardia.ru &mdash especially because of the mayor's open homophobia. "Thanks to his resolute position, Muscovites haven't had to watch queers marching down the city streets." The Young Guard even promised to become Luzhkov's "political SWAT team."

But as soon as the major television channels started their attack on Luzhkov, the Young Guard began to call him a "political pensioner" whose rule was "harmful and even dangerous" because people like Luzhkov are out of touch and can't support modernization.

Then came Luzhkov's personal Black Tuesday, and the scales fell from the Young Guard's eyes. They discovered that "Moscow has become totally unlivable" and "the Moscow mayor has lost his grip on reality. ... The city under his control is a total mess."

The reaction in the Internet community to the Young Guard's about-face was brutal: "That's not the way a SWAT team behaves. They're nothing but whores." It's hard to imagine positive results from modernization when the agents of change are United Russia and the Young Guard, which has cultivated outrageously anti-democratic and anti-Western ideas.

It seems like a Moscow businessman had the same doubts when he publicly left United Russia. This kind of gesture is rare enough in Russia, but the case got everyone talking because the businessman was Mikhail Dvorkovich, chairman of the communications group Press Hall and the brother of Medvedev's economic aide, Arkady Dvorkovich. Many bloggers think that Mikhail Dvorkovich's act was a calculated slap in the face of United Russia &mdash and committed with Arkady's consent.

Mikhail Dvorkovich left United Russia for the same reason that Medvedev sacked Luzhkov: He lost confidence in the "party of power." According to Dvorkovich, United Russia asked him to sponsor an event and promised to reimburse him in January. Dvorkovich's company spent 23 million rubles ($754,000) but never saw a kopek from the party. United Russia maintains that the party never discussed reimbursement.

Although Internet opinion is on the side of the rebel Dvorkovich, there are doubts whether the businessman was as naive as he paints himself. United Russia is famous for making businessmen offers they can't refuse.

Actually, the government is also known for its irresistible offers. The recently announced state program for patriotic education of Russians is 780 million rubles ($25.6 million), to be financed partially from the budget and partially from "nonbudget" sources &mdash that is, business.

This announcement was made on the same day that a psychology lecturer at St. Petersburg State University complained in a post that he only received a salary of 8,932 rubles ($295) in September, which works out to about 120 rubles ($4) an hour. Bloggers quickly did the math and calculated that if the government abandoned its program of patriotic education,

it could double the 2010 salaries for 7,222 lecturers.

Perhaps the government should determine what it really wants in the 21st century: "patriotic education" or real education and modernization.

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