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Just Russia, Communists Finalize Bids

By Alexey Eremenko

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Communist leader Gennady Zyuganov speaking during a party convention just outside Moscow on Saturday. **Sergey Ponomarev**

Two left-leaning parliamentary parties, A Just Russia and the Communists, held their pre-election conventions on Saturday, approving nonflashy electoral lists in the shadow of United Russia's political show at Luzhniki.

A Just Russia, which met in a congress hall in Moscow's Sokolniki Park, picked its founder Sergei Mironov and party bosses Nikolai Levichev and Oksana Dmitriyeva to top its 600-member list of candidates for the State Duma vote on Dec. 4.

The federal list comprises mostly party officials, with the exception of Alexander Lomakin-Rumyantsev, head of the All-Russia Organization of the Disabled, and Andrei Tumanov, editor-in-chief of the Vashi Shest Sotok (Your Six Acres), a bimonthly nonpolitical agrarian newspaper with a print run of 230,000.

The federal list usually has 10 names, but A Just Russia's only has eight because two

candidates were dropped.

One of them, actress Rimma Markova, was struck out because of her considerable age of 85, Levichev said. The other, the charismatic leader of the party's youth wing, Dmitry Gudkov, was demoted to head a regional list in one of Moscow's districts because of his "abysmal" relationship with the Kremlin, Gazeta.ru reported.

The party also approved its election platform, which promises to lobby for the interests of the poor and state employees.

The platform will provide an alternative to "soft and hard authoritarianism and liberal cannibalism," Levichev said.

Mironov lashed out at United Russia but stopped short of criticizing the ruling tandem, which de facto discarded A Just Russia despite its loyalty after it started draining votes off the ruling party.

Mironov dodged a question about whether A Just Russia would support Prime Minister Vladimir Putin's bid for presidency, announced at the United Russia convention on Saturday.

The party will reconvene in December to decide on its strategy for the March presidential election, Mironov said. He added that the party planned to double its results from the 2007 Duma vote from 7.7 percent to 15 percent in December.

Interestingly, while Mironov addressed the congress in a calm and reserved tone, a huge screen behind him aired his heated speech from this spring, when he criticized United Russia. A Moscow Times reporter overheard delegates muttering that this was how he should have spoken to them this time as well.

The Communist Party stuck to its tradition of holding pre-election conventions on the premises of Moskovsky, a former collective farm seven kilometers south of Moscow.

The head of the Central Elections Commission, Kremlin loyalist Vladimir Churov, attended the event without voicing his reasons for showing up, Gazeta.ru said.

The Communists' electoral list has 597 names and is topped by party leader Gennady Zyuganov, retired Navy Admiral Vladimir Komoyedov, who commanded the Black Sea Fleet from 1998 to 2002, and the head of the Communist Youth Union, Yury Afonin, Interfax said.

The rest of the federal top 10 includes four more party bosses; Nobel physics laureate Zhores Alfyorov, 81; Soviet-era cosmonaut Svetlana Savitskaya; and, most curiously, the former head of the Federal Drug Control Service, Viktor Cherkesov, who infamously decried "feuds in the Chekist community" ahead of the 2008 presidential election when his agency lost in a turf war with the Federal Security Service.

Prominent names on the regional lists include Khakassia Governor Alexei Lebed and film director Vladimir Bortko, famous for TV adaptations of Fyodor Dostoyevsky's "Idiot" and Mikhail Bulgakov's "Master and Margarita."

The Communist platform envisages the nationalization of the oil industry and the modernization of the economy, Zyuganov said.

The party will also campaign for the disbandment of "imperialistic" NATO and the establishment of a new alliance of former Soviet republics, he said.

He also promoted democracy, expressing regret that the word had been "devalued" recently. "Real political competition should finally replace the dictatorship of the information syringe, the money bag and the police baton," Zyuganov said, speaking with a bust of Vladimir Lenin looming on the stage behind him.

The unregistered Party of People's Freedom, or Parnas, suffered a split at its own convention, also held in Moscow on Saturday, after its four co-leaders failed to agree on whether to combat the Kremlin in the elections or boycott them.

The party, which was denied registration in June, approved a proposal of three co-leaders, Mikhail Kasyanov, Boris Nemtsov and Vladimir Ryzhkov, to protest the Duma elections by calling on voters to destroy their ballots.

But a fourth co-leader, Vladimir Milov, denounced the move as "the road to nowhere," the Trud newspaper reported. Milov proposed instead to vote for any party other than United Russia to undermine its hegemony in the parliament.

Milov left the convention after his proposals were discarded. An unspecified number of members of the Democratic Choice, the movement that he brought to Parnas, followed him, Noviye Izvestia said.

The three other co-leaders were re-elected to their posts, Interfax reported. The party also announced Saturday that it would field a candidate for the presidency in 2012, but did not say who it would be.

The Communists can count on garnering 18 percent of the Duma vote; A Just Russia 6 to 7 percent, and Parnas, were it allowed to run, just 1 percent, according to a poll by Levada Center released in mid-September.

Staff writer Alexander Bratersky contributed to this report.

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