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Society Is Changing, Veteran Rocker Says

By Sergey Chernov

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ST. PETERSBURG — Mikhail Borzykin, the frontman of Televizor, a St. Petersburg band that has been performing protest rock songs since the perestroika days of 1987, spoke and sang one of his Putin-era songs during the rally in St. Petersburg against electoral fraud, which turned out to be the city's largest demonstration in the past few years, bringing together more than 10,000 people.

"I can say without a doubt that the awakening of civil society is happening as new groups of people — totally nonpolitical — have started to participate in political events," he told The Moscow Times.

"Everybody has been waiting for this for a long time, but the first signs of this have appeared, thank God. People are unhappy about the very element of deception and are aware of who is responsible for this deception. They have no illusions left about Putin and Medvedev's innocence. The electoral fraud has become obvious to everyone."

Borzykin's song, which he sang at the rally to a pre-recorded instrumental background, was called "Nail Down the Cellar." Comparing Putin's Russia to the Soviet Union, it mentions "Orthodox Christian Chekists," referring to the group of KGB officers who came to power in Russia after President Boris Yeltsin resigned in 1999.

Borzykin sees the statements of officials — including St. Petersburg Governor Georgy Poltavchenko — who traced people's dissatisfaction over the fraud to the "hand of the West" as a blunder by the Kremlin's alleged gray cardinal, Vladislav Surkov.

Before performing the song, Borzykin referred to the statements about the alleged involvement of Western intelligence in the protests. If we are the agents of the Western secret services and are paid by the West, he said ironically, then Putin and Poltavchenko are perhaps the agents of the Martian FSB and should return to Mars.

"There could be nothing more stupid and insulting at the same time to an honest citizen who is indignant about his or her vote being stolen than to accuse them of being an agent of Western secret services. When it comes from the representatives of billionaire circles, it looks especially cynical — and, of course, people have reacted to this."

Just before the Dec. 4 State Duma elections, the St. Petersburg branch of United Russia proposed punishments for promoting homosexuality and pedophilia, which Borzykin sees as a failed attempt to re-channel people's anger at the authorities.

"It's amazing. Every television channel was fighting [the promotion of] sodomy and pedophilia. It looks like they have nothing else with which to divert the attention of the public," he said.

"They choose things that have no relevance for the life of the country. Such a system inevitably starts to eat itself. It's organized in such a way that it can't function without hysteria. Its foundation starts to fall apart because of them blowing hot and cold and starting to look for enemies where there have never been any enemies at all."

Speaking at the St. Petersburg rally, Moscow music journalist and promoter Artyom Troitsky called on rock musicians, specifically Akvarium's Boris Grebenshchikov and Leningrad's Sergei Shnurov, to speak out against the electoral fraud. Both were absent from the rally.

"There are more and more people who understand what's going on [among rock musicians], even among those who were praising Putin three years ago. I know this from inside sources," Borzykin said.

"Perhaps soon we'll hear whole albums of protest from those who even recently pledged eternal love to Putin and his system. It's very amusing that it's happening, and it's good, even if it's difficult to believe in the sincerity of such an outburst."

According to Borzykin, the rallies held across Russia on Saturday showed that nonpartisan protest is becoming dominant.

"You don't have to belong to a political organization to bring the authorities down a peg or two," he said. "When anarchists stand next to nationalists and shout 'Putin is a thief' all together, this is absolutely the right situation for now."

Borzykin, one of the few Russian rock musicians who has been active in opposing the Kremlin since Putin came to power, said Saturday's rallies gave him new hope.

"It was a very inspirational day for me. I found a new source of hope and felt a new burst of energy," he said.

"I didn't feel that society would be roused so quickly. ... I think there's no turning back."

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