The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Weekly Wrap: Poets, Landgrabs and Brezhnev

By Unfair Observer

July 16, 2015



The New Horizons spacecraft reached Pluto this week, making the United States the first nation to tap a dwarf planet with a man-made tin can (they bagged all eight proper planets earlier). The news is remarkable in that Russia had nothing to do with it whatsoever, its latest planetary mission wrapping up 29 years ago, and nothing new in the works (don't believe the Roscosmos press releases). Yury Gagarin must be rolling in his grave.

It makes sense, however, given that the number of Russians living below the poverty line rose again to 22 million this quarter. We've no immediate information on how many of those are scientists, but a good guess would be "many."

Thank God Russian football officials at least managed to save the country some cash by haggling down the golden parachute for the national team's Italian football coach to a mere $16.4 million (he was really owed $23.6 million). Though given the team's performance and the situation with Russian mass football infrastructure, the nation's best bet for a competitive national squad would be spending that money on volunteers deployed to annex

a Brazilian province, its natives to comprise the new team.

On that note...

Crimea Goes Global

Let's talk about Venezuela. Yes, it has to do with "the most brain-dead developments in Russia," bear with me for a minute. Venezuela is, after all, one of Russia's few remaining global allies, and the two countries have so much in common — the populism, the America-bashing, the leader cult, the inflation rates.

But the best thing about Venezuela is that it is about to annex a neighboring province. The territory has belonged to Guyana since 1899, but President Nicolas Maduro suddenly realized it's been ours all that time, and should come back home. Which is, of course, a prime concern for a nation plagued by beer and toilet paper shortages, not to mention luxuries like food and medication.

A flagging economy whose authoritarian leadership decides to go for a landgrab in order to distract the people from those pesky inflation rates? Gosh, that sounds familiar. Crimea did make an impression on minds worldwide, so it's finally starting — expect Britain to annex Normandy soon, Mexico to make a grab for Texas, and China to go for that land north of the Amur River ... wait, that does not work out so well.

At least there are no beer shortages in Russia, yet.

Rap Battles

Russia is still behind Venezuela on pro-governmental paramilitaries beating up the dissenters, but this is because the government is perfectly capable of handling the subversive elements on its own, thank you. This time, the enemy of the week is poets.

A court in Yaroslavl granted the drug police's request to ban lyrics by Krovostok ("Blood Groove"), Russia's household name in gangsta rap. You know, "bitches," drugs, gunfire and plenty, plenty of satire, which flew completely over the heads of the defenders of the law.

Separately, a schoolteacher in the Oryol region was convicted of extremism for writing a pro-Ukrainian poem. Apparently urging people to defend themselves when fighting Russians is anti-Russian — makes perfect sense. The prosecution did not miss their chance to arrest the crime tool as well, seizing the man's laptop — to write pro-Russian poems on it, no doubt. A Soviet memo from 1985 making rounds on the Internet listed Western bands to ban, and the reasons for doing so: Black Sabbath for "religious obscurantism," Kiss for "neo-fascism," Tina Turner for "sex," and so on.

The memo needs to be updated — surely sex alone will get most of the world's R&B banned, and gangsta rap would have given Soviet censors the hiccups. Let the youth stick to Tchaikovsky, and if they behave, maybe President Vladimir Putin will bang some jazz standards on the piano for them.

The only problem is, Alexander "Russian Shakespeare" Pushkin and his literature buddies

also struggled with censorship — and won — and Joseph Brodsky would have been much less likely to grab his Nobel Prize if the Soviet authorities hadn't persecuted and expelled him. So wait for it, Krovostok will yet be the first rap band to bag a Nobel.

Brezhnev Returns

And just in case you missed the whole "the Soviet Union is back" thing, a Brezhnev is running in Russian elections. Granted, it is Andrei Brezhnev, a grandson, it is only regional elections, and he's run before, without success. But it is clear that his time is now.

Communist dynasties are exciting — just ask North Korea — but the return of the Brezhnev raises a more vital question: President Putin still does not have an heir. (Let's just not talk about Medvedev).

Putin does have two daughters, true, but he is too masculine to be expected to promote a woman to the throne. So, perhaps a grandson? Hidden among the common folk, tacitly groomed for succession, educated in all that a young KGB prince should know to lead his people to the shining heights of world domination.

This would explain why Putin is clinging to power for so long — the heir is still in the making. Let's just hope they are aware that succession has not worked out so well in Russia since 1917 — even children of Putin's close allies, while studding the CEO rosters of state companies, have not succeeded in public politics.

So unless Brezhnev Sr. himself descends from the cloud to anoint the heir, the young prince may be in for a nasty surprise. But then, it's still decades until the throne is ready for a handover.

Unfair Observer is the pen name of a Russian journalist that The Moscow Times has invited to observe the most brain-dead weekly developments in Russia.

The views expressed in opinion pieces do not necessarily reflect the position of The Moscow Times.

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2015/07/16/weekly-wrap-poets-landgrabs-and-brezhnev-a48229