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# More Challenges to RF Democrats: Interview with Father Gleb Bakunin

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**PERSPECTIVE**

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**More Challenges to RF Democrats**

Interview with Father Gleb Bakunin

By KEITH ARMES

**[Father Gleb Yakunin, Deputy of the Russian Federation Supreme Soviet and a member of the Supreme Soviet Committee on Freedom of Conscience, was interviewed by Keith Armes, Editor of *Perspective*, on October 14, 1992, in Tacoma Park, Maryland.]**

***Perspective:* Is there any effective parliamentary oversight of the security organs and the military?**

Essentially the security organs and the army are out of control. The parliamentary Committee on Security and Defense has no real power. In practice, it is unable to supervise the KGB or the army. It has no power to ensure implementation of its policies. Some members of the committee work for the KGB. The committee chairman himself, [Sergei] Stepashin, is a deputy minister with the Ministry of Security (MSRF) and head of its St. Petersburg division. It's difficult for him to work effectively--how can he be supposed to supervise his own boss?

***Perspective:* How do you view the disposition of forces currently in parliament?**

In rough terms, the Communists of Russia are on the right, in the center is the Civic Union of [Arkady] Vol'sky, [Aleksandr] Rutsкои and [Nikolai] Travkin, and then there is our left bloc, Democratic Russia. As far as opposition to the communists is concerned, we are ready to collaborate with the Civic Union, but with regard to our views and our approach to reforms, we have differences of principle with it. We are very afraid that

while the Civic Union gives lip service to supporting the reforms, in fact its line is one of braking and holding up the reforms, and this is extremely dangerous--indeed it may be fatal and result ultimately in a social explosion. Consequently we are extremely alarmed, and we are doing everything we can to support [Yegor] Gaidar personally and his team of reformers. But if Yel'tsin removes Gaidar, we would be ready to go into opposition.

***Perspective: What are the relations between your Committee on Freedom of Conscience and [Supreme Soviet speaker Ruslan] Khasbulatov?***

We are actively fighting him. He has been establishing an enormous staff of advisers for himself--a greatly excessive number. In this way he's been strengthening the infrastructure over the Supreme Soviet and its commissions and committees, while the commissions and committees themselves don't have enough staff.

***Perspective: What view do you take of the activity of Khasbulatov? As you know, Otto Latsis has written in *Izvestia* that he is responsible for a "usurpation of power."***

We are one of the groups that are most actively promoting the creation of an anti-Khasbulatov bloc. We've carried out a political offensive against him. We consider his activity to be absolutely unacceptable--he's committed too many violations and he issues too many anticonstitutional directives (*postanovleniya*). Finally, it's absolutely unacceptable that he appointed Gen. Achalov, an active member of the State Emergency Committee [August 1991 putsch group], to head an expert commission. During the putsch, Achalov is said to have been an active advocate of storming the White House.

***Perspective: ... He's appointed a lot of people from V.I. Boldin's apparatus, too-- [Yuri] Voronin and others...***

That's right, a whole group of CPSU TsK members--as well as Gorbachev people--who are only capable of braking the reforms. Currently our struggle against Khasbulatov has died down somewhat, since there's an informal agreement with him that we will not continue to fight him on the condition that he stops fighting Gaidar.

***Perspective: What are the reasons for the great power that Khasbulatov holds over deputies?***

He's managed in one way and another to subordinate the Supreme Soviet to himself and turn it into a kind of state office (*kontora*) under his direction. He holds excessive power over the deputies. He exercises control over the committees through the system of foreign trips [for deputies]. He personally controls which deputies get to travel abroad. Lev Ponomarev and I have never once travelled abroad at the expense of the Supreme Soviet. He provides the deputies whom he sends abroad with a \$30 *per diem*, if they don't already receive a travel allowance. These are substantial amounts. One can speak in terms of Khasbulatov's "personal machine" (*personal'naya mashina*)--deputies are given apartments and dachas.

Given the mentality of our deputies, most of whom in the past had always been members of the apparatus system, they very easily succumb to such influences. We have a very difficult situation with him--but that's the reality today.

Consequently, as far as the political future is concerned, a great deal depends on Khasbulatov personally. If he restrains the "red-browns," the Supreme Soviet will be able to pass some more or less tolerable, if not progressive, legislation. On the other hand, if he starts to wage war against the president, the democrats won't have much of a chance.

***Perspective: How do you view the inclusion of members of the military-industrial complex, for instance [Georgi] Khizha, in the government?***

Khizha's joining the government was not a catastrophe, although it did alarm us. In fact, the job was offered to him by [Anatoli] Chubais, who had known him for a long time. As far as [Victor] Shumeiko, a former deputy of Khasbulatov, is concerned, thank God he's closer to the reformers than the centrists. However, Yel'tsin's last speech in which he criticized [Industry Minister Andrei] Nechaev alarmed us greatly, since after all Nechaev is an advocate of reforms.

The fact that Yel'tsin now seems to be putting his faith [*delat stavku*] in the centrists very much disturbed us. However, it's entirely possible that this may be a political maneuver, and he is trying to reconcile us with the centrists, and to save the government and the presidential special powers. As you know, these special powers will expire in the near future, and it's clear that for Yel'tsin this will present the very difficult problem of how to proceed, because if the special powers are cancelled, the cabinet will be thrown to the wolves. For this reason we categorically advocate the renewal of the totality of the special powers. Otherwise, the reactionary majority [in parliament] will install ministers who will ensure that all the reforms are nullified. The possibility exists that this will happen. Consequently we will be engaged in a difficult, stubborn struggle during the next few months.

***Perspective: Do you agree with Gavriil Popov that it was inevitable that the old nomenklatura would end up in power under Yel'tsin?***

This is very far from being the case. When we look at the series of appointments of *oblast'* governors (*gubernatory*) that were made, it's clear that Yel'tsin could have appointed a lot more democrats than he did. The same holds for other state structures. He's surrounded himself with retreads.

***Perspective: What is your view of the role of the State Security Council and the appointment of Yuri Skokov?***

The council possesses too much real power--although it is supposed to be only a consultative organ. It's turned out to be an extraordinarily effective and powerful body, which works in a far from democratic way. Skokov has never been a democrat and was never a supporter of democratic reforms. All these people have a mentality that makes them perform correspondingly, and the effect of their influence is to brake reforms. Take Yuri Petrov, the head of the presidential apparatus, who has been interfering in too many matters. It would be completely acceptable if he confined himself to his own narrow area of managing the apparatus, but we believe that he has expanded his powers, and interferes so as to have great impact in a number of other areas of administrative activity.

***Perspective: ... In your opinion, Petrov has excessive influence on Yel'tsin?***

Certainly he does, enormous influence. He's an ex-obkom secretary, Yel'tsin's successor [in Sverdlovsk], then later he served in Cuba. I don't have anything against him personally, but it's clear that an active democrat ought to be occupying his position-- a person with democratic views, who would pursue a democratic course. Clearly people like this around him exercise pressure on Yel'tsin. Yel'tsin talks to them every day, and it's evident they create a certain background, and that they have a psychological impact on him. The danger is that Yel'tsin will simply move to the right.

***Perspective: What is your view about the holding of new elections?***

Of course, in principle we are for new elections. Ninety percent of the deputies in parliament were communists. Even if many have now changed their red coloration, these people have not given up their apparatus style, and their nomenklatura-- administrative methods of administration. Very many deputies are classic *apparatchiks*.

Nevertheless, although new elections are unquestionably necessary, it's obvious that we need to go into elections at a time that it is favorable. Only a political madman or someone without political experience would plan to hold new elections now. We have

entered a stage of shock therapy, [a] rupture of the old structure. The standard of living has fallen, in the near future there is going to be heavy unemployment, and it is natural that right now we are being cursed by many of our voters who originally had enthusiastically supported democracy.

If new elections were held today, the communists would come to power again. Of course we are in favor of new elections in principle, but not under [the] present conditions. When we emerge from the economic crisis [we can hold elections]. The current [parliamentary] term has two and a half years to go. In two years' time there is every chance that the country will have overcome the economic crisis. If this happens and living standards begin to improve significantly, we will have every chance of coming out afloat and proving capable of political action. Then we will not end up in opposition, but be able to continue carrying out historic reforms.

***Perspective: What are the main problems that Democratic Russia is having in building political support?***

The greatest danger we face is the lack of a financial base. Travkin's party and the centrists have a financial base, the Industrial Union has a powerful financial base, and so do the communists, but we don't, and we get no support from the state. It is only now that we are getting help from mid-sized and small businesses, which [are] beginning to understand that they need us as much as they need air, and to realize that [they] cannot survive unless democracy comes out victorious. But this support we get from business is still very weak. If we had a proper financial base our political strength would be much greater.

Our great hope at the moment is our second echelon, so to speak--the Public Committees for Reform (OKR), which are now represented in 60 *oblasti*. The committees are essentially controlled by Democratic Russia, although the OKRs have opened their doors wide for all other organizations to become members as well. These committees provide us with a political base for the next elections.

***Perspective:* How great in your view is the danger of a new totalitarianism--of antidemocratic forces gaining power? What if the economic situation deteriorates further?**

Everything depends on the economy--how much worse the economic situation gets, and how long it remains that way. I consider that the next six months will be the most critical, but if we get out of this crisis successfully, I don't believe there are any grounds to believe that there will be a rebirth of totalitarianism.

***Perspective:* Do you believe that a democratic system (*stroï*) has now become substantially rooted in Russia?**

Yes, I believe that, to a large extent, people have now become used to enjoying freedom of speech and of action in our country, and that we can rely on the civic consciousness of our citizens.

***Perspective:* So you are relatively optimistic about the prospects for democracy, provided that the economic situation does not deteriorate greatly?**

Yes, I am--on that condition.

***Perspective:* If the economic situation does improve, would you expect new elections to result in a stable democratic majority?**

Yes, at least we hope so. The most important thing now is that unquestionably the power of the communists has been significantly weakened.

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