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LARGE-SCALE ANTI-AMERICAN CAMPAIGN PLANNED IN
UKRAINE

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Since October 1 representatives from the headquarters of Ukrainian opposition presidential candidate Viktor Yushchenko have discovered over 150 tons of illegal election materials that are both anti-American and anti-Yushchenko (see samples at: www.ham.com.ua/index.php?action=black). The find, estimated at 300 million items, is a critical opposition victory that has undermined a major anti-Yushchenko/anti-American operation intended to flood Ukraine with millions of anti-Yushchenko posters and leaflets during the last week of the election campaign (www2.pravda.com.ua/archive/2004/october/6/4.shtml).

The anti-American posters, with slogans such as "Yankee Go Home!" completely undermine Ukraine's rationale for providing the fourth-largest military force within the U.S.-led coalition in Iraq. They also reveal the schizophrenic nature of Ukrainian foreign policy. The U.S. Embassy in Kyiv issued a strongly worded condemnation of the use of portraits of President George W. Bush and American national symbols: "The use of pictures of U.S. politicians and the U.S. flag on political posters in Ukraine is absolutely unacceptable" (Interfax-Ukraine, October 7).

The materials testify to the apparent desperation of the authorities, which have been reduced to such radical strategies after their candidate, Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovych, still trailed in the final weeks of the election campaign. The mass distribution of overtly hostile anti-American posters, reminiscent of the worst period of Soviet anti-Western propaganda, suggests that, "The authorities have come to realize that they will lose the elections," according to Yushchenko's election coalition. "This is the work of those who only yesterday called for the holding of a free presidential election campaign" (razom.org.ua, October 4).

On October 2, pro-Yushchenko parliamentary deputies from Our Ukraine and the Yulia Tymoshenko bloc raced to a warehouse near Kyiv where they found 10 tons of A3-size anti-Yushchenko/anti-American posters and leaflets. The warehouse was leased to a private company, Zahray. Guards advised the deputies that they were expecting delivery of another 14 tons of posters allegedly from the company "Agro." However, the real printing house was Novyi Druk. Some of the material was also prepared in Slovakia and Hungary and smuggled across the border. The parliamentary deputies next traveled to Novyi Druk in Kyiv where they found another 5 million of the offensive posters as well as leaflets promoting Yanukovych's campaign (ICTV, October 4).

Ukrainian election law requires that the name of the printer and the total number of items printed should be clearly stated so that the Central Election Commission (CEC) can track each candidate's spending. But based on this material, and numerous Yanukovich billboards around Ukraine, Yanukovich's team has far exceeded the 10 million hryvnia (\$2 million) spending limit. The materials discovered in Kyiv alone are valued at "hundreds of millions of dollars," and many more had already been distributed throughout Ukraine (Ukrayinska pravda, October 6).

The poster scandal took a difficult turn when the parliamentary deputies identified the owner of Novyi Druk: Viacheslav Pustovoitenko, son of former Prime Minister Valeriy Pustovoitenko, the current head of the pro-presidential People's Democratic Party (NDP). When Valeriy Pustovoitenko alleged that two of the opposition deputies had beaten his son, they countered that he had attempted to physically block their entrance into Novyi Druk (Ukrayinska pravda, October 4). Our Ukraine deputy Pavlo Kachur told parliament that the younger Pustovoitenko would be brought to justice for campaign violations. He also condemned the hypocrisy of the authorities who may declare their support for Ukraine's stability and sovereignty while, "in reality [they] are undertaking the political and social destabilization of Ukraine, dividing Ukraine, provoking inter-ethnic conflicts and propagating fascism" (razom.org.ua).

The Yanukovich team has tried to deflect unwanted attention over the posters. On October 4 two of the presidential candidates allied with Yanukovich, Oleksandr Bazyliuk of the Slavic Party and extreme right-winger Roman Kozak, were dispatched to the warehouse to claim the literature as theirs. But the stunt backfired as neither candidate could describe the materials they sought. Next, high-ranking Yanukovich supporters began making the bizarre claim that Yushchenko was himself behind the posters. Social Democratic United (SDPUo) parliamentary deputy Nestor Shufrych claimed that the entire volume of literature was a "provocation," as it had all been in reality printed by "the Viktor Yushchenko team" (Ukrayinska pravda, October 5). Stepan Havrysh, Yanukovich's representative to the CEC, claimed, "This is political PR, a provocation, which has as its aim to now direct attention to the repressed leader who represents the interests of the 'Strength of the People' bloc [i.e. Yushchenko]" (Ukrayinska pravda, October 6).

On October 5, an anonymous tip led to the discovery of a large cache of anti-Yushchenko/anti-American literature in the National Exhibition Center (NEC) (razom.org.ua/album/150/). A room 100 by 60 meters in size was found to be full of materials awaiting distribution around Ukraine. Besides the negative literature, there were also large volumes of Yanukovich posters and posters for the "pseudo-candidates" supporting Yanukovich. More negative materials were found the next day at yet another NEC warehouse. The NEC directors claimed that the two warehouses had been rented to a commercial firm and that they did not know what was stored there.

The situation at the Exhibition Center became tense when Yushchenko's supporters from parliament were joined by pro-presidential deputies from the SDPUo and Yanukovych's Regions of Ukraine. As both sides hurled accusations, riot police blocked the arrival of more Yushchenko supporters and prevented them from moving the literature to a safer location. The deputy head of the CEC, Yaroslav Davydovych, arrived only long enough to say that he would report the issue to the remainder of the Commission.

Popular distrust in the impartiality of the authorities during the elections is at an all-time low. Yushchenko, who is being treated in a Vienna clinic, refused to meet with the Prosecutor-General, whom he accused of being unwilling to investigate his poisoning (see EDM, October 6). His election team doubts that the CEC, the courts, or the Interior Ministry will undertake any legal action against those involved in printing 40 tons of illegal campaign materials. Yushchenko's team has nonetheless submitted the case to court, based on the argument that at least five articles in the criminal code and the constitution have been violated (razom.org.ua, October 5).