

RISING ABUSE OF STATE-ADMINISTRATIVE RESOURCES IN UKRAINIAN ELECTIONS

By Taras Kuzio

In late July, the Ukrainian Ministry of Families, Children, and Youth unofficially organized a youth forum to rally support for President Leonid Kuchma's candidate in the upcoming presidential elections, Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovych. Each oblast branch of the Ministry received instructions to organize "delegates" for the youth rally.

The Minister of Families, Children, and Youth is Valentyna Dovzhenko, who is also the leader of the Women for the Future party. Women for the Future, which ran in the 2002 parliamentary elections as a pro-Kuchma party but failed to cross the 4% threshold, back Yanukovych's candidacy.

The use and abuse of "state-administrative resources," was first tried in 1999, perfected in the 2002 elections, and is again quickly becoming a major issue in this year's election campaign. Opposition candidate Viktor Yushchenko complained to the Central Election Commission that local state administrations are actively campaigning for Yanukovych (Ukrainian News, July 15).

The pro-Kuchma camp has denied the allegation. First Deputy Head of the Presidential Administration Vasyl Baziv claimed, "The collection of signatures [for Yanukovych] are being undertaken by his elections centers, and not organs of the authorities" (Ukrayinskaya pravda, July 23). Interviewed by the Washington Times (July 9), Yanukovych declared, "I don't need elections at any price" and he pledged that the elections would be free and fair.

It is difficult to believe that Yanukovych has reformed. The 1999 and 2002 elections in Donetsk oblast, when he was still regional governor there, were falsified. In a conversation taped by Mykola Melnychenko between President Kuchma and Governor Yanukovych, the then Donetsk governor said, "Well Leonid Danylovych, a miracle does not happen. The boys who were put in place fulfilled what was asked of them. And, in reality [Oleksandr] Moroz came third. Basically he received 12-13%" (Ukrayinska pravda, July 14). Moroz was officially given 6% in Donetsk. The Our Ukraine movement's 2002 election result in Donetsk oblast was also reduced from 8-10% to less than 4%, thereby ensuring they would not enter parliament. The April Mayoral elections in Mukachiv and the June parliamentary elections in Poltava oblast have been widely condemned for fraud on the part of state authorities. Yet President Kuchma even awarded a state medal to the head of the Mukachiv Territorial Election Commission (Ukrayinska pravda, July 7).

The use and abuse of state-administrative resources is ongoing. Examples such as Mukachiv and Poltava make it difficult to accept claims by Serhiy Tyhipko, head of Yanukovych's election campaign, that, "I will do everything so that the campaign goes transparently, openly, and in a maximum way democratically without quarrels and administrative resources" (Ukrayinska pravda, July 15).

The head of the Kharkiv state administration, Yevhen Kushnariov, openly conceded that state-administrative resources would be abused because of the minimal political culture and disrespect for the rule of law in Ukraine (Ukrainian News, July 16). Yanukovich's top aide, Volodymyr Rybak, even admitted, "I, for example, am in favor of harnessing administrative resources in total" (Ukrayinska pravda, July 22). To minimize the potential for such manipulation, Kushnariov recommended that governors be popularly elected, rather than appointed by the executive.

However, Kushnariov has himself abused state-administrative resources to support Yanukovich. He organized a pro-Yanukovich rally on July 14 that was attended by some 70,000 Kharkiv residents. Most of the crowd turned out because employees in state enterprises and state institutions had been ordered to attend on threat of losing their jobs or being expelled from their university. The Kharkiv branch of Yushchenko's election campaign received hundreds of complaints from local residents who had been forced to attend the rally (yuschenko.com.ua, July 20). Similarly, Transport Minister Herhiy Kirpa's newly established pro-Kuchma Revival Party reportedly is forcing employees in the transportation sector to join under threat of losing their jobs or vacation leave (Ukrayinska Pravda, July 13 and 17).

How much this type of abuse of state-administrative resources will backfire against the authorities is difficult to foretell. Yushchenko's supporters handed out campaign literature at the Kharkiv rally, which were eagerly taken (Ukrayina moloda, July 15).

When asked about the Kharkiv rally, Tyhipko replied, "Administrative resources should not be used in any way." His reasoning was not based on principles, but because, Tyhipko said, "I fear that it [administrative resources] will bury the candidate and his best qualities" (Ukrayinska pravda, July 15). Attempts to portray Yanukovich in a better light, particularly by papering over his prison record, will obviously fail if such blatant abuses continue. Anatoliy Kinakh, the dissident candidate from the pro-Kuchma camp, warned his colleagues, "I am certain that those who dream about victory obtained only on the basis of administrative resources or domination of the media are deeply wrong" (Ukrayinska pravda, July 10).

The Kuchma camp has utilized state resources in several ways. Meetings have been held in factories or town halls where employees are "advised" by state bureaucrats about which candidate to pick. Reports of people being forced to sign pre-printed texts in support of Yanukovich have appeared throughout Ukraine, ranging from librarians in Lviv oblast, residency associations and students in Sumy, to medical staff and patients in Odessa (Ukrayinska pravda, July 21 and 22). Each signature is reportedly worth one hryvnia (about 20 cents). Teachers are sent instructions to take to the streets and support Yanukovich when he visits a city (razom.org.ua, June 30). According to Yanukovich's election team, they have already collected one million signatures, when the election law only requires candidates to collect 500,000 (TV Channel 5, July 21)

Other tactics include pressuring bus companies to refuse to transport opposition supporters to rallies (<http://maidan.org.ua>, July 4), closing roads,

and denying access to meeting facilities or public squares for opposition rallies (Ukrayinska pravda, June 29).

State-administrative resources can play both a negative role against the authorities but, at the same time, they can also assist them in winning elections. They can provide the 5-10% vote margin to tip the balance in closely fought elections, such as the upcoming presidential race in Ukraine (Ukrayina moloda, July 3).