

## **BEREZOVSKY HOPES TO SELL ORANGE REVOLUTION TO RUSSIA**

**By Taras Kuzio**

Exiled Russian oligarch Boris Berezovsky is planning to visit Ukraine in the very near future, a trip that may prove uncomfortable for Ukrainian authorities because of two factors.

First, Berezovsky may plan to be in Ukraine when Russian President Vladimir Putin arrives on March 19. Berezovsky obtained political asylum in the United Kingdom by convincing the British government that Putin wanted him dead. The two men remain bitter enemies.

Berezovsky has been linked to at least one scandalous attempt to undermine Putin's public image. During the March 2004 Russian presidential elections presidential candidate Ivan Rybkin, head of the Berezovsky-funded Liberal Russia Party disappeared. When he was found, Rybkin claimed that he had been lured to Kyiv and drugged.

Second, Berezovsky's trip may be part of an effort to research how best to export Ukraine's Orange Revolution to Russia. Berezovsky told Glavred that a "third Russian revolution," as he called Russia's pending popular revolution, "will definitely happen. And it will happen soon. The opposition are all those who do not agree with the current regime. And they are in the majority in Russia today" (glavred.info, March 11).

Berezovsky is rumored to be interested in purchasing a Ukrainian television station to transmit Russian-language programs not only inside Ukraine but also to Russia, especially programs critical of Putin's regime.

Berezovsky has some strange bedfellows in his effort to export revolution to Russia. In January the weakest wing of the PORA student movement, dubbed "Yellow PORA" for the color of its insignia, announced that one of its three avenues of activity in the post-Kuchma era would be to export revolution to other post-Soviet states. The other branch, Black PORA, opted to remain a non-governmental organization and is more pessimistic about the possibilities of "exporting" the revolution.

PORA may consider revolution as a way to exact revenge. On the eve of Putin's visit to Ukraine,

PORA has demanded that Russia "apologize" for its interference in Ukraine's 2004 presidential elections (Ukrayinska pravda, March 17).

A Russian wing of Yellow PORA was created in December 2004 in order to harness the experience of successful democratic revolutions in Serbia, Georgia, and Ukraine (pora.org.ru). At a press conference in Kyiv, the leaders announced their intention to back former Prime Minister Mikhail Kasyanov in the 2008 Russian presidential elections as Russia's version of Viktor Yushchenko. Kasyanov has, Russian PORA admitted, still to be approached on this question (Ukrayinska pravda, March 15). Russia's PORA held its press conference in Kyiv because opposition forces cannot operate openly in Russia. Group leaders admit to having contacts with Berezovsky because they share "similar views about the state of affairs in our country [Russia]." Russia's PORA would seem a prime target for Berezovsky's funding.

The Ukrainian authorities have quickly distanced themselves from plans to export revolution. They are plainly aware that the political forces that lost the 2004 elections, such as former prime minister Viktor Yanukovich's Regions of Ukraine and the Communists, are likely to receive financing from Russia.

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Borys Tarasyuk told Kommersant (March 17) that Ukraine would not be exporting revolution. Rightly, Tarasyuk stated that no amount of transplanting would be sufficient if there were no home base ready for a revolution. Tarasyuk did, however, say with obvious pride that that the Orange Revolution "has become a magnet that is attracting fighters for liberty."

Ironically, Tarasyuk is ignoring the fact that the Rukh party, which he heads, has begun close cooperation with Yellow PORA, the very wing most interested in exporting revolution. It is difficult to see how he will reconcile his party's political ambitions with the demands of his government position.

Besides Russian PORA, Berezovsky's second ally is Mykola Melnychenko, the former Ukrainian presidential guard who illicitly taped conversations in President Kuchma's office. Berezovsky's Foundation has underwritten the transcription of the Melnychenko tapes since he fled to the United States in April 2001.

Berezovsky claimed that one of the main reasons the Ukrainian authorities are taking so long in deliberating whether to give him a visa is that he allegedly knows too much about the murder of opposition journalist Heorhiy Gongadze. Is Berezovsky planning to make public some of the

transcribed tapes when he visits Kyiv? If so, the release would provoke severe problems in Ukrainian-Russian relations and within Ukraine itself (Izvestiya, March 17).

Berezovsky's third strange bedfellow is Oleksandr Volkov, a former lower-ranking Ukrainian oligarch and adviser to Kuchma during his first term in office (1994-99). Volkov has announced that he would meet Berezovsky at the airport and that Berezovsky would stay at Volkov's home in Kyiv. "Berezovsky was and remains my close colleague and brother," he told Ukrayinska pravda (March 15).

Berezovsky's ties to Volkov arise from close, possibly corrupt, business dealings in the 1990s. During Kuchma's second term in office (1999-2004) Volkov was progressively marginalized, and he defected to the Yushchenko camp in 2004. He is actually closer to Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko, another dissident oligarch who initially made her capital in the 1990s as CEO of Ukraine's United Energy Systems. What unites Berezovsky, Volkov, and Tymoshenko is that they all became dissident oligarchs after 2000.

As with so many facets of Berezovsky, his Volkov connection contradicts that of his link to Melnychenko. Volkov's involvement in corruption was first exposed in Ukrayinska pravda shortly before its editor, Gongadze, was kidnapped on September 16, 2000. Volkov is reportedly heard on the Melnychenko tapes talking with Kuchma about Gongadze.