

"Rainbow warriors"

Vol. 4, No. 102, February 16, 1998

... Like seven colors of a rainbow, seven principles characterize the direction and purpose of our pre-election program... (Election agenda of the bloc of the Socialist and the Peasants' Parties "For the Truth, the People, Ukraine")

The "rainbow" of principles, defined by its creators as "Ukraine's Bright Prospects in Town and Village", includes slogans equally good for a demonstration of left-wingers as well as of right-wing forces:

"All Power to the People and the Law! Reforms for the Good of Ukraine! Renaissance of production for the sake of a human being! The village will save Ukraine if we save the village! Well-being and social justice! Spirituality, humanity, friendship of peoples! Sovereignty, security and partnership of the equal!"

Indeed, the slogans differ in colors from hard-line Communist crimson through collective farm red and soft Socialist rosy, to moderate Social Democratic hues, while appeals for spirituality, sovereignty and security, no matter what Socialists and Peasants imply in these notions, make the agenda acceptable for potential voters beyond the traditional left-wing electorate. However, Oleksandr Moroz may discover that he is losing voters to his more radical and vocal left-wing competitors, and that even his carefully worded socially-oriented agenda and repeated anti-NATO and anti-western statements may not suffice for winning a clear majority. After all, the Socialist-Peasant bloc has to compete for the bold and devoted electorate with the relatively disciplined and enthusiastic team of Petro Symonenko, as well as for more moderate voters - with the financial resources and influence of left centrists, primarily Pavlo Lazarenko's Hromada and the Social Democratic Party (United) led by Kravchuk and Marchuk.

Competing with Communists in producing populist accusations of the "ruling criminal-mafiosi antisocial regime" and referring to power currently held by "dirty hands of illicitly enriched scoundrels", the temporarily united Socialists and Peasants argue they do not declare "demagogic slogans" and stress their consistent campaign for "interests of a worker and a peasant, a doctor and a teacher, a scientist and an artist, a student and a veteran, a soldier and an officer, a decent entrepreneur and a law enforcement officer". Like their left-wing competitors, they call for "radical change of the current damaging 'reform' course" and declare their aims to be as follows:

- halting the economic crisis, ensuring growth, renaissance of national production, effective control over the banking system, strategic and profitable markets;
- effective regulation of prices, reduction of taxes for manufacturers;
- rising purchase power and real personal incomes;
- privatization only for creation of new jobs and filling the budget.

The bloc's agrarian program is given a special emphasis. Specifically, it includes:

- making agriculture a real priority, investing in agrarian production and infrastructure, changing pricing policy to benefit agrarian manufacturers, encouraging large producers;
- halting purchase of food supplies abroad;
- subsidizing national manufacturers, granting state orders for key products;
- strong opposition to selling and buying land, especially to and by foreigners.

The social pledges include elimination of unemployment, revision of the salary and pension systems, raising salaries, pensions and social benefits, maintaining legitimate compensations and benefits, as

well as returning lost savings, halting the "criminal practice" of delaying payment of wages and social security benefits.

Being aware of growing resentment of regional authorities over their dependence on the center, the bloc vows to pursue a regional policy that would give more independence to the regions and allow them to keep much of their revenues.

Like other left-wingers, Socialists and Peasants accuse international financial institutions for "humiliation" and "dictating" to Ukraine and pledge to prevent it "from becoming a colony" of the Western capital. The foreign policy agenda focuses on development of "brother relations" with "the Slavic world, primarily Russia and Belarus".

Who is expected to vote for the Socialist-Peasant block?

The agenda specifically pledges to respect traditional left-wing electorate - veterans of war and labor, the disabled veterans of the World War II - as well as Afghan veterans, Chernobyl victims and "liquidators". These categories of potential voters are promised special access to free medical service and medicine. Women are promised a "decent place" in the society, and young people are offered the prospect to get education and housing loans. Other necessary ingredients of the social part of the agenda need no comments: priority of science and culture, equal development of all languages, "especially of Ukrainian and Russian", preventing interethnic ire and interference with religious matters. Similarly to all other parties, blocks and individual pretenders, the Socialists-Peasants vow to reintroduce discipline, order in the state, security and freedom of people, and to put all criminals to jail.

What should one expect if the Socialists and the Peasants do get the majority of seats? According to the agenda, they will start with separation of state property from private property, nationalization of enterprises of key strategic branches - metallurgy, machine-building and chemical industries, the fuel and energy complex. To that they will add state protectionism for the agro-industrial complex. Less credible are vows to ensure due funding of education, science and culture and guaranteed free health care, preschool, secondary, vocational and higher education in state-owned institutions. Declared measures of fighting organized crime and corruption will include "suing officials who took part in the total ruination of the economic basis of the society or sponsored it [i.e., the ruination]."

While the bloc's election list of "decent, competent and responsible" candidates includes too many businessmen and influential officeholders to expect that Mr. Moroz will be allowed to implement his left-wing pledges by means of reintroducing Soviet-style economic and political practices, the bloc's financial sponsors, once becoming MPs, may press for reprivatization and changing economic legislation for their benefits. Together with left-centrists, they may form a core of vehement critics of President Kuchma's reforms - or the lack of them.