

WASHING AWAY POWER: LOCAL CPSU NOMENCLATURE DURING THE LATE AND POST-SOVIET PERIOD (1985-2015)¹

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March 2015 marks the 30th anniversary of Gorbachev beginning perestroika. What path has Russia taken since that time and what became of the Communist Party nomenclature? What positions did they come to occupy over the last three decades and what positions do they occupy now? These lesser-discussed but crucially important aspects to post-Soviet power transition (especially at the sub-regional level) will be the chief focus of our article.

Key words: SPSU, Soviet Union, contemporary Russia, nomenclature, elites, power transition, sub-regional level, perestroika.

I. Introduction

We have undertaken an inter-regional comparison of seven subjects of the Russian Federation: the Ryazan, Samara, Tambov, and Ulyanovsk oblasts and the Republics of Mordovia, Udmurtia, and Chuvashia. This approach we feel creates an adequate field for analysis as it encompasses two oblasts each from the Volga and Central

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Russian regions (these are traditional subjects for comparison in Russia) as well as three national republics with their extraordinarily high political diversity. The principal results of the project have already been published [1-4]. However, in Russia over the past 10 years, new elections were held.

Table 1

Electoral procedures for city heads and rural raion administrations in Russia (1991-2015)

№	Periods	Forms
1.	1991	Appointment
2.	1996	Direct elections
3.	2000	Direct elections
4.	2004	Direct elections
5.	2008-2010	Mixed electoral system
6.	2012-2014	Mixed electoral system

In Russia sub-regional authority was first appointed in 1991 and then elected through five electoral cycles (1996, 2000, 2004, 2008-2010, 2012-2014). Two new electoral cycles have occurred, thus creating a need to continue the research. This article is a report made by the authors in ICCEES IX World Congress, Makuhari, Japan, 3-8 August 2015.

II. The Collision: 1991

Recall the historical context: the autumn of 1991 was the zenith of Yeltsin's glory as concerns societal support (not popularity, mind you, but glory in the pop-culture movie-star sense). This glory was marked by the ovations from oblast committees, the renaming of newspapers, the removal of Derzhinskii's statue from Lyubyanka Square and the naked pursuit of the local nomenclature with the shrill question – *where were you on August 19?* In a word, it was the apotheosis of an emergent *anti-communist* democratic country. The new authority would be able to begin its reign with great fanfare and, in the sense of obtaining legitimacy, with great effectiveness. The way was open and obvious – if you could win through general, fair, direct, and transparent elections, in direct contradiction to the Soviet

experience, you could be infused by the process with a true democratic *essence*. Such a task seemed wholly attainable.

But if that was the case, why weren't there such elections? The official explanation always returned first to the danger of a communist retrenchment, of a new August putsch: that the extraordinary circumstances brought the threat of the Russian state's actual dissolution. These maxims (*Don't let the Russian Federation suffer the same fate of the Soviet Union!*) were widely distributed both for public consumption and the scholarly community. Thus, the new Russia missed its chance for constituent elections (i.e., missed its chance for making a real movement to democracy) and began instead a transition to a more 'culturally appropriate Russian way.' Ultimately, this was in fact a tremendous mistake by the new authorities, a barrier to the democratization of the country, a blow to the party system, and a main source of the bitter conflict that would emerge between the President and Federal Parliament.

In our view this mistake was largely false and man-made, connected with a critically low-brow and peculiar world-view that was seemingly innate to the post-putsch Russian leadership. The new residents of the Kremlin not only understandably feared the Communist party, but they also didn't believe in the personal victory they had just achieved and were not ready to fulfill a more responsible governance role. They possessed neither the statesman's demeanor nor the legislative experience and thus found themselves buried deep in the captivity of decades-long complexes and stereotypes. From this foundation they inevitably positioned themselves like a fortress under siege and treated all around them as if they were enemies, actual or potential.

The Presidium of the Verkhovnii Soviet of the RSFSR, which had just before been a supporter of Yeltsin in opposition to the Soviet Union central government, adopted a decision on September 6, 1991 to allow for the direct election of the heads of regional administrations beginning on November 24, 1991. However the decision was subsequently vetoed: analysts for "Democratic Russia" prognosticated a tremendous defeat for the supporters of the President (at best they felt there might be 10 or 12 victories versus 36 *iron-clad* defeats). It was this very prognosis, which subsequently proved to be

partly mistaken, that served as the basis for the realization of the “executive vertical.” As a result of this dramatic struggle the Russian Congress of People’s Deputies acquiesced to a resolution on November 1, 1991 that effectively placed a moratorium on elections across all administrative levels until December 1, 1992. Thus, in 1991 the new authority de facto rejected constituent elections and began a “democratic” transition in the style of a Byzantine court. The procedure they developed, born from the President’s inner circle, was quite simple: the President would appoint governors while these, in turn, would appoint the heads of sub-regional administrations. In this way, the glow of democratic victory following the August coup led immediately to the very same democrats turning their backs on democracy for the rest of the country moving forward. If Lenin felt he needed a vanguard of the proletariat, Yeltsin’s team apparently felt it needed the exact same for democracy.

Table 2

Recruiting the heads of City and Raion administration (1991-1992)

Heads	R Y A Z A N	S A M R A	T A M B O V	U L Y A N O V S K	M O R D O V I A	U D M U R T I A	C H U V A S I A	I N T O S T A L	%
1 st secretary	5	10	4	7	2	4	1	33	16,6
2 nd secretary		1		1				2	1,0
Chair, Dep. Chair, Soviets	1	1	1	1		1	3	8	4,0
Chair, Dep.Chair, Exec. So- viets	21	21	15	10	15	13	14	109	54,8
Directorate	2	2	6	3	5	11	6	35	17,6
Others			4	2	3	1	2	12	6,0
In Sum	29	35	30	24	25	30	26	199	100

In more than half of the cases (52 %), the heads of administration were recruited directly from the chairs of the city and raion executive committees. The directorate and first secretaries lagged significantly behind, with only 17.6 % and 16.6 % respectively. The chairs and deputy chairs of the *soviets*, as well as the deputy chairs of the executive committees, added to the surprisingly impressive success of Soviet apparatchiks (5.1 % and 4.6 % respectively). In total it worked out that 117 people came to leadership positions in the sub-regions (58.4 %) directly from the Soviet nomenclature apparatus. Most importantly, there were no striking inter-regional differences with this percentage, only a few minor exceptions. In Ryazan Oblast, the chairs of the executive committees of the Soviets achieved an extraordinary 75.9 %. In Samara Oblast, the divergent result came from the first secretaries with 28.6%. In Udmurtia, the directors were greatly represented with 34.5 %.

What accounts for this relative lack of success of the first secretaries? We surmise the continuous rotation of the oblast committee first secretaries (it subsequently came to be commonly known as the *cadre meatgrinder*), organized by the general secretary across the top echelons of the party hierarchy, created a de facto collapsing interchangeability at the sub-regional level.

Table 3

**Interchangeability of City and Raion First Secretaries
of the Communist Party of USSR**

Region	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	In Sum
Ryazan	6	12	5	9	5		4	41
Samara	6	1	5	6	1	9	5	33
Tambov	7	2	9	6	3	3	13	45
Ulyanovsk	7	2	8	4	2	11	2	36
Mordovia	6	2	4	9	4	18	1	42
Udmurtia	5	4	7	9	1	22	1	49
Chuvashia		2	5	6	6	12	2	33
In Sum	37	25	43	49	22	75	28	279
%	13,3	8,9	15,4	17,6	7,9	26,9	10,0	100

The continuous shifting of first secretaries across various locations placed them in a tremendously difficult position. Many who

appeared in the sub-regions for the first time were immediately placed in the position of first secretary. For a non-competitive system with a continuous rotation of cadres this would have been almost normal. In a competitive system this made the first secretaries politically doomed. Recall that in March 1990 Gorbachev became the President of the USSR and allowed for the simultaneous holding of dual political office, thereby crudely raising the status of local *soviet* leaders. The elections for these local *soviet* deputies in 1990 became a bitter pill for the city and raion first secretaries. They were charged with the difficult task of finding a way to be elected to these local *soviets* and then subsequently head them. Those who did not succeed were consequently relieved of their right to head the city and raion committees. In the majority of cases where the first secretaries succeeded in becoming the leaders of the local *soviets*, they usually found themselves in collision with the directors of local industry (for example, in Samara and Ulyanovsk Oblasts and the Republic of Udmurtia.)

Table 4

Chairs of local *Soviets* (elections of 1990)

Region	1 st Secretary	Secretary	Chair, 1 st Dep. Chair of Exec. Committee	Others (Directorate)	In Sum in the sub- regions
Ryazan	25	1	-	3	29
Samara	22	3	1	9	35
Tambov	22	3	-	5	30
Ulyanovsk	21	-	2	2	25
Mordovia	18	1	2	3	24
Udmurtia	15	2	5	8	30
Chuvashia	19	1	2	4	26
In Sum	142	11	12	34	199
%	71,3	5,5	6,1	17,1	100

This collision produced a direct hit on the authority of the first secretaries acting as the new chairs of local *soviets* and felt like someone was playing a cruel joke on them (in Tambov Oblast and the Republic of Chuvashia, for example). This “contra-elite” worked against the first secretaries/new *soviet* chairs, blocking all their attempts to penetrate the elite local power structure. Recruiting for the

new elite thus came mostly from an old reservoir of power – the old guard Soviet party nomenclature with its preservation of an unadulterated pre-Perestroika rhetoric and access to local insider knowledge. In opposition to this development a democratic movement did try to emerge simultaneously at the local level, but in reality the aforementioned contra-elites had already formed the irrefutable foundation of regional power by 1991.

In the regions, where the successes of the first secretaries had been more humble in 1990, an immediate substitution was consequently made in favor of the chairs of the city and raion executive committees. Thus, the new federal authorities by 1991 had placed a risky political wager on their success. This was most easily symbolized by President Yeltsin’s decree on July 20, 1991, ‘About the dismantling of the party’ (*O departizatsii*). In the Republic of Mordovia, for example, the local apparatchiks reacted to the decree by being totally demoralized and were subsequently more preoccupied with finding new work. In the Republic of Bashkortastan only 34 city and raion secretaries remained, in Tambov Oblast only 13. In most cases replacements would end up being second secretaries who had no future prospects. These substitutions would succeed in place for only a few weeks at most, while some only managed to work in these positions for just a few days. These people were nearly without authority and wholly unsuited for the role of head of the local administration. The only remaining ‘choice’ to the first secretaries, becoming a source of regional support for the federal center, was not much better.

Table 5

“Agents of Influence” for the federal center in the regions

Region	Name of regional leader	Mini-political bio	Sub-regional politics
Ryazan	L.P. Bashmakov (appointed)	Industrial director, Chair of Oblast Ex- ec. Committee (1988-1990)	The domination of the chair and his recent subordinates
Samara	K.A. Titov (appointed)	Deputy director of “Informatika”, Chair of city <i>soviet</i> (1990)	Support the exec. committee chair and his recent sub- ordinates

Region	Name of regional leader	Mini-political bio	Sub-regional politics
Tambov	V.D. Babenko (appointed)	Chief doctor of Oblast Hospital (1977-1991), People's Deputy of RSFSR (1990)	Support the exec. Committee chair and agricultural directors
Ulyanovsk	V.V. Malafeev (appointed, 10/24/1991-11/2/1991) Y.F. Goryachev (appointed)	Director of "Kontaktor", First sec. of oblast comm. CPSU (1990), chair of oblast <i>soviet</i> (1990)	Support the exec. Committee chair and agricultural directors
Mordovia	V.D. Guslyannikov (elected President of Mordovia, 12/22/1991)	Senior scholar of NPO, People's Deputy (1990)	Support the exec. Committee chair and agricultural directors
Udmurtia	V.K. Tubilov N.E. Mironov	Chair of Supreme Soviet (1990) Chair SM (1989)	Support the exec. Committee chair and agricultural directors
Chuvashia	Presidential elections in 1991 did not achieve results E.A. Kybarev N.A. Zaitsev	Chair of Supreme Soviet (1991) Chair of SM (1989)	Support the exec. Committee chair and agricultural directors

“Partycrat” Y.F. Goryachev (Ulyanovsk Oblast), industrialist L.P. Bashmakov (Ryazan Oblast), academic V.D. Guslyannikov (Republic of Mordovia), doctor V.D. Babenko (Tambov Oblast), дума deputies V.K. Tubilov, N.E. Mironov (Republic of Udmurtia) and E.A. Kubarev, N.A. Zaitsev (Republic of Chuvashia), all were chosen according to one stark logic: chief support fell on the chairs of the local executive committees as they were the least politically dangerous. If for whatever reason the chairs were inappropriate, then the choice fell on the industrialists. Only in those instances where both chairs and industrialists were not available did they seek out “loyal” first secretaries of the new authority, capable actors of the democratic movement, or people who had fallen out of the nomenclature during the Soviet era. Indeed this process of appointing first secretaries was done only with great reluctance. The only exception to this process seemed to be K.A. Titov in Samara.

It was because of this that the first secretaries only managed to maintain their positions in 15% of the cases. Simultaneously, a small part of their number (less than 10%) did not fall from the nomenclature but simply exited into the oblast structures, as the new heads of local administration needed experienced and young administrators. These first secretaries of the provinces who ended up in the oblast centers were not considered dangerous and therefore acceptable. For example, first secretary of the Kotovsk city committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union O.I. Betin became the first deputy for the head of the Tambov Oblast administration in 1999. Betin would then become Governor of Tambov Oblast and has remained in this position. In this way nearly a quarter of the leaders of the sub-regions were able to preserve a primary spot for themselves in the local organs of power.

III. The Transformation: 1992-2015

The above explains why the events of 1991 did not allow the first secretaries many chances to hold on to their former positions of power. At best, only a few of them were able to hold on to power at the sub-regional level. This collision of appointments happened throughout 1991-1992. It is now necessary to move forward, discussing the developments that have emerged since the fall of the Soviet Union. After this appointing collision, the sub-regions in Russia went through three electoral cycles (the mid-1990s, the late 1990s, and the early 2000s). Each successive cycle further weakened the position of the first secretaries. Each successive election the first secretaries suffered losses of around 50%: the first cycle put an end to their dominant leadership role in the sub-regions; the second cycle displayed the futility in attempting to return to power; and the third cycle basically ended as a total fiasco for the former first secretaries.

What accounts for these trends across the electoral cycles? This ‘washing away’ of the party nomenclature out of the local administration system can be explained through a number of circumstances. During the elections of the mid-1990s the first secretaries who remained in power largely conceded to one of two groups: either to the minions of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF)

or to the local industrialists/businessmen (ironically, these candidates were often overlapping in the sub-regions).

Table 6

**First secretaries of the City and Raion Committees of the CPSU –
subregional leaders**
(<+> = appointment of first secretaries as heads of administration
[between elections])
(<-> = removal of first secretaries as heads of administration
[between elections])

№	Subregion	Appointment (1991-92; 1992-96)	1 st	2 nd	3 rd	4 rd	5 rd
			Electoral Cycle (1996; 1997-00)	Electoral Cycle (2001-04)	Electoral Cycle (2004)	Electoral Cycle (2008- 2010)	Electoral Cycle (2012- 2014)
1	Ryazan	5	5	7	5	1	0
2	Samara	10+1	5	5	4	0	0
3	Tambov	4+3-3	5-1	3	0	0	0
4	Ulyanovsk	7+1-1	4	1	0	0	0
5	Mordovia	2	3-1	0	0	0	0
6	Udmurtiya	4+1-3	2	2	2	0	0
7	Chuvashia	1+1-1	3+2-1	5-4	1	0	0
	In Sum	33+7-8	27+2-3	23-4	12	1	0

During this time the opposition leaders within the CPRF were concentrated mostly in the local legislative organs (the Soviets and Dumas) and were continuously on the attack. For them, the first secretaries – whether they be the heads of administration already or simply candidates for the position – were traitors and opponents to their overall agenda. In Tambov Oblast, for example, during the elections for the head of the Muchkapskoi raion administration in December 1996, the raion committee for the CPRF issued a summons for its members to vote for A.V. Trubnikov as first secretary of the raion committee. Trubnikov was at the time only a farmer and had as the height of his Soviet career a position as instructor of the agricultural division of the raion committee of the CPSU. As a result, nine candidates ended up being carried to victory across the oblast because of the support of the CPRF. Amongst them were only three former first secretaries (Uvarovo, Staryuryevskii, and Mordvoskii

raions). Fascinatingly and contrary to the scholarly literature in the West, the Tambov communists simply ignored the former party nomenclature. The organizational structures of the CPRF instead supported representatives from the powerful industrial elite, who had been almost wholly unconnected to the former nomenclature.

The elections in the late 1990s clearly demonstrated that the only leader capable of mobilizing the popular vote was one that had become part of some clan, namely, one that was pro-presidential. At the local level a peculiar ‘party of power’ arose again and again – formed from the various politico-economic groups that were stable enough to be consolidated around formal and informal leaders. The unity of such structures was established through official coordination, informal connections, coinciding interests on the personal front, and the manipulation of extreme dependence. The elections in the early 2000s only strengthened that trend toward clan development. Unfortunately for them, a place for the first secretaries really was not part of this new power structure. It quickly became clear to them, however, that there were other options, post-USSR, for achieving a more-or-less comfortable standard of living outside the organs of local administration. In fact, it would be more accurate to say that only the *less successful* first secretaries were ultimately recruited into the organs of local administration. For obvious financial reasons, these administrative positions were clearly on a secondary level in terms of priority. Two other sectors were more ideal and preferred: head in the direction of industrial activity, as captains of new industry emerging with the privatization of state property, or the pursuit of positions within the oblast administrative structures. Regardless of the choice, both of these options were attractive in comparison with local administrations because of their swift opportunities for personal enrichment. And so, where does that leave scholars if they seek to find the footprints of the sub-regions’ original ‘local heroes’? What became of them and what finally were their long-term career trajectories?

IV. The post-Soviet careers of City and Raion first secretaries

The post-Soviet career of city and raion first secretaries evolved along six trajectories:

First trajectory: ‘The Boom – jumping to a new system.’

This trajectory comprised governors, vice-governors, heads of oblast administrative structures, and top managers. It was less than 10% of the overall nomenclature and was marked by an ability to achieve increases in overall authoritative capacity. In 1991-1992 they became the new authority and ultimately the self-interested protectors of the new order. These figures would have likely achieved a comparable status within the Soviet Union with but one significant difference: under the new system they were incomparably better off financially.

Second trajectory: ‘The Preservation – successfully maintaining the continuation of administrative-political activism.’

This trajectory was comprised largely of the heads of oblast and raion administrations and was about 15% of the overall nomenclature. These figures managed to sustain their pre-1991 levels of authority. They did not form a support network for the new powers within the system (as this effort would be politically dangerous) and by the mid-1990s had achieved an administrative distance between themselves and the top trajectory.

Third trajectory: ‘The Quasi-Survival – remaining in the system of administration but suffering a reduction in authority to secondary roles within municipal structures.’

This trajectory comprised the largest percentage of the nomenclature, nearly 35%, and included the deputy heads of city and raion administration, the chairs and deputy chairs of city and raion *soviets*, and municipal workers who had a higher administrative status pre-1991. These successes did sometimes become significant: across a majority of sub-regions (57.1%) the first secretaries succeeded by 1990 in combining their post with another, usually chair of the local *soviets*. The dissolution of all local *soviets*, however, in 1993 ended this opportunity.

Fourth trajectory: ‘The Exchange – voluntarily transitioning away from political authority toward economic opportunities.’

This trajectory was the second largest category (25%) and was comprised of the managers/directors of industry. A large number of industrial managers came into the party organs by answering the “Gor-

bachev summons” during the second half of the 1980s, as Gorbachev sought to produce a swift transformation of party cadres. This status gave them a significant advantage when the privatization of industry and agriculture began. These managers and directors eagerly returned to what was for them a more comfortable and habitual role of activity and quickly established for themselves an enviable standard of living.

Fifth trajectory: ‘The Orthodox – resisting the new system.’ Comprising only 10% of the overall nomenclature, this group was mostly made up of the first secretaries of the official raion and city branches of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation. They successfully clung to their orthodox rhetoric and became ideological fighters against the new system. In the first half of the 1990s this trend was actually rather popular. The calculation to pursue this course of action paid off in the success of G.A. Zyuganov as a potential candidate for Russian Federation President and in their own personal success as the most believable and trusted heads of local administration. In the present day such opposition to the authority of V.V. Putin is not only futile but almost masochistic. Today this trajectory is basically closed.

Sixth trajectory: ‘The Exit – retiring into the pension system.’ This age group, who were mainly the most elderly first secretaries of the local Communist Party branches, made up only 5% of the total nomenclature. For the most part they put in for retirement immediately after the failed coup attempt in 1991.

This presentation has elaborated six trajectories which explain the general mutation and flow of authority and power of the sub-regional party nomenclature after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. While this article certainly provides proof of the fusion between municipal service and business, it also shows the subtlety and diversity of options from which the late-stage Soviet nomenclature was able to choose. Clearly some options for lines of authority dominated over others. What should be emphasized, however, is how closely those choices ultimately gave foreshadowing for some of the most signifi-

cant problems and flaws that would occur throughout the 1990s and beyond as Russia tried to complete its transition to democracy and a free-market economy. The poor choices and frustrations of the sub-regional nomenclature were often ultimately mirrored in poor choices and frustrations within the transition at the federal level. Today, the chain follows thusly:

1991 – Manager with work experience in Soviet organs (so-called «the Soviet nomenclature»).

1996 – Manager Nomenclature of the Soviet era.

2000 – Non-nomenclature Managers, placed by clans.

2004 – Non-nomenclature Managers plus other persons, also placed by clans.

2008-2010 – Peoples from outside, *Varangians* (Businessmen and Intelligence officers).

2012-2014 – *Varangians* somewhat transformed into a new type, but still close to the governors.

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