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postmasters 459 w 19 street nyc 10011 212 727 3323

fax 212 229 2829

postmasters@thing.net

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ENGINEERS OF THE SOUL Инженеры человеческих душ 人类灵魂的工程师

The Tower: A Songspiel A film by Chto Delat



Director: Tsaplya (Olga Egorova)
Screenplay: Chto Delat
Composer: Mikhail Krutik
Set: Dmitry Vilensky and Gluklya (Natalya Pershina)
Choreography: Nina Gasteva, Mikhail Ivanov and Tsaplya
Editing: Vilensky and Tsaplya
Director of Photography: Artyom Ignatov
Sound: Alexander Dudarev

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This film is the final part in a trilogy of socially engaged musicals that the Chto Delat collective began work on in 2008. This cycle includes the video films *Perestroika Songspiel: Victory over the Coup* (2008) and *Partisan Songspiel: A Belgrade Story* (2009). Filmed in April 2010, *The Tower: A Songspiel* is based on real documents of Russian social and political life and on an analysis of the conflict that has developed around the planned Okhta Center development in Petersburg, where the Gazprom corporation intends to house the headquarters of its locally-based subsidiaries in a 403-meter-high skyscraper designed by the UK-based architectural firm RMJM. The proposed skyscraper has provoked one of the fiercest confrontations between the authorities and society in recent Russian political history. Despite resistance on the part of various groups who believe that construction of the building would have a catastrophic impact on the appearance of the city, which is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, Gazprom has so far managed to secure all the necessary permissions and has practically begun the first phase of construction. (Although recent oblique signals from the Russian president may have thrown an insurmountable wrench into the works.) The Gazprom tower is promoted by the authorities as a symbol of a new, modernized Russia. How are such symbols produced? How does the ideological apparatus of power function? How are projects like this pushed through despite the resistance of ordinary citizens? These are the principal questions raised by this film.

The film is structured as a confrontation between two worlds. On the one hand, we see the world of power, which is represented by a group of people working to create the new symbol: a PR manager (the head of the corporation's branding project for the skyscraper), a local politician, the company's security chief, a representative of the Orthodox Church, a gallery owner (who is in line to become director of the corporation's contemporary art museum), and a fashionable artist. On the other hand, we see a chorus comprised of people from various social groups: the intelligentsia, workers, pensioners, unemployed office clerks, migrants, young women, a homeless boy, and a leftist radical. The film is set in a corporate boardroom, where a meeting has been called to discuss the rebranding campaign for the Gazprom tower. The participants converse frankly among themselves and from time to time rehearse speeches addressed as if were to the public. They get up from the conference table, situated atop a podium, walk to the edge of this platform, and make speeches in which they attempt to persuade society at large of the need to build the skyscraper and the benefits it will bring the city and its people. The chorus reacts to the proceedings "on high" by singing Brechtian songs and performing choreographic tableaux that illustrate their standing in society and their attitude to what is happening. These dialectical choruses, whose performers constantly contradict one another, are as if were the symbolic manifestation of debates in society about power and violence, love and beauty, and urban planning and the right to the city.

<http://www.moscownews.ru/news/20100607/187863914.html>

For Gazprom's tower, does size matter?

by Anna Sulimina at 07/06/2010 21:29



The construction of Gazprom's 403-metre Okhta tower in St. Petersburg has been dividing the city since 2006, and now even Russia's ruling partnership is lining up in opposing corners. President Dmitry Medvedev has weighed in on the side of UNESCO (the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation), calling for a halt to construction since it could harm the city centre's place on UNESCO's World Heritage list.

But in the modernist's corner the architect argued that the glass skyscraper was a symbol of St. Petersburg's future as the economic capital to rival Moscow's stalled business district, Moskva-City.

"The Okhta Centre will become St. Petersburg's modern business area and a new symbol of the city", the tower's chief architect, Philip Nikandrov, told The Moscow News. "Now there are 28 industrial structures in the city that are up to 310 metres and they do not have any historical value – so the city needs a dominant feature higher than them."

In a rare sign of differing viewpoints from Russia's ruling tandem, Prime Minister Vladimir Putin has consistently supported the tower, saying it will help revive the city's economy during the crisis.

"Since the main office of Gazprom-Neft is moving in, it will bring annually around 20 billion roubles (\$631 million) in taxes to the city budget and some 60 billion roubles (\$1.9 billion) will be invested by the company in the construction directly," said Nikandrov.

Cultural projects

The project – dubbed by some "Gazprom City" – has received the backing of St. Petersburg Governor Valentina Matviyenko and will include offices, hotels, shops, a concert hall, an art

museum, libraries, a skating rink and a park.

Critics say the tower contrasts with the surrounding Tsarist-era buildings and both the St. Petersburg Union of Architects and the International Union of Architects have gone against their peer.

“The maximum permitted height of buildings in the area is 48 metres, so the tower will completely ruin the panoramic view of the city and will dwarf Rastrelli’s Smolny Monastery, which is right on the opposite embankment,” said Oleg Romanov, vice president of the local organisation.

“St. Petersburg has its own character and has gained an historical value because there were high standards of architecture in Tsarist times. We are not going to resemble London or New York.”

Opposition protests

Medvedev has now come in line with opposition parties, such as the Communists, Vladimir Zhirinovskiy’s ultranationalist Liberal Democratic Party, Just Russia and Yabloko, who had already taken a firm stand against the tower.

The liberal Yabloko have already launched a lawsuit against City Hall for overlooking the law on city standards and their refusal to hold a referendum on the issue.

“[The government] tends to ignore citizens’ and professionals’ opinions and, moreover, ignores the law prohibiting any building in the area to be higher than 40 metres,” said Maxim Reznik, the head of the city’s Yabloko branch. “It goes without saying that the tower will spoil the ancient architecture of the city and the panoramic view. By promoting the project people just want to earn money on construction.”

Opponents decried

Okhta’s defenders reject their opponents’ allegations, claiming the project is legitimate – having undergone public hearings in September 2009. The tower is to be built in an industrial area 5 kilometres from the city centre.

“The project will be constructed to fully balance with the city’s skyline and isn’t at odds with any historical place,” said Nikandrov. “For a person standing in the city centre on Vasilievsky Island, the tower will seem lower than the Peter and Paul Fortress.”

He added that opponents of the project use it as an opportunity to promote themselves and often use unprofessional or false plans and doctored photographs to create a misconception of the project.

Plus for tourism?

The city’s tourism industry has also plumped in favour of the skyscraper, pointing out that London has suffered little backlash after modern architecture changed its historical cityscape.

“I have not heard of representatives of the tourist industry being concerned about the construction of the Okhta Centre,” Sergei Korneyev, vice president of the Russian Tourist Industry Union, commented on the Okhta Centre’s web site. “In London – which last year became the world’s leading tourist destination – they are absolutely happy about the fact that there are several modern skyscrapers, including famous buildings by Norman Foster, around the old city.”

The Okhta tower will give tourists a new vantage point to view the city, with the highest viewing platform currently only 42 metres high in St. Isaac’s Cathedral.

The plans are currently undergoing state verification and construction is slated to start next year. If the project goes ahead it will take four years to build and create employment opportunities but its opponents are confident the high-profile support of President Medvedev will deliver a knock-out blow to the tower.

“I do not think the giant will be finally built,” said Reznik, of Yabloko. Recently more and more top officials and ministers, and outstanding art people have criticised the project.”

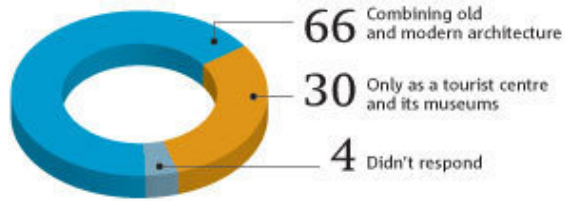
Okhta Centre

Saint Petersburg should develop ...

Saint Petersburg should develop...

(one answer)

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The citizens' attitude towards construction of high buildings

(one answer)

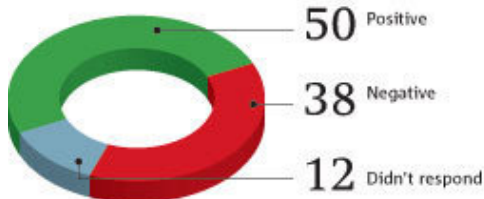
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The attitude towards the Okhta Centre project

(one answer)

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The survey was carried out in May 2010 in Saint Petersburg by Romir Monitoring

Gazprom, the opera

Russian activist group Chto Delat ('What is to be done?') have sung out against Gazprom's Okhta tower, producing a Soviet-style musical film called 'The Tower: A Songspiel'. The performance is set in Gazprom's boardroom.

On one side there is the PR manager who promotes the project, a local politician, the company's security chief, a priest, a gallery owner who is set to become the director of the corporation's contemporary art museum and a fashionable artist.

Pitted against them is a microcosm of Russia's voiceless minority. The intelligentsia, workers, pensioners and the homeless among others strain their vocal chords to shout down the tower.