

From Susan Viets
in Kiev

LENIN once said that to lose the Ukraine would be to lose the head of the Soviet Union. In the western Ukrainian city of Lvov, where the city council is 80 per cent controlled by members of the opposition umbrella movement, Rukh, a bronze Lenin recently had a noose slung around his neck before being firmly lifted by crane from his pedestal and sent off to storage.

Rukh leaders, assembled yesterday in Kiev for the opening of their second congress, will abandon *perestroika* and attempt to make the union a more comfortable place for Ukrainians.

They will transform Rukh into a movement for outright independence.

The Rukh chairman, Ivan Drach, told delegates: "We shall lead Ukraine out of its crisis ... we will fight for independence ... we will follow in the footsteps of Gandhi and Mandela." He also called for a separate Ukrainian army and direct relations between an independent Ukraine and an independent Russia.

Cultural sovereignty is already a fact in the Ukraine. Last autumn Rukh held its congress in a Kiev polytechnic. The building was surrounded by militia, who attacked a delegate when he unfurled the blue and yellow national flag.

On Wednesday the same flag was flying from windows of a police car escorting busloads of delegates. As they travelled down the central Khreshchyatyk Boulevard they passed under decorations for the 7 November Revolution parade, interspersed with banners proclaiming: "Rukh for an independent Ukraine."

Talk of new elections is commonplace in Kiev. On Wednesday, a Communist MP, Volodymyr Smetanin, told communists in parliament to stop blocking the proposal for constitutional court judges to be non-party members "because in a year we don't know which political party will be in charge of the government".

Yesterday a Rukh MP, Sergei Hulovati, told delegates Rukh's goal was "a peaceful removal of the Communist Party from power through parliament".

A handful of unofficial parties, soon to be registered, now exists in the Ukraine. Oles Shchevchenko leads the radical and prominent Republican Party. Independence was the starting point when these Republicans banded together last year. Since then Mr Shchevchenko has taken them to the steps of the KGB to protest against "smear campaigns". Another Republican Party leader, Stepan Khmara, was the first MP to don a white headband and join students in their recent hunger strike.

The effectiveness of opposition in the Ukraine, however, depends on Rukh's success. Paralysed by in-fighting in recent months, members are looking to the congress for new leaders and a dynamic programme. Rukh was registered under the protection of Mr Drach, until recently a member of the Communist Party. Now considered a relic, he has tendered his resignation.

Mykhailo Horyn, a former political prisoner, is a likely successor. The strong-willed Mr Horyn survived 12 years in labour camps and recently visited the United States seeking advice on "the international recognition of Ukraine as a sovereign nation".

Goodybe to Lenin and hello Gandhi

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