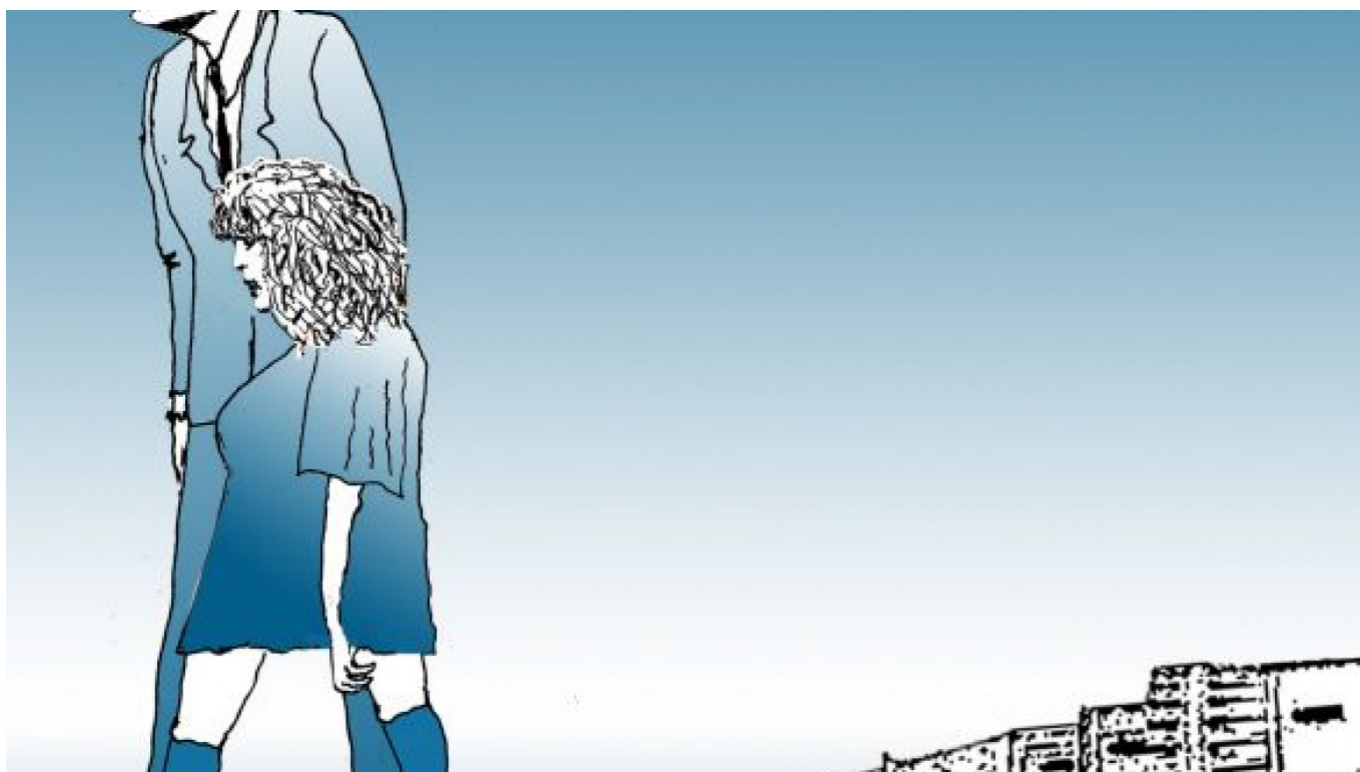


## In the Spotlight

By [Anna Malpas](#)

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This week, pop diva Alla Pugachyova has been on everyone's lips since she stood up, hands in pockets, and bluntly expressed her support for "Misha" Prokhorov and dressed down spin doctor Vladislav Surkov for "going crazy." Revenge was swift to come, as toadying channel NTV dusted off a shady financial scandal involving the singer for a show Sunday night.

One of many jokes about Leonid Brezhnev was that he was a "political figure in the era of Alla Pugachyova." And that was in the days when they really knew how to do propaganda. In a way, no muckraking documentary can really touch her because everyone knows so much about her anyway — the string of husbands, the chain-smoking, the dubious fashion sense and the face-lifts.

In Forbes magazine's latest rating of stars, Pugachyova came in third, not because of her relatively modest earnings but because of the huge number of Internet searches for her name. But somehow, I felt more disgusted about that documentary than all the Gazprom-controlled NTV's propaganda efforts. After all, how long ago was it that the Kremlin was handing her a medal, the president grinning away like a schoolboy?

The show, though, was so dull that one colleague fell asleep watching it. So what if Pugachyova got taken in by a banker who is now in hiding and doesn't pay his kids' school fees? Far more fascinating was the brief mention of Pugachyova's ill-advised venture into a pyramid scheme in the 1990s. Not MMM, but one run by a woman called Valentina Solovyova.

"For the first time in my life, I saw a million dollars, how they fitted into a briefcase," said Pugachyova's latest ex-husband, singer Filipp Kirkorov. He said he drove the money over to Solovyova and saw a room full of sacks of money, and remembered thinking: "God, what are we doing?"

The malice intended in the documentary was most evident in the choice of the Pugachyova double for the reconstruction scenes: a toad-like squat figure with a cigarette dangling from her lips.

There was something magnificent about Pugachyova making her off-the-cuff speech at Mikhail Prokhorov's meeting in the same forthright tone she uses for ticking off the contestants on television talent shows. And the whole affair has provoked some surreal combinations of heavy political analysis and big hair.

Left-wing politician and blogger Roman Dobrokhotov wrote on Slon.ru that Pugachyova was a "symptom" showing that middle Russia had finally grown sick of the political situation. His article was headlined "Alla Pugachyova, the mirror of the Russian revolution."

He ridiculed any attempt to silence her, saying there are some things beyond Kremlin control. "I'd like to see them hinder Alla Pugachyova — how they would cut her out of all the television shows [and] ban Komsomolskaya Pravda from mentioning her new young husbands."

Liberal Novaya Gazeta, which would normally ignore Pugachyova, had a similar message in its article, headlined "Alla is tired" (one of her lyrics).

"Alla is an indicator of the moods of society. Even that genius of managing his own fate, Putin, should envy her. He has stayed afloat for two presidential terms so far, but she has been around for at least 10."

"One word from Pugachyova is enough to bring millions of people to the party without any program," Ogonyok magazine wrote when Pugachyova announced her backing for Prokhorov.

Nonetheless she would not appeal to his target audience of upwardly mobile iPad users, it sniffed, calling her fans the "budget" classes. "For 20-year-olds, she is as much a symbol of the Soviet Union as the hammer and sickle. You can't call her an idol of the middle class and youth."

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