

Mikhalkov Takes Jab at Medvedev

By [Alexander Bratersky](#)

October 27, 2010



Nikita Mikhalkov being hit by an egg in 1999 by a member of the now-banned National Bolshevik Party.
Igor Tabakov

Nikita Mikhalkov, the Oscar-winning film director and a monarchist with close ties to the ruling elite, set the political classes chattering Wednesday with the release of a nearly 10,000-word political [manifesto](#) promoting “enlightened conservatism.”

The document, written in a flowery language and titled “Right and Truth,” attacks Western-styled democracy in an indirect dig at President Dmitry Medvedev, but stops short of outright condemning the capitalist reforms of the past two decades.

“Euphoria of liberal democracy has come to an end. Now it is time to do the job,” Mikhalkov said in the manifesto, copies of which were provided to “state leaders,” Ekho Moskvyy radio reported.

The manifesto, which cites pre-revolutionary conservative thinkers such as Pyotr Struve and Konstantin Pobedonostsev to support its theses, describes the current state of affairs in the

country as “a mix of West-chasing liberal modernization, nepotism of local authorities and widespread corruption.”

Mikhalkov gives lengthy guidelines for fighting social ills, including combining elements of market and planned economies, promoting “traditional religions,” strengthening the “power vertical,” protecting the rights of nationalities and individual citizens within the state and revising current modernization programs.

Only three political parties — a conservative, liberal and socialist one — should remain in the country, Mikhalkov said, without explaining whether he is referring to existing parties or seeking the creation of new ones.

Local self-government should be boosted, but governors and mayors of “cities of federal significance” should be nominated to their posts by the president, the manifesto says.

The document also sports a number of odder ideas, such as basing its ideology in part on “the sinfulness of man's nature” and its description of Russia as the “geopolitical and spiritual center of the world.”

The manifesto caused a flurry of reactions but left many politicians and analysts skeptical, with some calling it an attack on the liberal-leaning President Dmitry Medvedev and others an attempt to distract the public from Mikhalkov's recent controversial business dealings.

The ruling United Russia party, which has previously adopted conservatism as its own ideology, but does not count Mikhalkov as a member, praised the manifesto. But the leader of the liberal Yabloko party, Sergei Mitrokhin, said the document was essentially an attempt by Mikhalkov to make up for United Russia's ideological blandness.

“United Russia has promised us ideological ideas but failed, so Mikhalkov is trying to fill the vacuum,” Mitrokhin said by telephone.

Vyacheslav Nikonov, head of the pro-Kremlin Politika foundation, agreed that Mikhalkov “is trying to play the role of ideologist,” a sentiment shared by independent political analyst Stanislav Belkovsky, who said Mikhalkov is “trying to present himself to the Kremlin as a conservative leader.”

Belkovsky also said Mikhalkov, who was considered by President Boris Yeltsin as a potential challenger in the 1990s, retains political aspirations, but added that the manifesto cannot be viewed as a serious political agenda.

“He would certainly make a better talking head than many of the United Russia functionaries, but this manifesto is just a compilation of various ideas. I personally saw nothing new,” Belkovsky said.

Mitrokhin said the document, which criticizes the Kremlin's ongoing modernization program, has “certain elements” that may be considered criticism of Medvedev, who has made modernization a main point of his political agenda.

Pro-Kremlin political pundit Gleb Pavlovsky also said the manifesto was an attack on the president. “Politically, it is an attempt to start a counterattack on Medvedev's cause,” he said,

Interfax reported.

The Communist Party was split over the manifesto of Mikhalkov, its old enemy. Communist leader Gennady Zyuganov told reporters that the document shares some provisions with the party's program, but another prominent Communist, Viktor Ilukhin, said Mikhalkov was "trying to force his way of life on people."

Medvedev attended a celebration of Mikhalkov's 65th birthday earlier this month, but the director enjoys a much closer relationship with Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, whose government co-financed Mikhalkov's latest movie, the sequel to the Oscar-winning 1994 "Burnt by the Sun."

The epic film — at a budget of \$55 million, the most expensive production in Russian history — still tanked at the box office this year despite a nationwide advertising campaign.

Belkovsky said the manifesto might be an attempt to distract the public from recent Mikhalkov-related scandals, such as a conflict over the construction of a downtown Moscow hotel developed by his company. The work was halted Wednesday amid accusations of paperwork fraud.

Mikhalkov's Russian Union of Rights Holders also won the right this week to collect 1 percent fees from electronic devices and blank media for redistribution among rights holders — a business estimated to be worth \$100 million a year. The development caused a storm in the blogosphere.

"When I was trying to search for news about Mikhalkov's manifesto, the first news I found was about those fees. This says a lot," Mitrokhin of Yabloko said, jokingly.

A self-proclaimed monarchist, Mikhalkov has made a number of political U-turns in the past. He voiced support for former Vice President Alexander Rutskoi, a friend who staged a failed coup against Yeltsin in 1993, but then campaigned for Yeltsin's Our Home Is Russia party, led by then-Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin, just two years later.

Members of various political camps united in their criticism of Mikhalkov in 1999 when he was caught on camera beating a member of the now-banned National Bolshevik Party who pelted him with an egg. The young man was held by security guards during the beating.

Still a prominent figure on the Russian cultural landscape, Mikhalkov has been gradually losing his clout with movie audiences in recent years. An online poll in September ranked him as a director "the audience is fed up with."

Original url: <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2010/10/27/mikhalkov-takes-jab-at-medvedev-a2565>