

Medvedev Is No Lee Kuan Yew

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It appears that Igor Yurgens, head of the Institute of Contemporary Development think tank that is linked to President Dmitry Medvedev, has become a satirist. Yurgens' latest pro-Medvedev article, published in Monday's Vedomosti, was titled "[Medvedev Should Become Russia's Lee Kuan Yew](#)" and argues that Medvedev should run for a second presidential term.

Yurgens is clearly trying to amuse readers. The title is funny in and of itself. Lee, the legendary Singaporean prime minister, served more than 50 years in public office. Under his leadership, Singapore achieved amazing success. For example:

- Per capita income increased 40 times;
- The World Bank rated Singapore the No. 1 country for ease of conducting business;
- Transparency International placed Singapore, (along with Denmark and New Zealand) in first place for having the world's lowest corruption;
- The country has consistently placed high in per capita gross domestic product. In 2010, Singapore was No. 3 with a per capita GDP of \$56,000, according to the International Monetary Fund.

The first key element of Lee's reforms was the creation of individual retirement accounts

funded jointly by employees and employers. Workers purchased homes using their accounts as collateral. As a result, Singapore quickly created a large class of private property owners.

The second key reform concerns the education system. Even in a country where 80 percent of the population is ethnic Chinese, Lee was not afraid to shut down universities that taught only in Chinese and force everyone to learn English. Although Singapore has an outstanding education system, it also pays for the best students to receive higher education in U.S. and European universities in exchange for their pledge to return and work for the Singaporean government.

The third key element was Lee's fight against corruption. Although he inherited a country infested with corruption in 1959, Singapore is now virtually free of corruption, and its public officials receive salaries commensurate with comparable posts in the private sector.

The fourth major element was the internationalization of the economy. At a time when other Third World countries cursed the West for wanting to "exploit" them, Lee attracted hundreds of billions of dollars in foreign investment in Singapore.

And the last major reform was making the city-state green. Lee sent out brigades of Singaporeans to collect trees from around the world. They returned with 8,000 varieties. Before Lee became president, Singapore was nothing more than a colonial dumping ground. For example, 900,000 pigs lived near the Singapore River, creating a stench that approaching visitors could smell 500 meters away. Now, under Lee's cleanup and landscaping efforts, Singapore has been transformed into a true garden city, becoming one of the best-kept countries in the world.

At the same time, Lee was anything but a democrat. He behaved mercilessly during a tough battle with the Chinese Communists, who in Southeast Asia during the 1960s were much more expansionist and messianic than the Moscow-based Communist International ever was in the 1920s and 1930s. He arrested political opponents and shut down newspapers he didn't like. In Singapore today, drug traffickers receive the death penalty, spitting and the sale of chewing gum are forbidden by law, and Communists and Islamist terrorists are jailed without trial.

My question is: Does Medvedev have even one of Lee's traits? There is as much in common between Medvedev and Lee as there is between the climate and size of Singapore and Russia.

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