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# Why Prokhorov Quit

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There is a puppet master in our country," Mikhail Prokhorov said last Thursday after renegade members of the Right Cause party staged a coup against him. "He has long misinformed the country's leadership about what is happening in the political system, suppressed the media, and created discord. His name is Vladislav Surkov."

Those words alone more than justify Prokhorov's short tenure as party head.

What was the nature of this conflict? When Surkov's flunkies tried to exploit Prokhorov for their own political ends, he told them just where they could go. When Prokhorov agreed to head Right Cause, he thought he was making a standard deal with the Kremlin.

But it turned out that he was doing the bidding of Kremlin political strategists who had told President Dmitry Medvedev and Prime Minister Vladimir Putin that they needed to add a liberal party to their "multiparty system," and then turned around and told Prokhorov that the Kremlin needed his help. After that, everyone started divvying up the money, the real reason the arrangement was made in the first place.

About two months ago, several wire services carried reports that Ibragim Yaganov, an Abkhaz hero and one of the leaders of the Kabardin people, had been beaten in Kabardino-Balkaria.

It just so happens that Yaganov is my friend. He has a very bad relationship with Kabardino-Balkaria leader Arsen Kanokov, and this was not the first time he had been beaten. So I called him up and asked, "So, Ibragim, is Kanokov after you again?"

But I was surprised by his answer. "No, this was because of Right Cause," he said.

"We have a fellow here named Mukhammed Tlekhugov who is a relative of Kanokov and the chief of the local branch of the Russian Agricultural Bank," he said.

"People here tell me that Tlekhugov was in Moscow where he met with Prokhorov, and that Prokhorov named Tlekhugov the leader of Right Cause for our region. I am a member of the regional political council, and it appears that I was beaten just to keep me out of their way."

I then called Prokhorov to ask about this. He assured me that he had never even heard of Tlekhugov, much less met with anyone by that name.

But one week later, the political council of Kabardino-Balkaria elected Tlekhugov as the regional head of Right Cause "by personal order of Prokhorov," according to statements made during its session.

This means that those Kremlin flunkies who persuaded Prokhorov to play their little game were negotiating party posts by using his name without his knowledge.

Prokhorov personally called up prominent journalist Olga Romanova and invited her to accept a top position in the party. Romanova went to meet with one of his public relations representatives to discuss the terms.

After Romanova, who is one of Russia's most prominent journalists, showed up for the meeting, a Prokhorov lackey greeted her with coffee and invited her to sit in a large, comfortable chair. He then politely said, "May I ask what brings you here?"

"I am Olga Romanova," she answered.

The fellow furrowed his brow as he tried to figure that one out. Then his face suddenly brightened: "That's right," he said. "You're the expert on family issues."

Romanova shrugged and replied, "You could at least Google me to find out who I am."

Several minutes went by "Oh yes!" he finally exclaimed. "You're from Intel."

At that, Romanova stood up and left.

The problem for the Kremlin flunkies is that Prokhorov is not the type of man that you can walk all over. He is not some milquetoast bureaucrat who they can shove around. After all, Prokhorov is the guy who kicked out the Soviet-era directors and corrupt trade unions that were gumming up the works at Norilsk Nickel.

There never was a "Kremlin project" concerning Right Cause. There was only a public falling out between Prokhorov and the Kremlin spin doctors that ended in a public scandal because Prokhorov was not about to let anybody call the shots for him.

Will this be the banana peel on which Surkov finally slips, falls and never gets up again? Probably not. And that's too bad.

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