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Managed Democracy Fails in a Crisis

By Boris Kagarlitsky

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The crisis is developing exactly as expected. The inability of the authorities to cope with the rising wave of social problems has naturally spilled into the political sphere.

At the same time, the mechanism of "managed democracy" has yet again demonstrated all of its strengths and weaknesses. The greatest strength is the way the system can rather effectively resist not only widespread social discontent but also the pressures of an increasingly disturbing reality. But it cannot withstand those mounting pressures indefinitely — and therein lies the main weakness of the existing order.

The authorities are able to pursue their political course and ignore voter sentiment because they have created a political system in which every sanctioned political party is only a puppet of the ruling party. Their relationship to the leadership and to each other strictly controlled, the outcome of elections predetermined and the distribution of seats in the parliament made according to the needs of the rulers.

But managed democracy only works well when the economy is booming. During an economic

crisis, it runs into trouble. When the people's standard of living falls and the political elite turn a deaf ear to the problem, the people reach a point where their greatest frustration is not with the economic hardships they face but with authorities who prevent them from effectively voicing their dissatisfaction.

Deprived of the right to vote for the political party of their choice, elections instead become the chief means by which the people can vent their anger at the authorities. And as voter turnout declines, the number of people who vote to spite the authorities increases sharply.

Intellectuals from Moscow and St. Petersburg glued to Facebook have no idea of the pressure applied in recent days to millions of provincial civil servants, doctors, teachers, university professors, students and others.

For example, bloggers in Moscow did not receive calls from their child's teacher who, in a state panic, pleads with them to go and vote because otherwise the school is threatened with various forms of punishment.

They were also not subjected to a speech from their bosses saying they would check every name on the voting list and would personally deal with anyone whose signature they found missing.

Moscow intellectuals have no idea how much bravery it took to just not vote on Sunday.

Few were forced to vote for United Russia. That would have been impossible to enforce in most cases. Authorities only demanded that everyone go to the polls and vote for whomever they please, promising that they would take care of the rest.

Those people who called on their fellow citizens to come out and vote only helped perpetuate the electoral fraud. They signed their names to the list of voters, and now nobody can prove that they did not vote for the party of power. They accepted United Russia as the ruling party, and they also accepted the clowns from the Communist and Liberal Democratic parties as the "opposition."

People who voted in many towns and villages essentially betrayed those who made the brave choice to stay home or otherwise resist the coercion from their employers. They will never learn.

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