The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Putin's Puppet Show

By Boris Kagarlitsky

February 27, 2012



Prime Minister Vladimir Putin and his team deserve some credit for doing their utmost to conduct a Western-style election campaign. They are even attempting to convey a message to the public and to explain the candidate's views on the issues. With the regularity of a well-tuned machine, his campaign headquarters churns out literary texts discussing the economy and social policy. But his calls for discussion of the issues go unheeded.

Meanwhile, Putin's opponents are incapable of giving a substantive response, and the public, unaccustomed to being addressed by the authorities, either fails to react to the publications or simply does not take them seriously.

Russia now has an extraordinary political system in which all of the elements are present, but nothing works. There are courts, but few believe they are impartial. Russia has a parliament, but its lawmakers are little more than Kremlin puppets. Even United Russia, ostensibly the party of power, actually carries no authority and is not even a true political party. Its governing bodies do not make decisions, its leaders do not determine policy, its lawmakers serve no function and its ideology is devoid of ideas. For the one who does hold power, such

an organization is more of a burden than a support. It is no wonder that Putin has distanced himself from that party and acted as if he has no connection to it.

Russia does have separate elements of a civil society, but their activity reflects not so much the real social interests and needs of the country as they do the agendas of their sponsors.

In the authorities' mad rush toward democracy following the December protests in Moscow, Putin proposed creating agencies in workplaces that would represent employees — as is done in Germany. German order has always been a dream of Russian officials, and the Mitbestimmung, a co-determination system in which workers have a hand in managing large companies, is definitely the most progressive form of social partnership in modern industry.

The problem is that this system works only when the labor unions are real, and Putin proposes filling this role with the official Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia — another marionette that is not independent or composed of real labor unions. They are essentially departments of factory administrations responsible for dealing with social issues. In short, they represent the interests of owners and managers, not workers.

The government needs the public's support, but instead of engaging it in a dialogue, the authorities turn to the puppets under its control. It is incapable of taking any other approach, and most importantly, it has stripped the political landscape so completely that nothing and nobody is left to use as an effective resource for its efforts. The authorities pressure thousands of state employees to turn out for pro-government rallies on the streets in the middle of winter. Meanwhile, in Barnaul, police investigate possible violations of a "protest" consisting of stuffed animals holding anti-government signs that were placed on the streets because the human protesters did not want to freeze in the icy weather.

Watching the desperate attempts of the prime minister and president to reform the puppet theater they themselves created, one almost begins to feel sorry for them. They need a rest — and they should pick a nice warm place as far as possible from us.

Boris Kagarlitsky is the director of the Institute of Globalization Studies.

Original url: https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2012/02/27/putins-puppet-show-a12905