

Gudkov Calls for Leftist Groups to Join Forces

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A Just Russia leader Sergei Mironov **Sergei Porter**

A Just Russia party heavyweight Gennady Gudkov joined forces Tuesday with a group of party deputies to lay the groundwork for creating a united alliance of leftist forces.

But party insiders and analysts say the move may actually signal a split within A Just Russia and is likely intended as a call for reforms within the party, following the relaxation of party registration rules by the Kremlin in response to recent political protests.

Gudkov, a charismatic Duma deputy from the left-leaning party, called for all left-leaning forces to unite under the platform of a single social-democratic union called the Left Alliance.

“Today we need to create the foundations for a united party,” Gudkov said at a conference attended by 150 delegates, including prominent members of Russian social-democratic and leftist groups.

Gudkov was joined by several prominent figures — including Oleg Rumyantsev, a Yeltsin-era social democrat and one of the draftees of the current constitution — on the podium at the group's founding conference at Moscow's Museum of Contemporary History of Russia.

But while A Just Russia leader Sergei Mironov sent a message welcoming the delegates to the conference, the attitude of party leaders — including Mironov — toward the event was standoffish and tense, said a senior party official who was familiar with the situation and spoke on condition of anonymity.

“Some of the people have been summoned for questioning,” said the official, who added that the new movement intended to send a message to the party leadership. “There is a need for fresh blood.”

Some party members have questioned Mironov's place as party leader after he came in dead last in March's presidential election, gathering just a quarter of the votes the party received in December's parliamentary elections.

Political analyst Alexei Mukhin said he sees the move as an attempt by Gudkov to “create leverage” in dealing with Mironov.

But Mukhin added that Gudkov and the other Just Russia leaders standing with him wouldn't clash openly with Mironov and the party's leadership as they might lose their seats in parliament.

Several members of the Communist Party also attended the conference and voiced their support for a broader social-democratic agenda to unite the left.

Yelena Lukyanova, a lawyer and a member of the Communist Party who helped found the alliance, told The Moscow Times that several regional branches of A Just Russia are starting to act independently from the party leadership.

“Either the party will reform, or it will face hard times,” Lukyanova said.

She also quoted a 2005 article by jailed Yukos founder Mikhail Khodorkovsky called “The Left Turn,” which focused on the growing popularity of the left in Russia in the coming years.

Despite the popularity of leftist ideas among many Russians who miss the Soviet welfare state but also support a market economy, several attempts to create a successful, moderate leftist party have been in vain.

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