The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

United Russia's Phony Liberals

By Vladimir Ryzhkov

February 06, 2013



As the popularity of President Vladimir Putin continues to decline, United Russia is continuing to rot from the center.

On Monday, three prominent United Russia members — Vladimir Pligin, Viktor Zubarev and Valery Fadeyev — presented a "Manifesto of Russian Political Liberalism." These loyal apologists for Putin's authoritarianism are making a pathetic attempt to pass themselves off as liberal democrats. In reality, however, United Russia's "liberal manifesto" would be more aptly titled "Lubyanka liberalism."

For example, in the authors' opinion, the media should not be free to serve the public or the state. On the contrary, the media "should help try to unite the nation." Even Nazi propaganda chief Joseph Goebbels could not have said it better.

According to these newly minted "liberals," the main guarantor of liberal freedoms should be a "strong state." In other words, "the Kremlin autocrats are the chief protectors of your freedom." That is "state liberalism" taken to its logical conclusion.

The United Russia phony liberals support honest elections but include an important qualifier: The state should have the right to decide who can participate in elections. It is safe to say that this pretty much defeats the purpose of democratic elections.

Neither did the authors of the manifesto forget to swear an oath of allegiance to the siloviki and the Kremlin's U.S.-hating "patriots." They solemnly swear that the sovereignty and right of the state to do whatever it pleases on its own territory is higher than the human rights of its citizens. The way the manifesto's authors justify abuses by the state on its own territory sound almost like a solemn hymn to the NKVD. They write: "Sovereignty means ... the unconditional priority of the laws of the state throughout its territory, without which the provision of human rights would be impossible." Even Adolf Hitler could not have done a better job of legitimizing the notorious emergency measures enacted by the Third Reich.

The authors of the manifesto showed their true colors when they co-authored or supported some of the country's most anti-liberal legislation in the past 20 years — from the elimination of direct gubernatorial and mayoral elections, the stiffening of laws governing rallies and demonstrations and the laws requiring foreign-funded nongovernmental organizations to register as "foreign agents" to the recent law prohibiting U.S. citizens from adopting Russian children. Now they are trying to tell us that they have suddenly become defenders of liberalism and democracy. Do they really expect anyone to believe them?

Their economic program is also a simple justification for Putin's state-capitalism model and is just as anti-liberal as everything else they advocate. These United Russia "liberals" boldly support increasing the state's role in the economy, even though state enterprises, which account for more than half the country's gross domestic product, have proven to be ineffective and wasteful across the board.

Curiously, these staunch supporters of justice and progress make no mention whatsoever of Russia's rampant corruption, the main obstacle to the country's development. They recommend flooding the country with cheap credit and show no concern for the spiraling cycle of inflation that would trigger. Even Communist Party leader Gennady Zyuganov pales in comparison with United Russia's new, ultra-leftist "state liberalism."

Will all this help United Russia win more votes? And how effective is the party's strategy to incorporate all three ideologies in its platform: liberal, socialist and conservative or patriotic?

Everything will turn out contrary to what United Russia had hoped. Not a single left-wing, liberal or right-wing voter will support a party that does not know what it is — leftist, rightist or liberal. Rather than creating an appealing image, United Russia has created Frankenstein's monster, a grotesque patchwork of competing ideologies. In place of music, they are producing cacophony. In these circumstances, the most popular moniker for United Russia will remain "the party of crooks and thieves."

It seems these pseudo-liberals realize that themselves. In their manifesto, they wisely admonish the party not to completely abandon the use of "administrative resources" — that is, vote-rigging and other electoral manipulations — but only to "limit as much as possible the temptation" to use them.

The Kremlin understands the reality of the situation even better. Information was recently leaked that the Kremlin has already informed the regions that United Russia candidates must win at least 60 percent of the vote in the local and regional elections this fall. So much for United Russia's "liberalism."

Vladimir Ryzhkov, a State Duma deputy from 1993 to 2007, hosts a political talk show on Ekho Moskvy radio and is a co-founder of the opposition RP-Party of People's Freedom.

The views expressed in opinion pieces do not necessarily reflect the position of The Moscow Times.

Original url: https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2013/02/06/united-russias-phony-liberals-a21306