

RUSSIA CANNOT AFFORD TO HAVE A ‘STUPID’ PARTY

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RJ What are your opinions on the role and importance of United Russia in the Russian political system? Would you say that the party can be considered a separate political force? Do you think United Russia can be a sustainable counterpart to the Russian President or Prime Minister in the fight for political influence?

United Russia could challenge President Medvedev if Prime Minister Putin were to lead it against the president. But then it would not be an independent force – it would be led by a particular Kremlin faction. I think that United Russia’s role in the Russian political system will depend on how the Russian middle class develops.

United Russia could become a separate political force if a really strong, independent, propertied middle class started to emerge in Russia, and if this middle class would want to carry out some sort of vertical revolt against the variety of oligarchs. If enough middle-class people chose to make United Russia their vehicle by which to do that, and **if there were people within the top levels of the state elite who would be pre-**

pared to lead United Russia in that direction from above, then it could happen. But there are too many ifs.

RJ United Russia has called itself a conservative party. Do you think the party can become a Russian variant of the British Conservative Party?

Not the Tories, I hope not. The Tories are often called a stupid party in Britain. **I do not think Russia can afford to have a stupid party.** Russia’s position is much more precarious than Britain’s. I think a better parallel would be with the Christian Democrats in Germany. They are a party that has a very appealing combination of concern for social services, social wealth, health and all these things alongside a strong but very pragmatic and moderate nationalism – which is also necessary for such a party. In principle, I think that this is a potent mixture, but of course the key question is whether the Russian government can deliver if Russia returns to a path of economic growth where the government can manage to deliver sufficient economic growth to the population in terms of services and better infrastructures and so forth. The government in Russia is still living off the fat in two ways: the first is obviously oil and gas revenues, and the second is that United Russia is still benefiting from the fact that it is not associated with Boris Yeltsin and can stand in contrast to the disastrous 1990s. So I think that **United Russia might**

Russia it is the other way round. What is the ideal relationship dynamic between these two institutions, or at least the one that would be most favorable for the democratization of Russia?

If the state is aiming for modernization, then change in ruling parties – as happened in the Philippines and in Pakistan – is unlikely to encourage this process. If in Russia there was United Russia on the one hand (as a kind of Christian Democratic, moderately conservative, moderately nationalist force), and the former Communists on the other (who renamed themselves social democrats and became much more like modern Social Democrats representing a more socially responsible, ecologically sensitive version of the free market), then I would say that the parties should dominate the government and should alternate endowment. **But if there is a choice between the present system of the government dominating one party or communists in their present form taking the government of Russia, I would prefer the present system of the government dominating the party.** It is not ideal, but speaking as a political realist I don’t really see many ideals in this world.

RJ What social, economic and political conditions are necessary to weaken the influence of the security structures in order to make them less influential in politics? I am speaking specifically

United Russia has the chance to become a separate party, close to social democratic parties, but I am not yet sure that it will be able to take that chance

have a very strong future, but I am not saying it will necessarily grasp it.

RJ In Soviet times, the party was the dominant partner in the party-government relationship. Nowadays in

about developing and developed countries. Do you think that a one-party system is the main instrument to canalize clannish and corporate interests to state interests?

Basically, what is needed is a political system that is not as dependent on individual members of parliament or senators with the ability to exercise their will independently and therefore the ability to seek patronage in the purse of the American system. Every senator and every congressman to a great extent should be able to vote against the will of their party on important issues should they want to. I mean that they often do that because the purse is paying them. This leaves them in hock to the Israeli lobby, to the health management lobby and to the military-industrial complex. **A certain system of voting, relatively independent of money but also subject to party rules, needs to be established.**

The other key issue is that a state elite that has some concept of national interest and national strategy that goes beyond military spending and simply more tanks and more guns is needed.

It is not a question of decisions on the human level; it is a question of the inherited political culture of institutions, which can be extremely difficult to change. If you look at the United States, America is crying out for a whole raft of major constitutional reforms – but if you know America, you will know this to be impossible. The American system is incapable of such reforms unless maybe there was a really shattering crisis. Yet, even having had a pretty severe economic crisis in the past couple of years, still nothing has changed. ■

Anatol Lieven was speaking with Julia Netesova



‘PARTY GOVERNMENT’ IS ALMOST THE IDEAL



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Samuel Huntington was right in saying that at some point during the process of development, strongly structured one-party systems that are equipped with a progressive ideology will be in a position to make some significant contributions to socio-economic development. If they are truly successful, the problem will then be that they will block any efforts to replace them. Single-party regimes may produce some political order grounded on the repression of any and all oppositions.

The risk is that incompetent one-party systems will manage to retain political power despite being unable to bring about development. Even though they can produce some political disorder, multi-party systems at least provide the potential for political and socio-economic development.

The ideal distribution of power is to be found in the ‘party government’ formula, applied within a two-party, or bipolar, competitive system as in the United Kingdom and Germany. Of course

the historical conditions that produced not only the two-party system in the UK, but also its peculiar type of democracy, can neither be imitated nor created. The same is true to a lesser extent for contemporary Germany. In any case, competitive party systems are the product of a society that has passed through two phases: liberalization and contestation.

The emphasis must be placed on citizens being able to organize themselves freely, to create their own newspapers and utilize all forms of communication, and criticize the government and bureaucracy. **A competent, not partisan, well-paid bureaucracy also represents a fundamental component of any decent state** and a prerequisite for equally decent democratic regimes. In any case, the role of political parties is to provide representation and a framework for governance. The role of the bureaucracy is to offer support and services to the citizens on an equal and fair basis. ■