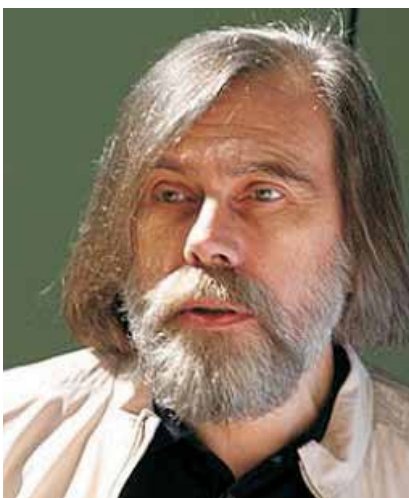


THE UPS AND DOWNS IN THE EXPERIENCES OF THE MULTI-PARTY UKRAINIAN SYSTEM

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When discussing the role of a party in the process of modernization, I would like to emphasize the following elements. Firstly, it is beneficial when the goals and patterns of modernization are chosen in a competitive atmosphere that includes competition between political parties. Secondly, the ruling party should serve as a means of modernization and act to mobilize its population. Thirdly, in relation to free elections, the party should provide continuity and act responsibly during the course of modernization.

Today, if the party does not fulfill all these duties it signifies that the institution has run out of steam.

Of course, total stability, where there is no development of a multi-party system, can reign. But there is a greater chance of revolts during leadership changes, since an important function of the party system is to 'let off steam,' and social discontent is often aimed at the ruling party that is removed

from power in the course of the election.

An advanced multi-party system is a costly affair and can only exist where the national capital is actively interested in preventing power from being accumulated in the hands of one clan or autocrat who is able to threaten it vis-a-vis propriety re-division.

On the other hand, the left wing is also interested in a multi-party system since it provides them with access to parliamentary mandates. Therefore, in Ukraine the political reforms of 2003-2004 were backed by the interests of both big financial and industrial groups, as well as Communist and Socialist parties.

Naturally, countries with a one-party system or one dominating party are more stable. Nevertheless, this greatly depends on the peculiarities of the country in question. In South Korea, authoritarian modernization turned out to be more efficient, but that does not imply that it necessarily will be as efficient in Ukraine.

Conversely, the Ukrainian experience looks successful enough since its elections often result in changing party colours and government coalitions.

Yet in many ways, the experience is unsuccessful since the mechanism of government formation in accordance with parliamentary elections is not legitimized via public opinion. Moreover, a proportional election system is not legitimized either and the political class has not yet come to realize how to clearly change this system.

The Ukrainian party system represents the interests of social groups rather poorly. Many influential political forces are merely parties and blocs with "names" that have no discrete ideological identity. A typical example is the Yulia Tymoshenko Bloc and the Party of Regions (led by Viktor

Yanukovych), which is being gradually de-ideologized as well.

There is still no sharp division between ruling and oppositional forces in Ukraine, and the reason for this is the permanent conflict between the President and Prime Minister. This conflict reached its climax when President Yushchenko and Prime Minister Tymoshenko both belonged to friendly political parties.

When compared to Russia, where the most influential party was created 'from above' and identified exactly as the 'ruling' one, the experience of forming a party 'from above' is rather negative and if a party loses the presidential election it can easily collapse.

Is it reasonable to say that the parties in Ukraine are under great pressure from economic clans? Yes and no. On the one hand, the term 'pressure' is an understatement for the parties that are practically created by big industrial capital (the Party of Regions). Yet on the other hand, we can also note that the leading parties that attract the representatives of big capital lay various kinds of resources at the feet of their leaders, vote in the Rada, and act according to the leaders' order in other circumstances. However, this happens only when the leader either is or appears to be the main proprietor of power.

The destiny of the Ukrainian party system depends greatly on the outcome of the current election. In any case, the present-day party landscape is not going to survive the next set of parliamentary elections, and the political class must come to a consensus about the fact that the election system needs to be changed.

The destiny of the Ukrainian party systems also depends on the extent to which the electorate links parties that realise its interests, as currently our electorate is mostly formed of symbols with no real assertion and affirmation for these interests. ■