

# SOCIAL SCIENCES

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## ***In This Issue:***

**L. Gudkov, N. Zorkaya:** “We have to admit that the evolution of Russian society in the post-Soviet, post-totalitarian period saw a systematic squeezing out of the semantic and value content of the revolutionary events of 1917. It is important that this was done by politicians of different ideological persuasions... The populace is indifferent to the centenary of 1917... It would be wrong to say that the jubilee is being hushed up by the authorities, but there is a sense of ambivalence in the attitude of the top leadership, born-again communists and ‘Orthodox Chekists’ who are not exactly sure what to tell ‘the people.’ The need to react to a milestone date does not reflect an inner need of society to understand past events and their consequences, rather, it is a forced reaction of the administration to external circumstances, the need to keep up the appearances of a ‘cultured country’ which has a ‘great’ history that is important to the world community.”

**A. Gusev et al.:** “In Russia, and in any other countries, the administrators of R&D are confronted with the task of the most efficient distribution of financial resources among subjects of scientific activities. Results-based budgeting is gradually moving to the fore in countries with developed science. The share of competitive funding in Russia has not yet reached the level observed in highly developed countries yet it is steadily moving toward the funding pattern designed to stimulate competition among scientists.”

**I. Semenenko et al.:** “The post-Soviet countries’ experience demonstrates that identity politics and self-identifications dominated by the state principle, in combination with ethnic orientations, is what supports the hybrid forms of identity based on a mix of modernizing and archaic features. Under these circumstances, state- and nation-building prove to be not so much competing as essentially different and often incompatible projects within the framework of a ‘national’ state.”

**A. Guseynov:** “Ethics needs a new theoretical perspective, a rethinking of its philosophical status... Ethics has ignored the *I*, the personal pronoun, translating it into an impersonal form. It wanted to be a science, to objectify morality, reveal its patterns, formulate and explain its norms, and reduce human motives and actions to a common denominator... Ethics reasoned in the third person. But the question was not about what is duty and how good men should act, but about how I should act. I as a unique and concrete individual with my own name, place in the world, my own history and my absolute irreplaceability. This articulates the demand for first-person ethics.”

**P. Marchenya:** “While in theory the multi-party system is designed to be a key element of the democratic political system that translates the interests of the

civil society into the sphere of genuine attention and concrete activities of government power, the practice of the Russian multi-partyism has—twice within a century!—served as a major factor of Troubles, dismantling of the system of interaction between power and society and liquidation of the historical imperial statehood. Today it is a token institution called upon to demonstrate compliance with the ‘world’ (Western) standards and to legitimize the authorities...”

**E. Artemov:** “The Soviet atomic project had a marked applied character. Its overarching goal was to develop a nuclear weapon for the armed forces. In the eyes of the Soviet leaders, such a result would justify any cost. Hence the unconditional priority of the atomic project in allocating resources... The ‘command economy’ institutions were capable of operating efficiently... The unconditional priority in the distribution of resources, the project-based organization of work, ‘manual’ control, encouragement of competition among administrators and organizations, effective (though at times cruel) methods of exacting labor performance—all this optimized costs and results... However, there were limits to the number of priority segments of the economy.”

**A. Teslya:** “Throughout the 19th century the concept of ‘Europe’ was being constructed and built up, while ‘Russia’ was located outside it; comparison became juxtaposition of ‘Russia and Europe.’ Such an image of Europe predictably turns out to be a projection of ideas about Russia (what it should be like); at the same time the prominence of ‘geographical’ definitions of Europe (later reinterpreted as ‘civilizational’) tends to displace the former confessional geography: the religious dimension can now only be a ‘cultural characteristic.’”

**O. Osovsky:** “...in the period known as the Thaw, the rusty structure of Stalinist social sciences sprouted with new humanitarian knowledge in the Soviet Union, and the crisis of European structuralism which occurred at about the same time triggered not only feminist studies, but also humanistic quests based on the ideas of Mikhail Bakhtin... The current crisis... is in need of a productive resolution, and a considerable number of studies in Russia and abroad give grounds for such expectations.”

## **The Russian Multi-Party System: The Cradle of Civil Society or the Grave of Imperial Statehood?**

*Pavel MARCHENYA*

*Abstract.* The role of the multi-party system during the Russian Times of Troubles, otherwise systemic crises of the Russian Empire, is one of the key problems behind the collapse of the Russian Empire that occurred twice during the last century. This article takes a critical look at the following theoretical propositions:

(1) the multi-party system is a universal constructive factor of civil society development;

(2) the popular attitude to political parties depends on the extent to which party programs meet the interests of the masses;

(3) interparty rivalry in Russia unfolds in the sphere of rational public politics.

All these propositions are overturned by Russian practice:

(1) the Russian multi-party system was one of the catastrophic factors that played a key role in the dramatic collapse of the Russian and Soviet Empires;

(2) people in Russia have never read party programs and do not read them now;

(3) parties and the “historical options” they offer compete in the realm of mass consciousness which is far from rational and which invariably turns out to be the dominant factor in the history of Russian Times of Troubles. “The Empire” is perceived as a form of unity of power and the masses that appeals to mass consciousness, while Times of Troubles represent temporary deconstructurization of the system of interaction between the power elite and the masses in the Empire threatening to disrupt historical continuity of state imperatives and civilizational identity. The author identifies and compares three “waves” of the Russian multi-partyism:

(1) early 20th century;

(2) late 20th century and

(3) early 21st century.

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The first two versions of the multi-party system are analyzed in the context of their role in bringing about the demise of historically established empires. The modern stage is interpreted in the context of opposing historical trends as the least of all possible evils in the current situation.

*Keywords:* Russian multi-party system; Russian crises; Russian revolutions; political parties; Times of Troubles; Empire; masses; mass consciousness.

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Understanding the place and role of the multi-party system in Russia and the Soviet Union in the context of systemic Russian crises is one of the key challenges for modern projective Russia studies which seek to explain the accidents and regularities of Russian history as it lurches from crisis to crisis. Imperial statehood collapsed twice within the space of one century. The attitude to the problem of forming a multi-party system is arguably a measure of understanding Russia and an indicator of the division of its political expert community (and of society as a whole) into “two Russias.” Some still see their country following a unique path and view multi-partyism as a tragedy, which breaks up social cohesion into contradictory parts,<sup>1</sup> and a symptom of time being out of joint, the threat of disruption of historical continuity and loss of identity as a civilization. Others, proceeding from borrowed experience, pin their hopes on a transformation of Russia believing that the multi-party system guarantees civilized development. It is symptomatic that much of the Russian expert community does not deem it necessary to discuss the issue whether the multi-party system is bad or good for Russia apparently because it considers the second option to be proven or not needing any proof, in other words, treating it as an axiom to which there is no alternative. For example, the moderator of the *Politicheskaya ekspertiza* journal’s (2005) round table on “The Multi-Party System in Russia: Good or Evil” (the formula proposed by Sergey Mironov, politician and party leader), Valery Achkasov, categorically rejected this formula even before the debate started declaring that “for most of us there is no dilemma here because multi-partyism is naturally good” [15, p. 142]. The statement elicited no essential objections from the participants. Speakers who criticized the Russian political system in general and the party system in particular said (Sergey Korkonosenko) that “known Russian parties have no statistical support, no social base, are wobbly on ideological matters, and as for unknown parties, they are not worth discussing at all”; that Russia “has no democracy” (Vladimir Gutorov) and “most importantly, there are no parties,” and in general there is no multi-party system but only “a mask of multi-partyism” (Valery Kramnik) [15, pp. 161, 152, 162], etc., etc.—and yet the question in the title of the Round Table *was not even discussed*.

There are several methodological myths underlying many studies of political parties in Russia,<sup>2</sup> that are not borne out by Russian history and are indeed denied by it. Let us name three basic party study myths which, obliquely dictating

the theoretical mainstream in the study of the Russian multi-party system, rarely find themselves at the focus of theoretical reflection.

*First*, many scholars take it for granted that the existence of many parties, at least “in theory,” is a constructive factor contributing to the development of the civil society (see, for example, [10; 15; 20; 16]). However, this is merely a *hypothesis*. In relation to Russia, this hypothesis is *anti a priori* because it contradicts reality. This country has seen two brief episodes when the multi-party system was functioning, that in the early 20th century before and during the collapse of the Russian Empire, accompanied by numerous social cataclysms; and the period at the tail end of the century against the background of the collapse of the Soviet Empire with all the dire consequences. If this experience is anything to go by, the above hypothesis holds no water: the emergence of a multi-party system played a highly negative role in the history of the Russian and Soviet Empires. Therefore the thesis that our society (like any society irrespective of its sociocultural characteristics and concrete historical practice) needs a multi-party system cannot be regarded as proven and calls for serious academic discussion.

*Secondly*, practice does not vindicate the notion that the electorate in this country (or its statistically significant part) determines its attitude to political parties by studying their programmatic documents and comparing them against their own, electorate’s, perceived objective interests. Nor is there any proof that these interests determine the popularity and political success of this or that party (see [14]). In Russia, party programs are read by their authors and those who are obliged to read them in line of their duty. It is not the content of policy documents that determines the success of a political force. This no more than a popular misconception which depreciates the corresponding studies. Whether Russia’s *political parties ideologically* and even more so *psychologically* correspond to the “*popular masses*” and whether “Russian politicians” are organically compatible with “Russians” is a topic that is sidelined in the discussions of parties by the scholars who are in thrall to this myth.

*The third myth* is the *confidence* springing from the first two (or an attempt to assure the audience) that inter-party rivalry in Russia is unfolding in the sphere of *rational public politics* and its real effectiveness correlates directly with the goals proclaimed by the parties and the needs of society and its significant reference groups. Experts can easily name other priority factors that influence the results of political forces in Russia.

Thus it would not be a big stretch to say that these methodological myths have little relevance (at least so far) to the study of the Russian political reality and the so called “Russian multi-party system.”

For the Russian society and state the multi-party system was a catastrophic factor that contributed to public Troubles and played an important role in bringing about the tragic end of the Russian Empire in 1917 and the Soviet Empire at the turn of the 1980s and 1990s. In situations of real historical choice, real (and not simulated) struggle of political parties and the competition of the historical alternatives they represent takes place in the mass consciousness which is miles away from rational politics.

It is this consciousness that provides not only the background and arena of the struggle, but is its main criterion. It is here that the winners and losers are determined, and they are not determined on the grounds which some (alas, many) scholars try to ferret out of the “mountains” of party documents...

Let us illustrate the above by turning to the events of 1917, the pivotal year in Russia's recent history which has compressed epochs of the overall path of “the Russian world.” That year saw the collapse of the centuries-old autocratic monarchic system of interaction between power and society, an attempt to establish “the most democratic democracy in the world,” and the collapse of this attempt followed by a period of the triumph of anarchy and ochlocracy, and an attempt of a “right-wing” putsch, and the establishment of a “left-wing” dictatorship. This was the period when more than 280 political parties of various sizes (see, for example, [18]) were offered a unique historical chance to prove the validity of their theories. In the period between February and October of 1917 Russia had only four credible political forces which represented the main party-political alternatives, and the popular attitude to them could determine the fate of the prematurely born “February democracy.” These were (“from right to left”): Liberals (Constitutional Democrats), Social Democrats (Mensheviks), Neo-Populists (Social Revolutionaries) and radical socialism or Communism (Bolsheviks). Their “interaction determined the overall temperature of the Revolution while a host of middle-of-the-road parties were drawn into their gravitational fields” [19, p. 32].

During that New Time of Troubles, in the country which was suddenly left without the Autocrat, at the “crossing” between Tradition and Modernity, amid unprecedented resonance of grandiose social cataclysms (modernization, world war, chaos, revolution, mass ideological, axiological and psychological shock, loss of “ground under one's feet” and total identity crisis) all these party-political alternatives involved in the spontaneous historical contest of “competing impossibilities” (William Rosenberg, Oleg Ken; see [6, p. 30; 8]) were to varying degrees utopian. However, Bolshevism unexpectedly turned from a semi-mythical and semi-legal outsider of Russia's political history into a real and only favorite (the Bolsheviks “found themselves at ‘the cash office’ of history and grabbed it” [17, p. 37]). Today, almost a century on, whether the Bolshevik victory in this contest of utopias was accidental or predetermined, is a much debated issue marking a cleavage in Russian society in the face of modern challenges which reveal obvious parallels with the choices the country faced a hundred years ago.

February of 1917 seemed to be the heyday of the multi-party system in Russia, however, history's verdict was different: the processes of interaction between political parties and the popular masses proved to be far removed from rational schemes and linear sequences. The study of party programs can add little to the understanding of the non-linear logic of the course and outcome of the struggle of the parties for the masses. According to Vasily Maklakov, “the political strength of a party lies not in the number of its registered members, but in the confidence it inspires in the non-party masses of *ordinary people*. The confidence is not based on the program, or the resolutions of congresses which are of interest only to the party press, but on the



independent opinion *the man in the street* forms of the party. It often differs from the party's own opinion of itself or from the image it tries to project." This is true not only of the broad "ignorant" masses, but also of the "educated" Russian intelligentsia. Fyodor Plevako wrote candidly about how he joined the party: "I am not interested in the program. This is a foreword to a book. Who reads it?..." [22, p. 253]. And this is how one of the sharpest minds of his time, Vasily Rozanov, described the "whys and wherefores" of his personal party-political choice before the Troubles reached their peak: "Vote for the Octobrists, Vasily Vasilyevich," shouted Borya, puffing at his pipe. "Your Octobrists, Borya, are dupes: but your wife has such gorgeous shoulders, and your sister is so virtuous and untouchable that I'll vote for the Octobrists. And I voted for them (for the 3d Duma): because I could not find the flat of Dr. Sokolov (chief Social Democrat in St. Petersburg, somewhere on Grechesky Avenue) and I had lost the damn 'ballot' on the same day I received it" [21, p. 235].

Let us stress that this was how the choice was made in a relatively calm pre-Revolutionary period. Needless to say, in the revolutionary cacophony of post-February party speeches an unsophisticated Russian voter found it still more difficult to decide, by studying party documents and the press, whose side his political sympathies were on. More importantly, party leaders themselves often ignored the texts of party programs. Aleksandr Kerensky wrote in his reminiscences: "It was tiresome to listen to interminable discussions of scientific and totally unrealistic programs. I tried to give them a wide berth... At that time I was least of all interested in political programs. I was too carried away by the grandiose mysterious unknown toward which the dizzying course of events was sweeping us. I told myself that neither programs, nor discussions would bring the future any nearer or cancel what had happened. Revolution is born not only of thought, it arises from the innermost depths of human souls and consciousness. And indeed, all the projects, programs and theories were cast aside and forgotten before they were implemented by their authors who chose a opposite path" [9, p. 37].

Examples can easily be multiplied. What needs to be stressed is that if the party programs were not even read by brilliantly educated party members, what could one expect of illiterate non-partisan peasants, soldiers and workers who were drawn into politics for the first time and had a very vague idea of it? As has been pointed out, the destinies of parties were decided in the mass consciousness whose matrix was the peasant consciousness infinitely remote from party doctrines, charters and programs, the consciousness that unquestionably dominated the whole Russian Revolution (see [13]). In the context of the Empire (see [12])—a form of unity of power and the masses that appeals to mass consciousness—the Russian multi-party system was a factor of Trouble, temporary destructurization of the system of interaction between the power elite and the masses in the Empire, threatening to disrupt historical continuity of state imperatives and civilizational identity.

The multi-party system kindled the conflict of identities in the mass consciousness, revived the old "us" and "them" codes while the inevitable shift of emphasis to "them-groups" fomented political hostilities [5, pp. 12-13]. Even the less astute party and government "leaders" in February 1917 belatedly admitted that "where 'party

interests' do not give way to the social and national interests there can be no civilization and no real progress" [9, p. 370].

Let us quote Vasily Rozanov's interesting comment on the role of the multi-party system: "Obviously, when all the parties *personally* merge 'in a single soul'—there is no point for them to be *as parties in opposition* and in *argument*... The parties will disappear. And once their totality disappears, politics as a *quarrel* and *enmity* will disappear. Of course, that would still leave 'management,' 'the running of things,' but only *at the empirical level*: 'this is the *fact* because it is *needed*'... Without any transitions into theory or the general passion... But it is impossible to 'outargue' all the politicians—such is their nature. One has *to agree!* With all of them" [21, p. 435]. In a nutshell (for more detail see [14]), the Bolshevik victory over the other parties and the subsequent liquidation by the victors of the discredited Russian multi-party system can be explained in the following way.

From the ideological point of view, the success of parties hinged on their ability or inability to produce ideologemes, slogans and symbols that struck a chord in mass consciousness; psychologically, on the type of political temperament, political will, a certain mode of behavior, the overall positioning, appearances that evoked various responses in mass consciousness. Or it had to do with the specific image of the party which took shape in mass consciousness regardless of any party documents. The effectiveness of party propaganda and the fight for the hearts and souls of the masses as a whole was determined less by accurate expression of group consciousness than by the ability to "connect" with the collective subconscious and to resonate with it.

The *Constitutional Democrats (Cadets)* "modestly" calling themselves "the People's Freedom Party" had nothing in common with the people and its idea of "freedom." Practically all the closet liberal values were strikingly at odds with the basic ideas of the mass (peasant) consciousness forming a well-known model system of binary opposition between "us and them" (see [12, p. 92]). The whole "party line" of the "democrats without democracy" boiled down to an unhistorical attempt to artificially (without any ideological and psychological grounding) graft Western values onto historically alien soil. Faced with the need to exercise state power the champions of "people's freedom" "suddenly" discovered that the Russian people "was not good enough" for their ideas. The rhetoric of the Cadets was not understood by the masses and, coupled with the "anti-bourgeois" propaganda of practically all the other parties, led to the vaguely trusting attitude of the masses being replaced with the impulse to make short shrift of the "enemies of the people." Because of the way the People's Freedom Party positioned itself, it became hopelessly alien to the people and the historical time under the conditions of "people's freedom." While advocating a "law-governed state," the liberals proved to be utterly incapable of governing (enforcing the law). Thinking of themselves as the makers of the Great Russian Revolution, the Cadets quickly became, in the eyes of the people, "blind guides" of the people who had usurped the place of the Tsar, "time servers" and ultimately "werewolves" responsible for all the troubles. Even Nikolay Berdyayev, who sympathized with the Constitutional Democratic Party, had to admit that "the party has no national essence and has no popular base" [2, p. 659].

*The Mensheviks*, who also were not noted for being unduly modest (not to be confused with being afraid to make a bid for power) positioning themselves as the sole true proponent of the interests of the proletariat, in reality hid behind the back of their antagonist, the bourgeoisie, and on all the key issues tended to capitulate to the liberals whose strategic goals were alien to them [1]. On the “question of land,” “the question of peace” and other acute issues facing the country their position, like that of their liberal “allies,” was “terribly far removed from the people.” Not having a political will of their own, they called all the “democratic forces” to unite, yet even in their own midst they agreed only on one point, and that was that “Menshevism was better than Bolshevism.” Considering themselves to be “the brain of revolutionary democracy,” they brazenly declared the absolute majority of the people, the peasantry, to be an “amoral class” (see [14, p. 91]). By declaring that the benighted Russian “Asiatics” were not equipped to accept the “bright European ideas” the dogmatically blinkered Social Democrats put themselves on the sidelines of ongoing Russian history.

*The Social Revolutionaries (SRs)*, contrary to the popular misconception, were not a “democratic alternative” to Bolshevism. The SR party was neither democratic (because when it came to the crunch they refused to assume responsibility for implementing the will of the people) nor a real alternative (because its behavior did not correspond to the mass/peasant consciousness). The SRs, while on the face of it keeping up the pro-peasant image, in reality surrendered ideological and institutional leadership to the Mensheviks (who hated the peasants). The SRs could not hold their own against the Bolsheviks ideologically and psychologically. As Yury Pivovarov put it with some rhetorical “finesse,” in 1917 the SRs “proved to be pathetic... and unexpectedly chicken-hearted politicians” [17, p. 24]. Being a party of protest, the Neo-Populists were never a constructive political force and owed their political capital to the peasant slogan “Land and Freedom.” However, it was precisely when the peasants set about implementing this slogan, instead of resolutely supporting them they started arguing that such issues could be solved only “in the constitutional way.” In effect the SRs themselves surrendered their slogans and their social base to their rivals. Thus the Neo-Populists remained without the people and became a party which no one—neither the peasants, not the Reds nor the Whites—needed (see more in [23]).

*The Bolsheviks*, while declaring their hatred for Tsarism, in practice occupied its historical niche in popular consciousness and inherited its imperial mission. In proclaiming internationalism, they took on board several archetypal imperial principles, preserved Russia as an integral and independent state and recreated the Empire in a new historical guise. While formally expressing the interests of the working class, the Bolsheviks acted in many ways in line with the collectivist mentality of the peasantry. It was not only that they legitimized the Black Repartition (*Chorny peredel*) by giving land to the peasants, they established strong power, implemented a communal social model of the state: paternalism, authoritarian collectivism (“democratic centralism”), regimentation of social life and even a calendar of days off and national holidays, etc. Instead of the desacralized old Idea the Bolsheviks offered the masses a “new” Idea, not just replacing the imperial ideocratic formula “Orthodoxy,

Autocracy, Spirit of the People (*Narodnost*)” with a similar formula “Communism, Dictatorship, Party Spirit (*Partiynost*),” but mobilizing all the main forms of popular utopias and messianic expectations.

Practically all the main ideologemes of Bolshevism can be represented as a system of ideologemes that resonate with mass attitudes according to the “friend—friend” scheme (see [12, p. 95]). The main resource of any party claiming to express the will of the people is the people itself. The Bolsheviks succeeded in mobilizing that resource. Meanwhile their opponents, while paying lip service to the “rule of the people,” proved to be woefully incapable of understanding their own people, compromising the very idea of democracy in Russia. One can subscribe to Vladimir Buldakov’s trenchant conclusions to the effect that “the parties in Russia expressed in a concentrated way the array of intelligentsia utopias, starry-eyed doctrines or frenzied sectarianism and not a pragmatic presentation of the interests of various social groups” and that “the Russian multi-party system looks like an embodiment of a kind of doctrinal schizophrenia of the intelligentsia and not a constructively dynamic entity that consolidates the nation. This is a kind of ‘barren flower’ born of imperial paternalism which, however, is capable of triggering social upheavals” [3, pp. 40, 41].

Thus, many scholars, including those that never tended to idealize Bolshevism, had to admit that there was “no democratic alternative” to Bolshevism. The establishment of a dictatorship in Russia was a natural reaction, partly to the activities of the numerous Russian parties. The Bolsheviks countered “the egoism of the parties that grew amid the privations and suffering of Russia” [21, p. 388] and “political formalism that turns a blind eye on the real substance of human life” [2, p. 190] with an understanding of the objective nature of political power,<sup>3</sup> paying a dear price to put an end to the multi-party impotence of the state and “democratic tearing apart” of their own society. The imperial “house divided against itself” stood its ground once again.

Even the enemies of Bolshevism, comparing the fruits of their one-party dictatorship and the barrenness of “the democratic multi-party system” made this admission: “Let us imagine that, by some incredible concatenation of circumstances, an uprising succeeds, the Bolsheviks are overthrown and Russia is not immediately torn to pieces by its neighbors and former friends. What happens the next day after the uprising? Who is in power? Who replaces the Bolsheviks? Who will be able, under still worse economic conditions, with the army a shambles, who will be able to get the country out of a new chaos? Kerensky? The Constitutional Democrats? People’s Socialists? Social Revolutionaries? Same old story all over again?... No, anything but these political corpses!” [4, pp. 348-349].

\* \* \*

Some may be tempted to explain the failure of Russia’s first love affair with the multi-party system of a hundred years ago as proof of the old Russian saying that the “first pancake is always lumpy,” and, defying our own historical practice, to follow the political theory with a promising mission for the multi-party system that fits all states and societies.

However, one would then have to admit that the next “pancake also turned out to be lumpy.” “The second wave” of multi-partyism which swept the suddenly open political system of the USSR/Russia at the turn of the 1980s and 1990s was even more destructive than the semi-legal multi-party system of the Russian Empire in the early 20th century. Practically all the parties then were formed to spite the CPSU (which did not only declare the unity of power and the people, but, to varying degrees, implemented it), undermined the foundations of the Soviet system, discredited the imperatives of the Soviet Empire—and destroyed the Empire itself—both as a form of the unity of power and the masses, and the concrete historical state. In that respect the “capitalist counter-revolution” parties (at least judging by external visible “political results”) appeared to be more effective than the “socialist revolution” parties: the Communist power was ruined more quickly and more suddenly than the Tsarist power, luckily, without any world war.

For all the difference of these two historical versions of “multi-partyism” they obviously played the same function in Russian political history: disintegration of the social whole, escalation of the main social conflicts and other destructive elements of Trouble, destruction of historical imperial statehood and preparation of new forms of political life (in which there is simply no room for parties claiming an independent role, whatever the party leaders may think).

Unlike the two previous versions of the Russian multi-party system (which brought about the destruction of the Empire) the current “third” version reflects an attempt to preserve a semblance of a multi-party system with a fundamentally different goal in mind: to shore up state power, to add to the legitimacy of the restoration of the Great Power and provide it with a new set of imperatives.

Having played one of the first fiddles in the music of destruction that swept the Russian Empire early last century and blew the trumpets of Jericho over the Soviet Empire, in the current century the multi-party system became “a tiny orchestra” conducted by the authorities with which, however, its links are tenuous, delighting the small audience and a few enthusiasts with a discordant but coherent sound of pro-government and “opposition” songs (often written by the same “composers”).

It is not by chance that the absolute majority of the population trusts the parties in modern Russia still less than a century ago. As before, nobody reads party programs except those who wrote them and the representatives of the relevant government agencies. The political parties and the masses live in totally different worlds, their life interests not crossing even on election day. Modern analysts, whatever they think about the multi-party system, have to draw a significant practical conclusion: “The course for creating a multi-party system of a broad pluralistic orientation meets with no support among the overwhelming majority of Russians” [11, p. 76].

Thus, while in theory the multi-party system is designed to be a key element of the democratic political system that translates the interests of the civil society into the sphere of genuine attention and concrete activities of government power, the practice of the Russian multi-partyism has—twice within a century!—served as a major factor of Troubles, dismantling the system of interaction between power and society and liquidating the historical imperial statehood. Today it is a token institution



called upon to demonstrate compliance with the “world” (Western) standards and to legitimize the authorities and the official public political space in which the latter are interested. In preserving the formal multi-party system the current Russian power chose not to follow the Bolshevik example and kill the sacred cow of Western democracy: it put it in a cow pen isolated from real politics from which it can position itself for the broad public at home and abroad, without breaking the rules of the game and upsetting the status quo. One would like to believe that the current Russian power will be able to learn the lessons of the past. And that most probably this version of the development of the multi-party system is, at this historical juncture, less harmful for the Russian state and society (and for the entire post-Soviet space) than any other. And yet... Scholars, at all events, have to separate myths from reality and call things by their true names if they can.

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#### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> The English *party*, and the French *partie* derive from the Latin *pars* (part, share, side...) (genitive case *partis*), which in turn derives from the Latin *partire* (to divide, separate, fragment, split...), therefore, etymologically “multi-partyism” is fragmentation, split, division into many parts, shares, sides...
- <sup>2</sup> See more in [14], and the author’s other publications and the *People and Power* research project on *Socionet* site [24]. On methodological principles and innovative studies of the Russian multi-party system see, for example, [7].
- <sup>3</sup> “Power is impotent here, it has no prestige, because it is partisan, it is an aspect of political struggle. Power in Russia is not statist enough. The nature of the state is objective, expressing the reason of social life of the peoples and it should be above the struggle of parties.” “For far too many Russia is supplanted by a particular entity, group, party or abstract idea” [2, pp. 339, 486].

*Translated by Yevgeny Filippov*