

The anti-worker program of the new “Right Cause” party in Russia

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At its June 25 extraordinary party conference, the Russian right-wing liberal party “Right Cause” elected its new leader, the Russian businessman and billionaire Mikhail Prokhorov.

The promotion of the “Right Cause” as a new political party and as an alternative to the Putin’s “United Russia” underlines the growing fragility of the Russian political system. The next Duma elections are due to take place in December and the presidential elections in 2012, amid growing social tensions.

The rising tensions within the tandem of President Dmitri Medvedev and Prime Minister Vladimir Putin—and the fact that neither man has made clear which one intends to run next year—are exacerbating the nervousness and uncertainty inside the ruling oligarchy over how the government will rule in the face of possible mass protests and new economic convulsions.

Some sections of the ruling elites fear that a government which is controlled by basically one person, “the strong hand” government as it developed under the presidency of Vladimir Putin, will not be able to meet the economic and social eruptions of the coming period. As an alternative they begin to see a bi-partisan-system, in which business oligarchs would exert more influence over the Kremlin bureaucracy. The “Right Cause” is designated to allow the business elites to further pressure the Kremlin, disturbing the already fragile relations between Putin and Medvedev.

In an interview with *Echo Moskvy* on Monday, Mikhail Prokhorov emphasized that the “Right Cause” was not intended to be an oppositional party. Rather, the goal was to become a second ruling party in coalition with Putin’s “United Russia.” Prokhorov also declared that he was prepared to run for the post of prime minister, if the party would succeed in gaining 15 percent at the parliamentary elections December.

He denounced the “degradation of the whole country’s system,” stating, “Everything that is related to the production of human capital in our country is degenerating: education, health care, culture.” He added that after waves of privatizations, the infrastructure and the social system had to be rebuilt. Prokhorov also advocated the decentralization of power—in an implicit rebuke to the Kremlin—and declared that he considered the imprisonment of Russian oligarchs Khodorkovsky and Lebedev unjustified.

These comments are basically in line with the political program of President Medvedev. The President’s announcement of eventually reducing the current 7 percent lower threshold to obtain representation in the Duma to 5 percent can also be seen as an attempt to support the “Right Cause” in the up-coming elections. “Right Cause” lacks any constituency in the population and will probably have great difficulties in breaking the threshold to obtain seats.

Prokhorov explicitly criticizes in his remarks, however, the bureaucracy which has emerged under the presidency of now Prime Minister Putin. While the *Moskovskye Vedomosti* suggest that Prokhorov coordinated his candidacy beforehand with Putin, the youth organization of Putin’s “United Russia,” *Molodaya Gvardya*, greeted the new elected Prokhorov on Saturday with outright hostility. It chanted that the State Duma was not Courchevel – a reference to the scandal in 2007, in which Prokhorov was arrested in Courchevel under the suspicion of pimping and maintaining sexual relations with minors.

It seems that Putin and his faction have for the moment accepted Prokhorov as a new figure in the political establishment, in order to avoid further

frictions with the liberal camp. However, Prokhorov was recently charged for tax evasion amounting to 2 billion rubles, subtly reminding him of the fate of Mikhail Khodorkovsky and that he could easily be dispensed with if he broke out of the role to which he is assigned. The tax organs are said to be under Putin's control.

Prokhorov's demands for a capitalism based on achievement and accompanied by a welfare state, are a sham—besides their hypocrisy, coming as they do from one of the most ruthless oligarchs in Russia. In fact, the restructuring of the “Right Cause” and the election of Prokhorov symbolize the political bankruptcy of Russian liberalism, and the failure of capitalism to provide the most basic social and democratic rights to the population of the former Soviet Union.

The “Right Cause” stands in the tradition of right-wing liberal parties, such as the oligarch-dominated Union of Rightist Forces, Civic Power, and the “Democratic Choice of Russia,” which was headed by Yegor Gaidar. Gaidar was a key figure in the ruthless implementation of the capitalist neo-liberal reforms in Russia during the 1990s, which plunged millions of people into misery.

Formed from the merger of the remnants of these parties in 2008, “Right Cause” has been built up systematically during the past few months and signifies a new shift to the right of the Russian bourgeoisie.

Since the beginning of the crisis, the gap between rich and poor in Russia has widened dramatically. According to *Forbes*, the number of billionaires has risen from 62 in 2009 to 101 in 2010. The combined sum of money in possession of the wealthiest 100 individuals is now \$432 billion; the previous year it was \$297 billion.

On 9 June, *Economitor* commented: “inequality in Russia is continuously increasing, not only beyond the point of social acceptance, but to the point where it turns against efficiency and growth. ... Income disparity is as large as it was during the czarist era, before the Bolshevik revolution almost a century ago.”

Mikhail Prokhorov speaks precisely for the tiny layer of the super-rich businessmen and the liberal intelligentsia who profit from this redistribution of social wealth, but who regard the Kremlin's bureaucracy as incapable of effectively controlling the mounting social tensions in Russia arising from the

extreme inequality and who see in it an obstacle to their personal enrichment.

Prokhorov himself is the embodiment of the parasitic oligarchy that usurped all of the Soviet Union's social wealth during the 1990s and is widely hated in the population. He started his career along with former business partner Vladimir Potanin in the years following the collapse of the Soviet Union, transferring hundreds of millions in Soviet assets to a company of which Prokhorov was then chairman. Now, he is the head of the private investment fund Oniksam group and, with an estimated fortune of \$18 billion, is the third richest man in Russia.

Among the anti-worker political demands raised by Prokhorov so far were the introduction of a 60-hour workweek and increasing of labor productivity. Such demands are incompatible with democracy and can only be achieved by repressive measures and against popular resistance.

As leader of the party, Prokhorov will have the right to impose every decision taken by him personally on the party membership. While he can expel members as he seems fit, the number of seats in the political council has been drastically reduced from 33 to 11 and the council's powers were severely restricted. The party's supreme council was abolished entirely. In addition, the *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* suggests that all three members of the party control commission are colleagues of Prokhorov in one of his firms, Polyus.

Boris Nadezhdin, a deputy of the State Duma and member of the party's political council, cynically commented on the party's reorganization: “The age-long dream of liberals is over. The party has introduced a one-man party leadership.” Prokhorov, whose run for the post of party leader was out of competition and approved by 107 out of 109 delegates, would for the next four years be “czar, father, god and commander-in-chief.” This is the political outcome of the forces who claimed they would restore liberal capitalist democracy in the USSR.



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