THINK PIECE

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A POLITICAL HISTORY OF THE RUSSIAN STATE: THE BASIS FOR BUREAUCRATIC POWER

Why Do Russia's Elites Support National-Communism?

Looking back to 1991, who would have imagined that the Communist Party would be at the forefront of Russian politics today. Only five years ago we watched TV snapshots of crowds toppling statues of Lenin, Boris El'tsin denouncing the CPSU and its ideology, and thousands of Russians enthusiastically embracing the new democratic era. Now Western and Russian observers can say with utter shock that Gennadii Ziuganov's Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF) and its parliamentary allies won a majority of seats in the Duma, Russia's parliament. Different articles in current Russian and Western presses, some backed up with concrete data, have expressed concern that the country might end with the same bureaucratic order it had under the old Communist collective leadership.¹

The threat of a new Communist counterrevolution seems to justify cyclic theories of Russia's political history. Russkaia ideia i 2000 god conti1n the theories that professor Aleksandr Ianov has elaborated. The influence of cyclic theories could be seen in some recent articles published by Rus-

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sian political scientists. Each of these theories grasps important aspects of Russia's historical reality. Yet they all miss a central point: Why are many dominant elites supporting the restoration of National Communism in Russia? This question leads to another important question: What rationale is behind this support? Answers to these questions are bound to be misconceived and incomplete, unless we take into account the historically verified progression of Russia's administrative elites toward political power and wealth unparalleled in the West.

I hypothesize that the major source of Russia's reforms and counter reforms is connected with the progress of Russia's administrative class in its struggle to maintain political dominance and economic wealth and prevent any threat to its power base. From the sixteenth century until 1917, this threat was incorporated in the autocratic power of the Russian tsars. After the Bolshevik revolution of 1917 until August 1991, the CPSU executed Party control over the state and over the nomenklatura. Since single party control was abolished in 1991 and parliamentary elections were first held in 1993, the Russian mafia took over the functions of social and economic control and political mediation in a symbiotic relationship with the state. These changes switched the monopoly on violence from the state to organized crime that started to build an independent "industry of violence" in competition and collaboration with the state.

The political competition from the electoral process is another threat that undermines hierarchical stability of the nomenklatura class, introducing the factor of nomenklatura rotation due to changes in the volatile political environment. Elections also posed a new threat, with national elites rapidly losing their independence from the electorate, the ordinary public and from the mafia. The mafia uses economic influence over the provincial population as a leverage in competition with elites in the capital. The Russian mafia no doubt seeks to regulate the intense war of all against all in contemporary Russia. This Hobbesian situation threatens to tear the society apart and imperils the mafia's position. However, the Communist state offers a more...