

ACTIONS INSTEAD OF PROGRAMS

Alexei Pushkov

SPECIAL OPINION



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■ *In your opinion, is loyalty to political order no longer in fashion?*

When speaking of loyalty, we should distinguish between the loyal attitude of society towards the ruling power, which means support for the ruling power on the part of society, and the loyalty within the system of power itself, i.e. within the circles that are ruling the country. Loyalty within the power system is maintained by the ruling power itself, otherwise it can not function. Disloyal members are expelled from the system. Loyalty to the ruling power on the part of society depends of course on society before anything else. It's a variable quantity and cannot be regarded as a constant of political development.

We shouldn't see loyalty as a foundation of political order but

rather as the effect of well-established institutions of power and law. When laws are observed, loyalty takes its proper place: it governs the relations between people working within one system of power. However, if the law starts to play merely a secondary role, if laws are officially declared but not applied in reality, then loyalty comes to the foreground and pushes back the law. It actually becomes the law, and society has to pay the price of this perversion with corruption and stagnation of its political institutions.

Let me make it more clear. Loyalty regulates the relationship between people that are working and acting in the same system of power (corporation). If you take away team loyalty, how can the government and the executive power continue to function as a whole? On the other hand, **when loyalty starts substituting itself for the law, when exceptional conditions are created for a narrow circle of people who are exempted from the applications of the provisions of law, then we get corruption** of both the ruling power and society. In this case, instead of loyalty as a necessary factor for the successful functioning of the state apparatus, we get a hypertrophy of personal relations within the system of power. Such relationships in this situation start to influence all system parameters.

This is quite clear when we consider the regimes that are now falling in the Arab world. Laws played a rather insignificant role in these countries where everything was based on the loyalty of members of the ruling clan (family). As a result, a moment came

when society ceased to regard such relations as normal and convenient. It started revolting against them because, as a rule, such relations are of a purely corrupt nature. People toppled the rulers who had forgotten about them and built their regimes exclusively on the loyalty within the power system. These events also demonstrate that a society that manifests loyalty for the ruling power at a certain stage of development, rejects this power if it discovers that it is losing contact with it, while still expecting loyalty from society even when it is no longer able to provide it.

■ *Where would you locate Russia on such a path of historical transition from loyalty to law?*

Starting in 1917, law ceased to have any significant meaning in Russia. It became a function of political will. Law was only found in the background of that system of regulations that governed the political relations between the ruling power and society. And although recently we keep on hearing that it's time for us to move towards a dictatorship of law, in reality we haven't seen any moves in this direction. Everywhere exceptions to the law abound. They adopt laws that essentially break the principles of the Constitution. As just one example, the law-enforcing agencies, investigators, judges, and even educators of the Federal Service for the Execution of Punishment and the Interior Ministry are practically allowed to commit drunk-driving. These people are never subject to arrest

by traffic police. **This is a gross violation of the principle of equality before the law. It means that relations are not built so much on the principle of loyalty as much as they are on the customs of a well-protected clan.** I can see that Russia is carrying on with a tradition that was established under the Bolsheviks. It was called 'revolutionary reasonability,' but in fact it was intended to defend the interests of the Bolshevik clan. The situation has improved since then but not by much. Too often the law in Russia today carries a propagandist meaning only.

■ *How do you feel about the complex situation in which the ruling class has found itself, in relation to the populace's loss of loyalty towards them?*

First of all, I don't think that we should be speaking about a total loss of loyalty of the people to the ruling power. This is not the case. At the moment, the situation depends on the ruling power before anyone else. And it shouldn't over-inflate power relations on the account of society. There shouldn't be irreplaceable, untouchable ministers. Loyalty within the system of power shouldn't become more important than the system's relations with society.

■ *What could serve as a basis for the formation of a majority that the ruling power could rely upon in order to carry out political innovations?*

In order to win a consensus in society the ruling power should prove that it is seriously minded and ready to mobilize resources, while directing earnest efforts to attain officially declared aims of suppressing corruption. If this is not done then the public will con-

tinue to alienate itself from the ruling power, stop trusting it, and start to protest on the internet. **Society tends to trust the ruling power to the degree it continues funding projects that have value for the public.** However, the results should necessarily be real, not virtual. In our country we very often see how budget funding goes to projects that are used by members of the ruling elite and business tycoons in their own interests, and the society doesn't see any connection between such projects and its interests. The ruling power should show that the projects it initiates will be done not in the interests of some group of people but in the interests of all society. This is one thing.

The other is that the ruling power should become aware of the fact that an uncontrollable growth in the number of millionaires and billionaires in Russia is neither an object of pride nor evidence of the economy's prosperity, but in fact quite contrary to that indeed: it is evidence of a lack of balance in the entire social and economic system, including the system of power. How can a country that, by UN global ranking, occupies between 70th and 72nd in living standards, be ranked third globally (after US and China) in the number of billionaires? What makes it worse is that Russia's GDP is ten times smaller than that of the US, and three times smaller than that of China. Such imbalances make it impossible to build a healthy nation. It is paramount that the system of distribution of public wealth be reconstructed by such means as reforming the system of taxation.

Further, in order to create a steady majority, the ruling power should wage a fight with corruption and make it one of its top policy priorities. Whenever the

bureaucrats start to feel that this is for real they will start behaving otherwise. **In order to create a steady majority support for the ruling power there's no need to force an open door.** Establish a society governed by law in which people can feel protected instead of being victims of lawlessness. Make citizens see that representatives of power and law enforcement agencies who break the law will be prosecuted and not merely fired. Only then can you form such a majority.

■ *Do you think such positions could find place in the presidential election program, bearing in mind that elections will take place in a year?*

Election programs, as I envision it, presently make very little sense at all and can not be taken as a factor of support on the part of the population. Real actions are the main factor of support. We still do not know what happened to the investigator who released five possible accomplices in the murder of Egor Sviridov, although the government promised to report on this. Was it criminal negligence or, as president Medvedev hinted, was it corruption? Three months passed and what do we hear? Nothing. Programs mean nothing if they are not manifestly backed with the desire for earnest reforms and earnest actions. Society can be mobilized only with actions, not on the basis of a program. What should be done is obvious to everyone, I think, starting with the president and ending with a miner in Vorkuta in the far North. Society is waiting for actions not programs. ■

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exclusively for Yaroslavl Forum*