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FORMATION OF RELIGIOUS POLITICAL PARTIES IN THE USSR

by **Sergey Deriugin**

Dr. Sergey Deriugin, at the time this article was written in the Spring of 1991, worked as a researcher in the Institute for Social Sciences in Moscow and became the vice-editor of a proposed journal, "Disput." This paper was written for a conference that took place in Budapest in May 1991 and reflects the situation prior to the dissolution of the USSR. His articles appeared previously in OPREE.

Presently, in the USSR, the method of forming multi-parties is developing within the political system. The constituent congresses of all kinds of political parties took place. Social-democratic, socialist, republican, liberal-democratic, anarchist, and many other parties declared their foundation as consisting of corresponding orientation.

Many of the parties created party programs and rules, published bulletins, newspapers, and magazines; they have central and affiliated bodies, and they can be considered political organizations-parties. Although they have not been registered as official yet, it is important to note that according to the law adopted in the USSR, it is necessary to have 3,000 members to register a party. Thus, approximately 95% of new parties are unable to register because of lack of members. But by the Spring 1991, there were 150 organizations that consider themselves parties. While there are religious representatives from many denominations in most of the parties, this paper will deal only with explicitly Christian parties.

We are able to reach a conclusion regarding the so called Christian world in the USSR if we use the program documents of Christian parties and movements, periodicals of various orientation and a number of the other factors as the basis of our analysis. That is to say that these organizations are gaining a political character thereby having a great influence on the life within the party and on the political atmosphere of society. Scholars and students holding the faith form the main social base of the "independent Christian world." Several political movements, unions, and associations have appeared as a result of this social base.

These movements and unions can be divided conditionally into two groups: the supporters of different forms of dictatorship and Christians with the liberal-democratic orientations. The former often defend the monarchial idea while the adherents of representative democracy usually calling themselves "Democratic Christians."

The so called People's Orthodox Movement (sometimes referred to as P.O.M.), set up in March of 1990, is a typical example of a branch with an extremist political character. They wish to help the establishment of a the dictatorship and stand under the banners of Orthodoxy. P.O.M.'s components include some off-shoots of "*Pamiat*" ("Memory"), an Orthodox national-patriotic front, in addition to the Russian Popular Party, the Russian Liberation Union, and the most conservative-monarchist and anti-Semitic elements of other Orthodox unions, the Christian-Patriotic Union, and others.

The People's Orthodox Movement is fighting for the "unity of monarch and people," for the union with the European (especially French and German) neo-fascists. A consequence of this is the adoration of Stalin, who is considered the greatest fighter against Zionism. The P.O.M.'s members hate liberalism, humanism, communism, and democracy. They revere power and dream about "an iron fist," admiring both the monarchy and repressive dictatorship. At the meetings held by the People's Orthodox Movement one can see young men wearing crosses and badges with portraits of Constantine Pobiedonostsev [the procurator of the Holy Synod and a conservative advisor of the tsar in the late 19th Century], and strange as it may appear, holding in their arms next to each other placards with portraits of Nicholas II, the last Russian tsar, and Stalin. The inscription "the great fighter against Zionism" often appears under Stalin's portrait.

The People's Orthodox Movement does not hide its hatred for *perestroika*; they consider it disastrous for Russian policy directed allegedly by "Zionism and Judaism." The movement promotes rallying round the Church, army, ministry of internal affairs, KGB, and even the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. The Orthodox monarchy is the final aim of this movement. Its members accept the use of violent methods of struggle, including the use of fighting men.

The leaders and active members of this Movement are on the whole people who lack professional skill and talent. They see the reasons for their failures in Jewish freemasonry intrigues. Interestingly, they criticized Hitler for his failure in the struggle against the Jews, saying that the Jews provoked Hitler to start the war. He was being reproached because he was unable to solve finally the Jewish question. The desire for a dictatorial regime, anti-Semitism, nationalism, and chauvinism are camouflaged by claims of the People's Orthodox Movements about their own "national character," "Orthodoxy," and "patriotism."

The ultimate political aims of similar parties are expressed in a clear and definite form. In most cases, the real programmatic orientations are camouflaged by flowery discourses about Orthodoxy, its ecclesiastic spirit, *its sobornost* [unity], etc. A Christian journalist, Dmitry Khanov, noticed accurately, "it is a pity that some people who call themselves 'Russian patriots' or 'Orthodox Christians' are infected, in a spiritual sense, with the nationalistic

disease--sometimes in a grave form."¹ This is why it is very important to differentiate the *pogrom*-makers with their false references to Orthodoxy, from genuine Orthodoxy. We can suppose that the leaders and active members of People's Orthodox Movement are on the whole pseudo-intellectuals, or more precisely semi-intellectuals. While they are ill-prepared and unskilled at making their professional careers successful, they possess the higher education and ambition; thus, they attribute their failures to the intrigues of Jews or to the character of social systems. Individuals with a status similar to this perceive the democratization as a threat to their own interests. They are not ready for normal professional and political activity under the conditions of representative democracy. The most sinister propaganda of nationalism and chauvinism is evident among these circles. In spite of the fact that their propaganda is full of the anguish peculiar to the historical way of Russia, they do show Messianic enthusiasm for the national renaissance. Like the "water of life" in fairy-tales it can cure all the wounds and disease shown in their feelings of patriotism, as well as pain for misfortunes of Russia, which are stirred up with blind hatred toward "aliens," with ideological intolerance, their support of violence and the suppression of all opponents.

There is some difference between the People's Orthodox Movement and "The Orthodox-Constitutional Monarchist Party." The latter organization is based on the constitutional-monarchist positions, and it expresses the attitudes in the minds of the respectable monarchists, which are far from extremism and chauvinism. Its organization committee was founded in 1989, and the Constituent congress took place on May 19, 1990.² The Orthodox-Constitutional Monarchist Party of Russia proclaimed the rejection of violence and holds as its objective to establish the monarchical power of the dynasty of Romanovs and to restore the pre-revolutionary estates. To join the party, it is necessary to take an oath to the Grand Duke Vladimir Kirilovich, who is the present head of the house of Romanovs.³ The Orthodox Constitutional Monarchist Party supports Vladimir Kirilovich without any

¹"Christian Information Center Bulletin," February 13, 1990.

²The First All-Russian Monarchist Congress. It was said that it is not the Constituent Congress of Monarchist party since it turned to be that "the orthodox monarchist order-union" has been doing underground work since 1924. At the congress they stated that the Orthodox Constitutional Monarchist Party of Russia is not a new party, but is the same "orthodox monarchist order union" which has come out from underground and became legal.

³The Grand Duke Vladimir Kirilovich is a grandson of Alexander II. He was born in August 1917 in Finland. Now he lives together with his family (his wife Leonida Georgievna, princess nee-Bagratiou Mukhanovskaya, came from a royal family of Georgia, his daughter Maria, and grandson Georgiy) in their villa Ker-Argonld, in a fishing town Saint-Briak, in Breton (France). His opinion is that the Monarchy in unique form of government, compatible with any political system, because the destiny of a Monarch is to be the supreme arbiter. See *Ogoniok*, 1990, No. 2, p. 29.

compromise and condemns those monarchists who come out in favor of the convocation of an electoral district council to elect a tsar.

The party proclaims the non-violent methods of fight. Its members set their hopes upon the limited rooting into this new machinery of the existent frames of army and navy, ministry of internal affairs, KGB, and other state machinery. It is supposed to bring in a new nobility and to grant lands for the faithful service to the "tsar and to motherland."

The party is engaged in active work among the young people; thus, a youth committee was founded. The committee amalgamates monarchist Orthodox people, mostly students of the Moscow Historical-Archives Institute and Moscow State University.

The constitutional monarchists have three main goals: to restore Russian Orthodoxy, to bring back the Orthodox Russian reign of the Orthodox Russian tsar, and to provide a united and indivisible Russian Empire. They interpret the rebirth of Russian Orthodoxy in an original way. The party's manifesto contains direct insults toward the Moscow Patriarch's administration, deeming them "communist-anarchists" and maintaining that the administration "lapsed into heresy."

The monarchists' immediate task is to fight for the opening of cathedrals in Russia. Presently, the cathedrals are under the jurisdiction of Russian Orthodox Church Abroad and the monarchists who call themselves its "spiritual children." It is very easy to explain why the constitutional-monarchists sympathize with the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad. First, its synod is based on the monarchist positions. It is more difficult to explain how those who call their party Orthodox, and themselves faithful, permit derogatory remarks against the Russian Orthodox Church in their declarations. For a clearer understanding, it is important to note that the Constitutional Monarchists not only direct sharp criticism to Moscow patriarchal administration but also to "the democratic Christian world" and their leaders.

Thus, the Russian Orthodox Constitutional Monarchist Party is a branch of the respectable monarchy. This organization aspires to have nothing in common with extremism, propaganda of violence, and hatred between nations. While the sincere, fervent convictions of the party have nothing to do with the violence; they are worth holding in respect although there are apparent differences from other points of view. The appeals to non-violence, penitence, peace, and forgiveness of enemies are among the most important components of Constitutional-Monarchist's propaganda. As these problems are the typical for the USSR, these appeals are worth supporting. Only rejection of revenge, hatred, and animosity toward other nations helped create conditions for normal living and development of society in the USSR, a place where people with various sometimes polar convictions make their home.

There is a possibility that the dogmatic education based on Marxist-Leninist theory has created to a certain extent the type of person with authoritarian thinking, now disappointed with ideals of Communism, a person who no longer trusts the authority of the Communist

Party of the Soviet Union. But people of this type keep their internal need to obey implicitly a supreme chief. They rebel against the system of administration and order which is in a profound crisis. They gravitate not towards democracy but toward some ideal hierarchial pyramid where it is enough to obey the superior orders.

A similar type of "intellectual infantilism" is one of the roots of respectable monarchism. At the time the great erudition, inner culture, and high educational level of the members of the Constitutional-Monarchist Party are their positive and strong side. But we can see another distinctive peculiarity of its party. Its members are suffering as a result of a distinctive historical development of Russia, unlike, both the occidental and the oriental. This way is completely original, though, of course, not only the monarchists dreamt to find that original, Messianic, especially Russian way to the bright future. The various new political forces and ideological trends anticipate this path to the radiant future. Some of them see the main direction in returning of "Holy Russia," while others consider that it is necessary to revise the socialist choice.

Advocates of the socialist perspective are sometimes reproached with insufficient concreteness. But the monarchists propose quite the reverse. They envision the future clearly, that is as a certain idealization, a projection of the best features of pre-revolutionary Russia, (or "Holy Russia," the "Orthodox kingdom"). In this romantic utopia the tsar is a guaranteed token of the original, unique, historical way and Messianic destiny of Russia.

Among the advocates of "Christian democracy," the most consistent ideas and slogans are suggested by those who share the ideas of the Russian Christian Democratic Union. Their political sympathies are often closer to the social-democratic ones and to the sympathies of Christian-democrats of Western Europe.

There is little agreement among the members of the Christian Democratic Union. One of its branches is headed by an Orthodox, Alexander Ogorodnikov, leader of the party since May of 1990. Various regional associations in Moscow, Leningrad and elsewhere, ecological groups, philosophical societies, charity groups, and the editorial staff of some newspapers, ("Christian-Democracy Bulletin *Sobornost*", "Resurrection") act as opponents to Ogorodnikov. In contrast to the right-wing "national-democratic movements" which are composed only of the members of the Orthodox Church, the Christian democratic union is integrated by Christians of all the confessions, Orthodox, Protestant, and Catholic. The Russian Christian-Democratic movement set up in 1990 has a great influence on "the independent Christian world." Also, it is the only officially registered Christian party at this time [Spring 1991]. The Russian Christian-Democratic movement takes a centrist position. It defends the idea of calling the elective council to determine the future system of Russia, republic or monarchial. The leaders of the movement agree to a presidential governing system under the

conditions of separation of legislative, executive, and juridical power, and the development of local self-administration. The president must be elected by universal ballot.

The movement speaks in support of gradual reforms, and it refuses all forms of violence. There are people's deputies among the leaders of the movement, for example, Victor Aksiutchits, and priests Viacheslav Polosin and Gleb Yakunin. The Council (*Duma*, central body of government) is represented by members from Moscow, Leningrad, Riga, Obninsk and other cities and towns. The structure of the Russian Christian-Democratic movement is not homogeneous. Thus, Gleb Yakunin, supports the bloc of "Democratic Russia" and speaks in support of the union with democratic forces in the party and state machinery. The writer Karpets, a member of the Council (*Duma*) is known as a staunch supporter of the monarchy.

Victor Aksiutchits is one of the co-chairmen of the movement. His political convictions are close to those of the constitutional Democrats. The political diversity of convictions among the leaders of the movement and their own inflexibility augment the possibility of a cleavage in the movement.

A sharp inner struggle is one of the characteristic features of the religious movements, parties, and unions with political character. There are two main tendencies: "traditional" and "modernist" among proponents of "the independent Christian world".

The supporters of "traditional" tendencies are often oriented to the foreign Russian Orthodoxy or the genuine Orthodox Church. They are animated by a monarchist "national patriotic" spirit. They are against innovations in the worship service. At the same time, there are apolitical traditional unions, for example, the "society Ignatyi Brianchaninov" in Leningrad. Sometimes the traditional orientation in the questions of home-church are combined with the support to the political democratization, (priest Gregory Edelstein, deacon Oleg Steniaev and other members of the association "Church and *Perestroika*").

The adherents of the "modernist" tendency attempt to simplify the rites, to introduce a liturgy in Russian and other vernacular languages, to modernize the theology, etc. But there are people with various political convictions and orientation, too.

The struggle between the advocates of different forms of dictatorship defended by monarchists and opposed by supporters of representative democracy, the sharp contradictions between "traditionalists" and "modernists" that can be observed in every group affect these religious movements by giving them a political character. They lack substance and run the danger of break up. But, at the same time, these branches express the spiritual and political interests of the religious intellectuals, the best educated strata of the believers, and will influence the life of the home-church and the general political situation to a certain extent.