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**Political and public organizations in Karelia, 1985 -1995**

The history of the creation and evolution of civil initiatives in the Republic of Karelia (RK) should be studied in the framework of events in Russia in general. The first impulse, which motivated the creation of various informal public organizations (historical and literary clubs, political clubs), was connected with the spread of the idea of "social justice" in society. Clubs of the historical and literary type that sprang up in Karelia in 1988 - "Social Pluralism" in Petrozavodsk, "Democratic Initiative" in Kostamuksha, Popular Front of Karelia - were trying to implement two basic ideas: 1) removing the party-state nomenclature from power (primarily by eliminating its social and property privileges) and 2) terminating the monopoly of the CPSU in society (by promoting a multi-party political system where real power would be transferred to the Council of People's Deputies).

This period from 1985 to 1991 could tentatively be named "the period of democratic romanticism", when the aspirations of the masses were the criteria of truth and reason for all that was taking place. Naturally the main forms of expressing the popular will took the form of meetings, picketing, demonstrations (forms of direct democracy).

In 1989-1990 the first party groups of Social Democrats (SDA) and Christian Democrats (RHDD) were registered in the RK. At that time the DPR initiative groups, the Workers' Party of the Russian Federation (RF) and others also declared their existence (though regional branches had not actually been formed).

The next period - from 1991 to 1993 - was characterized, on the one hand, by the development of a new pattern of power relations (competition between the legislative and executive branches of power) and, on the other hand, by reducing the activity of the civil initiatives. The tendency to reject the former ideology advocating the direct involvement of the masses in politics became obvious. A new stereotype was manifested: the people were persuaded to delegate their authority to representative institutions (parties, the Council of the People's Deputies, etc.).

The regional organizations of the Social Democratic Party of Russia (SDPR) were most active in Karelia. Beginning in autumn 1991 the Communist Party started to restore its structure. In December 1992 its resurrection culminated in the founding of the Union of Communists of Karelia (UCK). By the end of 1993 a "two-party" system was formed in the RK, where the UCK was opposed to the "Vanguard" party bloc (embracing "DemRussia", Party of Economic Freedom, Agrarian Party).

The people themselves ceased to be a source of valuable public ideals for the party functionaries. The parties are no longer satisfied with the role of authorized representatives, they claim to be the creators of ideological and political goals for the Russians (the latter are treated as "consumers" of ideas).

At that stage the Finno-Ugrian nationalistic-political organizations rather than the parties became more prominent and influential. Here we can note several periods in the development of nationalistic public bodies. The first, beginning in the latter half of the 1980s and continuing through 1991, can be classified mostly as ethno-cultural, when societies of Veps, Karelian and Ingrian culture were organized. The second (1991-1994) was characterized by the process of politicizing the activity of these societies. For instance, the Society of Karelian Culture, renamed the Union of Karelian People, embarked on a

program of political activity on the governmental level, defending the political rights of the Karelians as the indigenous people of the republic. This period enjoyed the liveliest discussions in Karelia on the national - governmental - structures.

The evolution of organizations with radical programs such as the "Karelian Movement", the "Karelian Congress", which promoted the idea of the separation of Karelia from Russia, occurred at this time. As an alternative *to* its present state status, a proposal was made to "re-unite" Eastern (Russian) and Western (Finnish) Karelia into a special entity of national sovereignty. In time this idea of an independent "State of Karelia" situated in the Russian -Finnish border areas was transformed into one of "Karelian autonomy within the boundaries of Finland" and finally with the proposal to set up national administrative areas in the Republic of Karelia.

Similar "territorial issues" were disputed in Ingrian society and, I believe, caused the split in the Union of Karelian Finns "Ingria". The majority of its members preferred to pursue ethno-cultural work and civil rights activity, whereas their opponents, after quitting the Union and founding the Ingrian Revival Movement, tried to promote the idea of creating an autonomous area on the Karelian Isthmus.

By 1995 the radical branches of the Finno-Ugrian public organizations ceased their activities although from time to time their leaders stirred the public debate with press conferences. In response to the aggressiveness of Finno-Ugrian nationalists in 1994-1995 public organizations of Russian orientation ("Russian Accord", "Zemstvo Movement of Karelia", "Russian Freedom Movement") were established and became rather active. In 1995 these organizations convened a conference of Russian communities in Petrozavodsk, declaring it a preparatory step to the First Congress of Russians in Karelia, but it stopped there.

By the time of the 1995 election campaign for the State Duma of the Russian Federation the nationalistic organizations (both Finno-Ugrian and Russian) were practically inconspicuous in the public life of the RK.

Let us return to 1993, which started the second phase of party construction in the republic. It began with the autumn showdown in Moscow which resulted in the drastic overhaul of the power pyramid, including Karelia. In spring 1994 a two-chambered parliament and head of government were elected in Karelia. It must be noted, however, that at that time there was no active confrontation between ideological rivals (UCK - "Vanguard") for the seats in the Karelian parliament.

From the end of 1993 and in the first half of 1994 the structuring of the party system and the transformation of all parties into "parliamentary" parties began. The main task of the local branches became "selling" themselves to the voters. The contradiction at that time was that in general in Russia the system of State Duma elections in the regions was stimulating the development of parties as political actors, permitting them through legislation to participate in the election campaigns. At the same time the regional legislative authorities obstructed the socio-political organizations from participating in the elections. Thus, the Supreme Soviet of Karelia in 1993 rejected an election model which allowed the election of candidates chosen by "party nomination". One of the first variants envisaged such a norm and even suggested its implementation, whereby those political organizations which had enjoyed the support of at least 3 per cent of the Karelian electorate (at that time this corresponded to 15 000 voters) would gain representation.

It can only be added here that in 1996 the Constitutional Committee of the House of

Representatives of the Karelian Parliament took up this issue again and came to the conclusion that it would be valuable to make use of the Russian experience of electing candidates nominated by the parties. This was also due to the growth in influence of socio-political bodies, which by that time had representatives in the organs of power.

Today there are two leading political organizations in the RK: UCK (about 2000 members) and LDPR (about 1000), which first appeared in the republic in the elections of the State Duma of the Russian Federation. Furthermore, such public organizations as OHR ("Our Home - Russia"), JABLoko, "Women of Russia" are rather popular in the RK. They are struggling to increase their influence on the masses.

I would draw attention to the following trends in voting patterns which reflect the popularity of parties in the RK. Throughout 1993 - 1995 the regional branches of the Russian parties and democratic movements ("DemRussia", "Democratic Choice of Russia", Party of Economic Freedom, Agrarian Party, etc.) have been losing ground. This is obvious from the results of the State Duma elections. The voters preferred to cast ballots in favor of communists and liberal democrats: in December 1995 the CPRF got 15,3 and the LDPR 13.5 per cent of the vote. But in all fairness it must be stated that the voters supported those candidates and bodies which had demonstrated, for example, their "social concern" rather than ideological adherence to communist dogma.

Whereas the CPRF, UCK and LDPR act as independent (self-sufficient) parties in the republic, the Democratic Party entities, due to their weakness, have to form various blocs such as "Vanguard". Furthermore, the regional politicized structures ("Republic", "Future of Karelia", "Northern Russia", etc.) very often gain the initiative in the democratic sphere but, being rather unknown in Karelia, cannot effectively promote the Russian democratic parties. This was quite evident in the last elections.

The mistrust of voters towards Gaidar-type and radical democrats resulted in the disintegration of the "Vanguard" bloc. The Democratic Choice of Russia failed miserably in the RK; in 1995 they lost more than 38 000 votes as compared to 1993 and fell to sixth place. In January of this year its members founded the "Social Democratic Union" in the RK. Thus the rejection by the people of the RK of liberal, social-cultural and economic values influences the pattern of party construction.

It appears that society is experiencing a change in ideologies and political affiliations and the tragedy of the democrats is that they are engaged in a debate with society, trying to force their, in many respects, speculative theories of development for the country upon it. They treat resistance to "the new ideology" as conservatism of thought or fascistization of the citizens' mentality or just brush it aside as the "retarded ness of society". Such unreasonable assessment is dangerous to democracy and the construction of civil society in Russia.

The political initiatives of the citizens have been studied in detail, but non-political formations have been developing much more actively from the organizational viewpoint. The number of various new public bodies is constantly growing. The peak of activity was in 1993 when 204 new organizations were registered. In contrast, in 1991-92 the Ministry of Justice of the RK registered 101 organizations. Analysis shows that the peak of public initiatives related to the political sphere is more often than not connected with Russian election campaigns. The elections have politicized the corporate public (women's, youth, business and even leisure) organizations as well, which previously had not engaged in political activity.

From 1989 to 1995 about 40 youth organizations sprang up (and largely died shortly afterwards). They can be divided into 1) those of a corporative nature established mainly to protect its members socially and professionally (eg, Union of Pupils of Karelia, registered in 1994; some of the students' trade unions); 2) party-oriented, i.e. created as subsidiaries of political organizations ("Liberal Democratic Union of Young People of Russia", the youth union sponsored by "Republic"); 3) leisure-time groups mainly sponsored by the state. Primarily pro-party youth groups indulge in political activity (constantly) as well as those who directly (if seasonally) participate in the struggle for power (local branches of the Russian Youth Union and young people's construction cooperatives).

There are very few unions of entrepreneurs active in politics in the RK. In the 1993 elections of the State Duma of the RF the Karelian branch of the Association of Privatized and Private Enterprises of Russia supported the candidates of the "Vanguard" bloc. The entrepreneurs express themselves politically through 1) industrial-business formations ("Independent Union of Producers and Entrepreneurs of Karelia", "Union of Businessmen of Karelia"); 2) political work (local branches of "Party of Economic Freedom" and Mavrodi's "Party of People's Capital"); and 3) membership in socio-political organizations ("Vanguard", "Northern Russia", branches of "Regions of Russia").

There are about a dozen women's organizations. They can be distinguished by 1) collaborating to realize creative potential ("Maria Association" - women writers, "Ludmila", "Northern Tapestry" - handicrafts, "Artemida" - scientists) and 2) uniting to protect civil rights (Union of Officers' Wives, mothers clubs, etc.).

To conclude I would like to note that the multitude of civil initiatives is a sign of a healthy society and the proliferation of public organizations can only be welcomed. It should be also understood that the rate of growth of politicized organizations will lessen as the state and political systems function more rationally.