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Communist and Post-Communist Studies 41 (2008) 205–216

Communist and  
Post-Communist  
Studies

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# Putin as a flexible politician. Does he imitate Stalin?

Vladimir Shlapentokh

*Department of Sociology, Michigan State University, 316 Berkey Hall, East Lansing,  
MI 48824-1111, USA*

Available online 24 April 2008

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## Abstract

The article is about Putin's 'Jewish anomaly'. Against all expectations, Putin during his tenure as president of the Russian Federation showed in various ways his concern about the life of Jews in his country.

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*Keywords:* Putin; Soviet Union; Authoritarianism; Jews; Anti-Semitism; Anti-Americanism; Stalin; Khrushchev; Gorbachev; Israel; Zionism

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Leaders who can be considered bearers of an ideology are, as a rule, less flexible in their domestic and foreign policy than those who are highly pragmatic, anti-dogmatic and completely absorbed in pursuing their personal interests and ready to pay any ideological price to hold on to power and its material benefits. Soviet history provides us with both types of leaders. As representatives of the first type, Lenin, Khrushchev and Gorbachev were champions of the Communist ideology in one form or another, while Brezhnev could be seen as a leader for whom the might of the Soviet empire was the prevalent value. The first group tried to implement their shared values in their policies. None of them neglected the importance of personal power, but none of them were ready to use any means to keep it or exploit it for personal material enrichment.

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doi:10.1016/j.postcomstud.2008.03.003

Stalin and particularly Putin epitomized the second type of leader who was ready to sacrifice the country's short and long-term interests to maintain his power. Yeltsin, to some degree, also belongs to the second group, even if his desire to look like a democratic leader influenced some of his actions. Of course, Stalin and Putin used ideologies extensively for propagandistic purposes and for the legitimization of their personal power. However, given the fact that they were concerned only about personal power, these two leaders were extremely flexible and open to the idea of changing the country's ideological course in any direction. Stalin proved this several times during his career. He cannot be labeled as a leader with Communist ideology, even if some of the elements of Marxism influenced his thinking, such as the high role of conflict and material interests in social life.

He easily departed from Lenin's belief in the world revolution and international class solidarity and moved toward the idea that the might of the Red Army was the means for Russia's security and expansion in the world. Dismissing social equality as the basis of his social policy, he made the party *apparatchiks* into the materially privileged class in society. In fact, he created a class-based society (Djilas, 1957). Some observers assert that Stalin, despite his Georgian origin and heavy accent, was a Russian nationalist. His policy better supported this label than the label of a true Communist. He indeed promoted aggressive Russian nationalism. However, when he felt some threat from young party leaders in Leningrad in 1949–1950, he accused them of Russian nationalism and executed two hundred of them (Brandenberger, 2004).

Putin is as flexible as Stalin. It is impossible to classify his ideology. Nobody thinks that Putin is a democrat, since he destroyed the fledgling Russian democracy. He reduced the State Duma into almost the same sham Parliament as the Supreme Soviet, while the leading pro-governmental party *United Russia* became similar to the Soviet Communist Party. In both cases, membership in the party was a necessary condition for careers. Also in both cases, no other political movement could challenge its supremacy in the country. In addition, Putin's control over the media, TV in particular, became almost as strong as the state's command of the media in Soviet times. He also restored Stalin's propaganda from the 1930s about the country being surrounded by foreign enemies that wish to destroy Russia, as well as lurid slogans about internal enemies serving their egotistical interests and those of the West. The idea of internal and external enemies was the core of Putin's speech to an audience of his supporters on November 20, 2007 in connection with the upcoming parliamentary election. The speech was amazingly similar, given its focus on enemies, to Stalin's speeches between 1937 and 1939 (Putin, 2007a).

With his creation of the *chekists* (current and former members of the political police), who now rank among the country's richest people, and his support for those oligarchs who are loyal to the Kremlin, nobody can name Putin a Communist or even a leader with sympathies for socialist ideals. However, he also cannot be treated as a genuine Russian nationalist. It is true that he directly and indirectly supports nationalist extremists and does almost nothing to oust them from the political arena. As we can judge from his behavior, he considers Russian nationalism a powerful ideological instrument that helps him maintain his power. At the same time, several facts cast doubt on his real concern about the country's long-term national interests.

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