



## SOCIAL STATUS OF LIBERAL OPPOSITION IN MODERN RUSSIA (BASED ON PUBLICATIONS OF REPRESENTATIVES OF POLITICAL PARTY “YABLOKO”)

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### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** The scientific purpose of this article is to define the social status and milieu of liberal opposition represented by the political party “Yabloko”. **Methods:** The research focuses on interrelation of social reality and ideology. The latter is considered not only as a justification for short-term interests by certain social groups (private ideology), but also as a reflection of their social status (total ideology). The novelty of the article is that social status and milieu as well as the perspectives of the transformation of anti-elite groups of liberal opposition were defined by this method. Moreover, the usage of this method for the specified purposes is uncommon in Russian science. **Results:** Certain elements of self-positioning of the liberal legal elite, its social status and environment, attitude to the socio-economic formation existing in modern Russia, as well as a number of other aspects of the social structure in the Russian Federation are determined in the article. In particular, it is found that “Yabloko” is not a mouthpiece for the big national bourgeoisie and the defender of its interests. It is more likely that the party represents the interests of social groups with relatively high economic, cultural, qualification and symbolic capitals; these social groups advocate for a change in the existing social order, but the sudden change will not favor them (this position can be called moderately reformist). **Conclusion:** Their asociality, isolation and lack of contacts with other social groups, despite significant political activity of some representatives of the party, prevents them from receiving widespread support from potential voters.

**Keywords:** Ideology; Liberal opposition of contemporary Russia; Social status; Social conceptions.



## ESTATUTO SOCIAL DA OPOSIÇÃO LIBERAL NA RÚSSIA MODERNA (BASEADO EM PUBLICAÇÕES DE REPRESENTANTES DO PARTIDO POLÍTICO "YABLOKO")

### RESUMO

**Objetivo:** O objetivo científico deste artigo é definir o status social e o meio da oposição liberal representada pelo partido político "Yabloko". **Métodos:** A pesquisa tem como foco a inter-relação entre realidade social e ideologia. Este último é considerado não apenas como uma justificativa para interesses de curto prazo de determinados grupos sociais (ideologia privada), mas também como reflexo de seu status social (ideologia total). A novidade do artigo é que o status e o meio social, bem como as perspectivas de transformação dos grupos antielite da oposição liberal, foram definidos por esse método. Além disso, o uso deste método para os fins especificados é incomum na ciência russa. **Resultados:** Determinam-se certos elementos de autoposicionamento da elite legal liberal, seu status social e ambiente, atitude em relação à formação socioeconômica existente na Rússia moderna, bem como vários outros aspectos da estrutura social na Federação Russa. no artigo. Em particular, verifica-se que o "Yabloko" não é um porta-voz da grande burguesia nacional e defensor de seus interesses. É mais provável que o partido represente os interesses de grupos sociais com capitais econômicos, culturais, de qualificação e simbólicos relativamente elevados; esses grupos sociais defendem uma mudança na ordem social existente, mas a mudança repentina não os favorecerá (essa posição pode ser chamada de moderadamente reformista). **Conclusão:** A falta de sociabilidade, isolamento e falta de contato com outros grupos sociais, apesar da significativa atividade política de alguns representantes do partido, os impede de receber amplo apoio de potenciais eleitores.

**Palavras-chave:** Ideologia; oposição liberal da Rússia contemporânea; estatuto social; concepções sociais.

### 1 INTRODUCTION

The texts of public politicians as the resource of information about social reality have the same value as, for instance, opinion polls. Also, the analysis of the publications made by representatives of certain social groups become the only scientific method available, given the groups' inaccessibility to the researcher.

The first scientist who conducted a systematic and focused study of the relationship between ideology and social reality was Karl Mannheim (Kozyrev et al., 2016; Mannheim, 1929, 1943), who had a huge impact on the development of Western social thought.

The purpose of this study is to elicit the social status of liberal opposition, interests of which are presented by the political party "Yabloko", and find out specific features of its relationships with other social groups.

Party "Yabloko" was founded in 1993 as a coalition of democratic opposition in favor of democratic and market reforms.



The ideology of the party “Yabloko” is social liberalism. The party advocates social free market economy, equal launch opportunities, the enhancement of competitiveness in politics and economics, the strengthening of democratic institutions, constitutional state, and civil control over legal authorities (Mikhaleva & Sheinis, 2014; Rochlitz et al., 2021; Schwirtz, 2007; Shishmanova, 2020; Weiss, 2013; White, 2006, 2013, 2018).

Party “Yabloko” is the member of Liberal International (since 2002), the European Party of Liberal Democrats and Reformers (ALDE, since 2006), and the Green Russia faction is an associate member of the European Alliance of Green Parties.

## 2 METHODOLOGY

The methodology of this study is based on the statement of Karl Mannheim who observes that ideology is a socially determined mindset, which is not only a justification for the short-term interests of certain social groups (private ideology), but also a reflection of the social position that they occupy, i.e. a certain social position correlates with certain points of view and ways of thinking (total ideology). For instance, Mannheim states that the fascist way of thinking, for which direct action, faith in the decisive act, understanding of the imperative of the moment, and the initiative of the leading elite play crucial role, defines putschist groups led by intellectuals (outsiders in relation to the social stratum of liberal-bourgeois and socialist leaders), who use a change in market conditions, constantly arising during the periods of transformation of modern society, to gain power. Mannheim analyzed the other ways of thinking, such as socialist-communist, bureaucratic conservatism, liberal-democratic bourgeois thinking and conservative historicism, the same way (Kozyrev, 2014; Mannheim, 1943). However, the article’s framework does not consider this issue.

It is worth noticing that the connection between ideology and social status has been justified by other scholars as well. In particular, Pierre Bourdieu (2007) argued that “the structure of the field of social classes reproduces the ideology” (p. 53). However, it was Mannheim who investigated this connection in more detail.

Consequently, the main method of the study is classic (traditional) analysis of documents, which aims to identify the meaning of the text and analyze its content. In this case, a quantitative assessment of the document is not conducted. Careful use of the classic analysis will allow to elicit ideally typical trends from an ideologized text, discarding a single one, determined by the individual worldview positions of the

publication authors.

The structuring of the material's analysis was conducted on the following items: the portrait of Russia in the world and its place in the world order; Russia's meaningful historic periods and their characteristics; Russia in the future (a description of the future social order and the degree of certainty of its characteristics); Russia in the present (ideas about the modern social structure and the place of the left opposition supporters in it), and the attitude towards various social groups and the majority of the population (dichotomy of the "elite-mass").

### 3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### 3.1 The portrait of Russia in the world and the country's place in it

The representatives of the party "Yabloko" consider the West (primarily, Europe) as the leader of progress, not only in politics or economy, but in cultural sense as well. Westward trajectory for "Yabloko" is a main priority (Kogan-Yasnny, 2016; Mikhaleva, 2015). This claim is confirmed by the following citations.

The most disruptive thing for the future of Russia is precisely the lag in historical time. That is why today we are formulating the European path as the Party's general prospective, we can put it another way: everything must be done in order not to lag behind in historical time, to create this modern model of life, the model of human rights and life according to the law, the main thing in Russia. (Mikhaleva, 2014, p. 47).

*"It is the West today that should begin the process of improving society, overcoming the destabilizing gaps and the search for new mechanisms to ensure accordance of public institutions with the tasks facing them"* (Yavlinskiy, 2017, p. 54).

According to the latter quote, the solutions for overcoming the world crisis should come from the West, too.

Such an opinion suggests the unlikeliness of connection between the representatives of the party and Russian business community, which is oriented either towards the Russian market or Russian production resources. In other words, "Yabloko" is not a mouthpiece of the big national bourgeoisie.

It seems that liberal political system is the most valuable for social groups with relatively high economic assets (figuratively speaking, they are not going to change freedom for bread, because the latter they have in abundance). Moreover, these social groups are assumed not to hold leading positions in the political or cultural sphere. Otherwise, it remains unclear why they need to associate themselves with the foreign

influence. It is most likely that between two evils they choose the one that is further away and does not directly limit their claims.

The roles in such groups may be occupied by people possessing high rates of cultural, qualification and symbolic capital. The monopolization of politics and economy by the ruling elite and restrictions associated with this process, which do not allow members of these groups to convert their assets into financial prosperity and improve their social status, unite them.

### 3.2 Russia's meaningful historic periods and their characteristics

Russian history is considered from a very peculiar point of view since it is viewed as a series of attempts to deviate from the European developing path.

Nicholas I regarded the entire political transformation from an autocratic monarchy to a national state of one or another degree of democracy as a collapse of basic values. The departure from the autocratic monarchy to the modern European state seemed as the collapse of traditional values for him. The result was a grave defeat in the Crimean War, then a defeat in the Japanese War, then the 1905 revolution, then the 1917 coup d'état. (Mikhaleva, 2014, p. 22).

And it is not surprising that the October Revolution of 1917 is considered as a coup d'état, during which the Bolsheviks encroached power from the legitimate Provisional Government (Kogan-Yasnyy, 2016; Mikhaleva & Sheinis, 2014).

More than that, quite a lot of attention is paid to such a short historical event as the convocation and work of the Russian Constituent Assembly in 1917-1918.

One of the stages of establishing continuity and re-establishing the state is everything related to the Constituent Assembly. And this will be a formal act of continuity and connection with that Constituent Assembly, which was destroyed, dispersed, shot. (Mikhaleva & Sheinis, 2014, p. 54).

Almost the whole soviet period in Russian history is characterized negatively. The following citation is a typical example.

The Communists ruthlessly terrorized the people in order to keep them in subjection. We emphasize: being a cross-cutting trait of the system, this happened not only during the Civil War and the Great Terror, but also down the line. Demonstration of workers in Novochoerkassk was shot in June 1962, in the midst of the "Khrushchev Thaw". (Kosmyrin et al., 2018, p. 44).

In general, "Yabloko", remaining on the positions of ideological purity while assessing historical events and showing considerable scrupulousness in this, has managed to declare its ideological continuity only with the Constituent Assembly.





Probably, Assembly's work is the only historical event which was not ostracized by the party ideologists. Such historical parochialism indirectly indicates a similar social parochialism of the party "Yabloko". As for the assessment of the events of recent decades, it is as follows.

Welcoming the collapse of the Soviet system, the party representatives stigmatize what happened on its ruins (Kogan-Yasnyy, 2016; Mikhaleva, 2015) (more details on the assessment of modern times will be explored below).

It seems that such assessment typifies unjustified expectations and unrealized ambitions. Some social groups with high cultural, qualification, and symbolic capital claiming a higher status were not able to use it in the course of political and economic transformations in the 1980-1990s in Russia for the benefit of their upward social mobility. Instead, "dealmakers" took the positions that were claimed by these social groups. Accordingly, the social foundation of the party "Yabloko" probably consists of those "disgruntled" people.

### 3.3 Russia in the future. A discussion of the future social order and the degree of certainty of its characteristics

Generally, the party proclaims European future of Russia without Putin (Mikhaleva, 2014; Vishnevskiy, 2018).

*"The faster other opposition groups rejoin "Yabloko" to come to the European vector, the sooner we can build a political future without Putin"* (Mikhaleva, 2014, p. 6).

However, the replacement of leaders is definitely not enough. A number of characteristics of political and economic system is supposed to change (Mikhaleva, 2014; Vishnevskiy, 2018).

*"Then - the country's transformation on the basis of the European choice, demonopolization in the political (dismantling the system of political monopoly and the irremovability of power) and economic spheres"* (Vishnevskiy, 2018, p. 32).

The flow of thought is not original in this case. The representatives of "Yabloko" as well as other opposition parties, who criticize the monopolization of power by the ruling elite, advocate for strengthening the competitive principles in politics. A rejection of revolutionary transformations in favor of a gradual, evolutionary development is evident too.



### 3.4 Russia is in the present. Suggestions about the modern social structure and the place of the left opposition supporters in it. Attitude towards various social groups and the majority of the population. Ideas about relationships between social groups

The social structure of modern Russia is described as unjust, illegitimate and incapable of providing a decent standard of living to an absolute majority of citizens (Mikhaleva, 2014; Mikhaleva & Sheinis, 2014). The following statements can be quoted as an example.

*"First of all, in 1992, the confiscation reform was conducted, as a result of which all deposits and savings of Russian citizens were eliminated"* (Mikhaleva, 2014, p. 15).

This system is able to provide approximately 25 % of citizens with a modern standard of living, and the other 75 % of our fellow citizens do not have any perspectives and will not have them either from the angle of education, or from the angle of medicine, or from the angle of professional occupation. (Mikhaleva, 2014, p. 15).

The ruling elite was accused of either monopolization of economic, ideological and political power or inability to solve core problems of Russian society. The existing social system seems resourceless to find a way out of the crisis (Mikhaleva, 2014).

*"The thing is this system is not able to solve any problems our country faces"* (Mikhaleva, 2014, p. 16).

We note that the country has developed a system that is useless for the XXI century. The system that was built in 20 years has no prospects, it will not work effectively. It will not lead Russia to prosperity and will not make it one of the leading world countries. And it may be a system that will lead to the collapse of Russia as a state. (Mikhaleva, 2014, p. 17).

*"Because the absence of real political competitiveness leads to the absence of a modern economic system, there is no economic growth. This system makes impossible the reduction of poverty"* (Kosmynin et al., 2018, p. 56).

Unlike representatives of the party "Yedinaya Rossiya", who contrasted the "freewheeling 90s" to "stability" of nowadays, Yabloko does not see significant differences between these time periods and believes that the events of the latter are a logical consequence of the events of the former (Kozyrev, 2017).

*"Is the policy of Putin a continuation of Eltsine's policy? Definitely, it is"* (Mikhaleva, 2015, p. 41).

*"...the regime of Putin continues the regime of Eltsine, do not deform it"* (Vishnevskiy, 2018, p. 58).



### 3.5 Dichotomy of the “elite-mass”

Elite is explained as clever, unprincipled, immoral, selfish, incompetent, ignorant scammers, whose basis of power is the manipulation of consciousness, lies and violence (Mikhaleva, 2015).

*“The motto of ruling class from 90s in Russia has become “fanatically take care of yourself and about yourself only” (Kogan-Yasnyy, 2016, p. 23).*

*“It is clear why current Russian state is in hands of modern bolsheviks, heirs of former bolsheviks, who use the same means and methods, also profess cynicism and deception as universal political principles” (Kosmynin et al., 2018, p. 71).*

*“The lack of conscience in power is a disease that cannot be cured by persuasion and requests. It can be treated only in one way: democracy, fair elections, political competition and the succession of authorities” (Vishnevskiy, 2018, p. 124).*

Legitimate question arises from the analysis of the aforementioned citations: how could people with such low moral and business qualities take power and hold it for three decades?

One of the answers is below.

*“This is how negative selection works – the meaner, more hypocritical, more dishonest the man is, the more likely he is to make a career in politics today” (Vishnevskiy, 2018, p. 113).*

It seems that human decency, honesty, intelligence, a high level of education and professionalism prevent representatives of “Yabloko” from seizing political power in Russia. However, they do not lose hope to form an elite of their own with all these qualities. The following citation exemplifies such an intent.

*“The core of the democratic opposition is such an elite. “Yabloko” should take responsibility to form and lead this elite” (Mikhaleva, 2014, p. 24).* Attitude to the largest part of the Russian population is also typical, i.e. it is ambivalent.

On the one hand, the party recognizes the talents of the Russian people, civic engagement of the population, to which there is evidence indicated below.

*“Obviously, there are various points of view, but my colleagues’ and my personal opinion do not mean that Russian people are somehow different. The Russian people are exactly the same as all the educated people of the world - neither better nor worse” (Mikhaleva & Sheinis, 2014, p. 72).*





What I hope for is civil society. It really exists, it appears in many situations where the authorities push the interests of citizens. People unite to protect themselves. I assure you, the prospect of building a parking or a business center instead of a playground in a five minute walk turns a person into a citizen. And he is ready to take it to the streets, to organize rallies, to examine the laws, to defend his rights. (Mikhaleva, 2015, p. 73).

On the other hand, Russian society is portrayed with eschatological brushstrokes.

*"In our fragmented, atomized society, there is a huge demand for respect for ourselves and our country, and first of all for the self-respect"* (Kosmynin et al., 2018, p. 98).

Further, when politics and history separate, the crisis begins. In our situation, this crisis has two dimensions. It is a crisis of self-identification, when a huge country in groups, in regions, as a whole state is not able to answer fundamental questions – who we are, where we are going, what the path which we have passed is, what modern Russian society for XXI century is, what the modern nationhood is for us? (Mikhaleva & Sheinis, 2014, p. 112).

I have mentioned it many times in recent years that we exist in the world of the "Inhabited Island" - it is an all-pervasive propaganda radiation that divests people from their ability to critically analyze the reality, which turns them into if not robots, then in those who obediently follow the authorities. (Vishnevskiy, 2018, p. 198).

If in a normal country the president kept silent for several months on the issue most discussed by the citizens (at the same time, his press service assured that it was not his concern at all), then he would speak in a similar way - that would have ended his service. (Vishnevskiy, 2018, p. 214).

The elections on 18<sup>th</sup> march have two disastrous results.  
The first result – a huge number of citizens, voted for Putin, i.e. for preserving the current state of politics in Russia.  
The politics of war and aggression, corruption and theft, inflation and police rule. (Vishnevskiy, 2018, p. 237).

*"More than that, it is important to take into account the peculiarities of the state of a significant part of modern Russian society (atomization, lack of moral guidelines, historical pessimism)"* (Kosmynin et al., 2018, p. 112).

*"Self-interest and platitude do not simply exist, they have become a feather in the cap, a kind of criteria of already achieved or future success"* (Kogan-Yasnyy, 2016, p. 38).

Official sources of (des)information assure that Russian society is divided between conservative, patriotically thinking people and Western-minded groups of liberals. In reality, the borderline runs between depersonalized, disoriented, ruled masses and critically minded people. (Mikhaleva, 2015, p. 94).

As it follows from citations above, Russian citizens are insulate, enslaved, vulgar, mistrustful, suggestible, unable to comprehend modernity and think critically, and at

the same time they encourage a policy of war and aggression, corruption and theft, inflation and police rule.

Apart from the mentioned above, the population is observed solely as an object of politics. It is withheld in subjectivity.

*"What do we do in this situation? Only one thing: calmly and consistently try to explain to people what is happening, despite the mass hysteria that has taken over a considerable part of the population"* (Mikhaleva, 2015, p. 99).

"Yabloko"'s ideology is characterized by the division of population into two groups: critically thinking, self-reflecting minority and the rest of the population, not having such qualities (Kogan-Yasnyy, 2016; Kosmyrin et al., 2018).

*"The whole evolution of humanity is an endless enchainment of the majority's mistakes and the truth of the minority"* (Vishnevskiy, 2018, p. 173).

Finally, a "conservative turn" of 2014 exacerbated to the extreme the split in society on the annexation of Crimea and the hybrid war in Ukraine, while the liberal parties were representatives of the interests of a critically thinking minority, who are traitors and the "fifth column" from the point of view of the authorities and the population's majority supporting them. (Mikhaleva, 2015, p. 156).

The analysis of citations above leads to the following conclusions.

First of all, psychologism, i.e. reduction of the causes of political, economic, cultural and social problems to the moral and business qualities of the elite and the rest of the population, the ideology of the political party "Yabloko" is typical of liberalism (Dorey, 2013; Kozyrev, 2015; Rempala et al., 2016; Schoonvelde et al., 2019; Sembou, 2013; Smith, 2103, 2014; Van De Haar, 2015), but it is not utopian in the sense of Mannheim (Kozyrev, 2014). It is not targeted to the collapse of the existing social order, which means that it is in some ways conservative.

Secondly, there is a factor of the isolation of party members from the large part of the population. The party hardly penetrates into the nuances of the social position of various groups, apparently due to the lack of experience of such an immersion. With a slight exaggeration, it should be supposed that there are very few men "from the people" in their ranks.

### 3.6 An attitude towards various social groups

A group of oligarchs (representatives of big business united with the official establishment who occupy high positions in state bureaucracy) is mentioned in the



party's publications, inside which there are very controversial relationships.

*"Oligarchs are multibillionaires who have skimmed the country's main assets. It is not important whether they are businessmen who control power (in the 2000s) or officials who control business"* (Mikhaleva, 2014, p. 6).

There are other oligarchs, offended by Putin and removed from power. They are the very force that wants to remove the Putin group in order to take its place and manage giant assets. This is the meaning of another oligarchic project, tentatively called "Navalny". The right hand of this opposition politician is the recent top manager of Alfa Group, owned by multibillionaire Mikhail Fridman. (Mikhaleva, 2014, p. 7).

Sometimes a so-called creative class is emitted.

*"It is in the capital where this "creative class" is brought to light. It is a segment of the middle class, but distinguished by higher standards of life quality and, consequently, a request for change"* (Mikhaleva, 2015, p. 162).

Possibly, the ideologists of "Yabloko" hope to win over this social group.

There is no reference to other social groups.

The analysis of the connection between working relations and social structure of modern Russia, conducted by the party's representatives, provokes interest.

In a post-industrial economy, the quantity of workers is losing its importance due to the permanent introduction of new intellectual solutions into production that increase labor productivity. According to Marx's terminology the intellectual factor becomes a more powerful "productive force" than physical and other labor. (Mikhaleva, 2015, p. 144).

Actually, from this point of view, the party "Yabloko" is more Marxist than the Russian Communist Party. For the latter, an appeal to patriotism and nationalism is more peculiar than a rational analysis of working relations and related class interests (Kozyrev, 2019).

This fact leads to an observation that "Yabloko" may hardly be equal to political opposition forces represented by the Russian Communist party, the Russian Liberal party, party "A Just Russia", which have occupied their political niche and abandoned activities aimed at changing the socio-economic formation. Opposition niche occupied by liberals is not sufficient for "Yabloko". It is hardly worth relying on a radical change in the existing social system if this party comes to power, nevertheless, certain social metamorphoses, consisting not only of changing the plates on the doors of bureaucratic officials, will take place.



## 4 CONCLUSION

Finally, the following hypotheses may conclude an ideological analysis of the publications of the political party "Yabloko".

1. "Yabloko" is not a mouthpiece of the big national bourgeoisie and the defender of its interests. It is more likely that the party represents the interests of social groups with relatively high economic, cultural, qualification and symbolic capitals. Monopolization of politics and economics by the ruling elite and restrictions associated with this process prevent them from converting available capital into material wealth and increasing their social status. They are not satisfied with the currently occupied social niche. We can observe the small number of such groups. Apparently, this is mainly the urban intellectuals.

2. Social groups mentioned above advocate for a change in the existing social order, but its collapse will not favor them. This position may be called moderately reformist.

3. It is worth noticing their restraint, isolation and lack of contacts with other social groups. Some of the rare counteractants are the representatives of the ruling elite and bureaucracy on different levels.

4. Despite an active political work of some party's representatives, its isolation prevents the party from a broader support of potential voters. Big and sustained election victories are highly doubtful. Only a large-scale involvement of the representatives of other classes and segments of the Russian society in party's ranks (including the positions of party leaders) can change the situation. However, it will lead to the change of ideological orientation and, accordingly, "Yabloko" may end up to be a completely different political party.

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