CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion: Problems And Prospects For The Emergence Of The Multi-Party System
Behind the turbulent events that have taken place in the erstwhile Soviet Union and the present Russia in the last few years, one can discern four distinct but overlapping phases:

- First, over 1989-90, a wave of expanding democratic participation through elections to the Soviets;
- Second, through 1990-91, an opposing trend to strengthen executive authority by creating powerful executive positions such as presidencies and mayoralities;
- Third, from 1991 until 21 September 1993, when Yeltsin decreed the dissolution of parliament, a deepening confrontation between executive and legislative branches;
- Finally, following the elections of December 1993 and the constitutional referendum, a new parliament dominated by opponents of the Yeltsin programme. This trend continues even after the latest Duma elections in December 1995.

The first of these stages was the heyday of Gorbachev’s democratisation programme in 1989-90. The prospect of competitive elections to the Soviets stimulated groups of democratic activists to mobilise their followers to elect 33 known reformers and to defeat candidates representing the old Communist establishments. For the reformers it meant using the newly democratised Soviets to wrest political power from the Communist Party and the state bureaucracy. This strategy suited Gorbachev as well, for whom the democratisation of the Soviets was a way to reinforce his own power to enact reform and weaken his opponents.

Gorbachev’s plan for elections to a new system of legislative power at the level of the Soviet Union in 1989 and to the Supreme Soviets in the republic in 1990 was faithfully implemented. At the Union level, following the election in March 1989, a two-tiered legislature came into being. In a country wide election, deputies for the 2250-seat body, the Congress of Peoples Deputies were elected. The Congress had the power to amend the constitution and adopt laws, and would in turn elect from among its membership 542 deputies to a bicameral parliament called the Supreme Soviet. In a
major departure from the past, the new Supreme Soviet, Gorbachev declared, would exercise *real parliamentary power* by being in session almost throughout the year, deliberating on legislation and exercising oversight over the government.

However, numerous safeguards were devised against excessive independence by the new legislative branch. First, a third of the seats in the Congress would be filled directly by officially recognised public organizations, such as the Communist Party, the Trade Union Federation and the *Komsomol*. Second, the complicated procedures for nominating and registering would be overseen by the same electoral commissions that had been supervising elections for decades and were thoroughly controlled by local Communist Party officials. Third, many aspects of the old structure of the Supreme Soviet was preserved, including a powerful inner parliament, the Presidium, to guide agenda formation and control the proceedings, considerable discretion in the hands of the Chairman of the Supreme Soviet to govern floor proceedings, and precedence of unicameral structures such as committees and presidium over the nominal division of responsibilities.

A number of important and impressive victories of the democratic forces threatened the interests of the powerful ruling bureaucracies, such as the Communist Party apparatus, the ministries and agencies of the state and elements of the military and security forces. As party leader, Gorbachev too had lost his ability to control the pace of change in the outlying republics. In some republics, local Communist leaders were forced to align with powerful movements for national independence, while in others, the leaders increased repression of opposition in order to tighten their hold over their republics. In Russia, the democratic forces linked the demand for a radical democratic and economic reform with the demand for a powerful and sovereign Russia.

Being attacked from every side, by both the 'hardline conservatives' based in the central state bureaucracies and the 'democratic forces' allied with the movements for national sovereignty in the Union republics, Gorbachev moved in early 1990 to strengthen his own political position. This was done, by creating the post of the
Executive President, who was to be elected by the Congress of People's Deputies. In keeping with his dual strategy of consolidating his personal power while expanding mass participation, in the political system, Gorbachev created the post of the president as an extremely powerful one. The President could name and dissolve the government, suspend legislative enactments, declare emergencies and impose presidential rule. An advisory council called the 'Presidential Council' was created, as well as a 'Federation Council' which would give the President direct access to the chiefs of state of the Union republics.

The creation of a powerful Executive Presidency at the Union level did not inhibit the gathering momentum of popular movements for republican sovereignty and democratic reform. The election to the legislative organs of all the Union republics, gave a new impetus to these movements. Throughout the USSR, around 2 million deputies seats were filled in 1990. As in 1989, the democratic forces fought to nominate and elect candidates defending the cause of radical reform and to defeat prominent representatives of the ruling establishment. More than the 1989 elections of USSR deputies, the 1990 republic and local elections in Russia were conducted along partisan lines. Although competing parties as such were absent, many of the Russian candidates affiliated themselves with a political movement. Most prominent was the Democratic Russia - also known as Dem Rossiya or DR - which was a loosely organized coalition of candidates for Soviets at all levels, who pressed for radical political and economic change. Opposing them was a smaller alliance called the 'Bloc of Public and Patriotic Movements of Russia', having an aggressively nationalist and authoritarian stance.

The democratic forces won a number of notable victories. Around 40 per cent of the newly elected RSFSR deputies identified themselves with the democratic cause. In Moscow, Leningrad and Sverdlovsk, democrats used their majorities to elect prominent democratic politicians - Gavrill Popov, Anatolli Sobchak and Yuri Samarin, respectively - as Chairman of the City Soviets. In the Russian Congress, the democrats succeeded, in winning the election of Boris Yeltsin as Chairman of the Supreme Soviet, who in turn ensured that the committees of the Supreme Soviet was headed by democratically oriented
deputies. However, soon due to inexperience, and lack of incentives to maintain any sort of partisan discipline, the democratic forces at all levels began to splinter into rival factions.

Although, at the level of the Russia-wide Congress of People’s Deputies, the democratic and conservative sides were roughly equal in strength. Yeltsin and his supporters had several advantages that enabled them to win a number of significant victories in the first year of the Congress’s existence. One was the strength of popular hostility to Communist power and privilege. Second, the democrats allied themselves with the popular cause of Russian resistance. Yeltsin appealed for solidarity among the Russian politicians against the bullying tactics of the Union leadership. In the Third Congress, which was convened at the initiative of the Communists, to remove Yeltsin, was tactfully used by Yeltsin to endorse his proposal for a powerful, directly elected Russian President. The third factor that strengthened Yeltsin’s position was the strategic opportunity that the chairmanship gave him to cultivate alliances within the Supreme Soviet.

The model of Soviet power that had developed under Communism had treated state power as a single, undivided whole. The demise of the old regime left the question of the division of responsibilities between Soviets and state administrators undecided. The new deputies elected on the democratic wave of 1989 and 1990 frequently found themselves unable to take charge of the generally conservative, hostile bureaucracy, and demanded stronger executive authority that could monitor and control the powerful agencies of the state. Even the ‘Nationalists’ in the republics demanded powerful presidents who could stand up to the central government in Moscow.

Consequently, over 1990-91 there was a counter movement back towards greater centralisation of executive power within the state. In January 1991, responding to Gorbachev’s call for a union-wide referendum on the concept of a ‘renewed’ federal union, Yeltsin won the agreement of the Russian parliament’s leadership to the idea of placing another question on the referendum ballot in Russia. About 70 per cent of the
voters in March 1991 referendum in Russia endorsed the proposal for a Russian presidency. The election was held in June: and Yeltsin won over 57 per cent of the vote in a field of six candidates. At the same time, the cities of Moscow and Leningrad elected the Chairman of their City Soviets, Popov and Sobchak as Mayors.

The establishment of a Presidency, set off a chain of events leading to sharp confrontation between the President and the Parliament. Establishment of the presidency brought about the problem of competing mandates between the legislative and executive branches. The polarisation of political forces would have occurred sooner, but for the August coup which became instrumental in uniting most groups against the hard-line elements at the centre who seized power. The surge of popular resistance to the coup in Moscow, Leningrad and other cities and Yeltsin’s role as its focal point, gave the Russian leader a substantial political bonus. His Communist opponents in the Congress lost their political bases through a series of decrees which suspended and later outlawed, the activity of the CPSU and confiscated its considerable property. At the Fifth Congress in October 1991, Yeltsin won several significant victories. He sought and received special powers to enact economic reform measures by decree besides winning approval for constitutional amendments giving him the right to suspend the acts of lower authorities in Russia if they violated the constitution and to suspend legal acts of the union if they violated Russian sovereignty. The Congress also approved his programme of radical economic transformation.

Among the various issues that formed the basis of the struggle between the President and the Parliament in 1992, the primary were the programme of ‘shock therapy’ launched by Yegor Gaidar and issue of the approval of a candidate for the Prime Ministership. Denouncing the Congress and its Chairman Khasbulatov, Yeltsin demanded a national referendum that would dissolve the Congress and adopt a new Constitution. A compromise was reached due to the intervention of the Chairman of the Constitutional Court, Valerii Zorkin. Under its terms, both sides agreed that a referendum would be held in April that would decide the principles of a new constitution. It also provided a
means for voting on a new Prime Minister that was acceptable to both Congress and President and the result was the nomination of Victor Chernomyrdin as the Prime Minister.

The constitutional crisis was further precipitated with Yeltsin and Khasbulatov disagreeing over the wordings of the issues to be put before the people for a vote in April. The referendum was held on 25 April and was to include four items - carefully balancing 'pro-Yeltsin' and 'anti-Yeltsin' questions:

- Do you have confidence in the President of the Russian Federation?
- Do you approve of the social-economic policy carried out by the President and government of the Russian Federation since 1992?
- Do you consider it necessary to hold early presidential elections?
- Do you consider it necessary to hold early election of people's deputies?

Responding to the Yeltsin camp's appeals to vote 'da, da, nyet, da', the citizens came to the polls in large numbers and supported the Yeltsin positions by 58.7, 53, 49.5 and 67.2 per cent respectively. In case of the latter two questions, since the Constitutional Court had ruled that a majority of registered electors would have to approve the measures for them to have constitutional force, the referendum failed to force new election. Inspite of Yeltsin's political victory in the referendum he could not break the impasse in the power struggle between the legislative and executive branches.

The collision between President Yeltsin and his opponents in the Russian parliament reached a climax in the spring and summer of 1993, when the parliament attempted to remove Yeltsin from power. Yeltsin's decree of 21 September disbanded the parliament, stripped all deputies of their legal mandates, and demanded new parliamentary elections in December 1993. Decrees soon afterward dissolved city, district and village Soviets and called for elections to new, far smaller, bodies of representative power. In place of the older bodies there were to be small, purely deliberative and representative bodies at the local level, and a national parliament called the Federal Assembly with two chambers. The Upper Chamber, the Council of Federation, like a
Problems and Prospects for the Emergence of the Multi-Party System

typical European Upper House was to be much weaker than the Lower House giving equal representation to each of Russia’s 89 regions and republics. The Lower House, the State Duma was to introduce a fundamentally new principle into Russian legislative institutions: proportional representation. Half of the Duma’s 450 seats were to be filled by the candidates listed on parties electoral lists according to the share of votes that party received in the election in a single federal-wide district. The other half of the seats were to be filled in traditional single-member district contests. Each voter thus had, in effect, four votes for the Parliament: two for the two deputies from his or her region to the Upper House, and two for the Lower House, one to fill the local district seat, and the other for a party list.

Although Yeltsin’s orders were obeyed by some deputies, there were many who resisted it and barricaded themselves inside the White House (the Russian Parliament). Parliamentary Chairman Ruslan Khasbulatov convened a rump Congress of People’s Deputies, which passed motions declaring Vice-President Aleksandr Rutskoi acting President of Russia, and naming a new government. For ten days demonstrators opposed to Yeltsin’s decrees confronted the riot troops surrounding the White House. These protestors included both militant communist and Russian nationalist groups. Appeals by moderates for a compromise went in vain and the Church mediated negotiations between Yeltsin and the White House too broke down. On the weekend of 3-4 October, the loosely organized para-military units opposing Yeltsin breaking through police lines joined forces with some of the group holed up in the White House. Together they stormed the Moscow Mayor’s office and the television tower Ostankino resulting in the exchange of gunfire with the police and the killing of dozens of people. After several tense hours of indecision, the army moved decisively to back Yeltsin and crush the uprising. Khasbulatov, Rutskoi and the other leaders of the rebellion were arrested. In the assault on the White House that followed, heavy shelling caused yet more loss of life and gravely damaged the building.

Behind the struggle for constitutional supremacy between the President and the
Parliament over 1990-3, there stood a larger and continuing contest between the forces aspiring for a liberal, Western-oriented political and economic order and those trying to return to some version of the Soviet or Russian past. Each group defended a different model of rule but neither were strong enough to impose its will on the other.

The October events, prompted Yeltsin to reconvene the Constitutional Assembly to produce a draft constitution to be approved in a popular referendum held the same day as the parliamentary elections. The draft constitution provided for a very strong presidency. Elections to the Federal Assembly took place on 12 December. In all there were 3797 candidates, of whom 494 were seeking places in the Council of the Federation and 1586 in the constituency section of the State Duma. The other half of the seats in the State Duma were contested on a party list basis, with 1717 candidates in all. In all 13 blocs were registered for the electoral contest.

PROSPECTS FOR THE EMERGENCE OF THE MULTI-PARTY SYSTEM

Several theoretical perspectives have been put forward to conceptualize the democratic transition that Russia is going through. For some, the most important requirement is at least some minimum agreement among the elites of that society about the rules of the political game. For others, like in Germany or Japan, the elite-led democratisation must simply be shown to be successful, after which, mass support would automatically sustain the political institutions.1 The third perspective which is derived from historical sociology, places central emphasis on long term patterns of social change and the relationship between class forces. For sociologists like Max Weber, Reinhard Bendix and Barrington Moore, the formation of a powerful, well articulated bourgeoisie is of crucial importance. It is this group which, having overcome aristocratic curative resistance, can establish the rule of law and other conditions within which a market and

---

Problems and Prospects for the Emergence of the Multi-Party System

218

representative government can successfully develop. Democratic rule is unlikely to survive unless it is sustained by a substantial consensus on liberal and democratic values. These values include the diffusion of political power throughout the society, guaranteed minority rights and a legal system capable of defending these rights and holding government whenever necessary to account.

Historically, the Russian political experience in this direction was not expected to favour the development of a pluralist order. Compared to Europe and North America, political institutions made a very late appearance on the Russian scene. The first institution of a recognisably parliamentary kind was the State Duma established in 1906. Resting on a franchise that was restrictive even by the standards of the time, the Duma did not develop any particular commitment on the part of the population on whose behalf it ruled. Although the legal system had been introduced in the 1860s, trial by jury in political cases had been suspended in 1878 and in 1881 a system of extraordinary courts was instituted which conferred unlimited powers upon the governor-general to arrest, or exile any citizen, to ban any meeting and to close any commercial or educational institution or any newspaper or journal. Trade unions and political parties were legalized only in 1905, to be operated under considerable restrictions.

Besides a comprehensive system of censorship, there was a detailed control over the flow of information across frontiers. Most important of all, there was a close association between the church and the state of a kind that obliterated the distinction between the public and private spheres. In prerevolutionary Russia, citizenship and orthodox belief were closely identified with the church being run by a Holy Synod appointed by the Tsar.

More fundamentally, Russia lacked those articulated social classes which in other

---


4 ibid., p.39.
countries had placed limits upon the monarchical authority and established their own rights based upon private property. The state itself was a substantial participant in the economy with the largest single interest in mining and metallurgy besides owning extensive coalfields, oilfields and goldmines. It owned two thirds of the railway network. The outcome was a society in which every one was dependent with no basis for the assertion of individual or group rights. This trend was carried forward by the Bolsheviks too, leading to a situation where it was not possible to build liberal democracy in a short or medium term.

Against this background, three features of the Post-Communist order become significant - the first being the weakness of law; the second the institutional setting; and the third the dominant values prevalent in the society.

The first of these is the weakness of law, in particular of a set of judicial institutions and practices capable of sustaining a clear boundary between state and society. It has been argued, that the attempted coup of 1991 was at least nominally legal. Gennadii Yanaev assumed the powers of the USSR presidency on the basis of Article 127 (10) of the Constitution, which specified that if the president were unable to perform his duties 'for any reason' his powers passed automatically to his deputy. Although Gorbachev's state of health was not authenticated by any doctor, formally no such certification was necessary. A state of emergency was declared in certain localities of the USSR without the Soviet parliament being convened to approve such an action. According to the requirements of the law, the parliament was convened on 26 August to legitimate an action which had already taken place. Presumably to guard against the repetition of such an action in the future, the Congress of People's Deputies, in September 1991, agreed that in future the President's medical incapacity would have to be confirmed by a commission appointed by the Supreme Soviet. 


The defeat of the coup was followed by a series of decrees showing little respect for the need of a democratic system upholding the supremacy of the law. The first such arbitrary action was the decree issued by the Russian President banning a series of newspapers. Under the *Law on the Press*, adopted in June 1990, a newspaper could be suspended or banned only if it advocated the forcible overthrow of the government. *Pravda*, *Sovetskaya Rossiya* and the other newspapers concerned were hardly advocating any action of this kind. In any case, such an action had to be a court decision that too after evidence had been produced in support of the charges. The dismissal of the heads of Soviet radio and television, of TASS and of the Novosti Information Agency by Russian presidential decree were equally in technical violation of law. 7

There was no adequate legal basis for the banning or suspension of the Communist Party. Under the *Law on Public Associations* adopted in October 1990, the party could only be suspended under a state emergency, which in any case was no longer in force after the coup had collapsed. Similarly, no existing law allowed the nationalization of the CPSU property or that of any other public organization. Under the existing law, only the property of a liquidated organization would revert to the state; but the Communist Party had not been liquidated, and only the USSR Supreme Court could adopt a decision to this effect. 8 The party was banned outright in November 1991 by a Russian presidential decree on the ground that the coup was an outcome of its policies. 9 Again, in technical violation of the law, its publishing houses were liquidated and in January 1992 the party's frozen assets -- 4.3 billion roubles and some US $17 million were arbitrarily transferred to a state fund for social security. 10

The weakness of the law was evident in other ways too. For instance, during

7 *Pravda*, 23 August 1991, p.3.
1990, all 15 Union republics adopted declarations on sovereignty under which their own laws took precedence over those of USSR. This was in total violation of Article 74 of the Soviet Constitution. During 1991 and 1992 a series of autonomous republics followed suit by refusing to accept the supremacy of the Russian laws, over their own decisions.\footnote{Izvestiya, 23 March 1992, p.1.} Despite the ruling of the Russian Constitutional Court that it would be unlawful to do so, the Tatar republic proceeded to carry out a referendum on its new status.\footnote{ibid., 14 March 1992, p.1.} The refusal of the individuals and even local levels of governments to pay taxes, seriously prejudiced the Russian state budget and the fulfillment of commitments to pensioners, students and military service men.\footnote{Izvestiya, 18 March 1992, p.1.}

Again, the new legislature that came into existence after the December 1993 elections and the process that had regulated its election were born in a process that was both unconstitutional and anti-constitutional. The irregular procedure that was adopted to break the 18-month long impasse in the struggle between the Supreme Soviet and the Presidency, undermined the development of a legal basis for the Russian government. Even during the course of the campaign the rules governing the election and the referendum were changed apparently at will by the president, further undermining their legitimacy.\footnote{Moscow News, no.43, 22 October 1993, p.1.} Even the December 1995 Duma elections were not free from these flaws in the electoral process.

The second major weakness of the Post-Communist order, was the extremely under-developed institutional setting which was expected to sustain the democratic process. Unlike in other systems, there were no nationally organized political parties that could offer a choice of candidates and programmes at periodic elections simultaneously maintaining a stable pattern of interaction with the wider society. There was no dearth
of bodies which had adopted a designation of this kind. Soon after the parties were legally permitted to exist, at least 20 all Union and 500 parties at the level of republics had come into formal existence.\(^{15}\) While some of the parties took names of the pre-revolutionary parties, like the *Constitutional Democrats*, there were many which took well established labels like the *Socialists* and *Liberal Democrats*. There was also a *Humour Party* and an *Idiots Party of Russia* with its slogan of 'give the people beer and sausage'.\(^{16}\) A guide to the newly-formed parties and associations that was published in late 1991 listed over 300 of them including 9 separate anarchist parties, 17 monarchist ones, and 53 of a 'national-patriotic' character. Even the chauvinist movement *Pamyat* had at least ten distinct tendencies.

The new parties suffered from a number of inherent weaknesses. Most of these parties had very limited memberships in comparison with the CPSU which at the time of its suspension had a mass membership of 15 million and an inflow of recruits of at least 100,000 a year.\(^{17}\) By contrast, the membership totals of the new parties were much more speculative. While some kept these matters secret, others kept no central records. There was also some double counting with most of the new parties exaggerating their number considerably. For instance, Zhirinovsky *Liberal Democratic Party* included all those who had attended its first Congress, including those who had done so simply out of curiosity.\(^{18}\) In late 1991, a Russian parliamentary representative described the party system in Russia as a fiction with a wholly imaginary national structure and a real membership of a few hundred rather than tens of thousand as stated by them.\(^{19}\) As a result of these distortions, the *People’s Party of Free Russia*, led by Russian

---

\(^{15}\) *Pravda*, 20 February 1991, p.2.


\(^{17}\) *Pravda*, 26 July 1991, p.2.


\(^{19}\) *Sovetskaya Rossiya*, 27 December 1991, p.2.
Problems and Prospects for the Emergence of the Multi-Party System

Vice-President Aleksandr Rutskoi was clearly the largest of the new parties in the early 1990s with a claimed membership of at least 100,000. Second was Nikolai Travkin's Democratic Party of Russia with a membership of about 50,000 and the 'left centrist' Republican Party with an estimated 20,000 members came third. All the other parties were called, divannyе or 'sofa parties', whose total membership could be accommodated in a sofa. It was only after the November 1992 Constitutional Court decree partially overturning Yeltsin's November 1991 decree banning the Communist Party, did the Communist Party of the Russian Federation with its 500,000 members as on July 1995 emerged as the largest and the best organized party in Russia.

The new parties could not command the support of a large proportion of the mass public. There was in fact some anti-pathy towards the very concept of political party. Seventy years of single party monopoly had led to a general association between party membership and careerism. The word 'party' had been deeply compromised and had become a synonym for single-party dictatorship. In a survey conducted in Moscow in early 1992, when asked to identify a political force with which they associated their hopes for the future, 23 per cent of Moscovites opted for the Russian president, 20 per cent for businessmen, but only four per cent placed their confidence in the Russian parliament or the new parties and movements that were represented within it.

Most of these parties lacked a properly defined constituency. There was not much difference between the Democratic Party and the Social Democratic Party. Although both of them were in favour of social reform and market, as well as in their opposition to the

---

20 Moskovskie novosti, no.4, 1992, p.6
21 ibid.
23 ibid.
24 Izvestiya, 23 March 1992, p.3.
Problems and Prospects for the Emergence of the Multi-Party System

CPSU many of their views were reflected in the CPSU itself.\textsuperscript{25} Without some anchoring social interests, the new parties became pre-occupied with leadership intrigue, thus becoming prone to damaging divisions. Democratic Russia split in November 1991, when three of its constituent parties withdrew and formed their own association ‘Civil Concord’. This new arrangement too did not last long. The same was the case with other parties too.

For many, these political formations were at best proto-parties or leadership support groups. It was suggested that without the formation of coherent social interests no parties could develop. The parties that did come into existence were based upon small groups of intellectuals advocating their individual ideas which was often abstract, rather than putting forward a clear and coherent programme of action. Speaking to American Senators in 1990, Gorbachev described USSR as the ‘most politicized society in the contemporary world’;\textsuperscript{26} but the elements involved were still very fluid. As late as in the summer of 1991, about 70 per cent were willing to agree that ‘Russia’s salvation would be a person able to lead the people and bring order to the country’.\textsuperscript{27} This reflected the older pattern of orientations to government in which parties and representative institutions had held little place.

Another major weakness of the Post-Communist order was that, it appeared to be based upon a limited and qualified commitment to democratic values. Although the attempted coup was seen as illegal in many quarters, the fact remained that there was substantial support for the coup and its apparent objectives. According to Gorbachev himself, speaking shortly afterwards to journalists, support for the coup ran as high as 40 per cent.\textsuperscript{28} More than half of those surveyed in Kazakhstan while the coup was

\textsuperscript{25} Literaturnaya gazeta, 20 February 1991, pp.1, 3.
\textsuperscript{26} Pravda, 13 April 1990, p.1.
\textsuperscript{27} Moskovskie novosti, no.38, 1991, p.5.
\textsuperscript{28} Izvestiya, 20 September 1991, p. 3.
taking place supported the coup or at least did not actively oppose it.\textsuperscript{29} A majority of the letters received by the Russian Prosecutor about the arrested conspirators were in their support.\textsuperscript{30} Similar sentiments were expressed in some of the letters sent to the Soviet press.

After the collapse of the coup, the new institutions of government that succeeded, failed in developing a high level of support for their activities. Only 13 per cent, in the spring of 1992, thought their newly elected deputies had justified the hopes that had been invested in them, with 56 per cent taking the opposite view.\textsuperscript{31} In early 1992, only 12.3 per cent had confidence in the Russian government and still fewer had confidence in its most prominent members. Deputy Prime Minister Gaidar had the support of 8.5 per cent of the public, legal counsellor Shakhrai could count on the support of 3.4 per cent, with the state secretary Burbulis having no more than 0.8 per cent behind him.\textsuperscript{32} Even Boris Yeltsin’s support had gone down from 80 per cent support in the autumn of 1991 to 43 per cent by March 1992. This political alienation among the people was the result of their belief that the political leadership was ‘a particular group of people, an elite, that was exclusively concerned with its own interests.’\textsuperscript{33}

The degree of personal political power being wielded by President Yeltsin was effectively used to stifle political development. Rather than giving free rein to a political competitive process, Yeltsin appeared to be establishing the framework for the creation of a party that would enjoy some sort of a most favoured political status, in the new political set up. This was the underlying political message of his keynote address to the Russian Congress of People’s Deputies at the end of October 1991:

\textit{ibid.}, 27 Aug. 1991, p. 3.

\textit{Pravda}, 26 October 1991, p. 3.

\textit{Izvestiya}, 23 March. 1992, p. 3.


Those parties and movement which support the proposed measures (of fundamental economic reform) could consider the matter of setting up a single political bloc. This is necessary to mobilise mass support for the policy of transformations and to ensure political stability in the Republic. In his turn, the President is ready to maintain feed-back with these political forces and facilitate their systematic dialogue with state structures. We are ready to brief the main political forces on major state decisions being planned and to amend these, depending on the results of this socio-political consultation with experts. This bloc of political parties, having concluded a strategic union with the President, would become a major source of ideas, suggestions and schemes for implementing reforms.\[34\]

Such a situation would not be too dissimilar to Gaullist France, and while many would argue that this approach was a necessity in Russia's current anarchic condition, it could hardly be called a real enhancement of democracy. In the December 1993 election, voters had at best a vague idea of the programmes of the blocs, and were often confused about which candidate represented what bloc or view. The farcical nature of the reporting of the results on the night of 12-13 December appeared vivid testimony to the attempts by the authorities to depoliticize the elections and reduce them to the level of political theatre. The same was true even of the December 1995 Duma elections.

Surveys conducted in the former USSR suggested that a majority of the people were much more willing to allow 'the government or its bodies' to determine the boundaries within which freedom could legitimately be exercised.\[35\] It also suggested a relatively low level of attachment to minority rights and a number of other conventions that sustain a democratic order. For instance in a 1990 survey 28.4 per cent favoured the liquidation of prostitutes; 28 per cent favoured the liquidation of drug addicts, 22.7 per cent the liquidation of the handicapped, and 21.2 percent the liquidation of all 'rockers'.\[36\]

In the prevailing Russian situation the question arises as to what are the prospects

\[34\] Izvestiya, 28 October 1991, p.2.


\[36\] Obychestvennoe minenie v tsifrakh, vol.9, no.2, January 1990, p.11.
for the emergence of a democratic polity in Russia based on a multi-party system. At best one can offer three rather general observations:

First, Political Scientists agree that democracy requires a body of politicians possessing the habits and skills needed for a system build on choice, bargaining, compromise and accountability. Incidentally a very large number of Russia's present political class, both liberals and conservatives served in either the USSR legislature of 1989-91 or the Russian legislature of 1990-93, including Yeltsin himself. However imperfect these new deliberative bodies may be, they have provided valuable, parliamentary experience to the politicians, a fact acknowledged by most of them.

Second, revolutions seldom make an abrupt break with the past. Behind the appearance of radical discontinuity lies, very often the restoration of older arrangements. Many of the same people who ran the old system resurfaced in leading positions in the new one. It may also be due to the fact that certain institutional arrangements are, at least temporarily, efficient and familiar ways of getting things done. A deeper and more lasting change in a political system requires a longer period in which new people are brought into the political elite, new interests rise and organize, and new structures arise to meet new needs.

Third, social change like biological change occurs in an evolutionary fashion. Imposing a new constitution on a political system in which the actual distribution of power and political resources are unchanged, is most likely to result in either of two outcomes; the constitution is tacitly ignored, or the constitution is explicitly rejected and an new one more suitable to the systems reality is adopted. Russian parliament failed to develop a working system of political parties as the other structures like - the centralized presidium, the functional committee, the weak fractions, - met the political needs of the deputies better. Once the presidential - parliamentary impasse was resolved by the dissolution of the parliament, a set of powerful incentives was created for parties to develop electoral organizations, that could win seats in the new parliament. Immediately, a diverse array of party coalitions quickly scrambled to assemble lists of candidates and
attain the required number of voter signatures to register them, and to campaign for electoral support. One may expect that with the development of Russian society on the lines of a Western-style capitalist welfare state, its politics will evolve along similar lines. Democracy in Russia will require good constitutional engineering as well as the peaceful organic development of liberal institutions in society.