

Alexei Navalny, with backing of Russian Pabloites, shifts toward support for Stalinist KPRF

By Clara Weiss
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Though virtually blacked out by the Western media, which has been engaged in a year-long campaign in support of the right-wing “liberal” opposition politician Alexei Navalny, yesterday’s election to the Moscow City Council was accompanied by a remarkable shift in Navalny’s orientation toward propping up the Stalinist Communist Party of the Russian Federation (KPRF).

The elections were preceded by two months of protests in the Russian capital demanding that liberal opposition candidates be allowed to participate. The protests in Moscow have been dominated by middle class layers and right-wing nationalist forces that are oriented toward an alliance with US imperialism.

The Russian authorities deliberately staged a massive crack-down, which turned parts of the city into a virtual war zone. Their aim was not merely to suppress Navalny’s supporters, but more importantly to intimidate the millions of workers and youth who are seething with anger over mass poverty and the reactionary policies of the Putin government.

Shortly after the protests reached their peak with up to 60,000 in attendance on August 10, Navalny urged that they be ended. Instead of protesting, everyone should now focus on “voting smart” in the election, Navalny stated on his blog. “Our minimum task”, he wrote, “now is that [the ruling party] United Russia receives less mandates than it has now [38]. Our maximum task is to deprive UR of its majority.”

Out of the 45 candidates Navalny’s team recommended, no less than 35 were from the Stalinist Communist Party of the Russian Federation. The others are running for the US-aligned liberal party Yabloko, and the Just Russia party, one is an independent. Several leading figures in the US-backed “liberal opposition”, including Garry Kasparov and the ex-oligarch Mikhail Khodorkovsky, criticized Navalny’s “vote smart” strategy.

Defending his call for a vote for the KPRF candidates, Navalny wrote, “These [the KPRF candidates] are different sorts of people which seek a place in the opposition from within the system. Wherever there is a chance to be elected, they use us and we use them. If we elect many of them then they will become bolder and will start to better defend our interests. If we elect few of them, then they will sit quiet and we will receive little help from them. To vote based on ideological convictions (that is, for those whose views are closest to ours) makes no sense now.”

There is a definite political logic behind Navalny’s orientation

toward propping up the KPRF in this election. As the WSWs has explained, Navalny, whom the Western press has promoted for years as a “democratic” alternative to Putin, speaks for sections of the Russian oligarchy and the upper middle class that seek to replace the Putin regime with one that is directly aligned with US imperialism. However, whatever their differences over foreign policy and the distribution of wealth and power at the top, they share a mutual hostility toward and fear of the working class.

Under conditions of a growth of the class struggle internationally, they are above all determined to prevent an offensive of Russian workers and its linking up with the working class on an international scale. It is this that drives Navalny toward forming an alliance with those political forces that have the greatest experience in suppressing and politically disorienting the working class: the Stalinists and the Pabloites.

The KPRF is a hardcore Stalinist and pro-capitalist organization. It was founded by functionaries of the former Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) which liquidated the Soviet Union after it had betrayed the working class and October Revolution for decades on the basis of the program of “socialism in one country”. The KPRF to this day praises Stalin and defends his most horrendous crimes, including the mass murder of revolutionaries and some 30,000 Trotskyists in the 1930s.

Throughout the 1990s, the KPRF supported a nationalist faction of the rising oligarchy that opposed Yeltsin fearing that he and the oligarchs aligned with him would provoke a social explosion with their “shock therapy” and that they would reserve the biggest piece of the pie for themselves in what was a historically unprecedented orgy of plunder. For the past two decades, its main role in Russian politics has been that of a “loyal” opposition party to Putin, working to divert social discontent into nationalist channels.

Although the KPRF disagrees with Navalny over the orientation of Russian foreign policy, with a majority of the KPRF opposing the kind of close alliance with US Imperialism that Navalny is advocating, both aggressively promote Russian nationalism and have a mutual history of stoking anti-immigrant sentiments and working with far-right organizations.

The first open alliance of the KPRF and Navalny occurred last year over the pension reform. Under conditions where roughly 90 percent of the population opposed the raising of the retirement

age, the KPRF, along with the fascistic Liberal Democratic Party (LDPR) and the Stalinist United Communist Party (OKP) lined up with Navalny and broad sections of the pseudo-left in the so called “Narod Protiv” alliance (The People Against) to divert this mass opposition into nationalist channels and block it from developing into a movement by the working class against the Putin regime and capitalism.

The “smart vote” strategy of Navalny demonstrates that this alliance was part of a conscious response by sections of the oligarchy and upper middle class toward what they perceive as a growing threat of working class unrest directed against the Putin regime and the capitalist system. In this endeavor, Navalny and the Stalinists receive critical support from the Pabloites who provide this reactionary alliance with a “left” veneer.

The Pabloites emerged as a revisionist tendency in the Trotskyist Fourth International in the post-war period. They broke from the Trotskyist movement on the basis of a rejection of the program of international socialist revolution and the struggle to build sections of the Fourth International to carry it out. In the former Soviet Union, they advocated for an orientation by the working class toward supposedly “reformist” factions of the Stalinist bureaucracy. This orientation culminated in the 1980s in their full support for the restoration of capitalism.

The current Russian group affiliated with the Pabloite International Secretariat, the Russian Socialist Movement (RSM), has for years backed Navalny and has repeatedly formed alliances with Stalinist and far-right forces. Making clear that it was determined to continue forming alliances with right-wing forces, the RSM insisted in an August 14 statement on the “need for a broad political coalition, the inclusion of the regions, the significance of social demands”.

On August 26, Krill Medvedev, one of the leaders of the RSM, tacitly backed Navalny’s “vote smart” strategy in an article that concluded by stating emphatically that those who “hold their people in contempt and consider it a dumb, pliable mass ... should not be in the Moscow City Council”. This statement could only be understood as a call to go to vote for any candidate other than the United Russia candidates – that is, the main line of Navalny.

Boris Kagarlitsky and his website *Rabkor.Ru*, already part of the “Narod Protiv” alliance against the pension cuts, have taken a similar line. As one of the most experienced bourgeois politicians in Russia, Kagarlitsky’s role is of particular significance. In the past four decades, he has routinely intervened whenever the control of either the Stalinist bureaucracy or then the new Russian ruling class over the working class was threatened. When the Stalinist bureaucracy began to embark on the program of full-blown restoration of capitalism with the program of “perestroika” in 1985, Kagarlitsky established close relations with the Pabloites and went on to promote the election of Boris Yeltsin and his “shock therapy” which would plunge millions into poverty.

Now, as the Russian oligarchy is in profound crisis, Kagarlitsky is again summoned to intervene. For the first time since 1997, when he unsuccessfully ran as a candidate for the Bloc of Nikolai Goncharov, who was then aligned with President Boris Yeltsin, Kagarlitsky put himself forward as a candidate for the Moscow

City Council. Apart from promoting hi*Rabkor* candidacy, published a list with recommended candidates on September 1, writing that “our main recommendation is to come to the elections on September 8”.

In 30 out of the 45 cases *Rabkor.Ru* endorsed openly or implicitly the same candidates as Navalny. Most of these were running on the ticket of the Stalinist KPRF. In one case in which its recommendations did not overlap with those of Navalny’s team, *Rabkor* recommended that its readers not vote for the Stalinist candidate, but rather for Andrei Petrov from the fascistic LDPR whom it described as “unexpectedly vivid”. Neither in this nor in any other recommendations did the website address the politics of the candidate or their party.

Rabkor also endorsed the candidacy of Daria Mitina, the co-founder and head of the Stalinist United Communist Party (OKP). Mitina, as the WSWS has exposed, is a decades-long Stalinist who maintains close ties to the Kremlin and the Russian-backed East Ukrainian separatists – whom she visited several times during her election campaign – as well as to far-right forces.

The lineup of these forces is directed against the emergence of a socialist movement of the working class and must be understood as a warning about the advanced preparations of the oligarchy and its lackeys for an eruption of social struggles.

Workers, youth and intellectuals committed to the struggle for social and democratic rights must make their own preparations by turning toward the fight for the building of a section of the International Committee of the Fourth International in Russia. The most important political precondition for this fight is an assimilation of the lessons of the struggle by the Trotskyist movement against the nationalist betrayal of the October Revolution by Stalinism and against Pabloite revisionism.

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