

because China, India and Brazil are dependent suppliers of goods and services to the markets of the developed Western countries and Japan. The same can be said about Russia, in fact, although now it is only a supplier of energy and raw material resources to its European partners. All of them are part of the global financial super-system, which they can probably shatter or even destroy with the currency reserves they have accumulated in recent years but still cannot manage properly. The only option left here is to keep on the same track that they are currently on, with more or less well-informed adjustments.

The ex-Soviet republics, once labeled as “the second world”, played this round with the worst results. Specifically, there has been a de-industrialisation that is much more spontaneous and destructive than even that which is observed in the ‘rust belts’ of Pittsburgh or Glasgow. This has been worsened by being combined with a financial and corruption trap, similar to the kind seen in the third world.

**Neither China, nor Brazil, nor India nor even Russia, to say nothing about the European Union and Japan, represent a viable alternative to the hegemony of the USA.** They have not disposed of their dollar assets. Moreover, they have kept buying them. Turbid talks arose about multi-polarity, social accountability, and the necessity to regulate financial markets. They only reflect the discontent of the elites in many countries of the world. Nevertheless, this is not at all evidence of some kind of new world order, and not even a resistance against the existing one.

### *Anticipating ‘the changes’*

However, a credible and viable alternative cannot be found overnight. Just think about it, the last generation of big thinkers, big ideas, style and drive disappeared with the end of the 1970s. At that time, social life had a great emotional and creative energy boost. It manifested itself in everything, from the rock music to the conflicting vision of the world put forward by Raymond Aron and Immanuel Wallerstein. (The 1970s went largely unnoticed in the USSR during its period of stagnation. It all came back to us quite a bit later in a short burst of public activity at the times of glasnost).

It is probable that things could be changing right now. Having virtually overcome the financial crisis, the West now faces a crisis of a social nature. My American and European students cannot find the jobs they expected to have upon graduation. It is not clear now whether they will ever find such a job. In other parts of the world, the situation may be even worse. A need for changes, which still remain vague and unclear, is beaming through the sphere of world discourse. Thus, ideas still might arise and polemic clashes still might occur. It would be good to have a close look at our recent history and at what is going on now in order to avoid the same catastrophic disappointment that happened with the ‘new thinking’ of the times of the perestroika, which were so optimistic at the very beginning. ■

*Exclusively for RJ*

## BEYOND IMITATION

*Boris Mezhev*

The new book by the Russian political scientist and theologian **Dmitry Furman**, entitled ‘Spiraling’, is devoted to the democratic experiment that has been carried out in Russia over the past twenty years. Gorbachev’s reforms gave rise to this experiment. He approved the relaxation of the total control over the political process by the Communist Party, as well as relatively free elections for the representative bodies of government. Meanwhile, the revolutionary and non-legitimate effects of Gorbachev’s overthrow, which took place at the initiative of the leaders of sovereign Russia, broke the natural transition of the state towards democracy. Yeltsin and his supporters could not withdraw from power and rely on the free expression of the voter’s will any longer. As they entered the 1990s, they made both themselves and the state more and more closed to any other alternatives apart from the strengthening of the authoritarian model of power and the marginalisation of the opposition.

Although a lot of harsh words are said in this book about Yeltsin’s successors and especially the first president of Russia, **the crux of the author’s criticism is directed at those democrats who insisted on the right of the President to violate existing law and the Constitution in the 1990s** and who went on to depict themselves as advocates of democracy throughout the next decade. Furman is generally dissatisfied with the Russian political system, but he is unique among today’s critics of this system in that he recognises its actual creators. He points to those ‘democratic authorities’ that previously demanded that the state leader put pressure on the Parliament and ignore the Constitution at the beginning of the 1990s.

Furman is relentless and exacting in his convictions. He is also right when he compares our political model with analogous models, with the **imitative-democratic** models of the CIS countries, as he calls them. He reveals their obvious similarity, though he doesn’t really pay attention to the differences between them – during the post-Yeltsin period in Russia, the acting president did not prolong his term as head of state for an indefinite period. The hereditary presidency in Russia was subsequently replaced by tandemocracy and, together with its rise, some degree of hope for a new circle in the ‘democracy’ spiral emerged. However, Dmitry Furman is very vague when it comes to elaborating on these hopes in his book. In the end, he leaves the reader with a feeling that a new spiral will come about, not so much as a result of good intentions on the part of the present head of the state, but by the fundamental contradiction between the seemingly global devotion to democracy and the equally global indifference to it.

## BEYOND IMITATION

Boris Mezhuev

*Review of the book 'Spiraling. Political system of Russia in a row of other systems' by Dmitry E. Furman (Moscow: Ves mir, 2010).*

Some day the formal ritual of elections will turn into a real competition between real political antagonists with an indefinite outcome for all participants.

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What does Furman's model lack in my opinion? What does it leave behind in the frame of reference? Furman is one of few people in Russia who are sincerely and selflessly faithful to the concept of democracy. Democracy is important for him, in and of itself, and not simply as a means of achieving other objectives like, for instance, protecting business and mass media representatives against arbitrary treatment by state officials or as the mechanism of national demilitarisation. Frankly speaking, this position is not very popular in Russia, not even in liberal circles.

Furman obviously fails to notice that **an element of the 'imitation' that is present in Russian democracy is conditioned not only by the mistakes and crimes committed by state authorities, but also by a serious deficiency in terms of understanding exactly what democracy is needed for.** And what is more, it brings with itself cataclysms, disasters, disorder and quite definitely uncertainty in the future.

Let's try to analyse the point of view of those pseudo-democrats who, after Yeltsin's victorious referendum in 1993, advised him to act without looking upon the Constitution and Parliament. They argued that power belonged to the head of state, who had the full support of his nation. They said that he had been carrying out important transformations. On



what grounds did the state minority dare to put a stick in his wheel? The same arguments can be used against those who insist upon democratic transformations today. When the leaders of our country are popular, on what grounds should someone dare get in their way? If this is the case, doesn't the parliamentary democracy as it is meant to function in the West look something like an object of a tribal cargo cult? In other words, it works something like this: 'we have a leader, and we like him; when we don't like him any longer, we will try to depose him'. If that is the wisdom that is being offered, what do we need democracy for?

Dmitry Efimovich should recognise that these arguments, which he surely has often heard, are quite reasonable. Democracy cannot find its roots in the 'third world' because such a primitive line of argument can hardly be contradicted. It should be noted that the supporters of these views quite sin-

cerely consider themselves to be democrats. They are supporting, not tyrants, but leaders who are popular amongst the people. If they were standing for the power of unpopular despots, then they otherwise could be blamed for being non-democratic.

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This logic of political archaism has not been seriously questioned by anyone. This logic can only be disproved in the case there is a perception that any power, even good and popular power, calls for restrictions on the part of the statute law, popular government and the highest judicial agency protecting this law. Let's take one more reflexive step here. Namely, the understanding of necessity of such restrictions appears only in the situation of realising some initial depravity, wickedness of power, and not some concrete power, but power as such. This requires either very specific religious preconditions (i.e. something like a European Reformation), or a chronological correlation between the democratic experiment and national emancipation.

It is for this reason that, unlike the author of this notable book, I think that **democracy could come to Russia only on the wave of some national self-determination.** Such self-determination would not require a substitution of a bad governor for a good one. It would require the denial of any external domination as such. After that, it would call for the creation of a true democratic society of free people who have to submit to some power, but only with such authorities that remain obedient to the law and are restricted by the Parliament. ■