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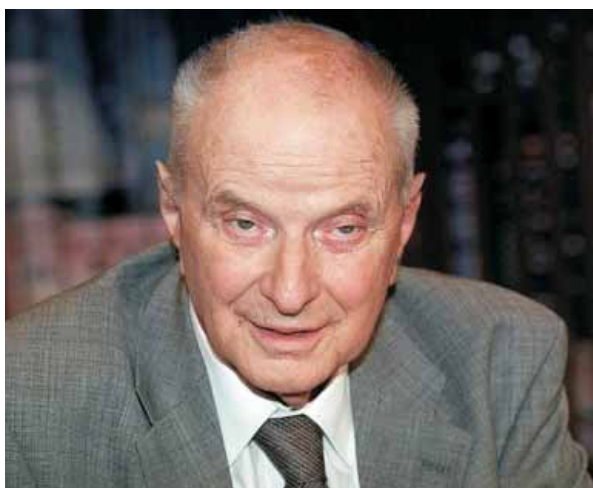
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Walter Laqueur: IN THE REALM OF INEQUALITY



All over the world, we are faced with growing inequality — a dangerous widening of the gulf between rich and poor, in terms of both income and property. In America this began in the late 1970s, in Russia in the 1990s, and in Europe the trend also exists but in a less dramatic way. In China and India it is even more marked (the richest bil-

lionaires living in London are Indian or Russian, not British; the richest American billionaire is a Mexican). According to the Forbes list, there is twice the number of Russian billionaires in 2010 than there was just one year ago. The total assets of these billionaires amount to more than \$3 trillion. This trend is bound to have negative political consequences—and not only for democracies, but also for countries which are not so democratic. This is particularly true at a time of economic crisis, when many people are suffering. It

Russian Journal presents an exclusive contribution by Walter Laqueur, the globally renowned historian and one of the leading specialists in the history of Russia, Europe and modern diplomacy.

is not so much that the rich and super-rich are acquiring greater political power (but this too is an important consideration); people are willing to put up with inequality in income and property but only up to a point. **Once the trend goes beyond a certain point there is bound to be trouble. But what kind of trouble? This differs from country to country. At the very least it will lead to political instability, but it may well be worse.** This explains the need for the White House to press for stricter regulation, to combat speculation (which causes a great deal of international unrest) and eventually also for higher taxes.

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everyone hears exactly what he wants to hear, so to speak.

Nationalism will become a hidden agenda, but it will always be translated as being statist or as favoring the Russian Orthodox Church. Directly proclaimed nationalism will result in a shock to the non-Russian population, create fear within academic circles, as well as various intellectuals who identify the 'Black-Hundred' in the word 'Russian'. No anti-state nationalism is possible in Russia, because the Russians today are undoubtedly sacrificial and heroic people. They have paternalistic and ultra-rightist views and they think in an ultra-rightist-state way, but one that is not Nazi-like.

People have become used to the prohibition of spicy, salty, or variations of ideology, in which even brief appeals to nationalism sound somewhat like a manifesto. Remember how the Soviet citizen read, for example, Stalin's statement that, first and foremost, he was grateful to the Russian people for the Victory in World War Two (the Great Patriotic War). He was essentially beating around the bush. He said it only once and never repeated it again. To everyone to whom these words were addressed, they read them and took them with extreme gratitude. When speaking about Stalin, they repeated and cherished his words, believing that he was 'for us', for the Russian people.

Russian people tend to believe in the of truth regarding nationalism, but this truth has not yet been verbalised. Rather, it is undergoing vague languor. If you show a Russian something even for a brief moment, he will start putting his languor into it. They do not insist on straight talk. An official may hint at what people want to hear when required with the help of charisma, and this will be quite enough to win the people's confidence.

While any clear statement from the opposition will not be taken positively, an indistinct and unintentional hint from the country's leading figures will be taken as a manifesto, as a declaration. This is the paradox of the modern national psychology.

People are waiting for the country's leading figures to confirm that they are 'our guys'. We always tend to believe that the person governing the country is also 'one of us', and that he is not allowed to do simply anything that he wishes to do. We also tend to believe that Russians use to operate under circumstances. In fact, this perception is simply rubbish. Of course, our emperor also has to do many things against his own will. He has to be sly, play the hypocrite, pretend that he's doing things in favour of other people while he's actually doing them in our favour. When he pronounces only one phrase: 'I'm grateful to the Russian people', this is quite enough and nothing else matters. By saying this very phrase, he is sending us a signal and we interpret it adequately. ■

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IN THE REALM OF INEQUALITY

Walter Laqueur

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Social problems in the nearest future

One of the most important issues—and this too concerns America as well as Europe and Russia (but not China and Japan) is immigration, both legal and illegal. In the United States there are probably 10 million illegal immigrants, if not even a little more, mostly from Mexico, and their absorption into society while unemployment is running at 9% has become a central issue. Since the central government has not been able to develop a strategy on a federal level, all kind of decisions have been taken by the border states trying to restrict immigration. But there will have to be a unified policy and this will be a major issue in Washington. In Europe, needless to say, the problem is even more severe, because many of the new immigrants (mainly from Muslim countries, much less from others) have no desire to integrate. As a result, the whole demographic make-up of European cities is changing—one need only walk the streets of London, Brussels, Paris or Berlin to realize this. **In brief, the old Europe is gradually disappearing and no one can say for sure what the new Europe will be like 20 years from now.** As for Russia, I believe the same is true. Politicians are shying away from considering political and social consequences even in the nearest future.

Foreign Policy

The Obama administration has tried to 'engage' other countries, meaning to establish friendlier relations. It has had only limited success (and none at all with Iran) but it is still a reasonable goal because had it not done so, its critics would have claimed for the next 10 years that it missed golden opportunities. There have been, and still are, conflicts with China but I believe they will be resolved because the approach of the Chinese leaders is sober and sensible, and the White House wants better relations too. The agreement with Russia concerning nuclear weapons is very welcome, but it could have gone further, although perhaps it will in the future. Unfortunately, there has been not that much progress in other aspects of US-Russian relations. There are various reasons, but **this might change for the better once American troops withdraw from Afghanistan (the sooner the better) and once Russia has to accept its responsibilities its 'privileged zone of influence' in Central Asia.** ■

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