

RUSSIA'S PECULIAR AFFLICTION



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Everyone understands that Russia is an ill country. But what exactly is this illness? This question has been answered differently by liberals and democrats, by Eurasians, Slavophiles and Byzantians, as well as by nationalists and imperialists. **In my opinion, Russia suffers from a political illness, which also inextricably means an economic, anthropological and ideological illness as well.** Today people have been left without any point by which to orient themselves and, as a result, the so-called “political doctors” are emerging on the scene. Who are these people? Primarily, they are people lacking morals. All of them tend to hold a purely aesthetic view of the world. They tend to position themselves as outsiders and they also detach themselves from society on a personal level.

Alas, they are ruling Russia, they own the mass media system within the country, and they also control the masses, forge social pseudo-structures. As well, our future depends on them. But these people neither have any flair nor the capacity for strategic thinking. The situation is made even worse in Russia by the existence of acute social problems. A structured society simply does not exist in Russia, and there are no groups here that are

capable of clearly voicing what they want and what they don't want. Our political parties are not parties per se, but merely a political palimpsest. Our trade unions are not unions per se, but a political pastiche of the epoch of labour and capital. What is typically called Russian society is in fact a “passenger without a seat”, which cannot mount any resistance on the institutional level even if it wanted to. The only option left for such a society is to take on a “partisan” stance. All of us today, in a sense, are thus partisans.

Does Russia need a tough doctor? I do not actually know. I only know that, at times of distemper, Russia has needed real leaders. However, the whole world today is in a situation of uncertainty, where nobody tends to understand anything. There is distemper everywhere and everyone needs a political shaman so to speak. And this essentially means that the problem is not even associated with risk factors, which, at the very least, we have learned to evaluate. Rather the problem is associated with the darkness of our civilisation, where we are only able to move by feeling our way. And, given this situation, we should be led through this darkness not by blind managers, but by prophets who indeed have flair. ■

RUSSIA DOES NOT NEED TO BE CURED



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International ratings of democracy, such as those published by different international agencies, are important for the overall estimate they provide of the political development in different countries. Aside from building-up a certain image of a country in the world arena, such ratings are invaluable for politicians and especially businesses, since large transnational companies need estimates of political risk in order to safeguard their long term investments.

But one should not consider such ratings as a tool for international struggle. If this were the case, if basic human rights were used as a tool in a propaganda confrontation, it would prove a major loss for everybody in the post Cold War world. Instead, it is necessary to pay attention to these ratings as indicators of the varied social challenges of societies in transition. Ultimately, basic human rights, the rule of law, and accountability of the authorities should be the minimum requirements for a democratic society.

However, under no circumstances can one impose democracy by force, **because the so called collateral dam-**

ages brought from the institutionalization of democracy in the form of military and humanitarian intervention can cause more harm than non-democratic rule. After all, sovereignty is also a value that should not be violated, and a broad international consensus is needed as a starting point for defining its treatment and its boundaries.

Russia, however, does not need any treatment. It is not a totalitarian society. Moreover, Russia is not even particularly an authoritarian society. At the level of the constitution, the Russian Federation is a democratic state, albeit one which is undergoing certain difficulties at the present stage of its development. These difficulties lie chiefly in the fact that Russia has a rather unorganized popular mass underneath a rather entrenched and powerful elite. Since there are no strong groups with organized or articulated interests, the media is the only real instrument between the elite and the masses. Yet many remain hopeful, with a number of political scientists, including Samir Amin, maintaining that **such a political system in contemporary Russia is no different to that of America in the 1950s.** ■