

SOCIETY THAT GENERATES FEAR

Vladimir Nesterenko ('Adolfych')



VLADIMIR NESTERENKO (born in 1964) is a writer from Kiev, a journalist, a playwright, and a counter-cultural activist known by the pseudonym 'Adolfych'. According to his own claims, he used to be involved in criminal activities in the Czech Republic in the 1990s. This experience became the foundation for the script of the motion picture 'Chuzhaya' ('Alien girl'), which was published in 2006 as a book and then later filmed with the same title (2010) by Anton Bormatov. 'Adolfych' calls himself a fighter for justice and he consents to giving interviews and allows himself to be photographed only when wearing a mask

I did live in a totalitarian society during the period of its dissolution. Of course, there was fear, but it was a sort of a make-belief fear. People of the older generation have lived with fear throughout their entire lives. I will explain that with the use of some examples. One of my grandmothers used to try get in the way of me developing an interest in the 'Voice of America' – pressing her index finger to her lips, she would say to me, 'Volodya, turn it off, the NGB will know' (the NGB, I guess, was some kind of

synthesis of the NKVD and the KGB). My second grandmother also once whispered in my ear (and we were even alone in the apartment at the time), 'Volodya, remember, Kuchma (the president of Ukraine at that time) is the enemy of the people'.

We were afraid of militia. The district militia officer was essentially an embodiment of the state power. However, back then, the militia did not have billy clubs or wear masks on their faces. Those were believed to be the signs of capitalism and, in my opinion, that belief was correct.

As to the 'post-Soviet' democracies, I don't even know what to call them – it could be ugly democracies or democracies of voice (where one can talk but nobody is actually listening) – I have lived under them long enough to draw the following conclusion: **fear has been transformed from state fear ('state horror', as the dissidents used to jokingly call it) into private fear.** It has essentially spread throughout the whole society, and what people have begun to fear is not the omnipotent state, but a number of small social groups. Among them are Caucasians, criminals, terrorists, the militia as an organised criminal group, football fans, fascists, and other groups... it could be one's neighbour, for example.

Society itself has begun to produce various fears, you just name one. **When democracy is not supported by a concept such as equality before the law and by its adherence to this very law, it is transformed into a society that generates fear.** It is possible that the free possession of arms may help in terms of overcoming this fear, although, of course, it will not eliminate the root cause of that fear. Arms, in this case, would play the same role as armour or a bulletproof vest – of course, it can save your life, but it is rather a sort of self-complacency, just as a bulletproof vest in the face of machine-gun fire.

Fears kill democracy or, to be more specific, they transform it into an apathetic, merely formal lip-service democracy: people vote for anyone 'as long as there is no war'. In the long-

term perspective, such a system brings about destruction of those states that are do not have limits in some respects (for example, human resources, like India and China).

In the 1990s, we were afraid of hunger and, after that, we were afraid of crime and terrorism. I believe the appropriate response to the 'dashing nineties', the definition which was thrown to us from the top, would be the 'foul 2000s'. While we are no longer afraid of hunger these days, we have learned to be afraid of the secret services and the militia. It is true that the latter has always engendered fear, but today this fear has become heightened. We have begun to fear terrorists more than we used to. And we are still afraid of the rich. In the 1990s, people just did not like the rich and felt happy when some of them were killed, but today, on the whole, the rich tend to soar high above the society, and there is no authority that reckons with them (they are above the law so-to-speak) – hence the fear.

I doubt that it is possible to return to the nineties. A whole layer of extremists has grown up during and since this time, and these are the same sort of people who previously would have become criminals in the nineties. In 2010, we should be afraid of such extremists, not so much of the criminals.

Fear is not something useful or necessary – fear paralyzes the best feelings and drags from the murky depths such negatives as infamy, envy, double-dealing and so forth, i.e. the qualities that the sacred books of all religions call upon us to get rid of.

Fear, even those fears that has been lost, spoils the character of a nation. Those who live in fear can only be mobilised to do something simple – ranging from slave labour to massacres. And now our governments and societies face the task of catching up to, or at least gaining ground to become closer to more civilised societies, where fear is not the most important lever used to put our miserable world of shatter-brained consumption into motion. ■

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