

THE RULERS DON'T WANT TO, THE LOWER CLASSES REMAIN POWERLESS

Ilya Kalinin



ILYA KALININ is the Editor-in-chief of the *Neprikosnovenniy zapas* (Emergency ration) magazine

In and of itself, the mere recognition of the existence of a gap between society at large and the ruling class is not something to feel anxious about. In principle, this gap could serve as an indicator or sign of an impending social recovery that, in turn, may bring about some positive changes and improvements within the socio-political regime. The discouraging part is that **'society' itself is, in many respects, something that emerges in relation to the ongoing rejection of and opposition to the elite** (or other forms of negative self-identification).

While the elite can still be regarded as a more or less coherent social stratum that is united by its access to the distribution of economic, political or administrative resources, 'society' is, on the contrary, atomised and fragmented into countless groups that, in turn, are amorphous and connected only by their respective modes of consumption. This social diffusion points not so much to the complexity of social structures and the diversity of social interaction, but rather to the prevalence of public anomie. In this situation, any form of solidarity

virtually vanishes, which is not so much due to the unfair division of labour but rather to the outrageously unfair way that the results are distributed. This is further aggravated by the consistent erosion of the institutions of political participation.

This cleavage is not just negative in nature, springing from trivial envy to those who are well-to-do within society. It is also highly counterproductive and conducive to the further disintegration of the social fabric. Generally speaking, the situation is rather auspicious in terms of the agenda of the ruling class - which is basically to prevent any possibility of social consolidation, which might potentially threaten the existing status quo.

In my opinion, the social schism in question has little to do with rejecting the way of life that is associated with the elite. It is not about style so to speak and, in this respect, those on the very top should not fool themselves. This hatred is not actually caused by 'blinkers' or any other vestiges of power and wealth. Rather, it is caused by those who use them. It is true that, in the course of time, the most visible differences between 'the

have either been severed or that they have become strictly unilateral. It is becoming quite obvious that there is the distribution of wealth has already taken place and that only those established elites, whose legitimacy is not sanctioned - neither by time nor by the willingness to serve the national interests - will have a share in any of the further redistribution of such wealth should that eventually take place.

The 'stability' that had become the major political theme of the early 2000s has its own distinct logic. First of all, this depends on a sense of prosperity, which is rather ephemeral, as we know from recent experience and is brought about by the combination of high oil prices and the living memory of the economic collapse that epitomised the first half of 1990. It also elicits the sense of total exclusion that comes not so much from the political process *per se* (which is usually not a matter of great importance for the society at large), but rather from what one might tentatively call a process of shaping the future. **The latter is pertinent to the sphere of politics in a**

Today's mutual alienation of society and the elite is taking place in a very different way from the one summed up by Lenin in 1913 as 'the lower classes don't want to live the way they have done and the ruling class cannot rule the way it is used to doing'. The current situation is quite the opposite: those who are in power do not want to change anything, while the lower classes are unable to even express their unwillingness to tolerate all that is going on within the country

elite' and 'society' are becoming less and less audacious in form. At the same time, notwithstanding all the rhetoric about 'serving the people' on the part of those who are in power, one cannot help but feel that all communication channels between the top and bottom layers of society

broader sense - as a way of participation in the 'common life' that encompasses the people, the nation and the state. In this respect 'stability' is understood by many as a projection of their current social, political and/or financial impotence in terms of the future, which thus appears, at best, to

represent a continuation of the current situation.

The hatred of the ‘ruling class’ is neither consistent nor can it be socially localised. It is more or less obvious that the higher the degree of socio-economic marginalisation, the more intense the negative feeling is towards the elite. At the same time, moving along the social axis in the direction of relative prosperity, one can notice that a decline of certain ‘organic force’ is accompanied by an increase in political motivation and the awareness of exclusion among the people. The latter factor can affect virtually anyone whenever he or she encounters the authorities – not so much those who are conventionally denoted as ‘the establishment’ or ‘ruling class’ but also the various authorised institutions, ranging from public utility services to courts of justice and from law enforcement to public administration.

The problem is that the ‘institutions and practices’ established by the ruling class pertain solely to the sphere of public administration. Furthermore, the very cleavage existing between the elite and society cannot be reduced to the natural antagonism of the ‘poor and sick’ and the ‘rich and healthy’ being motivated by something bigger than sheer social distance. More to the point, this gap is not so much socio-economic in nature as it is epistemological. It springs from disharmony between media images and sensually perceivable reality, and between the order of discourse and the political regime. While watching TV, the viewer gets the impression that it is only his or her problems that are not being resolved.

An object to which this energy of rejection is directed has equally diffusive, obscure features. In the 1990s, mass resentment was very personal – it was always either Yeltsin or Chubais or Gaydar or Nemtsov or Grachov who was to blame. In 2000, upon winning the war in terms of the mass media, the top echelons of the elite took precautions to shield itself from such attacks if they are not authorised by the governing regime. Today, public outrage becomes personal only in the case of an impending resignation. **Nevertheless, by diverting a blow from individuals and bending over backwards to publicise its unity, the ruling class as a whole has become an object of mass rebuff.**

At the same time, I wouldn’t place too much emphasis on hate as a major descriptive instrument or apply to it epithets like ‘all-consuming’ in this study of the attitudes harboured by society towards the elite or vice versa. The focal point here is not an aggression or defence but rather mutual alienation, which may prove to be even more dangerous. Yet this mutual alienation is very much different from the one Lenin had summed up in 1913 as ‘the lower classes don’t want to live the way they have done and the ruling class can’t rule the way it is used to doing’. And since the political domain is not just deinstitutionalised (although, technically speaking, institutions of political participation do persist) but also sorely devaluated and reduced to the state of a bargaining ground for the factions inside the elite, the only thing that the rest of society can do is to ramble against ‘politics’ – that is everything that goes beyond one’s personal business, personal experience, and personal horizon. ■

Exclusively for Yaroslavl Forum

WORSE THAN HATRED



SERGEY CHERNYSHEV is an expert in organizational development and management. He is the Director of the Russian Institute and a member of the Public Chamber of the Russian Federation

Exclusively for Yaroslavl Forum

An increasingly large part of the educated class does not expect anything from the government. In the best-case scenario, a process of inner immigration starts: people will not be involved in any discussions, they will not fall for any slogans, they will not participate in anything, they will not suggest any innovations. In other words, they will effectively be saying ‘leave us alone’. In the worst-case scenario, which prevails today, we face actual departures. These are, for the most part, businessmen who form the active part of society, who live here or are at least registered here *de jure*, but have *de facto* already moved their business assets and families abroad. This is the most dangerous trend that we are seeing today.

There is nothing bad in this in terms of elections. What is the big deal if a couple million people from the educated class become sulky and ignore the elections. As if they had ever participated in elections previous to that! But here the threat is much graver than the hatred borne by certain citizens.

Indifference and lack of expectations is not due to the disappointment of people who have been enchanted. It is rather a cessation of expectations on the part of those who were once ready to fit in and to support some meaningful message. Since none of them have followed this, these people do not fan the air – they just choose to

not wait for anything and instead, end up leaving the country quietly. This is the threat, which is the gravest threat because then **we, our government and our state will find ourselves alone with nothing but state employees and raw material sectors.** And all the people who could have potentially participated in something innovative will leave the country and instead pursue a path of self-realisation, while at the same time preserving their polite willingness to come back in the case that anything should happen. This cannot be considered as a social protest; rather, it is something worse.

We have what may be perceived as a very nice political elite. They seem to be sincere, honest and believe in all good people who have tried and are still trying to do their best. But **we have hermetically sealed elite class, who are totally enclosed – both in terms of politics and content.**

Anyway, there will be turmoil that will produce cracks and divisions, and thus leakage, in this hermetically proofed system, meaning that it can just flow through it. It is difficult at this point to say how exactly these cracks will eventually appear. When something that should have been done is not done and when the steps that should have been taken are not followed, we are ultimately exposing ourselves to the malice of the power of nature. ■