

ABSTRACT HATRED AND DESIRE FOR SYMPATHY

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Both democratic and authoritarian regimes are characterised by a mutual dislike that occurs between the middle class and lower class within society and its elite. But the nature of this aversion within a democratic society is based on competition, whereas the nature of such dislike between the social strata in an authoritarian society tends to be different. In the latter case, society rejects the institutions and the lifestyle that the elite typically suggests.

The Russian elite is detached from society; however, it assumes the right to propose various institutions. The problem is that the elite tends to create these very institutions and then these fiction-based institutions ultimately fail to adjust to real life. Russia's peculiarity in this regard is that, here, institutions are often imaginary and they sometimes do survive, but they

finally end up operating in a completely different capacity.

Russian society does not reject the lifestyle that elites offer. It would accept it most willingly; however, unlike the elites, the bulk of Russian society tends to be poor. If we were to analyse the conditions of the different social strata existing in the Russian Federation, we would see an obvious replication of the elite's lifestyle in the segment characterised by staggering poverty – it takes the same form but only 'two pence worth'. However, in strata where the majority of society happens to be comprised of the middle class, the situation is much more complicated. **In Russia, there still exist two middle classes – the old Soviet middle class and the new non-Soviet middle class.** The old Soviet middle class does not copy the elite's lifestyle. It has its own values and its own lifestyle. As for the new non-Soviet middle class, it has not yet made up its mind as to whether they should invent its own lifestyle or whether they should try and copy the lifestyle of the elite.

The latter is related to the fact that even the new non-Soviet middle class dislikes the elites, a feeling inherited from the Soviet times, with particular disdain for the part consisting of state bureaucrats. This dislike is felt to the least extent within the poorest, marginal layers within society, which explains why they tend to imitate the lifestyle of the elite. Discrepancies of this kind are associated with the different level of awareness among the different strata about what is going on with-

in the country. The middle class is better informed about the situation in Russia, while the poorest layers are less aware about it. Accordingly, the middle class dislikes the elite more, while marginal groups tend to be less negative towards it.

Hatred towards state bureaucrats is, to a large extent, specific for Russia. It is tied to the autocratic and tyrannical character of Soviet power. And this hatred has also been preserved throughout the past few decades. Broadly speaking, such bosses were as much disliked during the Soviet times as they are now. Breeding this disdain does not require any special effort. You only need to preserve the dislike for bosses that was inherent in the Russian citizenry throughout the last 50 years.

Theoretically speaking, such dislike for the elite may become a platform for a new social consensus. But in practice the more numerous are those who should form a new consensus, the more abstract is the hatred they feel towards the elite. I always refer to the scenario of the 1979 Iran revolution. Its driving forces were simultaneously the progressive and fundamentalist circles. We cannot speak about an alliance between these two circles, but can say that they acted in one phase and that their joint actions resulted in the successful toppling of the Shah regime. It was sheer fate that it was Ayatollah Khomeini and not a progressivist who ended up coming to power. Is such a scenario possible in Russia? Theoretically yes. In practice, however, the cur-

rent regime in Russia is quite stable. But it is stable under present economic conditions, and no one knows what turmoil is actually in store for us.

To prevent such turmoil, the current Russian government is trying to regain the public trust. Moreover, most activities on the part of the Russian ruling elite are inspired by nothing other than their wish to appease everyone - both those who can be pleased and those who cannot. **The desire to regain trust is one of the leading forces of the Russian authorities and the driving force of Russian reforms. Besides, one can hardly imagine a more powerful driving force for Russian reforms,** not to mention an irrational pursuit for good and justice as understood by elites.

However, there should be an easier way to regain public trust.

About 80-90 people should be arrested and tried fairly. This would be a good lesson for the remaining dozens of thousands of Russian officials. Unfortunately, these people are symbols of Russia's national identity.

It is believed that the Russian society of today is depoliticised. However, this is not actually true. The apathy and submission inherent in Russian society are not a sign of depoliticisation. On the contrary, **our society is quite politicised, but its politicisation is focused on the understanding of and interest in circum-political events,** which is quite natural for a country that has recently changed its political regime. To a lesser extent, its politicisation is focused on interest in political actions. At the same time, public interest in non-political actions is rather strong. It is a general trend which

hardly depends on who is in power. Broadly speaking, the space that is gradually utilised by society is utilised faster than the pace at which the authorities are growing. Surely the government has long arms, but it simply cannot reach everything that appears all of a sudden. The world is growing faster than the government is able to reach and grasp it. The number of forbidden things is gradually decreasing, not the least because many new things continually appear.

One of the places where we may see the appearance of innovations that are not accessible is the Internet. However, Russian society gained access to the Internet in a mass form only three years ago, and new users need some time to master it. ■

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THE GOOD AND THE BAD



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As far as China is concerned, society does not reject everything that is associated with the elites. **Ordinary people believe that there are two kinds of elites: bad ones and good ones. The Chinese tend to look at local elites as bad ones and at some national elites as good ones.** Many have made tremendous efforts to go to Beijing, the capital, in the hope of finding 'real' justice. They know local elites are bad because many have suffered in their hands. But they still hope that national elites, especially President Hu Jintao and Premier Wen Jiabao, are good ones because they have appeared to be very much concerned with the underprivileged.

The hatred is not necessarily class-based. Anyone who has something to lose is bound to have some

complaints. For example, the middle class could also be victims of food safety issues, environmental degradation, and social injustice. The hatred in China so far is not directed against the whole system but against certain individuals, especially at the local levels.

In China, the elites do not hate the masses. Elites in China also have a lot to complain about the system, e.g., lack of freedom of expression, lack of mobility, and lack of full access to information. Some are working with international organizations to improve the situation.

In China it is unlikely for the moment to have any radical manifestations like those we have seen in the Middle East. **There are elements of hatred present in China but there are no organized opposition groups. Also, the peoples' hatred is not against the system but is mostly case-specific.**

One lesson from Tunisia is that, in spite of fast economic growth, income disparity could be a future source of instability. One lesson from Egypt is that high rates of unemployment, especially among the youth, could cause serious problems. ■