

A NEW POLITICAL CORRECTNESS TO COUNTER HATE SPEECH

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Russia is witnessing a change in the direction of its ideological debates – partly because old goals have been exhausted, and partly because they have been reconsidered in the new context of Medvedev's government.

The issue of Russia's sovereignty, for example, an issue which used to be fiercely attacked or defended by polemicists, has dropped out of mainstream discussion; it would appear that a consensus on sovereignty has been reached. Other topics are also being refined by the flow of events, as is the case with corruption, the reduction of which announced by the President as being his personal duty. The new core of Russia's eternal and ongoing set of disputes has dramatically revealed its roots in a different problem: privatized violence. Recent acts of violence – atrocious attacks on Kashin and Fetisov, and the ritualistic murders in the Kuschevskaya Cossack settlement of Kuban – have switched conversation in society onto this

deliberately overshadowed topic. It turns out that society is willing to talk about this but is unable to!

I

Public anger expressed by hate speech invariably gives rise to a demand for violence. All accusations are of a very serious nature, which is why anyone who is accused does not try to reply to the charge but is forced to step up and accuse others instead.

And so a race of mutual accusations usually ensues: Boris Nemtsov, for example, makes unfounded accusations against Vladislav Surkov, charging him first with inciting attacks on the journalists, and then later with organizing the criminal acts himself. Such accusations are never reasoned, and the adherents of a 'non-system opposition' welcome them as useful for their party. Kremlin advocates are also quite predictable in their search for a criminal background in the activities of irresponsible 'freaks.' **Mass suspicion from both sides starts to grow, to the joy of penal authorities.** This hysteria criminalizes all speech in politics, seducing politicians into making this compromising discourse an instrument of future dominance.

We can see the same pattern in every crisis: a list of foes is released – not suspects but people who have been caught just to be eliminated without investigation. This leads to various outbursts, 'denunciations of reality' – a Russian specialty – and an appeal to the authorities to deprive certain social groups of certain living conditions.

However it is less common that 'the finger of God' disguises a more general message from those who condemn: though the construction of power and society is said to 'have no right for existence', to be 'illegal' and disgusting, they reside aggressively within

it and are willing to build it up more carefully. These people call for the elimination of their enemies, and in so doing will certainly be heard. They demand a place for themselves in power, for it is power that they truly want. And the circles of power are ready for their message; they understand them and feel them to be true.

This speech of hatred and descriptive 'clues' appears to be a fully manageable factor. Hatred and righteous anger in Russian 'populist' rhetoric is considerably more manageable than caution, rational attention, and alertness.

Facilitated anger is exactly the way Stalinism operated. **Stalin preferred to work with anger that was spontaneous yet controllable.**

II

Russia's use of 'post-democracy' is an inevitable process. The improvisational model of the development of Russian national statehood, and particularly its late globalization, has made it necessary to search for 'technical simplifications' of complicated matters in nation building. It is not Russia's fault that the instruments it borrows from the outside world are often decayed products of classic democracies. The price of this is a fusion of patterns into a functioning, yet monstrous coalition.

In Russia, the state, which should distinguish itself from society, is occupied by a power that is indistinguishable from the prevailing patterns in social reality. Here, in order to protect oneself one has to resort to violence or get under the wing of someone who practices violence. The Kuschevskaya settlement is a very illustrative example of this trend. It is a prosperous zone of agricultural business successful on the domestic and world markets. Like the Neapolitan economics in Roberto Saviano's best-seller, *Gomorra*, Kuban's agrarian violence became a means of

defense, sometimes even economic ‘optimization,’ and as a means to prevent the interference of corrupted and incompetent authorities. The price was a life spent under the ‘protection’ of scum who have since massacred a farmer’s entire family and his guests. But these scum from Kushevskaya are not strangers, they are part of the dynamic social society that tries to survive and protect itself from ‘aliens.’

The top priority today is the expulsion from our lives of the habit to kill, on which our Russian society has become firmly based. Not the expulsion of amorphous violence in general, but the expulsion of certain patterns of aggression and sadism from the network of social and private defenses which have gained social footing — the abandonment of hate speech and violent attack, which together uncover fear and distrust in everywhere. It is hate speech that forms the basis of our native language, both folk and political.

This is exactly the origin from which the incident with Oleg Kashin stems. Kashin is more than a journalist. His professional identity is much broader. Kashin is a reporter, a blogger, a participant of demonstrations, an observer of morality, and simply a personal friend, a foe, or a good acquaintance of many people. In Moscow he belongs to a corporation of those who are apparently never ‘bullied’ for any reason. It is a metropolitan protected class, and the inhabitants of this ‘Moscow ring’ are forever confident that they will never suffer any of the accidents common to places like the Kushevskaya settlement. The indignation is therefore more intense when it happens that they are mistaken. The language that this group speaks is the same language of violence and hate, and in this case serves as a language of ‘justifiable self-defense.’ Nevertheless, it is the same language spoken by Kashin’s attackers.

III

Russian hate speech is a very peculiar weapon of self-defense. This language is used not only to

act on the defensive, but also to attack; it is a language of extreme violence, hostility, and hatred, borrowing elements of utmost abasement and scorn. Its roots are obviously in the past but its functions are quite acute. The public sphere can be easily privatized by those who speak this language.

When people cannot cope with themselves they seek blame in others — they either find them or they invent them. The danger of this language lies in this need to invent enemies where no such enemies exist and to populate the private space with them. So we should not confuse ‘Tadzhiks,’ ‘siloviks’ and ‘fascists’ inhabiting the landscape of this particular language with real fascists and Tadzhiks — they are no more than sparring phantoms required to justify the right of the speaker’s call for preemptive violence.

Defining someone as an enemy or protecting someone as a ‘friend’ is an easier pattern than a public political conflict. **Political hate speech abolishes the space for public policy** — the place for democracy — and turns it into a place of malicious and incessant scheming. Here if one wants to protect oneself one is supposed to resort to the preventative conviction of evil-doers or, more commonly, come under the wing of those who practice violence. Ultimately, both paths end at one point: reliance on a non-government power that privatizes violence. The pattern is unvaried, and maintains a culture of division, of an impassable line between friend and foe. Yet hate speech that has penetrated into the public sphere does not look for a real enemy. It invents it, and creates it in any neighborhood simply by applying a name.

IV

Hate speech is effective because it is a common language for those who manage and those who are managed. All attempts to replace it are rejected. This predominance of hate speech has no solution except for the self-restriction of individuals.

Russian politics gives grounds

for all kinds of suspicion, especially politics that avoids discussion of problems until they swell into outright scandals. And everyone, from governors to ordinary citizens, perceives ‘power’ as an insurance scheme. It has fused with the process of cellular violence and can only offer some measure of resource provision for those who deal with the task of protection on their own.

The expulsion and elimination of rivals or ‘foes’ is presented by hate speech as a path to the ‘purification’ and ‘recovery’ of the nation. The difference between those in power and the opposition is in their personal targets only, not in their language. They demand an immediate stop to violence, yet they start with proscriptive speeches and by pointing at enemies. Whom do they address? He who should be the recipient of proscriptive appeals does not want to become the state. Above all, he wants power — either real or dormant — so long as it is violent power.

President Medvedev faces a dilemma in issuing a new policy and a new language. He obviously longs for the normalization of life, but the password for normalization is not clear. So far we can only hear hostile speeches from all parties.

Political correctness in Russia has become the immediate objective. The minimization of violence requires a control over the standards of public speech, so the language of expulsion, repression, and hatred should be withdrawn from all political circulation. Of course, we cannot simply avoid thorny subjects. On the contrary, **it is thorny subjects we should talk about** — but we should be talking in a different way, and thus set out a new standard of speech for ourselves. The maintenance of public speech is now required for political normalization, and for the escape from patterns of multiple violence, defensive violence, and the protection of everyone from everyone — where enemies are invented and absolute aggression is practiced in the name of ‘justifiable defense’ or ‘fair retaliation.’ ■