

## LOYALISM WILL WIN EVEN IF IT FALLS OUT OF FASHION

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Loyalism is not just the practice of living through the 2000s, but is one of the first attempts to sum up the results of this experience. Because drawing conclusions as to the results presupposes the existence of some sort of intellectual effort based on a certain level of education, it is not actually desirable. At the same time, discussing the bearers of loyalism and defining this phenomenon as something akin to a frame of mind characteristic of the so-called educated class (or the ‘thinker class’) in terms of loyalism does not require a greater share of education and thinking activity. Nor does it speak to any scientific approach other than one needs for speaking and writing. However, this doesn’t make loyalism any different from its past, present and perhaps also its future opponents.

What then, makes loyalism different from its opponents? First of all, it is the factor of being distanced from the ruling power to which loyalties are

typically declared. Russian loyalists of the 21st century have always been rather removed from the ruling power to which they felt loyalties. This is very important. Loyalism is not a bureaucratic or political phenomenon. Rather, it is really a civil one.

Second, loyalism should be distinguished from any official ideology, with which it shares elements of ‘patriotism’ (a loyalist really wants to see his fatherland flourish and to have the airs of a superpower but without any geopolitical metaphysics), as well as a general attitude regarding the present situation as preferable to what we’ve had in 1990s in any case. However, a loyalist doesn’t believe that the major achievements of the regime were conditioned by any genius in terms of statesmanship, exceptional honesty on the part of political leaders, or a favourable conjuncture on the global market. But because loyalism is essentially the ‘product of Vladimir Putin’s second presidential term’, one can surmise that this phenomenon is quite stable in the sense that the serious economic problems that the regime are about to face will not generally affect the loyalty that it is now enjoying.

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Third, **loyalism** is principally a denial of perfectionism and of any sort of starry-eyed idealism. It is **an attitude that allows us to compare the present situation only with what was or could have been but not with the situation that should have been.** While Putin’s Russia can be compared with the Soviet Union in its

late years, it doesn’t make any sense to ask why Russia is not like Switzerland, who is to blame and who shall be judged so to speak.

Loyalism is very much like heroic pragmatism. You can see it even at the level of those who are notorious: ‘these are the people we’ve got and not any other’. But there are important additions, such as: ‘we neither have any other bureaucrats’ and ‘nor do we have any other political class’. This sort of pragmatism has been elevated to such high degrees of distrust towards other alternatives that this aspect is probably simultaneously the strongest and the weakest part of loyalism. I say the strongest part because a loyalist will not swallow the bait of any demagogic alternatives. I say the weakest part due to the loyalist’s blindness to any genuine alternatives.

Loyalism can be equated with amorality in the best sense of the word. It is a denial of the practice of charging the regime with ‘moral guilt’. This is because, in the first place, the misanthropic nature of the regime is the product of either the fevered imagination about its far too emotional opponents, or else a rhetorical move on their part.

Loyalism is a kind of resignation from moral appraisals, not necessarily because there is no room for morals in the political sphere, but because ‘the crimes of the regime’ are evidently insufficient to criticise it on moral grounds.

The use of the word ‘loyalism’ is opportune – not because it allows us

to avoid the beautiful word ‘conservatism’ and not in order to avoid the ugly word ‘conformism’. Loyalty is not a political worldview – nor is it a personality type. It is a certain politically tinted reaction to our present-day reality, which exists in a specific historic period and which has very little chance of preserving at least some potential for the everyday actualisation after this period has ended. To put it simply, **loyalty is possible only in the ‘times of Putin’**. There won’t be any loyalty ‘after Putin’. This is why it doesn’t make any sense to speak about loyalty as some kind of worldview, or to speak about loyalists as a personality type, because it does not even exist outside of a specific political context.

Recently, a new meme has found itself an independent existence on the internet: the ‘new wrathful’. It is resolutely ousting the not-so-successful meme-project of the ‘hipsters’ and the quite successful meme-project of ‘those who disagree’. This must be the first trumpet for loyalty. No one knows who the ‘new wrathful’ are but everyone is talking about them and this means that they will soon make themselves known. Are they going to suffer from ‘paranoid anti-Putinism’, which they have inherited from their immediate predecessors? Or, on the contrary, will they enhance their wrathfulness with anti-perfectionism and an inclination for substantial discussions borrowed from loyalty? Many interesting questions like these can be asked about the ‘new wrathful’.

There is one bad premonition with regard to this emerging group. Being a conventional ‘party of the 2000s’ that struggled against the ‘party of the 1990s’, loyalty was built upon the supposition that we were better off in 2000s than we were in the 1990s, and this fact in itself seemed sufficient to support anything that was happening in the 2000s. Well, the ‘new wrathful’ can also descend to that same rhetorical lap of competition we have witnessed in the 1990s and the first decade of the 21st century. The 1990s have already been referred to by some as ‘a paradise lost’, with a bunch of missed opportunities, the right direction having been abandoned by us, eventually leading us to lose our way. In the case that we again hear (which is already happening) such a primitive stance as ‘let’s revert to Yeltsin’s Russia from Putin’s Russia’, then the cause of the ‘new wrathful’ may really be regarded as lost.

Loyalty will end up winning even if it falls out of fashion. However, if ‘wrathfulness’ will not be based on the myth of perpetual return but on the myth of perpetual movement, or to put it differently, if the agenda of the so-called ‘post-Soviet Russia’ will finally be abandoned and the 1990s and 2000s can be left behind, then everything should be fine. We should start by seeing off the loyalists in a ceremonial retirement with flowers but without any calls to subject them to wrathful revolutionary trials. They should thank them, bid them farewell and provide tranquilizers to anybody who is displeased with such a treatment for the loyalists. Then finally they will be able to move on. ■

*Exclusively for Yaroslavl Forum*

## THE DECREASE IN LOYALTY



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Current Russian government authorities have encountered a serious problem. It is possible that they do not perceive this fact just yet, but the significance of the problem does not diminish as a result. This issue concerns the crisis of loyalty. Today, the Russian authorities should strive to resolve this problem. Unfortunately, the capacities for such manoeuvring are rather restricted. Thus, **the only step that the existing political elite can actually take today, if they indeed wish to maintain the existing status quo, is to exhibit a real change of power**. However, if the status quo is maintained in Russia for the next 10-15 years, something similar to what occurred in Egypt and in Tunis can still potentially happen in Russia. In order to avoid this, the authorities need to recruit members of the new generation into their ranks.

While the new generation of politicians often comes from the level of local administrations, unfortunately, the institutions of local governance in Russia are practically undeveloped, and any fledgling grass roots that emerge often perish under the asphalt roller of the governor and federal authorities. For instance, city mayors are not elected nearly anywhere these days. Instead, city managers are assigned in their place. It is hard to say just how we should cope with

this situation. May be an open tender should be announced? However, **there are quite a lot of people who would like to make it into the circles of power, so, more likely, the question should instead be how should we go about selecting the best people for the job rather than where we should find them**.

It is even more important in Russia, where people do not tend to read political programmes, but instead seem to react to specific people and to the general message that these people are bringing. For instance, President Medvedev’s message, under the conditional name of ‘modernisation’, appears to be rather reasonable from a conceptual standpoint, just as Putin’s messages about the country’s stability and gradual development. But, when these messages collide, on the one hand, people feel at a loss. On the other hand, they also realise that they are not seeing either one of these messages implemented in real life.

As a result, there is diminished loyalty towards the state. People are aware that something is not right. Representatives of the government authorities tend to openly criticise each other, while law enforcement agency openly struggle with each other. For the time being, it is not possible to ask common citizens for their loyalty under such conditions. ■