

MANEZHNYA SQUARE AND THE 'POLITICS OF THE MASSES'

Boris Kagarlitsky



BORIS KAGARLITSKY is a sociologist, journalist and a writer of political essays. He is the Director of the Institute for the Globalisation of Social Movements. He has authored many books, including 'Political Science and Revolution' (2007), 'Peripheral Empire: the Cycles of Russian History' (2009)

Social protest, by definition, occurs when people come out to defend or demand particular social rights. What sort of social rights were the people demanding on Manezhnaya Square? None. No nationalist slogans were heard at that time — there were only fascist and chauvinistic slogans. Furthermore, calling the people at the gathering on Manezhnaya Square nationalists would be flattering them. Nationalism in Russia presupposes some understanding of the notion of the poly-ethnicity of the Russian nation. What happened on Manezhnaya Square and later at Park Kultury and Kievskaya Square can be compared to the tribal unrest that we see in Kenya or Rwanda, where an excited mob of alcohol-intoxicated members of one tribe proceeds to bring havoc on the heads of another tribe. This really has nothing to do with social protest. We can only speak of some manifestations of social

destruction when society is beginning to fall apart. By the way, this sort of event raises the question of whether social protest is possible in Russia at all. This sort of thing occurs in places where there is no civil society as such. If our people are governed by tribal instincts then, as a consequence, they are not yet capable or are already incapable of producing any sort of social actions. This is why we could definitely ascertain that there is a disintegration of society and a social crisis at present, but certainly not a social protest.

The occurrence of social protests does not at all prove that Western society is healthy; however, what we see in the case of Russia is indeed degradation. The question is how far has this degradation progress gone? We will learn the answer only later. At present, we are witnessing only the symptoms and cannot fully estimate how deep-rooted the disease is. But then again, it would be wrong to say that protests and fights in which a total of ten thousand people took part may be interpreted as a significant symptom of a disease for a country of 140 million. It is significant only due to the fact that the event occurred right under the Kremlin walls with the connivance of authorities. Strictly speaking, these clashes also cannot be called mass events. **Only a country that had lost its culture of mass politics can regard a five-thousand strong 'mob' as a significant mass of people.** Three million people took to the streets in France, this is what I call a mass protest! In England, a students' march that ended in clashes with

actor of these fascist actions only against the backdrop of a total lack of mass politics as such.

There were less people at the gathering on Manezhnaya Square than there were at the so-called 'Russian March'. There was no mass mobilisation and there was no spread of this movement. What I see is mainly connivance and the eagerness of the press to discuss this particular event. The media is extremely effective in this respect. These fights and clashes are successful not because of their massive nature and not because they evoke sympathy among the people or represent wide social strata, but namely because the mass media does exactly what it should be doing according to the existing scenario. What I mean here is that the press starts to discuss these specific events in the following key: the authorities essentially allow a *pogrom* to occur on Manezhnaya Square and do not take any of the kind of harsh, clear or effective measures that they typically use against other opposition groups. This is partly true because the people who were there on Manezhnaya Square are not considered to be opposition and hence, are not regarded as enemies of the regime. Consequently, they are treated differently. However, this has nothing to do with any sort of processes that run deep within Russian society. Hence, when asked what to do, I say that we should just go on living. We should go on living according to the real daily agenda that has been defined by social crisis, economic recession, and the degradation of the material and

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police involved from 50 to 60 thousand people who were united by particular more or less perspicuous slogans and aims. However, in Russia, we don't have any mass movements and we can speak of the massive char-

technical basis of the Russian economy, etc. These are the actual issues that somehow have to be tackled at this point in time. ■

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