



The discussion on forms and principles of Russia's modernisation, that was continued in №27 (41) "RJ – Standpoint of the week" (24.11.2000) – "Leader between Intelligentsia and Bureaucracy", found a response among the intellectual environment of the West. The Russian Journal returns to this topic and gives the floor to David Apter, a renowned American political scientist and sociologist, Professor Emeritus of Comparative Political and Social Development at Yale (former Sociology Chairman at Yale), member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and author of many monographs, including his latest, *Legitimation of Violence* (1997)

ANTI-MODERNIST MODERNISATION IN RUSSIA AND THE USA

David Apter

In the past, modernisation theory drew on the broad questions of social change, transitions from pre-industrial to industrial societies and their structural and innovative opportunities, and the displacement of pre-existing normative factors. Modernisation, as a process, was studied in the context of Protestantism and the rise of capitalism, and the search for preconditions and conditions of possibility for "great transformations," from previously held beliefs, laws, institutions, and sources of power and legitimacy (Max Weber, Emile Durkheim). There were varieties among broad theoretical systems, which one might describe as an evolution in thought from Karl Marx to Talcott Parsons. Today, theories of modernisation have fragmented. Political economy, rational choice, these are the order of the day and they fit with a **liberal theory that is intellectually shriveled and narrow, and worse, one which justifies, in the name of innovation and free market capitalism, disastrous social consequences.**

Both Russia and the United States are suffering from some of the same problems, albeit in different ways. There is an acceptance of liberal economics as a form of natural justice – one which plunders economic and human resources as a legitimate way of freeing up innovation and wealth, regardless of the social overhead in terms of economic inequality, injustice, personal uncertainty, risk and the social pathologies such activity might produce. There is also



a deep suspicion of government and the state, albeit again for somewhat different reasons. The Soviet state left a totalitarian and arbitrary legacy. When the denouement occurred, Soviet *ideology* was destroyed, but the Soviet *methodology of management* was preserved. This allowed lower level officials and smart party cadres to plunder the economy with the result that it further alienated citizens who confront day to day exceptional corruption as a virtual way of life. **The result was to poison and make a mockery of anything resembling a public interest or a civic culture.**

The United States is polarized between those who use extreme individualism not only as a way of resisting political reforms, but as a cover for their racism despite Obama's election. Meanwhile, of

course, liberal theory justifies the market as the arbiter of allocation and appropriate justice so that an increasing part of the population lives in relative squalor, there is little trust, and **if they are not completely isolated from one another, people turn to evangelical or local militant movements to generate pseudo-solidarity.**

In general, only the Scandinavian countries and France, with their emphasis on social democratic institutions, have, for all their faults, been able to retain the necessary compensatory social institutions, health, unemployment insurance, etc. to give people some sense of their common citizenship and provide some semblance of a common rationality.

Both Russia and the U.S. are becoming "modernised" in anti-modern ways – there prevails religious sectarianism, the disappearance of normal rationality other than market rationality, fragmentation of the population due to nationalism or idiot issues like abortion, not to mention the many cases of regionalism, parochialism, and just plain ignorance. It used to be taken for granted that democracy required an informed public. In both Russia and the U.S., while there are remarkable intellectuals and brilliant thinkers, and very shrewd senior government officials, the general public has less and less understanding of the complex issues required for living in a modern world. ■

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