

REQUIEM FOR AN UNFORTUNATE REACTION

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The issue of progress in Russia is tinted with the light of lost time – a period in the past when Russian history suffered a shipwreck and Russia’s ‘backwardness’ started. Admittedly, there is no government that does not swear to bring in progress. Although reactions are not infrequent in Russia, they tend to disguise themselves as a new regime. Only the *Kulturkritik* status in the literary salons and drunken saunas of the governing establishment is left to the idea of reaction.

1.

Putin came to power by promising that ‘*there would be no revolutions or counter-revolutions*’ anymore. In fact, the voter expected him to immediately respond to the ‘counter-revolutionary revolution’ of 1991. Even the slogan of the 2000 electoral reaction - ‘no revolutions, no counter-revolutions’ - was written by the hand of a repentant Yeltsin activist.

The consensus of the year 2000 was a reactionary consensus and the immediacy of its acceptance by the entire country was such that there

was nothing significant left beyond the scope of Putin’s consensus (the axis on the basis of which the Medvedev-Putin tandem has been in place since November 2008). When the regime wanted ideological vocabulary, it put forth devious ‘*conservatism*’, which shortly became synonymous to ‘*loyalty*’ and even ‘*protectionism*’.

Today in Russia they talk a lot about the crisis of loyalty. The reason for this is simple: having accomplished its political tasks, the electoral reaction came to an end. **There are no reasonable reactionary tasks left for Russia.** A complex and peculiar environment with conflicting interests, demanding legalisation and recognition, has formed within the framework of Putin’s consensus. The carriers of these interests will not hear anything of the year 2000. Even less do they accept reactionary respite – for six or even twelve years. Medvedev’s progressivism seems to be more normal than nostalgic protectionism.

2.

The recent crisis has revealed the vapidness of the ‘protectors’ viewpoint ‘. Having lost their backbone of the unique charisma of the former Putin – the Putin of 2000-2007 – they cannot offer anything to the system that they wish to protect. They cannot describe it and will not talk to those who previously used to form ‘Putin’s majority’. We have to admit that after the hasty realisation of electoral reaction agendas, Russia lacks state loyalty in the very simplest meaning of this word.

The enigma of Putin’s system is that it does not let government authorities rely on the generally

loyal popular masses. **Loyalty has not created a conservative backbone in the coalition of national forces and has remained a media project of the authorities in a confined protective ghetto.** It does not trust the loyalty of the forces that have a stake in the state, though they do exist and make up the majority of the country. This is the root cause of the fatal uncertainty of the authorities, with the latter revealing this more and more obviously. Rejecting a relationship with the real social environment, the authorities improvise blindly, staging the ‘support of the majority’ while destroying one real majority after another at the same time.

3.

On the eve of the federal elections of 2011-12, Russian conservatism has been discredited and is getting ready to capitulate. It is too weak to do its mandatory homework – to bring the victories of the last decade to the state system and the rule of law. But ‘masters of reaction’ have not disappeared anywhere. Their efforts have transformed loyalty into a portable multi-purpose container, even if the purpose is to dismantle the regime – the key thing is ‘to have the Putin brand’ on the cover. The protectors are deaf when it comes to the real values and objectives of the Putin (today it is the Putin-Medvedev) regime. Having won a full and irrevocable victory, the reaction is getting ready to dive into unknown territory.

It appears that Vladimir Putin himself has even grown tired of Putinism with its credo of the rigorous ‘partyization’ of politics, the integration of regional elites into the party of power, and the taboo on

populism in the name of law and the state. The weariness and uncertainty of the father of this system is apparent in his proposal to establish a ‘National people’s front’. In a way that is interesting for the observer, the reaction is suddenly making the move to dismantle everything that it used to protect before.

On the eve of the elections, the ruling party ‘United Russia’ has been announced as being too weak to gain the majority in the State Duma. This is an unbelievable statement for the leader of the party to make, when you think about it! The choice has been made in favour of a despicable political annex with second-rate staff consisting of manipulated GONGO-activists.

The project of the prospective ‘Front’ will stifle the real party of power, which has already been triumphed over by the radicals. **The declaration concerning the front being established by Putin does not even mention the word ‘state’; instead ‘security’ is named to be the central motive.** However, over the last century we have tested several political options that have set security in opposition to the state, willingly sacrificing the latter for the former. As a result, the country had neither security, nor the state at the end of the last century.

4.

A ‘National People’s Front’, nominally established to consolidate pro-Putin forces actually serves as an impediment to this consolidation. It annihilates the legitimacy of the party system and – potentially – the legitimacy of the institution of presidential power. The Front defies investments into the constitutional state for the sake of temporarily strengthening the leader’s position. But a regime of personal rule is not the system that President Vladimir Putin and President Dmitry Medvedev have built. By opening the front in defence of himself, Putin will have to undergo change, and these changes will surprise even his followers.

It is probable that Putin thinks that, having broken his former model, he will be able to once again rely on his former charisma. But it’s gone. It was bred by a one-time request from the masses and a unique electoral reaction of 2000. Now he will have to reign in a different way. For instance, by simulating wide-scale lower strata outbreaks.

It is useful and instructive for a historian to see **how the reaction in Russia has once again failed to stop a revolution and, equipped with progressivist instruments, the revolution is ripening inside this power itself.** Twenty years on Russia remains a (post)revolutionary Russia. This, in effect, makes the future Russian state less and less certain. ■

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THE CONSERVATIVES STEAL, AND REACTIONARIES DON’T?



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Reactionaries, as a rule, are all those who want to finish a progressive process by cruel means. In Russia, such reactionaries can be found in parts of the Communist Party, in Russian national movements, and in the part of the political elite that, due to its relative paucity, cannot dominate in the political field. This part of the elite is actually as marginal, or perhaps more so, than liberal groups. Consequently, these reactionary groups have little to no influence whatsoever. Sure, they can utter some sounds here and there, but nobody listens to them. These groups are quite cowardly, they are afraid of liberals, which stems from the fact that the liberals at least have some sort of agenda.

Things have not always been like this. At several points in our history reactionary forces in fact dominated the political discourse. For example, from 1995 to 1997, reactionaries were a strong political force. At that time our country was facing a need to choose whether to go back to the past or to go on delivering the undertakings initiated

after the collapse of the USSR.

But it should be understood that **for the last decade it has been the reactionary and conservative political agenda that has been exercised.** Many democratic liberties have been scaled down, vertical distribution of power has been restored, and a forceful, brutal, and successful principle has been restored in our nation’s foreign policy. It is a consequence of all this that the potential agenda for these reactionary groups has mostly if not entirely been used up.

Due to the changes of the past decade, both the people and a significant part of the elite have turned into conservatives with a reactionary stance. They do not have as a goal the dismantling of the modernization agenda, they just are not willing to exercise it.

As for present-day conservatives, who have set themselves up as such within the public space, they can hardly become reactionaries in the true sense. **Their shortcoming is the desire for theft. This is what constitutes the obstacle in transforming conservatives into new reactionaries.** ■