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No Political Solutions

Laure Akai

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The Russian people, it is said, are in a political crisis. More correctly put, they are in a crisis of politics. The present problems facing the country – from social to economic- are all resultant of politics. By this the reader should not understand that these problems are resultant of bad politics, but of politics in general.

Over and over again the Russian people are told that if they elect the right politicians, reforms will be carried out and their lives will be better. Whoever is in power will blame other politicians, past or present, for whatever problems there are in the country (unless of course they can find an enemy or national minority to blame); most opposition political groups suggest that you help them into power to remedy the situation (either by voting them in or making a revolution or coup d'etat). This is the situation world round : politicians telling the people that what will save them is only new politicians.

There is increasing evidence that people in many countries have lost faith in political leadership. Take for example in America where there is a large awareness that most politicians are corrupt and that no matter who they vote for the government will work in the interests of the rich. The people, by and large, don't vote.

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Of the small majority who do vote, many do so because they genuinely want to have a political voice but usually wind up voting for the “lesser of two evils”. Many also vote out of a sense of duty. By and large nobody cares enough to find out about all the issues or a given politician’s stand on this or that. They don’t feel a connection with these issues and feel that the government will do what it wants anyway, so why bother. And this is fine with the politicians. Only when they feel that they can mobilize people around a specific issue to win a campaign will they try to inform the voters. Then, of course once a campaign is won, the issues change, promises are broken. Many people then wait for their chance to vote someone out, vote someone in... But many also loose faith in politics in general.

The Russian people are mostly looking for political solutions. For them there is enough of a difference between the current political pretendants to tend towards one side or another, if only in reaction towards the policies of the other. Much of the present support of Yeltsin is due strictly to the perception of his opponents as hard-line communists (whether or not this is what they really are). At the same time, many of those who support the parliament now do not actually support their policies, but see in them the only safe-guard against sped up economic “reforms” and the only alternative to Yeltsin’s dictatorship. Rutskoi was denounced by communists many times for selling out to Western capital; he and almost the entire parliament supported Yeltsin’s ascent to power and wanted to and still want to carry out economic reforms (just not at the same rate as Yeltsin wants). Yet most of the communists are now supporting Rutskoi.

There are some groups that have called on new elections, who want to get rid of both Rutskoi and Yeltsin. This too is a political solution, but as they have not made the possible alternatives clear to people, it’s not a popular one.

Seemingly the choice of government would make a difference in the life of people here. There are however many factors which

and bureaucratic rule. They offer no alternative to it whatsoever. It is ridiculous to think that any politician will come up with a program that will call for less government and more freedom. (If any have that is because business is the substitute government.) Right now there is no political solution for the Russian people. The international business community has its eyes on Russia as the market which will save it from crisis. Large investments have already been made. There is probably only one foreseeable course for the Russian economy; this course may bring them a VCR in every home eventually, in the very best of circumstances, but, as the market demands, it will be at the cost of a constant underclass, and a steady rate of unemployment. This is not the solution that people want, but it is the only one that they will get.

superscede the people's will. These range from foreign to extra-national intervention to the designs of government. Yet, no matter what government is in place, the people's ability to understand their will and to exercise it freely will be hindered.

The legitimacy of government lies on the belief that people cannot run their own lives and coordinate society orderly. It lies in the belief that if people had the chance to freely exercise their will, their greed and violence would take over, and that they would hurt other members of society to get what they want. It is aided by the creating and perpetuation of increasingly more complicated structures which make the running of society seem to be so incredibly complicated that it can only be done with a large bureaucratic apparatus in place and that in no way can it be run by the people themselves.

The Stalinists claim that greed and violence has taken over society, but this is because there isn't a strong government to control it. Fear and law would stop this. But wasn't Stalin the most effectively violent man of the century? And what about the greed of the nomenclatura? These things might have been seen, if it were not for the belief in the government. These things could not be prevented because the government protected itself with an enormous army.

The Yeltsinists imply that the prospective nomenclatura would rob the people's wealth and shoot people in the street. But isn't it the greed of Yeltsin's supporters, the speculators, foreign businesses and bosses who are growing rich off keeping the value of the rouble low and paying peanuts for labour and resources that is responsible for the current mass poverty and resultant upsurge in violent crime? People wouldn't tolerate this except they believe the lies of the Russian government that suffering through this unbearable nightmare is the only way to a better nightmare and that if this doesn't make any sense to you then that's only because you don't understand how to run a country.

In any case, the government, the army and the police (its henchmen) orchestrate a system where most people cannot freely determine the value of their labour, where industries can be legally owned by persons or bodies other than the workers, rendering them unable to freely dispose of the product of their labour — to use as they need or to trade with other workers for goods they need or would like but cannot themselves produce. Land cannot be freely acquired. If some individual or group of individuals got it into their stupid heads that they would live better, for example, if they kept the profits of their labour instead of contributing to the bosses' country club fund or the state's nuclear arsenal, if somebody, having no place to live built his or her own house, if a starving person, realising that a person who works 40 hours a week should be able to feed themselves but sees they can't now decides to take over a piece of land and farm it -then the powers that protect you and me from such irrational and greedy actions being carried out by the people step in and exercise control. But any of these actions would be rational given the situation. What isn't rational is working your butt off (for the good of everyone), receiving a wage on which you can only afford bread, potatoes and tea (never a home or anything else), watching the "democrats" getting rich off the property they sold to themselves, or from the money (skimmed from your labour) that they invested in buying your labour so that they can take what you make and re-sell it to you at a profit for their efforts.

People, living under years of government, years of promises of political solutions, have begun to think very irrationally. They begin to believe outrageous claims and support people and conditions they really don't want to support because they have been convinced that there is no other way. The Russian people are now going through a phase of optimal public stupidity. One ex-Komsomol leader claims to be God and people follow...people refuse to believe that Stalinist purges happened, and if they did, then only to the guilty...there is an unprecedented belief in the

horoscope and faith healers...people forget that Yeltsin was part of the nomenclatura...people stand in line for hours to look in Western department stores...workers who had their strike crushed by Yeltsin blindly and fervently support him. The only remedy to this will be when people begin to get interested in taking back active control of the processes that rule their lives and work with each other to make life enjoyable rather than crossing their fingers and heading off to the ballot box.

Sceptics of course argue that this alternative may not — or definitely will not- lead to any great life. The question is not whether or not this will lead to a workers' paradise (although what could be worse than waiting 40 years to get an apartment, working all the time, being unable to feed yourself or your family, hoping anxiously that there will be no civil war, that the value of the rouble compared to the dollar won't fall, watching government corruption hopelessly etc. etc.?). The point is to start a tradition where people will help themselves and each other (a tradition which to some extent exists in many countries where people take initiative to do something, without waiting for the government to decide to set up the program, in other words, where people respond to the immediate needs of the community in a timely and logical manner).

The Russians in many way have been conditioned out of such responses as such initiative was threatening to the totalitarian nature of the Soviet government. Still they are capable of organising things for themselves, as has been evident in times of extreme crisis, such as during the last coup when they organised shelter, free food, distribution of gas masks, etc. for the diffence of the White House, all on their own initiative. I would suggest, that as an alternative to political Russian roulette, that people would be better off meeting with each other, trying to create alternative institutions which can be influential paradigms for the future. The pseudo-left are trying get together a "kinder, gentler, platform" as they have some chance of winning some power in this somewhat pluralistic government. They, in general, support the idea of government