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The Role and Drama of the Russian Intelligentsia (in a time of change)

"If God wants to punish an intelligent person, he forces him to live in a time of change" (Nikita Mihalkov, 1995)

"The intelligentsia already starts to doubt its right to exist and commits one treacherous act after another: it is ready to repudiate its own hopes..." (Vasili Aksienov, 1995)

These two opinions, two points of view, are typical of Russia wherever there is a discussion - an eternal discussion! - about the role of the intelligentsia in society. The intelligentsia is either a victim which suffered most during the civil war, terror and perestroika or a stratum which is guilty in all the crises, a traitor to the people's interests. It has other roles, too: from time to time it appears in the role of the conscience of society, or in the role of God's fool (*jurodivyi*). These roles, for example, were very brightly reflected in the cinematographic art of Andrei Tarkovski, in the life, fate and creative work of Sakharov, Solzhenitsen, Vysotski, Likhachev ... (here and in the following I will use the term "intelligentsia" to mean its creative wing in the traditional Russian understanding of this word).

In addition to wars, terror and postperestroika, God or the Soviet system punished the intelligentsia three other times during this century, in a very original way. It gave it three interludes, three possibilities to survive, to breathe and realize itself by slightly opening the door to freedom of speech, conscience and creative work. And each time the door was slammed brusquely in its face.

The first interlude - the 1920s.

Those rare members of the intelligentsia who had survived the Civil War and had not emigrated were given opportunities. In the midst of military dictatorship the NEP (New Economic Policy) gave rise to a short-term, peculiar liberty to create a new world not only with the help of the hammer and sickle but also through cinema, theatre, literature and art. "The First Teacher" (character) stood firmly for a long time bubbling with pure enthusiasm. "The motherland of electricity" was being constructed though the majority of engineers had either been executed or had emigrated...

The history of the NEP or the vanguard of the 1920s hardly demonstrates the existence of any real elements of civil society inside the dictatorship and one-party system but the atmosphere of freedom itself played a role in the public consciousness and undoubtedly offered new hope. Masterpieces of art also appeared. The intelligentsia acted as the most important "agent of modernization of the society" (Levada, 1994). Mayakovski, Eisenstein, Yesenin, Gorky and the others shook the world as much as the "10 days" in October 1917. For a certain period of time it seemed that a society of freedom, brotherhood and equality was at birth.

Then the system, the new power, became frightened and started to attack. Though the bell of modernization had not yet pealed nor had society awakened, dissension and treachery very quickly appeared among the creative intelligentsia. Socialist realism appealed specifically to the Soviet "working" intelligentsia. This is understandable; the question of power splits intellectuals in any society, including civil society. And we should note that those who captured power in 1917 and were the leading Bolsheviks were

intellectuals as well.

Another strange phenomenon became apparent. New art, literature and cinema were born so quickly and with such enthusiasm and ideological inspiration that the authors themselves did not completely understand how they created a new hero: the harsh, cruel Bolshevik in a leather jacket. And in the 1930s this hero stepped forth from the screen and from the pages of the books and took vengeance on his creators through open terror and the censorship of socialist realism (Jurina, 1987).

Sometimes the human qualities of this new hero resembled "Ivan Lapshin" (German, 1985), but more often he was even coarser with his creators. Mayakovski, Fadeyev, Sholokhov, Eisenstein and Dziga Vertov with his famous "Cinema Eye" (*Kinoglaz*) took an active part in the creation of this hero. After that it was easy for Lenin to declare: "Cinema is the most important art for us" (Lenin, 1922).

Maxim Gorky's visit to the Solovetskie Islands was just a small episode at the end of 1920s in the great cauldron of history. But this episode shows the changes which occurred in the status of the writer himself and his attitude towards power. Only in this way can one understand the fact that the great writer found "useful red corners" in the torture chambers of Solovki (Goldovskaya, 1988) - and declared the humanity of the Soviet system to the world, the human methods of re-education in the GUILAG.

A shortness of memory is typical of enthusiasts, particularly intellectuals. It is easy to progress from Gorky to Alexander Nevzorov. Analogous to Gorky is the fact that the talented and always scandalous TV-journalist Nevzorov, who wanted to expose, disclose, and unmask everything in his program "600 Seconds", now goes to Chechnia and openly defends maniacal great-power chauvinism in his newsreel "Hell". This is an indication of power and status in society and, finally, morality and the conscience of an intellectual.

In my opinion an intellectual is a person who does not sell his conscience, and who has enough sense to be compassionate. The sense of compassion is necessary for him but higher education is not (I think this approach finds its roots in Russian history). During periods of great change in society the feeling of compassion always succumbs. People who are not afraid to raise their voices for justice, for the weak, at the critical moment are needed. When there is no moral opposition, it is too early to talk about any civil society. And even the notion of "civil society" implies "civil duty". This duty in Russia is primarily reflected in bold, conscientious actions by representatives of the intelligentsia who were not - and are not - afraid to argue with the authorities. It is a pity that they have paid and are still paying too high price for that: their lives, freedom, citizenship and motherland - freedom to speak and freedom to work creatively.

The second interlude of Russian intelligentsia - the end of the 1950s, the beginning of the 1960s.

By the end of the 1950s the generation which had been raised by the Soviet system had already grown up. There were many indications that a situation existed in the country where some intellectuals still remained but there was no longer an intelligentsia (Levada, 1994). There were militiamen inside even talented creative people. The Soviet intelligentsia knew the rules of behavior very well - it said one thing, thought another and did a third.

Soviet practice made it obvious that upbringing was an enormous force, in addition, the intellectuals themselves were engaged in this upbringing - former "first teachers" and their descendants. The methods of re-educating disobedient intellectuals were "self-criticism", attack on alien elements, camps.

It is accepted that the second interlude, the so-called "thaw," was influenced by the

political situation in the USSR - Stalin's death, the 20th Congress of the CPSU and the figure of Nikita Khrushchev. I think another factor is important here, the phenomena of "fathers and children", the protest of the second generation, the children of the revolutionaries. This protest was slowed by terror and war and finally found its channel in the thaw. The atmosphere of that time is clearly reflected in the culture: in Yevtushenko's poetry, in Marlen Khutsiev's famous movie "I Am 20 Years Old", in "Ivan Denisovich" by Solzhenitsen. Tarkovski, Shukshin, Vysotski - all of them appeared in the early 1960s. Yuri Gagarin orbited the Earth and became a very peculiar filmstar. Andrei Sakharov appeared in the "The History of the CPSU" before he had was labeled a "non-person."

It would be interesting to learn whether or not Nikita Sergeyevich was really a rural man, as he is described. What discussions and debates went on in the Kremlin about culture, the new generation, the role of the young intelligentsia? Were there any bold innovators who raised questions not only about the economy and agricultural reform but also about the organization, liberalization and modernization of ideological control. As far as I know, ideas like "glasnost" and "perestroika" were proposed from time to time in party discussions much earlier than in April 1985.

As early as the 1960s the base for developing the first phase of civil society was prepared, but the generation of the 1960s could not implement their ideas. For example, the legal defense movement did not become a real political opposition (Zdravomyslova, 1992). What is important here is the civil and moral position of separate personalities, not a whole generation. It is very typical that many art works - here I mean only the underground cinema - which were created in the 1960s had already played an important role in the new conditions at the time of glasnost and perestroika, at the end of the 1980s.

The second interlude of the intelligentsia was interrupted by a coup d'etat from the top and also by the reinforced censorship of all cultural life of the society at the time of Brezhnev, Suslov and like-minded persons. The Moscow film critic Valeri Fomin refers to this ideological control very shortly and pointedly as the "aesthetics of interdiction" (Fomin, 1991). The essence and influence of this aesthetics have still not been studied very extensively. I often hear the opinion, for example, from filmmakers that the aesthetics of interdiction had developed the language of cinema one hundred times more than glasnost and perestroika. They had to think, redo, outwit, fight - and as a rule this is useful in art. It is also useful in science as well. But not at the price of one's life...

The third interlude of the intelligentsia - the late 1980s, glasnost and perestroika

It is easy to blame the intelligentsia for what happened in the Soviet Empire in the past years. Its role was noticeable and conventional. Some scientists observed a paradox: people were absent in the activities of the people's fronts. The same eloquent intelligent figures, some hundreds of enthusiasts were shifting from Pushkin Square to Kazan Cathedral, from the TV-screen to the pages of the *Moscow News* (Kagarlitski, 1992). My own biological memory tells me something else, though probably in the depths of the country it was as silent as in the year 1917.

What was the active creative intelligentsia? Filmmakers, writers, journalists, actors, painters, scientists, singers and rock-groups. Was perestroika their mission, their moral act? Were they more conscious than the others, did they know more about such notions as "human rights", "freedom of speech and conscience", "political pluralism", "civil society"? Perhaps. On the other hand, totalitarianism and stagnation impeded these people from living and working normally, insulted their professional dignity. The generation of the 1960s was among the activists and now this generation has become vengeful as they have noticed their

second historical interlude in perestroika.

"Intelligent power", a dual power with economists and populists did not last long. After the fragmentation of the state and Mikhail Gorbachev's resignation, the historic moment passed. Some of the rebel-intellectuals were pacified by places in the state machinery, some shifted from the popular front to new political parties and the Duma, became leaders of new groups; others found comfortable jobs in business, some emigrated, etc. But the majority left politics, at least temporarily. The intelligentsia became surprisingly quiet by the mid-1990s.

Why?

Part of intelligentsia consciously strove for a new political culture. For them the idea of "a nation of laws", "people's rights", "justice", "a new order" and even of "development" had different contents than those of the old nomenclature, manufacturers, bankers and populists. The latter started very soon to think about the other order in the society and political reforms became central to their "new thinking". Cultural life succumbed. The intelligentsia had departed along with culture - particularly by the time it had become clear that "national speculation" had taken place of Cultural Revolution.

There was no one to protect the interests of the old unindustrialized spirit of the intelligentsia. The results are evident today - and the intelligentsia can again be blamed. It retreated and did not fight for the culture. It is an illusion that political power is given to the true representatives of the people, the defenders of cultural values in society. Democracy has already proven victorious. Control of its representatives is implemented through the media -television and the press (Tsygankov, 1991).

When postperestroika had arrived - the epoch of Boris Yeltsin - the war in Chechnia put an end to the other main illusion of the Russian intelligentsia, the illusion of humane and wise power which listens to its ingenious advisers, intellectuals in the field of culture, science and art.

I remember very well autumn 1991, when the seminar "Spirit of Art in Russia" was held in Helsinki. Andrei Bitov, Juri Ljubimov, Alexander Sokurov made their speeches. Sokurov had just finished his well-known documentary about Yeltsin and was almost sure - as were many other representatives of the Russian intelligentsia - that if Yeltsin held power for another five years there would be no nuclear weapons in Russia. We listened and nodded our heads, we also wanted to believe in these leaders. Of course, Sasha Sokurov has another opinion today, but in the early 1990s it was difficult to see that men of culture were only "decorations" of power.

One of the reasons for silence is the economic side of the question. During Soviet power it was not good manners to speak aloud about money. Today the intelligentsia does not make many speeches nor does it often go on strike - perhaps there is a storm approaching - it prefers to make extra money and enter other spheres of activities, including business. Perhaps in the end it is good for the economy, but it is bad for science and arts. The number of those defending spiritual values in society is being reduced. Emigration - the "brain drain" -and migration in science are being investigated, for example, by the "Centre for Independent Social Research" in St. Petersburg (Voronkov & Oswald & Fomin, 1995).

With the "the accumulation of primary capital" the values and psychology of the new intelligentsia are changing during postperestroika. The growth of pragmatism and the reduction of solidarity in human relations are typical of some; for others it is a nostalgic yearning for the "old good days" and dawdling. Vasili Aksienov believes that Russia needs "...civilized young people with idealistic aims and pragmatic means. People who are really

ready to become closer to the West..." Perhaps they are no longer representatives of the **"intelligentsia"**, but **"intellectuals"** and **"educated people"**.

There are other voices, too: Russia and the Russian intelligentsia should now only think about them and look for a road to a new society without the interference of the West. The conflict between *Zapadniks* and Slavophiles is felt in their attitudes towards civil society. There is one thing more; I would say a popular opinion among old intelligentsia: democracy was appropriated by ungifted people, patriotic ideas by the dregs of society and speculators.

What should we do then? It seems that with the help of the intelligentsia a false hero of our time has been created - the image of a young profiteer with whom there can be no solidarity. Moreover, it is he who has harvested all the fruits of perestroika, which appeared to be - according to Juri Levada - "the swan song of the Soviet intelligentsia".

It seems to me that these three interludes of the Russian intelligentsia indicate that its position should to some extent always be in opposition to power but active and moral in a "civil way". It is dangerous to reject politics because of the immaturity of democracy; the first phase of civil society, in particular, needs a cultural and moral force. If the "creative intelligentsia" is excluded and its public significance reduced at the critical moment of change, only populists will come to power, as well as pragmatists and business people who have no time and for whom it is not profitable to consider feelings of compassion and the cultural values of society.