

Chris Donnelly

* RIGHT-WING BACKLASH IN THE USSR *
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* 'THE TRAGEDY OF CENTRALISM' *
* BY ALEKSANDR PROKHANOV *
* (Translated by Robin Hammond - NATO IS Translation Service) *
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Well worth
reading. Shows
some of the
dark forces
operating below
the surface of
Russian society.

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Comment:

This recent article in the serious Moscow press is an eloquent testimony to the powerful nationalist Russian sentiments which Gorbachev's policies have evoked. This thinking is quite widespread, though rarely so well expressed. The right-wing Russian nationalist backlash that is taking place probably presents Gorbachev with the most dangerous challenge to his leadership. The article - the main part of which is attached - is well worth reading in full.

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We are experiencing the tragedy of centralism for the second time in a century. The monarchy was destroyed in a moment by the efforts of the Party, and the empire disintegrated in fragments around us. In the Civil War, in the crucible of a social utopia, and in attempts to recreate the basic structures of government over enormous areas, we lost the elite (the nobility), a frail emerging civil society and a refined culture and created centralism anew in the totalitarian Stalinist mould. In destroying the centralist idea and recreating it we lost 60 million of our fellow-countrymen. Now, by the will of providence and her earthly followers, we are again exposing our shaven unprotected necks to the blade.

The destruction of centralism, and with it the state, is taking place in accordance with a controlled algorithm, as if the entire programme had been entered on a punched card and the sequence, rate and time of the operations were the result of rational forces based on enormous potential. These are the paragraphs in this programme.

Socialist ideology with its integrating effect has been swept away, the Communist ideal will make no further progress, and the strategic aims which shaped our present from the future, which joined us together in a common social structure and which reconciled the contradictions inherited from the past have been discarded. This ideal of the future, a "dream-aim" extending almost to infinity, was apparent in ordinary life in a vast number of arrangements and forms of collective behaviour, binding us together into a single state and society.

Destruction of the ideology deprived the people of a common future and caused the instantaneous growth of nationalist ideas and faiths, which are tearing us apart by irreversible centrifugal forces. Today we are an exploded galaxy, rushing apart with a black hole at the centre.

An attack has been mounted on centralist structures, and is being successfully pressed home. The strong, unbending beams in these structures held together the vast bulk of the state, supported the excessive weight of the outlying districts, and made it possible to concentrate a colossal potential in a time of crisis. Today these structures are shattered, and we are becoming a pile of fragments where the mountain ranges rub shoulders with the deserts and abysses dissect the plains.

In practice the breakdown of the command and administrative system has led to the destruction of the economy, making it absolutely uncontrollable and generating administrative chaos: it has led to the deterioration of whole sectors of the economy. Today our economic system is a huge rumbling machine, with the shafts torn out of the bearings and the gears and pinions stripped. All this machinery still continues to clank and revolve in the gearbox of the state, but is producing nothing except grinding noises and no-one can find the resolve to look into its tormented interior.

The army is supranational, a single melting-pot of interests, concerns and tasks, a unified technosphere, a unified service which permeates the entire state. The army, which links present and past, young and old, by its traditions, is the guarantee of stability and sovereignty. It is a school of invaluable centralist experience, which has made it possible not merely to win a terrible war and to resist pressure from the great American empire, but also to put through an enormous scientific and technical programme which is thrusting us into the civilisation of the 21st century. Today the army is being destroyed, as our convoys were destroyed in the ravines of Afghanistan. The leading and trailing vehicles are set on fire and the systematic destruction of the unwieldy machine, bogged down and without impetus, has begun. The paralysed generals and the rank and file and the young officers, reduced to temporary insanity, are transforming the army into a demoralised immovable mass, depriving it of its basic defensive functions.

The Party seemed to be a unified nervous system controlling the vast muscular bulk of the nation and reconciling within itself a variety of contradictions - of ethics, class, profession and world-outlook. But the Party cannot be a consolidating force today, because it has itself been deconsolidated, broken down into factions and filled with internecine strife. The "social democrats" are striving for the ideal of liberal European parties. "The neo-Stalinists" see a way to stabilisation and development through totalitarian centralism. The "healthy forces" profess a faith in a state socialist idea based upon humanistic conceptual centralism. Some Communists of the Baltic states

are inclined towards demochristianity. In Central Asia, clan organizations similar to feudal-medieval satrapies operate behind a thin veil of Party forms. The Party, cut off from power, with no world view and reduced to chaos in terms of world outlook, is being held responsible for the failures of the past and for the crisis of the present, is presiding over excessive public hysteria and is obviously being excluded from the political arena.

This is the fate of the three most important centralist structures, which are now burning like fuses and forming long threads of ash extending from ocean to ocean.

The "Russian factor", Russia and things Russian are under attack. The state-based nature of Russian individual and collective consciousness, the psychology of Russian man open to international links, and the sacrificial nature of the Russian economic and cultural system which has contributed to the creation of the state, all this is in decline, and is being rejected and insulted. Russians are being given an inferiority complex. They are being blockaded, Russian history and the Russian character are being put on trial, and they are being made scapegoats for universal catastrophe. Russophobia is a political tool - it is being used to break up the multinational state, which has been nourished to a large extent by the Russian capacity for uniting.

The emergence into the open in economic life of enormous wealth concentrated in private hands; the legalisation of criminal wheeler-dealers who have found an opportunity to rob their unprotected fellow-citizens, to buy up assets, power and culture, to formulate policy, to create a social ideal and to eliminate and repress what they find objectionable; the rapidly increasing social inequality, the legitimised ideal of this inequality, purchased uncontrolled power and a purchased stultifying culture; all these factors are making us a nation of millionaires and beggars, sowing hatred, taking away civil unity and tormenting the people with suspicion and enmity.

We are attaching ourselves to the world economic system, to world money and to world financial energy, which is to flow into our necrotic tissues by way of concessions and joint ventures, sprinkling us with living water. This money is flowing in tiny incandescent streams into our simple basic economy, and is destroying it. It cuts channels for itself, as if in wax. And our socialist giant, our planned monster, is transformed into a stump devoured by termites, filled with a rotten dust of roubles and foreign exchange operations which nobody needs. World finances have their own masters, their own researchers, their own innovators. This is an area of enormous knowledge, carefully concealed from the uninitiated. By involving ourselves with world money we deliver ourselves into the hands of the real masters of the world. Centralism becomes a fiction, a means of serving foreign merchants and speculators in Russian furs, ikons and molybdenum.

The impoverishment of the economic system, poverty, a half starved life, the lack of prospects, moral and mental decline and powerlessness are inciting the population to strike. These are still sector strikes, extending sometimes to the mines, sometimes to the railroads sometimes to vehicle depots. However, they are poised to become inter-sector strikes, shutting down the engines in entire regions and bringing the country as a whole to a standstill. Cunning politicians who know the laws of mass hysteria are squeezing the trigger of civil disturbance with their calls for an all-union strike and turning off the tap of all economic and political life.

Strikes are terrible per se, involving confrontation with the forces of law and order and the army, and dreadful in that they conceal within themselves the risks of major technological catastrophes. In the past, strikes by workers at the Putilov Works and in the Lena goldfields posed no threat of explosions in cities and the pollution of rivers, given the technological situation which existed at the time. Today strikes at nuclear power stations and chemical plants, on oil pipelines and in munitions plants pose threats of Chernobyls of unprecedented violence. Cities burning on the horizon, refugees fleeing from exploding nuclear reactors, uncontrolled launching of ballistic missiles and the biosphere dead over enormous areas: these are what lie behind an all-union strike.

The finale of this apocalyptic symphony is civil war in the USSR, with all the ruthlessness of the last war and with the addition of new nightmarish factors introduced by a military-technical civilisation. The world will gaze in horror on our bleeding country, vomiting nuclear and chemical pollutants into the atmosphere and the oceans. The possibility of a collective attempt by the nations of the world to stabilize the process in the USSR, in the interests of the safety of mankind and of saving the planet and the human race, cannot be excluded. A new entente will attempt to occupy the helpless and unarmed country, establishing control by way of military commandants in the cities and in space.

These are the items in the breakdown of centralism, and much of the worst is yet to come.

The shock waves from these terrible blows are spreading beyond the USSR into the world beyond. At a stroke the East-West accord has torn down the whole geopolitical architecture of Eastern Europe which our country had paid a huge price to establish. The internal European balance of power has been destroyed, with unpredictable results. The sentimental theory of 'our common European home' has led to the ruin of the East European Communist parties, changes in sovereignty, and the inevitable reunification of Germany. By the end of the 20th Century Central Europe will see the rise of a German industrial giant, filled with energy, inspired with pan-germanic ideals, its gravitational influence pulling in former German lands. The political map of Europe will change its colours and configurations, and the bones of Russian infantrymen will rattle in their forgotten graves.

The "philosophy of new thinking" the "pre-eminence of common human values over class values" have been perverted in practice by disregarding the interests of the socialist state and satisfying the ambitions of imperialist oligarchies. The American invasion of Panama marks a new stage in international relations, in which a weakened Soviet Union remote from the regions of the world, can no longer act as a deterrent to expansion by bourgeois empires. Many small countries and peoples, taking advantage of the recent confrontation, will dance obediently to Washington's tune.

Today the Soviet Union is weak as never before. The crisis of 1917 took place against a background of world crisis and disintegration. Our crisis today takes place against a background of world prosperity.

It is impossible to incorporate the huge Eurasian land-mass of the USSR into the world community. There is no cosmodrome where our space shuttle "Buran", blackened and exhausted by its flight, could land. And the West is ready to receive us only in parts, piecemeal, the smaller the better. The doctrine of incorporation means the dismemberment of the USSR into republics, regions, individual areas, cities, towns, farms, separate individuals. They will receive us fragmented, transplanting us bit by bit into the living organisms of the West.

Incorporation presupposes force. The people, who once passed through the eye of the needle of socialist construction, were stripped of their culture and faith in the process and tens of millions of our countrymen perished. This people must follow this path once again, but in the opposite direction: they will do this only if force is applied. We will be driven into the kingdom of freedom with an iron rod. We will be plunged into paradise, having first been cut into quarters on the executioner's block. The iron leaders of liberalism are coming to maturity before our eyes, and liberal writers and historians are making themselves ready for the ministries of internal affairs.

Another model showing signs of revival is a neo-Stalinist breakthrough, through backwardness, degradation and chaos. Stalin, on receiving a ruined and impoverished state to govern, mercilessly fleeced the people, concentrated what had been procured or stolen in local centres and broke out from the centres into an industrial society, catching up the developed countries of the world in some strategic areas. Today's neo-Stalinist policy presupposes extortion for a second time, robbing the people for a second time in order to fill our empty coffers, to gather together resources in those areas of development where there is still intellectual and technological life, to complete a breakthrough into a post-industrial society and to come close to Japan and America in the main areas of effort, converting in the process the rest of the country into an impoverished, organized camp subordinated to futurological aims. This course, this programme of development, like the first, presupposes force, a totalitarian system, and the rigid, simplified organization of all areas of existence.

This is how our hurrying intellectual leaders intend to act, putting forward their prescriptions and methods for escaping from catastrophe.

What are we to do? Have we a choice?

Shall we reject an irrational, useless love for the state for the sake of individual salvation and wellbeing, for the sake of the "small man" who is the centre and summit of the universe? Or once again shall we hold ourselves and our insignificant lives in contempt for the sake of a powerful state lasting for centuries?

Alas, the people will not endure any more force, from the one side or the other. Suppressed, driven from streets and meetings into their huts and hostels, harnessed to an iron yoke and subject to the will of a formidable driver pointing the way to San Francisco or to Magadan, the people will not budge. They will simply decline, die and waste away, because the people's fatigue is great: their backbones were broken in previous experiments, and they would prefer to die under the blows from the iron rod. No longer will they try to move this unwieldy iron vehicle, bogged down between arctic ice and burning desert.

What will become of us? What are we to believe in? Whose speeches should we listen to?

There is a third, utopia-like picture, which antagonises practical natures by its transparency and its lack of a mathematical or concrete structure. There is a third model for development, which excludes dictatorship and death. You will not hear about it at meetings, you will not read about it in a fashionable journal, you will not find it at philosophy symposiums. But it is possible, its presence is felt. It is somewhere nearby, but not in halls, not at exhibitions and not in the bright beam of the spotlight. It is found in the cellar, in the attic, in the damp, sooty bath-house, unassuming, hiding itself, a lame creature with blistered lips. It must be sought, called forth carefully, not with a megaphone but with the gentle note of a child's pipe.

Our social consciousness is like an area of cleared forest with the damp, blackened stumps of former schools and opinions, philosophical and religious trends, economic and social cultures, and esthetic and scientific teachings. Everything has been chopped off at the roots, and instead of the forest, instead of a splendid culture revered throughout the world and the late flowering of the Russian spiritual renaissance, instead of all this we have wet, slimy stumps and the oily slime of the bog.

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