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THE RUSSIAN FREE PRESS IN THE TRANSITION TO A POST-COMMUNIST SOCIETY

Executive Summary*

This paper examines three independent newspapers founded in Russia during the last several years—Nezavisimaia gazeta (NG), Delovoi mir (DM), and Panorama—and finds that they are in fact helping to create the civil society for which they are intended. NG, the most successful of the three, is intended to be an objective, "Western-type" newspaper, DM a business daily for the new Russian entrepreneur class, and Panorama, a specialized paper featuring in-depth analysis of current events. All three papers were created in 1989 or 1990 and officially registered after June 1990, when the groundbreaking USSR Law on the Press established legal grounds for the institution of the free press. None of the three publications existed previously as an official Soviet newspaper, but two, DM and NG, had institutional sponsors which provide both financial and logistical support. These newspapers are all grappling with how to define and defend "objective" reporting in a country that lacks both a sophisticated political culture and tolerance for differing political views; many journalists writing for these papers believe their mission is to help dislodge old patterns of thinking inculcated by Soviet Communism. The future of these newspapers is uncertain, as Russia’s transition to a market economy has resulted in skyrocketing costs and lower subscription rates which may make their survival impossible.

The study analyzes the three newspapers in question to achieve a partial view of Russia’s transition to a post-communist society. Under Gorbachev, greater freedom of the press led the founders of NG, DM, and Panorama to create newspapers which were specifically designed for a post-Communist Russia. They essentially set out to create institutions upon which such a

*Prepared by NCSEER Staff
society could be built: a modern political culture (NG), a business culture (DM), and a civic culture (Panorama). Prior to the failed coup of August 1991, both NG and Panorama suffered harassment from the Soviet authorities, with issues of their paper often warehoused instead of properly distributed. Panorama, the only paper without an institutional sponsor, has suffered most from the enormous rise in the price of paper and now appears only irregularly in small runs.

NG was established in December 1990 by a group of experienced journalists under the age of 40 with a 300,000 ruble-loan and premises provided by the Moscow City Soviet. The paper's founders sought to break with the didactic, moralistic style of Soviet newspapers and create a modern, Western paper with an objective tone. Despite this aim, the paper is prone to youthful jargon and has resorted to using irony and criticism in order to convey a kind of objectivity recognizable to its readers. Within a year, NG became a national paper printing four times a week at various locations throughout the USSR in total runs of 270,000. The paper has run into trouble with the Moscow city and Russian national government for its criticism and coverage of events, putting it in the ironic position of defending its democratic right to criticism to democratic supporters. The paper was active in protesting the August 1991 coup and, together with other independent papers, helped produce Obshchaia gazeta during the 4 days of the putsch, one of the few papers which published authentic information at the time.

DM was created in May 1990 as a business daily by a consortium which included the USSR Ministry of Finance, the State Committee of Material and Technical Supply, the Ministry of Communications, the Petro-Chemical Bank, and the Union of Managers. It is the only paper surveyed which earns the bulk of its revenues through advertising. The newspaper aims at
conveying precise information on business trends and legislation which, unfortunately, appears to be more useful to foreign businessmen than to independent Russian entrepreneurs. Enterprise directors, however, do read the paper in large numbers. Many former Communists sit on DM's editorial board and the paper's policy of remaining "above" politics led it to remain silent during the coup. This silence provoked widespread disillusionment among its staff and was followed by a sharp drop in circulation, which had reached 120,000 in Spring 1991, in the months after August of that year.

Panorama was created in Spring 1989 as a bulletin on the "informal" movement in the USSR, but after a year refashioned itself to specialize in lengthy, articulate analysis of current events. The paper is in the Russian intellectual tradition and seeks to use a refined, literary style. Most of the contributors to Panorama are not journalists and appear to be learning their trade on the job; their connections with the "informal" movement give them access to many people now in government as well as detailed information not readily available to other journalists. At its height in 1990, Panorama appeared twice a month in press runs of 100,000; surprisingly, Russian entrepreneurs comprised a large component of its readers. Due to the soaring cost of paper, it has published only one issue in 1991, but is planning to resume regular publication in runs of 100,000 to 200,000 targeted for distribution near universities.

These papers are each attempting to reshape the political and social mentality of Russian society while struggling to survive amidst economic disarray. Perhaps their gravest mission is to develop objective news reporting in the new Russia. To quote one Russian journalist: "Objectivity is a problem for all newspapers in Russia today because a social consensus on fundamental values is missing." (see p. 17) Financial problems, and not political constraints,
will be the biggest obstacle to these papers' survival during Russia’s transition to a market economy.
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TRANSITION TO A POST-COMMUNIST SOCIETY

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Among the many "absences" endemic to the old Soviet order whose combined effect amounted to a thoroughgoing negation of any possibility for political life - the absence of public elections, the absence of political parties, the absence of a constitution, and so forth - none was of greater moment than the absence of newspapers. To be sure, the authorities had always made liberal provision for filling with state socialist simulacra the space created by the eviction of politics. Tens of millions would cast ballots installing in lifeless legislatures more millions to "represent" them; the Communist Party's monopoly on state power meant that it was never bothered to undertake the project which defines political parties per se, namely, to compete for, or for influence over, state power itself; and, of course, the Constitution of the USSR, a document whose language bore only the faintest resemblance to that of a constitution, was honored everyday in the breach and every year since 1977 with a day off work. And so the authorities created newspapers.

From its inception, the Communist regime in Russia had taken considerable pains both to promote its own publications and to eradicate all competitions.¹ A number of studies of the Soviet press have already detailed the various functions and characteristics that it had acquired and developed over the course
of its history - the propagation of officially established "truths", the mobilization of the population to accomplish regime-prescribed objectives, an outlet for widespread social frustrations, and the like. As important as these features may have been to understanding the Soviet press, however, they are of less interest to us here than is the position that the press had occupied in the overall construction of state power.

From this perspective, the Soviet press was one among many organizations and modes of activity that might be regarded as "instead of" institutions. That is, instead of elections, the population was provided with Soviet elections; instead of a constitution, they got the Soviet Constitution; and, instead of newspapers, they were supplied with the Soviet press. Moreover, the issue of the spurious nature of these "instead of" institutions - elections without choice, a Constitution without effect, newspapers without news - would represent only half of the picture. The other half was comprised of absences, absences on which the Communist order depended for its existence and absences that it maintained by occupying each space with its own counterfeit institution. Sanctions would then be employed against those who would as much as question the authenticity of the "instead of" institutions, let alone those endeavoring to create the genuine article. For within the logic of this order, any attempt to provide that which was in fact lacking simultaneously appeared as action intended to dislodge that purported to fill the lack. Consequently, any such effort immediately assumed the character of "anti-Soviet agitation", "a
slander against the party and people", and so on. This construction of state power, then, was anchored in a definition of politics as treason."

One of the outstanding accomplishments of Mikhail Gorbachev's perestroika was to undo this definition. By the end of the 1980s, limited forms of political activity were tolerated and, in some instances, even encouraged by his reformist leadership - the organization of political groups outside the tutelage of the Communist Party, elections that often featured real alternatives for the voter, a policy of *glasnost* in the mass media, still controlled by the party and state, that extended the bounds of the permissible. A milestone in this last respect was recorded on June 12, 1990, when the USSR's Supreme Soviet enacted a new Law on the Press. The legislative battles surrounding the adoption of this measure, as well as the efforts of many party and state authorities (including Gorbachev himself) to rein in the press freedom that it provided, testified to the fact that it represented a fundamental break from the past for the press and in the overall political life of the country. It marked the passage from state-sponsored *glasnost* to the institutionalization of press freedom. It meant that hitherto unofficial publications still appearing as a form of samizdat on the margins of legality could become duly established newspapers enjoying the same rights and protections as their state-sponsored counterparts. In short, the Law authorized for society its own voice.
Within the space of some 9 months, a total of 1,773 newspapers and periodicals—about half of them new publications and the great majority founded independently of state or party organizations—had been registered by the USSR's State Committee on the Press, while hundreds more had been registered with the Russian government's Ministry of the Press and Mass Communications. In terms of the range of reader interest (from business and politics to fashion, sport and sex), the character of founding organizations (state bodies, political parties, clubs and individuals); and the print quality of the publications themselves (from less-than-legible mimeographs to large clean-copy editions, the rival of any Western newspaper in this respect), the monotony of the press under Communism had given way to robust, almost dazzling, variety.

The present study focuses on three newspapers that have staked out distinct niches for themselves in the evolving milieu of the press in Russia: Nezavisimaia gazeta, Delovoi mir and Panorama. Each had been established during the final stage of the Communist system as a "post-Communist" newspaper. That is, firstly the very existence of these newspapers as members of the community of free publications pointed beyond the bounds of the (already collapsing) Communist order, while the particular projects toward which their editorial boards inclined have involved the conscious creation of new social institutions on which a post-Communist future might indeed be built. Secondly, this intention to create something new—a business culture in the case of Delovoi mir, a civic or political culture in the cases of Nezavisimaia gazeta and Panorama.
had led to decisions in each instance to begin with something new, namely, a newspaper having no direct association with the then extant Soviet press. As such, the variant of post-Communist newspapers represented by these publications contrasts with others—say, Moscow News or Argumenty i fakty—which had evolved in that direction during the period of glasnost' before establishing their full independence from the Communist authorities when the Law on the Press had made this possible.

To date, there has been little scholarly work published in the West concerning those newspapers in the former USSR that have evolved into post-Communist publications¹¹ and, to my knowledge, nothing has yet appeared on newspapers that began as such. The present study, then, has at least some of the earmarks of the exploratory. The selection of the three newspapers in the sample has been influenced by this consideration; viz., to explore the origins and development of Russia's post-Communist press by means of case studies comparing three publications whose differences one with another are large enough to suggest that they collectively represent a relatively large cross section of new newspapers in that country. The analysis, here, includes 16 interviews with editors-in-chief, department heads and correspondents conducted prior to (April–June 1991), during (August 1991) and after (November 1991) the coup and succeeding anti-Communist revolution.¹² The intention here is to document a portion of the transition process to a post-Communist Russia as reflected in the character and work of these three newspapers. Accordingly, the
analysis is pitched around an inquiry into: (1) the aims attending the establishment of each paper; (2) the particular difficulties encountered in attempting to realize these aims; and (3) the larger and evolving context in which the independent press has functioned.

Three Newspapers in Profile
A comparison of the newspapers in our sample might begin with a few words about the origins and development of each of them in the period prior to the August coup. We start with what has become the most successful of the three, Nezavisimaiia gazeta or, for short, NG.

During the summer of 1990, the idea of establishing a "newspaper of the Western type" began to circulate among a number of journalists in Moscow. Dissatisfied by both the limited news coverage and lack of editorial independence common to official newspapers such as Pravda and Izvestiia, as well as by the moralizing, didactic tone featured in weeklies more given to criticizing the Communist order such as Moskovskie novosti and Literaturnaia gazeta, these journalists decided that it would be far easier to realize their goal by founding a new paper than by attempting to reform one of the existing ones. Supplied with makeshift premises and a loan of 300,000 rubles by the Moscow City Soviet, NG began publication on December 21, 1990, putting out three editions per week with press runs of 150,000 copies. Initially printed by Izvestiia only in Moscow and available only there and in Leningrad, NG expanded during its first year of
publication to four issues per week, appearing in press runs of 270,000 that have been printed in Moscow, South Sakhalin, Tbilisi, Rostov-on-Don and Kemerevo. Along with the fact that it counted some 70,000 subscribers after its first year of operations, this plurality of print sites has made it a national newspaper. Moreover, since advertising revenues have always counted for a small portion of NG’s financing, growth has been sustained by increases in its readership who in the main have been purchasing the paper either at one of Soiuzpechat’s kiosks or from one of NG’s own street vendors.

NG began publication with a staff numbering about 100 who were divided more or less evenly into journalists and correspondents, on the one hand, and support staff and management, on the other. The Editor-in-Chief, Vitalii Tret’iakov, as well as his deputy, Il’ia Baranikas, had previously served as journalists and commentators with Moskovskie novosti, as had a number of others on NG’s staff. By means of networks of friends and acquaintances, other journalists from publications as varied as Literaturnaiia gazeta, Kommersant", Sovetskii tsirk, and Moskovskii avtotransportnik found their way to employment with this new venture. Their numbers were supplemented by a fresh crop of graduates from The Journalism Faculty of Moscow State University, a fact that highlights the related aspects of youth and journalistic orientation that are among NG’s salient characteristics.

Nearly the entire staff of NG is under the age of forty. In comparing themselves with other newspapers, journalists are likely
to point to this fact as indicative of the particular "Western" direction that they pursue. As one has remarked:

A number of leading journalists at Literaturnaja gazeta wanted to work for us. People from the older generation. We told them: "No". We didn't want that old, opinionated style in our newspaper...Our youthfulness also shows up in our language, our style. The other day a journalist from Moskovskii Komsomolets pointed this out to some of us. We hadn't noticed ourselves, but there it was in the text [copy], a lot of youth slang and jargon such as you'd never find in a newspaper of the more traditional type.

The tension between the aim of achieving a universalistic orientation for NG - free of moralism and partiality, and symbolized by the adjective "Western" - and the particular youthful cohort with their own subcultural proclivities that is attempting to realize this objective helps to explain why, in the eyes of some of its journalists themselves, NG "has still not become a Western-style newspaper".

But there may be deeper reasons for this as well, reasons rooted in the context in which the newspaper functions. As one respondent has remarked during an interview, "in the Soviet Union, objectivity and opposition are really the same thing". To Western ears, of course, this smacks of paradox. Even so, however, the paradox is revealing. On the one hand, the attempt to achieve objectivity appears as a form of opposition to the longstanding conventions of Soviet journalism in which those working for the press have been
trained to play the role of educator, if not propagandist. When those at NG speak of their intention to become a "Western-style newspaper", they seem to connote above all their rejection of the didactic, moralizing posture endemic to that role.

On the other hand, objectivity presupposes a normative context. In this respect, we are reminded by students of Western mass media that "objectivity" in news reporting is rendered by a particular formatting of events such that dominant cultural norms and myths are encoded directly into the news accounts themselves. Reporting, therefore, can assume the appearance of objectivity since the particular normative constructs on which it depends are already anchored in the consciousness of the audience. The news and the meaning of the news tend to form a seamless whole; as such, no "subjective" movement is detectable on the surface.¹⁴ What position is available to the journalist when the normative context of the social order, as in contemporary Russia, is disintegrating or under attack? How might objectivity be rendered under these circumstances? The tack taken by NG has been to lace its accounts with an ample measure of irony and criticism. These signal a distance between the writer and his subject; they alert the reader not to take the events or personages in question at face value, just as they invite him or her to share in the skepticism evinced by the writer himself. In so doing, the journalist may be providing valuable pieces of context that enrich an understanding of the event in question, even while he or she would be departing...
from canons of objectivity associated with the Western model toward which he or she self-consciously aspires.  

Much like NG, Delovoi mir (or DM) was founded with the explicit intention of introducing a Western-style newspaper into Russia. In this case, however, the project was to create a business daily along the lines of the *Financial Times* or the *Wall Street Journal*. As DM's Editor-in-Chief put it during an interview:

It had become obvious by 1980 that our socialist economy was doomed, that we were living under dogmas and illusions, and that we had to make the transition to a so-called "normal market economy". However, we weren't prepared for this, so we began to study Western experience and methods. We realized that a market means a number of various structures and sources of information - something completely different from our form of organization even up to the present time. And we weren't prepared for this transition. Neither the radio, nor the press nor the agricultural instructor had done anything [to prepare us]. So as a journalist, I became interested in organizing a newspaper of a new type...Our newspaper's role has been to play a part in the information network needed to undergird the new economic complex in the USSR.

DM was founded on May 11, 1990 by a Consortium composed of a number of the USSR's top governmental, economic and financial institutions, including: the Ministry of Finance, the State Committee of Material and Technical Supply, the Ministry of Communications, the Petro-Chemical Bank, the Union of Managers and
others. With the backing of these institutions, DM was able to begin publication on an episodic basis even prior to the enactment of the Law on the Press. By the end of 1990, it had achieved one of its major objectives, appearing in handsome copy across the USSR as the country’s first business daily.

Drawing its professional staff of some 50 (plus another 100 or so who occupy technical and support roles) from older publications such as Sotsialisticheskaia industriia and Stroitel’naia gazeta, DM presents all the appearances one might associate with the business press: its offices are tidy and, housed in a rather grand building in the center of Moscow, almost palatial; its personnel are fashionably dressed; the work pace flows rather evenly between 9:00 AM and 5:00 PM. In all these respects, DM contrasts markedly with both NG and Panorama for whom the word "casual" might be applied to the look of the premises, the dress of the staff and personal inter-action in the work place. Equally, the word "intense" comes to mind when reflecting on observations of the way in which journalists at NG or Panorama approach their subject matter. Those at DM seem much more subdued in this regard, discharging their functions with a more businesslike demeanor.

As a business, DM has depended on advertising for the bulk of its revenues. By spring 1991 it counted over 30,000 subscribers with another 90,000 copies or so sold at the kiosks of Soiuzpechat. By fall of that year, however, subscriptions had tapered off dramatically (to about 5,000) while daily sales had also plummeted by a factor of two or three.
DM's readership has been described in somewhat different ways by those on its staff. While some refer to the corpus of readers as "businessmen, practical economic actors, not the kind of people who go to demonstrations [for] they haven't the time to waste on that", others, perhaps less sanguine, lament the "small circle" of popularity surrounding the newspaper, labelling DM as a "director's newspaper". Opinions among the staff vary, too, on the extent to which DM has measured up to its own ambition of becoming a "Western-style business newspaper". The more critical among them argue that the decision to go over to daily publication had been taken prematurely, that insufficient preparations had been made for this transition and that the staff has been over-extended in attempting to provide suitable copy on a daily basis, invariably lowering in the process the quality of the newspaper.

But context, again, seems to be a contributing factor to these problems. For at the heart of DM's difficulties has been the fact that, as a business daily, it finds itself in the position of attempting to aid in bringing about that on which such a newspaper would in the first instance depend, namely, a business class, a business culture and the like. In a manner analogous to NG's paradoxical relation to objectivity/opposition, the editorship of DM defines its journalistic orientation as "objective" insofar as it includes "an historical perspective relating to the positive aspects of the development of market relations". Consequently, this orientation is "based" on something that does not (yet) exist, but something that it seeks consciously to develop. On the one
hand, it does so by providing its readers with business-related information on a timely basis after the fashion of the world business press. Its staff regard DM’s short, concise coverage of investment opportunities, the provisions of extant legislation relevant to them and other factors affecting the business climate as perhaps the outstanding feature of the newspaper, as something unique in Russia today. But, at the same time, the low level of business culture that prevails in Russia has meant that Russian businessmen, the newspaper’s primary audience, seem to have derived far less from this information than have their foreign counterparts entering the Russian market. As a member of the editorial board commented: "Our businessmen just don’t respond to this information the way you might expect; but Westerners are very quick to use this service of ours." On the other hand, the conscious emphasis on creating a business newspaper that will stimulate the development of a business culture has led to some questionable decisions that we take up, below, under the topic of repression and restriction.

Unlike NG and DM, the third newspaper in our sample, Panorama, was founded with neither institutional sponsor nor a complement of established journalists looking for a new outlet for their energies. In spring of 1989, Aleksandr Verkhovskii, Anatolii Papp and Andrei Vasilevskii, who had been putting out a bulletin (Grazhdanskoe dostoinstvo) that was the organ of the budding Constitutional Democratic movement, decided to join forces with Vladimir Pribylovskii and Sergei Mitrokhin of Khronograf (a
samizdat weekly devoted to covering the emerging "informal" movement in the USSR) in order to start a political newspaper that would also feature topics concerned with culture and ecology. The result, Panorama, drew in numerous actors from among leading activists in the country's "informal" movement who contributed episodically to its columns.

In its original incarnation, Panorama regarded itself as a newspaper "by, about and for 'informals' ... differing from similar samizdat publications in the fact that it attempted to be interesting and analytical, not just the kind of vulgar agitation that you get on the street." Another (former) member of its staff has added that the use of language set Panorama apart from the many other publications of its type. "We attempted to use a more literary language, one that would convey a more critical, reflective attitude" in our coverage. By early 1990, Panorama was appearing twice monthly in photocopied editions that had grown from 1,000 to 5,000. However, a sudden and precipitous drop in sales, followed by an attempt to have the newspaper printed on typographical equipment - a decision that resulted in the disaster of a completely illegible number - forced a temporary suspension of publication.

While searching for another firm to do their printing - a process that took over two months - the staff at Panorama began to rethink their entire project, and concluded that it was time to appeal to a larger audience by changing their focus from the informal movement to, in the words of one member, "what was
actually going on in the country at large". In its second incarnation, Panorama became Russia's first fully-independent (and duly registered) periodical devoted to the analysis of public affairs, appearing once or twice monthly in editions of reasonably good print quality in press runs of up to 100,000 copies. Relying on a network of contacts from associations made among those in the "informal" movement - many of whom were by now leading figures in government and in new political parties - Panorama has been able to maintain a unique quality for itself by supplying (often detailed) information not available through other sources in a format emphasizing analysis as much as reporting. To the surprise of the staff, a large section of Panorama's readership has included members of Russia's new business classes who have been attracted by the newspaper's subdued and gently ironic style.

Much of the character of Panorama is entwined with this question of style. Its core staff of five, and most of the dozen or so individuals who contribute items or articles from time to time, have no formal training as journalists. This fact is apparent in the contrast between the conduct of editorial board meetings at Panorama and, say, NG. Whereas the latter are given over entirely to a discussion of the content of recent issues and projections for future ones, those at Panorama more resemble seminars involving story construction, the clarity of a given phraseology, the effectiveness of a certain leader for an article, or the validity of one or another interpretation. The small size of the editorial collective, along with the close working and personal relations
they have built, probably accounts for some of this. Nonetheless, the level of details entertained during these long discussions suggests a situation in which these journalists are learning their craft as they practice it." As a consequence, certain aspects of their intellectual milieu are reinforced rather than challenged. Among them is the element of Panorama's rather sophisticated prose style. When asked if this style does not in fact prohibit the newspaper from reaching a broader audience, one member of the editorial board has replied simply that "we have done what we wanted to do". Another has noted in this respect that "we work in the Russian tradition, and maybe we are not really a newspaper in the Western sense of the term". Yet, in another sense, those at Panorama point to a certain strength accruing to the newspaper because of its relatively erudite style. "Objectivity is a problem for all newspapers in Russia today", as one has put it, "because a social consensus on fundamental values is missing. I don't see how we can reach consensus without first developing a civilized discourse in which arguments and criticisms can be made. We would like to think that Panorama is contributing to that process."

Repression and Restrictions

Although the USSR's Law on the Press established the principle of press freedom, practice was often another matter entirely. Authorities at the State Committee on the Press were known to drag out interminably the registration process for independent newspapers,²⁰ and then arbitrarily evict from their premises,²¹ or
deny distribution rights to, those who had been duly registered. Authorities at lower levels also relied on a variety of means for impeding the progress of fledgling — and even long established — publications. Principal among them appears to have been the disruption of distribution, either by means of overt police harassment or via the more discreet method of simply warehousing all or a portion of the copies shipped to a given region for sale and then, after a suitable time had elapsed, returning it to the central offices of Soiuzpechat as "unsold." Among the three newspapers in our sample, Panorama experienced the largest measure of adversity during the final year of the Communist order. After the publication of a series of articles on extreme right-wing political organizations in Russia, the Editor-in-Chief began to receive threatening letters from "Russian patriots". His apartment was then set ablaze on May 16, 1990. The following September, in the wake of another article on the right-wing and more threatening letters, a fire consumed the apartment of another member of the editorial board. No police investigation ensued in either instance while numerous letters from the newspaper to the office of Moscow's Procurator went unanswered. Panorama, too, had been victimized by Soiuzpechat's practice of warehousing, rather than retailing, copies of the newspaper and then returning these as "unsold". But the greatest threat to the continued existence of Panorama has been the skyrocketing price of newsprint.

In the face of reductions in the overall supply of paper, an accelerating pace of inflation and the Communist Party's
appropriation of the lion's share of available newsprint, the price of paper on the market had climbed from 40 to 50 times in the year following the adoption of the Law of the Press. NG was little affected by this problem due to the fact that it was able, through the intercession of its sponsor, the Moscow City Soviet, to purchase paper at a subsidized rate. DM, too, had found ways around the difficulty, both through exploiting its network of institutional associations and by bartering services with suppliers. Consequently, whereas these newspapers were able to purchase newsprint for as little as 2,000 rubles per ton during the winter of 1991, the price confronting sponsorless Panorama had risen prohibitively to 8,000 rubles. In January 1991, Panorama therefore temporarily suspended publication.

Although the institutional associations enjoyed by NG and DM had enabled them to avoid the exorbitant cost of newsprint, these same associations have in other ways led to certain difficulties. Journalists at NG smile at the storm of protest and angry letters to the editor that followed their first critical remarks on the leaders of Russia's democratic movement. "Since the Moscow Soviet sponsored us", one has remarked, "a lot of people assumed that this was the democratic paper and, therefore, it had no right to criticize democrats." More recently, the Russian Minister of the Press and Mass Information has threatened NG with criminal prosecution for publishing remarks made by the Ukraine's Deputy Premier, Konstantin Masik, to the effect that Boris El'tsin had been assessing the possibility of a nuclear strike against his
country. In this case, the inconvenience of the reporting for those charged with the affairs of state, rather than any comment or criticism on the part of the newspaper, has been sufficient to provoke the authorities to repression.

In the case of DM, restrictions on press freedom have come about in part as a result of an editorial orientation toward business to the exclusion of politics. This orientation was captured in the comments of the Editor-in-Chief who remarked during an interview: "It is better to pick up litter than to go to a political demonstration". It was also noted by some journalists who complained that many on the editorial board were longstanding members of the Communist Party (some of whom maintained close associations with important figures in the hierarchy) whose conservative orientations did little to expedite their self-proclaimed project of developing a Western-style business daily. As one put it:

These people don't like many of the political changes. Moreover, they still have their old habits, their old mentality. They judge ideas or stories not from the perspective of the readers, what they would like, but from the perspective of superiors. For them, everything is according to instructions [po zakazu]. So, they prevent the publication of many interesting and important things by saying: "This is not business, this is politics." And that's the end of it.

The most egregious instance of DM's self-censorship involved its refusal to print an article submitted on August 11, 1991 by its
legal-economics correspondent, Yurii Kon, that laid out in considerable detail a series of critical policy differences that had emerged during the previous year between Mikhail Gorbachev (soon to be kidnapped) and Prime Minister Valentin Pavlov (soon to be among his kidnappers). The fact that Pavlov, as then Minister of Finance of the USSR, was among the members of the Consortium that founded DM, may have influenced this decision. But whatever the reason, the prescience of Kon’s analysis coming just a week before the August coup, along with the public exposure that ensued for him during the coup and its aftermath, amounted to a major embarrassment for DM and contributed further to the demoralization of many on its staff.

The Press and the August Coup

Public communication, always essential to the political life of any society, acquired added significance in Russia during the seizure of power by the eight-man junta that installed itself as the government of the USSR on the morning of August 19, 1991. Control of the means of communication was essential to the strategy of the junta, just as access to these means was essential to the counter-strategy of the Russian leadership. In this respect, the latter might be regarded above all as the establishment and maintenance of symbolic boundaries around the entity, Russia, mediated by a continuous summons to the citizenry to defend these boundaries. The celebrated barricades erected around the seat of Russian government, the "White House", as well as the concentric human
chains of citizens standing, arms locked, in its defense, were cases in point. Equally, El'tsin's Proclamation to the Russian People, issued on the first day of the coup as well as his subsequent decrees placing all organizations on Russian soil under the jurisdiction of the Russian government can be taken as variants of the same strategy. In all these instances, symbolic lines distinguished "us" from "them". The real drama of those three days in August consisted in the innumerable decisions made by soldiers, their officers, KGB units, government officials and ordinary citizens to place themselves on one side or another of these boundaries.

The coup leaders, of course, had drawn their own lines. With respect to the all-important institutions of mass communications, they defined a set of organizations such as Central Television, the news agency, TASS, and a number of newspapers (Pravda, Izvestiia and Sovetskaia Rossiia and others) thought reliable for their purpose of limiting all political communication to statements aimed at building support for the coup d'etat and discouraging any notion that resistance to it either existed or was in any way possible. Sanctioned operation for the remainder of the mass media was immediately suspended. But the overwhelming majority of those thus silenced by the USSR's new government made the choice to side with Russia.

The origins and development of the three newspapers in our sample might already suggest something about the posture each was to assume during the coup d'etat. As independent newspapers over
which the USSR’s authorities exercised no direct control, all were included in the category of suspended publications under the state of emergency that had been declared. However, each responded quite differently to this common condition. Whereas DM abided by the junta’s orders, NG and Panorama - in somewhat different ways - waged an active resistance. Inasmuch as the conditions prevailing during the three days of the August coup amounted to a kind of political X-ray machine laying bare the internal makeup of actors and institutions alike, we might examine in some detail the conduct of these three newspapers, looking for indications of how the directions that they had hitherto pursued led them to adopt the decisions that they took during the coup d'etat and how their actions during those critical moments affected their own futures in a post-Communist Russia.

NG’s initial response to the coup d'etat was to continue normal operations under extraordinary circumstances. Deprived of its regular print facilities and engaged in what proved to be a futile search to locate an alternative, the staff nonetheless spent the first day of the coup assembling an issue of the newspaper focused on the military takeover. By evening, as armored personnel carriers had begun taking up positions around the premises, the staff turned its attention to putting out a flyer that would be photocopied and distributed that night and the next morning by the newspaper’s regular street vendors. This effort was among the first at establishing a communications link between resistance to the junta and the capital’s population.
As the second day of the coup began, Muscovites gathered around these flyers, posted in metro stations and other intersections of foot traffic, to read of the major events that had unfolded over the previous 24 hours and to exchange opinions on them. Often enough, arguments would flare up, leaving anyone moving around the city that day with the ineluctable impression that Moscow's "Hyde Park" - that sidewalk off Pushkin Square where spirited political discussions can be observed in all but the most inclement weather - had reproduced itself in every quarter of the capital.

On the morning of the second day, the Editor of NG joined his colleagues from 10 other banned newspapers assembled in the offices of Moskovskie novosti to discuss the possibility of combining forces and publishing a newspaper in defiance of the state of emergency. The result, Obshchaia gazeta, appeared on the same day in a four-page photocopied edition, with a second edition produced on the printing facilities that one of the participants, Kommersant", had managed to secure. Those collaborating in the production of Obshchaia gazeta were also linked to the daily, Chas pik, which transmitted news to the citizens of Leningrad (St. Petersburg). During its brief existence, Obshchaia gazeta became a standard fixture on the walls of metro stations and other public places, particularly in Moscow but also in other Russian cities. It provided the news to literally millions of people in spite of the news blackout ordered by the junta. Its final number, printed in 8 pages on the facilities of Krasnaia zvezda, appeared on August 22.34 In addition to working with Obshchaia gazeta, however, NG
also managed to put out its own four-page photocopied edition on August 21 along with other informational flyers. With four staff members working at the information center inside the Russian "White House", its own reporters patrolling the streets of Moscow and information supplied by Postfaktum - another news agency that refused orders to close down - its accounts were remarkably accurate as well as timely.

As noted, above, Panorama had been forced out of business in January by the prohibitive cost of newsprint and was, therefore, not a functioning newspaper when the state of emergency was declared. For the previous eight months its staff had been writing news dispatches for the fledgling Agency for News and Information (ANI) and earning incomes in other related pursuits. As a consequence of these avocational endeavors, some members of the editorial board were in the Rostov region on an archeological dig when news of the coup broke. They immediately trained to Moscow to find their colleagues at the editorial offices busy collecting information over the telephone from ANI correspondents around the country and - along with their old associates from the "informal" group, Grazhdanskoe dostoinstvo (now the Party of Constitutional Democrats) - hard at work on a political leaflet for immediate distribution in the capital. Some members then made their way to the Russian "White House", but were denied entry on the basis that the press center there was already overcrowded. Linking up with friends and acquaintances from past days in the informal movement, these journalists spent the remainder of that critical night of
August 20-21 assisting in the organization of the civilian defense of the "White House" and periodically telephoning reports on the situation there back to their colleagues at ANI."

Whereas NG responded to the coup as a newspaper whose aim to become a "normal" Western-style newspaper had been politicized by the conditions in which it found itself, and Panorama reacted by returning to its publicist roots in the "informal" democratic movement, DM simply complied with instructions from the junta to close down all operations. The reasoning behind the decision to do so, however, has remained a contentious issue among the staff. The authoritative explanation has been that to publish would have meant, willy-nilly, to take sides in the conflict between the new government of the USSR and the government of Russia, and that such a political role was not appropriate for a business newspaper. Others, however, have called attention to the links between DM and then Prime Minister, Valentin Pavlov, and members of the Politburo of the Russian Communist Party, and have argued that a tacit split on the editorial board over the question of whom to support was resolved in favor of a tacit consensus to do nothing. Whatever the motives behind the decision to remain inactive, the "neutrality" rule was actively enforced and led to angry recriminations and resignations in the wake of the coup’s collapse.

Conclusions and Perspectives
The defeat of the August coup signalled the final act in Russia’s transition to a post-Communist society. We have observed, here,
how the independent press has been a harbinger of, and active participant in, this transition itself. Hitherto, the issue of press freedom has been associated with the struggle against the Communist regime - both in the narrow sense of removing the restrictions that this regime imposed on publication and in the broader context of developing that quintessentially democratic institution, a free press, on which the political life of any modern society would depend. In the aftermath of Communism's defeat, what directions might we anticipate for the development of a free press in today's Russia? Conditions external and internal to the three newspapers on which we have focused supply at least the beginning of an answer to this question.

First, it seems highly unlikely that Russia's present government will succeed in reintroducing overt, political restrictions on the press. Having adopted for themselves a democratic identity during their protracted conflict with the now-defeated order, the legitimacy of the current government appears too closely connected to a pledge honoring the principles and practices of democracy for a repressive policy toward the press to get very far. This much is visible in the way that NG has parried the threat of criminal prosecution issued by the Russian Minister for the Press (referenced, above) and in El'tsin's reversal of his decision to ban those newspapers that had supported the coup once a spirited protest against this action had been mounted by the editors of those newspapers that had actively opposed it.38
Second, if restrictions issuing from the holders of political power appear unlikely at the moment, those stemming from conditions internal to one or another newspaper do not. In this respect, we already have had occasion to comment on the restraints that DM has introduced on itself under the extenuation that it is a business newspaper and should therefore steer clear of politics. Another, more ramified, version of self-restriction has been mentioned by a member of NG's staff in contrasting his newspaper with its much larger competition, Izvestiia:

The independence of Izvestiia, like big newspapers in America, is compromised by its proximity to power. That is, it has excellent channels of information in the government that it—and I know this for a fact in more than one case—does not want to jeopardize by publishing certain things...Another factor here is the generational difference. Those working at Izvestiia are older than us. Their generation thinks that the current government is "their" government; we simply regard it as the government. That's why we are more oppositional, more independent. Our independence is, of course, limited in various ways, but it is not as narrowly circumscribed as that of Izvestiia.

Pursuing further this association between the prominence of a given newspaper and the tendency to refrain from printing certain things, one member of Panorama's staff has noted that press freedom in Russia is "not unlike that found in the West. There is a tendency toward self-censorship in the face of the new power
[government], so we have achieved freedom of the press in a practical, rather than a utopian sense." Another, elaborating on this idea, has remarked that:

There is still very little that is published concerning political leaders. Who they are, their biographies. This is because we are talking here about a press accustomed to the control of the authorities, not about one [guided by] public opinion.

Panorama, given its origins and editorial orientation, has attempted to play such a role by profiling contemporary political leaders and featuring controversial topics in unconventional ways. Its July 1991 issue, for instance, contains an extremely unflattering portrait of Russia's Vice-President, Aleksandr Rutskoi, detailing his association with Russia's ultra right-wing "patriotic" movement, his anti-intellectualism, intolerance and penchant for demagogic hyperbole.39 Similarly, Panorama has specialized in covering the right-wing itself, and over time has adopted a rather non-judgmental tone, allowing right-wing leaders to speak for themselves and readers to draw their own conclusions.40 Although the threats and acts of arson previously occasioned by the earlier, more overtly negative coverage of the right-wing have ceased, one result of this new orientation has been a difficulty in getting the paper printed. In the words of one staff member:

Since we don't have much money to begin with, we are always looking for a printer that we can afford. We thought we had
solved our problem when Moscow State University agreed to print our July number. They didn’t ask for so much [money]. Then, when we took the copy to them, they refused because of the articles on Russia’s right-wing movement. They said that they would not take part in spreading fascist ideas. So now the censor is gone and the printers act as censor.

In conclusion, we might underscore this episode as emblematic of the restrictions faced by the Russian press in the current period. On the one hand, political culture in Russia has had precious little time to develop. Older habits of mind have not yet made much room for the virtue of tolerance or extended adequate appreciation either to the value of a free exchange of ideas per se or to the notion that one might, indeed, learn from one’s partner in debate. This condition was mentioned in one context or another by members of each of the newspapers in the sample in the course of interviews. Along with it, each respondent added that it was the obligation of his or her newspaper to work actively to dislodge those older habits of mind and, thereby, to contribute to the development of society’s political culture. Although a moment’s reflection would indicate that this would be an enduring task for the press in any democratic country, its degree of difficulty and urgency would appear to be especially pronounced in the Russian context.

On the other hand, material conditions can be expected to exercise an increasingly restrictive influence as state subsidies—either direct ones, as in the case of NG or indirect ones, as in
that of DM - are terminated in favor of market relations. Ironically, Panorama, which has experienced the largest measure of difficulty among our three newspapers in this respect, may have prepared itself most effectively for the transition to the market. It has already been practicing for some time that very resourcefulness that has been featured in the Russian government’s policy for assisting the press during the transition, namely, to undertake ancillary "productive and commercial activities" in order to fund the costs of publication.⁴¹ Similarly, it plans to resume regular publication in editions of 100,000 to 200,000 distributed in specialized markets - especially through newspaper kiosks located in or near universities - and expects to improve substantially its position vis-a-vis competitors once newsprint is available to all publishers at the same market price. NG and DM, managing much larger operations, may well find the market transition to be more difficult.⁴² One knowledgeable observer has even raised serious doubts as to whether any national daily can survive this transition and the inflation of costs attending it.⁴³ In this respect, Russia’s post-Communist press would seem again to reflect in microcosm the conditions prevailing in its context. Whether there is room in tomorrow’s Russia for erudite journals of public affairs in the Russian tradition, Western-style newspapers or business dailies is a question hinged to the outcome of the post-Communist transition.
NOTES

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4. "Zakon Soiuza Sovetskikh Sotsialisticheskikh Respublik o
pechati i drugikh sredstvakh massovoi informatsii", Izvestiia (20 June 1990).

5. Nikolai Fedorov, a member of the Supreme Soviet’s Committee on Legislation, Legality and Law and Order that fashioned the draft bill eventually adopted by the legislature, has described some of these struggles in "Ot dekreta do zakona", Narodnyi deputat, No. 5 (1990), pp. 70-76; and in "Still Trying to Influence", Moscow News, No. 11 (25 Mar.-1 Apr. 1990), p. 14. Some consultants to his Committee have published more detailed accounts of this process.


8. G. Shipit’ko, "V zashchitu glasnosti", Izvestiia (25 Mar. 1991). The registration process, however, appears often to have been a contentious one with various organizations struggling to receive the official registration of, and thereby control over, the particular publication in question. On this matter see: G. Alimov, "Bitva titanov", ibid. (23 Aug. 1990); idem, "Bitva titanov prodolzhaetsia", ibid. (2 Sept. 1990); idem, "Zhurnal ‘Znamiia’ zaregistrirovan", ibid. (4 Sept. 1990).

10. For an overview of the various types of publications that have appeared and of the groups and organizations sponsoring them, see Vera Tolz, "Alternative Press in the USSR", Radio Liberty Report on the USSR, 195/91 (16 May 1991), pp. 6-11.


12. The interview data are supplemented by observations recorded at meetings of editorial boards and, of course, by analyses of the "text" of each of the newspapers in question.


15. For a good illustration of this paradox of objectivity, see Sergei Parkhomenko’s article, "Gorbachev poprosil biudzhet vzaimy", Nezavisimaia gazeta (21 Nov. 1991), p. 1.
16. A list of the Consortium's members was published in the inaugural issue, Delovoi mir (June, 1990), p. 2.
17. On the origins and development of Khronograf, see "Ot redaktsii (dlya vnutrennogo pol'zovaniya)", Panorama, No. 12 (Oct., 1990), p. 6.
19. As one remarked during an interview: "We have learned a lot through our work. One of the main things I have learned is the importance of working regularly. It is important to go, to observe and then to write immediately. Waiting around means that details get lost and information gets forgotten."
23. Pavel Gutionov has reported that local authorities were often revoking accreditation of Izvestiia's correspondents in the summer of 1990 for writing critical dispatches. In Alma Ata, the City Party Committee, apparently believing itself to be conforming to the behavior expected "in any civilized country", declared


31. Kon’s article, which was picked up by Rossiiskaia gazeta (16 Aug. 1991), made him something of a celebrity during and after the August coup. During the coup itself, he delivered commentary in the role of an expert over the radio station, Ekho Moskvy, and served in similar capacity for Western television networks filming documentaries on the coup thereafter.
32. Those orchestrating the mass media on behalf of the junta, however, committed some serious blunders in this respect. For instance, Central Television carried footage of both El’tsin’s speech from the steps of the "White House" and brief interviews with citizens erecting barricades there on the first night of the coup. On how this footage slipped past the editorial censor, see Yelena Chekalova, "Has Central TV Collapsed?", *Moscow News*, Nos. 34-35 (1-8 Sept. 1991), p. 6.

Similarly, *Izvestiia* continued to publish during the coup, assumedly because its Editor, Nikolai Efimov, could be counted on to support the junta. He proved unable to control his own organization, however, as a condensed version of El’tsin’s Proclamation to the Russian People appeared in its August 20 number thus informing the entire nation of the very resistance that the coup leaders sought to conceal. Moreover, *Izvestiia*’s staff took an active hand in the resistance itself, putting out leaflets for the troops who had entered the capital, informing them of El’tsin’s Proclamation and urging them not to use violence against their fellow countrymen. On these questions, see "Nashi novye starye ‘Izvestiia’", *Izvestiia* (24 Aug. 1991); I. Ovchinnikova, "Pri svete sovesti", *Ibid.* (22 Aug. 1991).

33. It would be difficult to exaggerate the role played by broadcast and print media journalists in building counter-channels of information that served as a form of infra-structure for the Russian resistance. The news agency, Interfaks, for example, simply ignored the armed men who appeared on its premises during
the initial hours of the coup with orders to cease all operations. Interfaks, utilizing its own national network of correspondents and in concert with the information center established in the Russian "White House", functioned throughout the duration of the coup as a source and relay for information. It supplied crucial information to the radio station, Ekho Moskvy, which, transmitting clandestinely from a number of sites, broadcast this information to the capital’s population on a more or less continuous basis. Moreover, Interfaks worked to neutralize the junta’s real control over agencies - such as the USSR’s Ministry of Internal Affairs - that were formally loyal to it by transmitting information directly to contracts within them. See, Berger, "Fakt, kotoryi nashel Interfaks".

34. A description of how Obshchaia gazeta operated during the coup can be found in "Kak vypuskali 'Obshchuiu gazetu'”, Kommersant”, No. 34 (19-26 Aug. 1991), p. 3.

35. Out of their earnings the staff managed to finance a small edition of Panorama (3,000 copies) in July, 1991, distributed free-of-charge to a number of libraries and individuals in and around the world of politics. The purpose of this effort was to retain some presence for the newspaper during what its Editor referred to as its "diaspora" period.


37. Without the authorization of DM’s editorial board, one correspondent at the newspaper was assisting in the publication of
Obshchaia gazeta. In this capacity, he arrived on the premises of DM on August 20 in order furtively to make photocopies of El’tsin’s Proclamation and decrees for public distribution. Although the individual exercising custody over the photocopier waived the usual procedures for making copies and granted him access to the machine for this purpose, another colleague spotted what was transpiring and reported it to the Associate Editor who intervened to confiscate the copies that had been made and forbid further use of the machine for that purpose.


40. Compare, for instance, Vladimir Pribylovskii’s treatment of this topic in his "Patrrrioty" , Panorama, No. 6 (Jun., 1989), p. 8; and "Zakrytaia konferentsiia pravykh", ibid., No. 3 (Feb., 1990), p. 8.

41. See the "Instruction" of Russia’s First Deputy Prime Minister, Gennadi Burbulis, "O merakh zashchity pechati i sredstv massovoi infromatsii na period perekhoda k rynochnym otnosheniiam", Russiiskaia gazeta (7 Dec. 1991).

42. To be sure, DM and NG have also been cultivating their own ancillary "productive and commercial activities". On the latter’s, see Tret’yakov, "Nezavisimost’ – eto prekrasno".

39