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ABSTRACT

If "revolution" is the apt description of what is happening in Russia today it is a revolution only in the sense of making a full circle and returning to the original state, not in the sense of a dramatic rupture with the past. The revolution of 1917 built on and reinforced the original principles of the Russian state and society -- their collectivism, putting The People before all the people that composed it, with contempt for the individual; their authoritarianism; and the firm belief in the inequality of different groups be they nationalities or ethnic groups, genders, or the intelligentsia and the masses. In terms of social consciousness, the present revolution represents a return, to some extent conscious and intentional, to pre-1917 Russia.

The ideas of democracy and capitalism are not simply vague and undefined in the minds of those Russians who define themselves as supporters of reform, they are deeply foreign to them. Democracy and capitalism go against the values that form the core of Russian national consciousness: against the collective, against authority, against the intelligentsia as a natural social elite, against its other-worldly orientation, its proud irrationality and lack of self-discipline. These values are common to the "Slavophil" nationalists and the "Westernists". They form the foundation of social relationships in the society, of its culture, and of the way life is perceived and enjoyed in it. They are the basis of the intellectuals' kitchen circles, of the political system those circles opposed, and of the command economy.

What Russia needs to accomplish a transition to democracy is first of all to renounce the traditions of its pre-1917 past. But this is exactly what the Russians won't do, because communism and alienation from it prevented questioning of those traditions and reinforced them; because however closely related to communism, those traditions formed the only alternative focus of loyalty, sanctified by opposition; and because the intelligentsia, disappointed by the reforms (which for no good reason bear the name of "democratic"), is being pushed into nationalism, a virulent form of those traditions, which can restore to the intelligentsia the self-esteem of which it is now being deprived.

*Composed by NCSEER Staff.*
It is important to realize that at this point there are very few people in Russia who have any interest in the development of a democratic society there. The masses want "sausage," the "democrats" are discredited by their patent inability to provide it, and the intelligentsia wants status, of which democracy would rob it. By no means did we win the cold war, if by this we understand the victory of democracy over authoritarian dictatorship. A return to 1984 may no longer be possible, but a return to the traditional national consciousness of pre-1917, as more and more it is thought of as an ideal, may be no better.
On June 12, 1992, the Russian government announced a new holiday, the Day of Russian Independence. The Russians I knew met it without enthusiasm: it caught many of them unawares ("was dropped on their heads," as one of them put it), disrupted plans and added confusion to their already chaotic existence. Besides, they were not sure what they were independent from. The date did not mark an end to some foreign rule: unlike other nations endowed with similar holidays, Russia declared independence from its communist past.

On this historic day, I, appropriately, went to the famous MHAT theater to see the "White Guards," a new production of an old play, Bulgakov's "The Turbins," that bemoaned the 1917 Revolution, from which the communist past began. The play obviously spoke to the issues of the day: the parallels with the present could hardly be missed. Yet, toward the end of the last act, with the city in which the action takes place fallen to the Reds, and the central characters faced with the choice (no doubt, besetting some in the audience) of leaving Russia or staying no matter what future would bring, the producers of the play decided to spell out the message, so as to prevent any misinterpretation.
of their intention, and added to Bulgakov's text a striking
tirade, which they put into the mouth of the hero, Alexei Turbin.
The latter reacted to a remark by another White officer, that
Russia, the great power, was no more, which meant that there was
no longer anything worth staying for. Pointing to a card table,
Turbin asked "What is it?" "It is a card table," responded the
others, evidently eager to be enlightened. "Yes," he said, "it is
a card table. And if you turn it upside-down (he turned the table
upside-down), it will still be a card table, and if you move it
left or right, it will be a card table. And so it is with Russia.
You can turn it upside-down and move it left and right, and yet,
this still will be the same Russia." The audience, usually too
disciplined to disrupt a performance with expressions of its
approval, reacted to this didactic simile with spontaneous
applause. It, I believe, was happy to be reassured.

The passage might be too crude for Bulgakov's pen, but this
does not diminish the fundamental truth, and great importance, of
the statement it makes about Russia. The fact is that, in spite
of its metamorphoses in the 20th century, the dramatic
transformation from an autocratic czardom into a socialist
republic, and the equally dramatic, though less clearly defined,
transformations of the recent years, in some crucial respect,
Russia is still the same. If it is a revolution that is happening
there today, this is a revolution only in the older sense of the
word, in the sense of making a full circle and returning to the
original state, not in the sense of a dramatic rupture with the past and a breakthrough onto a new stage of development. The text added to Bulgakov's play implies that the other revolution was also a revolution in the older sense only and that Russia between 1917 and 1987 was also the same Russia, all the efforts of the Russian "democratic" government to make believe that was not Russia at all to the contrary. Indeed, the sameness in that case was only partially concealed by the imported universalistic ideology that, ostensibly, provided the foundation for the new social and political relations. Tocqueville would have seen through the disguise. The revolution of 1917 built on and reinforced the original principles of the Russian state and society -- their collectivism, putting The People before all the people that composed it, and contempt for the individual; their authoritarianism; and the firm belief in the inequality of different groups of men, whether these be different nationalities (or ethnic groups), different sexes, or the intelligentsia and the masses -- and the imported ideology was only adopted because it fit with these principles. But the revolution of 1917 was also a conscious effort to break from all past principles and create an entirely new social order. In today's Russian revolution there is no such effort. Talking to Russians who support the reforms -- leaders of democratic groupings, members of the government, and "westernist" intellectuals -- convinced me that, in terms of social consciousness, perestroika represents a return, which is at least to some extent conscious and intentional, to the pre-
1917 Russia. That Russia is being idealized and, having been idealized, revived wherever one turns: that is the reason for St. Petersburg instead of Leningrad and Lubianka instead of Dzerzhinski Square (the terrible Stalinist prison on it was called Lubianka, not Dzerzhinski prison, but somehow this association fails to compete with the halo of the more distant past), for the Association of the Nobility, the Kadet party, the sudden reawakening of the Orthodox faith, monarchist sentiments, and so forth.

This should come as a big disappointment to all of us in the West who less than a year ago, in August 1991, and several times before that -- in 1985, 1987, 1989 -- celebrated the conversion of the Russian people to democracy and its evident triumph over the forces of darkness. There was no such conversion and democracy did not triumph. It would be wrong to attribute this disappointing fact to the difficult economic situation which many Russians now identify with perestroika. Much more important is that perestroika, to begin with, implied no intention to transform Russia into a democracy. Nor was such a transformation implied in the estrangement -- and then independence -- from communism. The thing is that a society cannot dramatically change, if the fundamental social consciousness in it remains unchanged. And one of the most remarkable things about Russia today is how little its consciousness has changed not only in the last eventful years, but since the 19th century. After 70-odd
years of communist rule, its foundation remains the dual tradition of Russian nationalism: Slavophilism and Westernism; its values and orientations still conform to the way Russia was -- two centuries before 1917 -- defined as a nation. Marxist ideology, intolerant of competition, which succeeded in virtually eradicating religious faith in the country, failed to destroy or significantly modify this tradition, and instead shielded from disenchantment, preserved and in many ways reinforced the old values. When communism was gone, the ground was left to them, not to democracy. It would be a grave mistake to limit the significance of Russian nationalism today to questions of international conflict and prestige, or to see it only as the ideological basis of the right-wing opposition to perestroika. Its importance lies in that this profoundly anti-democratic tradition defines the ideas and aspirations of the Russian "democrats."

But, if nothing changed, why all the turmoil? I have tried to reconstruct the events that led to this latest stage of the Russian Revolution on the basis of my long talks with its participants in Moscow and St. Petersburg during June and July 1992.

It is clear that by the time perestroika was announced, the old regime no longer was an object of loyalty among the elite strata of Soviet intelligentsia and party apparat. Among lower
strata it had, probably, never been such an object, not because it failed to replace some other, older, loyalties, but because the hardship of everyday existence left no leisure and energy for higher sentiments of that nature, and most people simply lived without them.

Among the intelligentsia, the disaffection began to set in sometime in the mid-1970s, following the Soviet "era of good feeling" after Khrushchev's "thaw" of the late 50s and early 60s. Those halcyon days of the early Brezhnev regime, "when the country had calmed down after Khrushchev's madness (besumstvo), and no new Stalinization followed," were the days of harmony and hope for Soviet society. Several problems of the countryside were solved: rural dwellers were granted passports and permitted to leave the villages. In the cities, numerous families moved from the squalor of communal apartments into the private apartments, however tiny, of the newly built five-story apartment blocks. These momentous changes in the quality of life were reflected in culture: there appeared low-brow romantic literature, to fill the leisure hours of the new, uncouth and unsophisticated, but nevertheless reading public from the masses. The optimism of the intelligentsia was reflected in the high-brow novels and plays of the period. It was the last period in the memory of the terminally disappointed and apathetic Russians with whom I had the chance to talk, when it seemed possible to strive and build a better life not against, but with the Establishment, "to both be
honest and act together with the system." There was a possibility, in Pasternak's words, of "labor... in community with everyone, and at one with the political order" (truda so vsemi soobshcha i zaodno s pravoporiadkom), of belonging.

The trial of Siniavskii and Daniel in 1966 and the invasion into Czechoslovakia in 1968 might have been a sign for some that the hopes were not to be fulfilled and signalled the beginning of alienation, but for most this was not clearly perceptible until the middle of the new decade. What is now called "the period of stagnation" was announced in an essay of a classical philologist, Gasparov, "On Horace's Poetry" (a sign of the centrality of literature in Russian society, which makes its philologists its best and most interesting sociologists and political scientists). Gasparov's essay discussed the death of the Republic, and invited one to draw parallels between the ancient tragedy and one's own life.

The basis of the Augustan stagnation in the Soviet society was economic, rather than political. The liberal policies which led to the spurt of the Khrushchev and early Brezhnev years had negative implications. In the mid-1970s these became evident. Exodus from the countryside left villages depopulated, and as a result there were shortages of agricultural products. Whatever was produced was used to feed the cities, in the first place Moscow and Leningrad. The discrepancy in the level of life
between the "center" and the "periphery" grew (which, among other things, was reflected in the introduction of these two terms into the scholarly, official, and everyday vocabulary), and with it the resentment of the "center". Leningrad's ruler, Romanov, opened the city to an invasion from the countryside, changing the composition and, consequently, the character of the city. Moscow remained closed to newcomers, but was plagued by crowds of visitors who came to the capital to buy food, unavailable in the provinces. Jokes of that period faithfully reflect the situation. "What is green, long, and smelling of sausage?" asks one of them. The answer: "the train 'Moscow--Yaroslavl'." Another one tells of a lecture by a party propagandist, who predicts that so-and-so many years later every Soviet family would own not only a private car, but also an airplane. Somebody from the audience asks: why would every family need an airplane? "What do you mean, why," answers the party lecturer, "To be able to fly to Moscow to buy sausage." These grocery pilgrimages to Moscow created huge lines everywhere in the city, making everyday existence increasingly difficult for its permanent dwellers. This was further exacerbated by the fact that the city grew too large for its public transportation. An hour and a half commute each way to and from work, in over-packed subway trains and trolley-buses, standing or even hanging on a rail, often with several changes, became a rule, and with it systematic lateness to work, fatigue and absenteeism.
It seemed more and more difficult to survive on one salary, everyone looked for additional income. Whoever could steal, stole (folk wisdom recorded this in a proverb: "Whatever one guards one owns"); whoever could take bribes, took bribes (officials, from pettiest clerks to highest placed civil servants, and health workers were among the chief beneficiaries of this resource), whoever could find odd jobs on the side (from fixing appliances -- which needed access to tools and materials and therefore was necessarily supplemented by stealing -- to private lessons), took odd jobs. Engineers and applied scientists appeared to be hit hardest. (Now, one finds engineers and applied scientists among the staunchest supporters of the new order.) As a rule they had nothing to steal, offered no valuable services to be bribed, and had no skills that could allow them to moonlight. An expression circulated, "a-hundred-ruble-engineer," which summed it all up. And yet, high-school graduates flocked to colleges and universities to get an engineering diploma and be handicapped for life: such was -- and until very recently has remained -- the prestige of higher education.

Education became a handicap not only for engineers and not only because it made some people unable to earn a living. It inevitably led to a life of constant frustration. With the exception of party hierarchy, it was the only venue of upward mobility. Unlike party hierarchy, it was a venue open to all (Jews and more generally minority nationalities in every republic
could not aspire to high party posts), and, moreover, the status brought by success through education was considered to be more noble, more honest, in a word it was more of a status. Education, therefore, bred expectations of social success. In the 1970s, however, social advancement through education was blocked, it became virtually impossible, as Russians put it, to achieve professional self-realization. There was a feeling that no achievement was noticed, that in fact it was discouraged, that nobody cared whether one worked at all or not. The social ceiling a college or university graduate could reach was predetermined, one advanced from position to position according to schedule, even before one graduated, one knew exactly when one would get a raise and how much, and nothing, least of all individual performance, could change that. In this system nothing depended on one's abilities: one could not fail, one could not succeed. There was a sense of absolute stability, and at the same time of hopelessness, fatalism, and suffocation.

Russian intelligentsia found itself in a situation of status inconsistency and a state of inescapable frustration that added to the hardship of everyday existence the economic aspect of which was felt by all strata of Soviet society. In the process of building defenses against such frustration many a group at various times and places created a new identity and a new type of consciousness which formed the basis for a new type of social structure. Russian intelligentsia also built defenses, but it
failed to produce a new identity for itself.

The frustration of the intelligentsia which followed the period of renewed hope in the Soviet society and cooperation with the regime led to disappointment with the regime: with the party and its ideology. Communism -- the product of 1917 -- became the focus of resentment. But defensive mechanisms against its destructive influence utilized traditional values that formed the core of Russian national consciousness and identity before 1917. In some important cases nationalism was itself a form of opposition to the regime, which served to legitimate even its most virulent forms. ("Slavophilism began as a beautiful left movement," remembered one of my "democratic" interlocutors, baffled and pained by the fact that so many of her former friends were now on the opposite side of the fence.) Alternatively, reaction strictly corresponded to the action, and had little to do with any forms of consciousness.

Because work did not bring rewards, work-discipline deteriorated dramatically. In some professions, place of work -- to an extent -- was turned into a place of recreation. Some organizations developed a system of "appearance days" (prisutstvennye dni), usually two or three a week, when employees were supposed to show up (other days they were ostensibly "working" at home). On these days employees would come to their workplace -- perhaps stopping on the way to stand in one or
another line to buy some food -- drink tea, chat and flirt with
their coworkers, relax, and go home to the burdens of everyday
existence. Taking calmly the vicissitudes of public
transportation, they made no fetish of punctuality (time is
definitely not money in Russia) and both arrived at work late and
left early. This reinforced the traditional liberal attitude to
time and contempt for discipline and punctuality. There is an old
Russian saying "Punctual as a German," and it is not meant as a
compliment to Germans.

The real work was home. The difficulty of everyday existence
made family life with its responsibilities a heavy burden: for
men because there was no way they could meet the expectations of
society which, against all evidence, still defined them as chief
providers for the family and its economic mainstay; for women
because they often were chief providers and yet carried the
entire burden of housework and childcare. Both men and women,
with whom I talked, compared family to forced labor. For many,
home was the place of alienation which offered no refuge from the
pressures of life outside, but added to them, where one could not
relax but had to be always on one's guard: parents were afraid to
talk politics -- or anything remotely related to them -- in the
presence of their children, and spouses were too shy to mention
sex in each other's presence. In mid-1970s, apparently, this
situation led to a dramatic change in sexual mores and,
specifically, to the proliferation of extra-marital affairs. Both
men and women, whom I asked about that, regarded marital infidelity as an "air-way," an escape from the suffocating bondage and burdens of family life in a socialist society. Men, whose burdens were much lighter and who had much more leisure and -- given the ratio of male to female population in Russia -- many more opportunities to escape, also saw it as a form of freedom. It was the only form available to them and for that reason they practiced it with a vengeance, freedom being defined in a way traditionally dear to the Russian heart (as volia, not as svoboda) as an irrational, spontaneous demonstration of one's will and whim. And its result was often the increase of burdens from which one wished to escape: there were new children, and with them commitments and responsibilities for the new families which emerged and existed by the side of the old ones. Russian women, at least some of whom in mid-1970s had their private kitchens and bathrooms, seemed to have exchanged communal apartments for communal husbands.

Among the defensive arrangements utilized by the intelligentsia to allow it to have a life within the system which made it so difficult, the most important was that of "kitchen circles": circles of friends who assembled in the kitchens of their apartments and led endless conversations about the meaning of creation, art, and politics. All of the people whom I asked about this clearly regarded the kitchen circles as a compensatory mechanism, a substitute for fulfillment and recognition in the
public sphere that was denied them. But such clear realization did not make kitchen talks any less enjoyable for them, and the breaking up of the friendship circles that occurred with the perestroika is perhaps the thing they regret the most. The kitchen circle, indeed, formed an alternative, self-contained social world within the unfriendly society, with its own, alternative, system of stratification and measures of success. This cozy social world made it possible for its members to find fulfillment and happiness, in spite of the inhuman system that existed outside it, in which they willy-nilly had to perform their small parts. "This was community (druzhestvo), not simply friendship (druzhba)," one of my respondents told me, with a sense of evident loss. "We assembled and talked, and it felt good. In this terrible life we felt good." In this kitchen sphere one was valued not for what one did, but for what one was, not for achievement but for belonging, being entirely of the circle.

Since the mid-1970s, kitchen conversations increasingly turned to politics. Where in the 1960s they declaimed poetry, in the 1970s they criticized current leadership, and "being entirely of the circle" changed its meaning accordingly: while in the 1960s artistic personalities were most highly rewarded, in the 1970s they were replaced by "freethinkers". The recognition within the kitchen circles made recognition outside of them unnecessary and justified lack of professional or any other public success, and in fact, lack of effort to succeed, and lack
of activity. Significantly, kitchen circles freed one of economic effort as well, for, among others, they performed an important economic function. In the conditions of Soviet economy, the more friends one had, the less money one needed, for the chief economic problem was not the dearness of goods (in fact life was very cheap), but the difficulty of finding them. Before perestroika, I was told, "one needed a good acquaintance, rather than a ruble, now rubles became important."

Besides providing an alternative way of social self-realization and an economic safety-net, kitchen circles offered their members the additional gratification of venting one's frustration with and resentment against the regime or "the system". "The system" was, indeed, hated by the intelligentsia. It was regarded as inhuman and false, and many a bottle of vodka, it is safe to guess, was drunk to its imminent destruction. "The system" was the enemy, and hatred of it united friends in the kitchen circles. But, perhaps because they regarded it as in fact indestructible, they had no clear idea as to what other systems they would like to see in its place. The only alternative (envisioned by those very few who envisioned alternatives) was in fact the idealized Russia before or relatively untouched by communism, in other words, a system based on the ideals of Russian -- Slavophil -- nationalism. The Slavophils of the "stagnation period," some of whom stood in the front ranks of dissidents, represented a minority position within the opposition
to the regime, but it is very important to realize that theirs was the only articulate position. The views of the rest were purely negative: they knew what they did not want (ideological controls, interdictions on travel and associations, shortages of food and consumer goods), but there was nothing but confusion in regard to what they wanted. Many did think vaguely that what they wanted was a society of "a Western type," for it is an axiom of Russian Westernist nationalism that the way of the West is the way of the world, and that anyhow no other development is possible. This implied that the society they wanted was "democratic" and "capitalist." But when it came to defining what "Western," "democratic," and "capitalist" meant they, again, could think only negatively: a society not like the one in which they lived, their society turned upside-down, a society in which they -- intelligentsia confined to kitchen circles -- would be able to realize their creative potential and reach public recognition.

The disaffection of the intelligentsia was not the reason for perestroika, but it has been responsible for its -- clearly unintended -- result, the dissolution of the communist order. The reasons for perestroika had to do with aspirations of a much smaller minority -- the upper layer of the party bureaucracy. Within this small minority, by the early 1980s, there developed a sense of crisis, of an impending economic and military disaster -- a defeat at the hands of the West (which would
directly affect the party bureaucracy), a sense related perhaps
to the realization of the widening gap between the Soviet Union
and the West, to the evidence of whose strength and riches those
in the upper layer of the party bureaucracy, unlike the rest of
their compatriots, were personally exposed.

This sense of crisis was intentionally communicated to the
population at large and cultivated by Andropov's administration.
There was a widespread belief that, whatever its chances in the
cold war, the Soviet Union was in imminent danger of a disastrous
hot one, for it had lost to the United States the arms race, and
was entirely at the mercy of its much stronger and, as everyone
knew, bellicose, rival. Andropov proclaimed the need to save the
country, he introduced emergency measures for national salvation,
aimed, in the first place, at the improvement of work-discipline
and the increase of productivity. In the opinion of several of my
interlocutors, Andropov was the author of perestroika, and if he
had not died, it would still have developed in the direction it
took under Gorbachev. This, they say, was because Andropov
planted the idea that the Soviet Union must urgently catch up
with the West, and that for that reason it was necessary to
change "the system" and take on some Western traits, and because
Andropov began the assault on the CPSU and undermined its
authority.

The short intermission of Chernenko's rule did not restore
the old order. The criticism of the party grew louder and there was a widespread expectation of "a new man" -- a new type of ruler who "would show them" what's wrong and what's right and would put things in their place. Gorbachev fulfilled that expectation. To achieve the goal of economic renewal, he, among other things, decided consciously to coopt the disaffected intelligentsia and offered it glasnost' and the possibility of foreign travel. It was clear that this freedom was a means to an end and not an end in itself, but even so the intelligentsia was slow to believe that it was for real. (Many thought it was a charade, a litmus test aimed at tricking them to talk openly in public and compromise themselves with the authorities so that it would be easier to find and punish the enemies of the regime. The first to believe and respond were the Jews, which immediately triggered the reaction of the "Slavophil" nationalists who swiftly and almost imperceptibly changed sides, moving from outspoken opposition to the government of a totalitarian society to outspoken opposition to the government that itself opposed, and attempted to change, totalitarian society.) By 1988 the intelligentsia in general abandoned its fears and joyfully joined in the destruction of the hated "system", full of hopes for a brighter future and as unmindful as before of what kind of society it was building instead.

In this destructive work they were surprisingly successful: the "system" turned to be a house of cards, it was enough to say
"puff" -- to talk -- and it fell apart. But no society "of Western type" in which nobody was frustrated and everyone was permanently happy emerged in its place. The early enthusiasm gave way to confusion and disappointment. Today pro-democratic sentiment runs low. The word "democracy" itself, only recently endowed with totemic significance, became an object of abuse: inventive Russians talk of "demokradia" -- demo-thievery, and "der'mokratia" -- shitocracy. The famous privatization is also made fun of: the addition of just one letter transforms it into "prikhvatizatsia" -- steal-in-passing-zation. The difficult economic situation, obviously, makes things worse. (To my question, what do the people think about democracy, my interlocutors, one after another, responded indignantly: "The people does not need democracy, the people needs sausage!" Sausage, a rare delicacy at present, seems to be the metaphor for general material well-being, the level of life enjoyed by fortunate denizens of "civilized societies".) But, apart from Moscow, Leningrad, and a couple of other big cities, the economic situation in Russia has always been difficult, and, in general, Russians have been known to endure greater hardships without a complaint. It is not that they find the (economic) price for the new society exorbitant, it is, rather, that they begin to realize that this new -- democratic and capitalist -- society may be even less to their liking than was the detested old socialist one. "We had a clearly-defined goal -- to stir the totalitarian system," they say. "We stirred it. And now we look: has our life become
better? It has not."

The ideas of democracy and capitalism (the words whose sound in the first years of perestroika made one drunk with one's own courage and freethinking) are not simply vague and undefined in the minds of those Russians who define themselves as supporters of democracy and capitalism, they are deeply foreign to them. They go against the values that form the core of the Russian national consciousness: against its collectivism, its authoritarianism and its belief that intelligentsia forms a natural social elite; its other-worldly orientation; its proud irrationality and lack of discipline. These values are common to the extremist nationalists of the "Slavophil" bent and to those who call themselves -- and are in fact -- "Westernists". They form the foundation of all the social relations in the Russian society, of its culture, of the way life is perceived and enjoyed in it. They are the basis of the kitchen circles with their warmth and cozy sense of protectedness as much as they were the basis of the political system the kitchen circles aimed to stir, and of the command economy.

I am told that kitchen circles are disintegrating rapidly. Those with clear enough minds to understand say: "That capitalist way of life, so hateful to us, is setting in." There is less time to meet. Friendship networks within the intelligentsia become less useful as an economic arrangement. Soaring prices make the
ruble (ever increasing quantities of it) more important than a good acquaintance. People, for the first time in a long while, are preoccupied with making money. Some succeed in this more than the others, and this gives rise to hurt feelings, envy and alienation. There is no more feeling of belonging. The intelligentsia, in particular, is suffering from a crisis of identity. Before 1989, they say, it was absolutely clear who they were: they were united in the opposition to the regime. Now, when their enemy has been taken from them, they are no longer united. It turns out they did not know each other, they disagree on everything. It is no longer possible to talk politics among friends, for this is the surest way to lose them. Furthermore, there is less interest in culture among the people. Before the perestroika, art -- and specifically literature -- was the vessel of truth, writers, artists, and critics were treated as prophets, and the intelligentsia in general enjoyed the sense and prestige of those touched by the grace. Now the truth is being shouted from every newspaper editorial, one does not have to look for it between the lines, and to their surprise the intelligentsia find that the truth to which they have no privileged access, the naked truth turned onto the streets to be known and shared by the multitudes, has no charm for them.

Little did they suspect, while in their kitchens they were stirring the totalitarian "system," that with its demise they would be reduced to and levelled with the multitudes. The ideal
of equality, so central to "civilized" societies of the "Western type," has no appeal to the educated elite of the Russian society that for seventy-odd years believed itself classless. The intelligentsia call the people derisively "grey cattle" (seroe bydlo), a mindless animal mass; they never counted on being mixed with this mass. The attitudes of Russian democratic intelligentsia in the 1990s differ little from the views of their 18th century aristocratic forebears. I have constantly encountered this archaic thinking, while talking to Russian Westernist intellectuals both here and in their country. One tested supporter of democracy in Russia, a builder of barricades during the fateful nights of August 1991, came to this country to visit and I took him for a drive in New England and a Sunday brunch in a rather posh pub somewhere there. The atmosphere in the pub was relaxed, people sat at the bar with their baseball hats on and without ties. My Russian visitor leaned to me and whispered disapprovingly: "This seems to be a somewhat democratic public." I asked him what did he mean by "democratic" and he explained in so many words that what he meant was, in fact, "low-class", not at all the people who could be included in "our" society of university faculty. I pointed to the fact that this was a democratic society and that university faculty, ties or not, did not represent an aristocracy. My guest was evidently embarrassed and after a while found it necessary to assure me that he never felt contemptuous of the common people in Russia. "But you must understand," he said, "we and they [the
intelligentsia and the people] really have little in common, I never understood them, we speak different languages." Another Russian acquaintance, with whom I had many long talks during my visit to Moscow, also recounted a humiliating experience in America. While visiting New York she was invited by a Russian emigre to dine in some expensive hotel, where he had worked and, as a staff member, had some discount. When they entered the lobby, he shook hands with the bell-boy and introduced my acquaintance to him, which introduction, she said, "forced her" to shake hands with the bell-boy as well. At dinner, the host asked my Russian friend whether she had ever thought she would dine in such a luxurious atmosphere. At that point her indignation burst and she, as she told me, could not help retorting: "I, a descendent of a great scientist and a relation of a world-famous musician, have never in my life entered a hotel being obliged to shake hands with a bell-boy." The notion that bell-boys are people too, and that hand-shakes with them are not intrinsically demeaning, it seems, has not yet taken root in the consciousness of the Russian elite. Democracy, clearly, is too "democratic" for it.

What Russia needs to accomplish a transition from communism to democracy is, first of all, to renounce the traditions of its pre-1917 past, which made communism possible. But this is exactly what the Russians won't do. They won't do this because communism and alienation from communism prevented criticism and questioning
of these traditions, and in many ways reinforced them; because, however closely related to communism, these traditions were opposed to it and formed the only alternative focus of loyalty, sanctified by this opposition; because in their disappointment with the attempted reforms in their society -- which unfortunately and for no good reason bear the name of "democratic" -- the intelligentsia is being pushed into the embrace of the extreme nationalism, and because nationalism, which is only a virulent form of these traditions, can restore to the intelligentsia the sense of self-esteem of which it is now being deprived.

It is important to realize that at this point there are very few people in Russia who have any interest in the development of a democratic society there. The masses want "sausage," and the so-called "democrats" in power discredited themselves by their patent inability to provide it. And the elite wants status, of which democracy -- now they are beginning to get the idea -- would rob it. By no means did we win the cold war, if by this we understand the victory of democracy over authoritarian dictatorship. They lost the arms race and the affection of their intellectuals. But fortune is fickle. The return to 1984 may be no longer possible, but who says that pre-1917 Russia, the return to which becomes more and more likely as increasing numbers of people think of it as an ideal, is any better?