TITLE: IS RUSSIAN DEMOCRACY DOOMED?
A SYMPOSIUM

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RESEARCH

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Is Russian Democracy Doomed?

When Russian president Boris Yeltsin’s decision to dissolve the Russian Supreme Soviet led to an uprising that was suppressed by military units in October 1993, the implications for the future of Russian democracy were unclear. The resort to force on both sides of the conflict had brought the country to the verge of civil war and had set a most dangerous precedent. At the same time, the stalemate between Yeltsin and the antireformist forces had seemingly been broken, thus creating an opportunity to hold a referendum on a new Constitution and to select a new parliament in fully democratic elections.

On 12 December 1993, Russians went to the polls to vote “yes” or “no” on Yeltsin’s proposed Constitution and to cast three separate ballots for members of their new bicameral legislature, the Federal Assembly. The first ballot permitted voters to select two candidates from their region for the Council of the Federation, the 176-member upper house, with the two candidates receiving the highest vote totals in each of the 88 regions being elected. The second and third ballots determined the allocation of seats in the State Duma, the 450-member lower house. Half of these seats were awarded to the candidates who received a plurality of votes on the second ballot in each of 225 single-seat constituencies. The remaining half were allocated by proportional representation (with a 5-percent minimum threshold) among party lists according to the percentage of the vote that each party received on the third ballot.

Although the new Constitution was approved by a narrow margin, the parliamentary vote (see Table 1 on p. 6 below) was a great disappointment for proponents of reform. In an effort to assess the implications of these critical elections for the future of Russian democracy, we asked a number of leading Western analysts and three prominent Russians representing a variety of viewpoints (pro-Gaidar, anti-Gaidar reformist, and “centrist”) to write brief essays addressing the following questions: 1) What are the principal factors that accounted for the outcome of the December 1993 parliamentary elections? 2) Did these election results constitute a significant setback for the process of democratic transformation and consolidation in Russia? 3) How great is the threat that in the near future, totalitarian forces of either the Right or the Left might come to power in Russia, or that the country might fall apart? We believe that our readers will find the range of responses fascinating, although we fear that they will also be dismayed by the generally bleak picture that our authors paint.

—The Editors, 10 March 1994
Symposium

IS RUSSIAN DEMOCRACY DOOMED?

Explaining the Vote

Michael McFaul

Michael McFaul, a research associate at Stanford University's Center for International Security and Arms Control and at the Hoover Institution, was an international observer at Russia's December elections.

The future of Russian democracy has never been more uncertain. Vladimir Zhirinovsky's unexpected electoral victory, plus the strong showing of the Communists and their rural counterparts, the Agrarian party, have combined with the dismal performance of Russia's Choice and other proreformist parties to produce a political situation as unstable as before the election. What happened?

Any explanation of Russia's December vote must begin with the current dismal state of the country's economy. Beginning in January 1992, Russia's first postcommunist government launched the most revolutionary program of economic transformation ever peacefully attempted by a modern state. Like any effort comprehensively to restructure an economy and society, this program sowed massive dislocation, discontent, and anxiety among the general populace—a clear recipe for a sizeable opposition vote. In light of recent election results in Poland, Lithuania, and even in Russia's own April 1993 referendum, it should have come as no surprise that a significant part of the electorate would vote against those associated with market reforms.

The question to ask, then, is not why there was a strong opposition vote, but rather why so much of it went to Zhirinovsky's ultranationalist LDP. After all, there were 11 other parties vying for this vote. Moreover, only a month before the election, opinion polls (albeit untrustworthy) placed Zhirinovsky's support at what seemed to be a safely negligible level of less than 2 percent.
Several political factors having little to do with "shock therapy," the social safety net, or the failures of economic reform shaped the surprising outcome. First, Russia's mixed electoral system benefited the LDP. With half of the seats in the Duma filled according to the party-list system, the LDP was able to ride the coattails of its charismatic leader, taking almost a quarter of the party-list popular vote and just under 60 seats. Of the 225 single-constituency seats in the Duma, however, LDP candidates won only five, and they won no seats in the upper chamber, the Federal Council. In a purely majoritarian electoral system, the Liberal Democratic Party would probably not have won more than ten seats.

Second, Zhirinovsky and his party mounted the best campaign. The LDP secured more television time than any other party or bloc beside Russia's Choice. Zhirinovsky himself received more television exposure than any other candidate. Given the short electoral season (only one month), television was by far the most important campaign medium. Zhirinovsky used his time on the air very effectively, speaking in short sentences, using simple language, and addressing issues of personal concern to many voters. He promised more housing for military officers, decried "unfair" prices in farmers' markets, and demanded more police for crime-ridden cities. He lambasted the incumbent government as a pack of theoreticians who cared little about the Russian people, and blamed a string of scapegoats—among them Caucasians, Jews, neighboring countries, and the West—for Russia's woes. Zhirinovsky promised everything to everyone in snappy, slickly produced advertisements.

A third important factor was the fragmentation of the democratic forces into four separate blocs. Ideological nuances aside, the real reason for this fragmentation was personal ambition. The divisions made the democratic defeat look worse than it really was. An election in which a democratic coalition won 34 percent of the popular vote would have looked a lot better than December's outcome, in which the leading democratic party won only about 15 percent. In some of the single-constituency races, a Communist or ultranationalist candidate managed to carry the district with a small minority of the popular vote due to the feuding among democrats. This feuding went right to the top, with major reformist leaders like Yegor Gaidar and Grigory Yavlinsky spending more time criticizing each other than attacking antireform opponents such as Zhirinovsky.

Finally, the disastrous performance of the leading democratic bloc, Russia's Choice, is worth a closer look. The biggest handicap under which Russia's Choice labored was Boris Yeltsin's noninvolvement, which flowed from his conviction that, as president of all Russians, he was above party politics. His only participation in the campaign was a ten-minute television address urging voters to approve his proposed
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PARTY/BLOC</th>
<th>PARTY LEADER</th>
<th>PERCENT of PARTY VOTE</th>
<th>PARTY-LIST SEATS</th>
<th>SINGLE-SEAT BALLOT</th>
<th>TOTAL SEATS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Russia's Choice§</td>
<td>Yegor Gaidar</td>
<td>15.38%</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal Democratic Party (LDP)‡</td>
<td>Vladimir Zhirinovsky</td>
<td>22.79%</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF)‡</td>
<td>Gennady Zyuganov</td>
<td>12.35%</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agrarian Party of Russia‡</td>
<td>Mikhail Lapshin</td>
<td>7.9%</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yavlinsky-Boldyrev-Lukin Bloc (Yabloko)§</td>
<td>Grigory Yavlinsky</td>
<td>7.83%</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women of Russia†</td>
<td>Alvetina Fedulova</td>
<td>8.10%</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party of Russian Unity &amp; Accord (PRES)§</td>
<td>Sergei Shakhrai</td>
<td>6.76%</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democratic Party of Russia (DPR)†</td>
<td>Nikolai Travkin</td>
<td>5.50%</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russian Movement for Democratic Reform (RDDR)§</td>
<td>Gavril Popov</td>
<td>4.06%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civic Union for Stability, Justice &amp; Progress†</td>
<td>Arkady Volsky</td>
<td>1.92%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future of Russia/New Names†</td>
<td>Vyacheslav Lachevsky</td>
<td>1.25%</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constructive Ecological Movement (KEDR)†</td>
<td>Anatoly Panfilov</td>
<td>.75%</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dignity and Charity Bloc†</td>
<td>Vyacheslav Grishin</td>
<td>.70%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Parties</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>225</td>
<td>219*</td>
<td>444*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independents</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

§ Pro-Reform; ‡ Anti-Reform; † Centrist
* The final membership of the Duma totaled 444 instead of 450 because six constituencies failed to meet the required 25-percent turnout.

constitution. Without Yeltsin, Russia’s Choice was forced to make the uncharismatic, unpopular Yegor Gaidar its standardbearer.

The Russia’s Choice bloc also lacked organization. At its founding congress on 16-17 October 1993—less than two months before the election—it nominally united seven different political movements and organizations. In reality, however, the core of the alliance was a bilateral partnership between new federal and regional government elites from Russia’s Choice proper and old grassroots activists from Democratic Russia (DemRossiya), the anticommunist movement that emerged in 1990-91. The divisions between these senior partners, while temporarily resolved at the founding congress, resurfaced to plague the campaign effort in November and December. In many regions, differences between DemRossiya and Russia’s Choice were never resolved, leading to the odd spectacle of a single coalition producing several candidates to compete for the same seat. Perhaps even more consequentially, these splits meant that Russia’s Choice lacked regional organization. Thousands of posters and leaflets collected dust in regional offices. No coherent party message linked regional candidates to the Russia’s Choice party list. Many members of local elites who were supposed to be Russia’s Choice candidates ran for and won single-constituency seats without even mentioning their party affiliation.

In addition to leaderlessness and disorganization, a final deficiency that hurt Russia’s Choice at the polls was its complete failure to come up with an effective campaign strategy. The bloc’s chief strategist, Gennady Burbulis, sought to create the image of a confident party, already secure in power and destined to win in December. As it happened, leaders of Russia’s Choice made no campaign promises, but instead insolently asserted that the only alternatives were their way and communism. When they did try to explain their plans for reform, Gaidar and his colleagues delivered long boring monologues about the macroeconomics of financial stabilization—no match for Zhirinovsky’s pithy ads. Some attempt was made to craft sophisticated television spots, but these wound up resembling Western commercials for consumer products: they incessantly repeated the name of Russia’s Choice without really explaining anything about its candidates or policy positions.

More generally, the bloc’s arrogant approach spawned a passive, lifeless campaign. Little attempt was made to reach out or to mobilize social organizations. Groups such as the Independent Miners’ Union, the Association of Privatized and Privatizing Enterprises, the Committee for Social Reforms, as well as dozens of smaller business groups, women’s organizations, and trade unions, were left on the sidelines. Perhaps the greatest mistake, however, was the failure to respond to Zhirinovsky’s inflammatory rhetoric. Instead of pointing out the frightening implications of his bellicose campaign promises, Russia’s Choice decided not to challenge him directly. When at last the bloc bought television
time to air some of Zhirinovsky's old speeches in hopes that this alone would scare voters away from him, the tactic backfired: the free exposure merely helped to cement Zhirinovsky's position as the leading opposition candidate.

The composition of Russia's government has changed dramatically in the aftermath of the December elections. Deputy prime ministers Yegor Gaidar and Boris Fyodorov have resigned, leaving only one of the original reformers, Anatoly Chubais, in the higher offices of government. In their place, Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin has installed Soviet-era bureaucrats with little expressed commitment to market reforms. Chernomyrdin has also now asserted himself as the head of government, and is in many ways beginning to overshadow Yeltsin as the "man in charge."

Paradoxically, the governmental changes that have occurred do not reflect the election outcome. Despite voters' rejection of the status quo at the polls, Chernomyrdin—the prime minister since December 1992—remains in power. Strangely enough, the poor showing of parties with which Chernomyrdin is most closely affiliated—especially the Party of Russian Unity and Accord and the Civic Union—seems to have done nothing to reduce his influence. If the government truly reflected voter preferences, Russia's Choice would now have gained more rather than fewer ministerial posts (it remains the largest group in parliament). By the same token, the LDP would enjoy significant representation in the government (at the time of this writing, it has none). Ironically, then, the political group that fared the worst at the ballot box is now in the driver's seat.

Although they admit to trepidations about the current government's course, disgruntled reformers such as Gaidar and Fyodorov remain confident that a solid year of hyperinflation, declining productivity, stymied privatization efforts, and shriveled foreign aid will be enough to make Yeltsin give them their old jobs back—certainly a possible scenario. Gaidar and Fyodorov, however, are not the only political figures waiting for a chance to save the day. Zhirinovsky, among other aspiring fascists, is also looking for his own grand opportunity.

The 1996 presidential election—if it in fact takes place—will be pivotal for the future of Russian democracy. The flippant dismissals of the Western press notwithstanding, Zhirinovsky (and all that he represents) is a real threat. He or someone like him will be a serious contender for the presidency in two years' time. Russia's current government, with its indecisiveness, half-measures, and squabbling, will continue to fuel rather than quell antidemocratic forces like the LDP.

This is not to say that the threat is invincible. Zhirinovsky and his fascist cohorts can be defeated by peaceful, democratic means. Still, the battle will be hard. Russia's economy, especially given the new government's tendency to shy away from reform, is not likely to make
much improvement over the next two years. With few means of helping the economic situation, Russia's democrats must focus instead on identifying and correcting their political mistakes. First of all, however, the democrats must start to confront Zhirinovsky, not appease him. As they do that, they can educate the Russian electorate about the possible consequences of making Zhirinovsky president: war with Ukraine, war in Central Asia, and possibly even war with the United States. Third, they must offer an attractive alternative to Zhirinovsky's promises. This may be easier to accomplish as an opposition force in 1996 than it was last December as the "party in power." Fourth, Russia's democrats must improve their game in the field of electoral politics and take better advantage of television, coalition building, voter contact, and message development. Finally, they must convince Yeltsin to step forward as the champion of democracy and reform in Russia.

Each and every one of these strategic corrections must happen if proreformist forces are to have any chance of regaining power in Russia. Sizing up these long odds, many Russian commentators and officials (including leaders of Russia's Choice before they resigned from the government) have called for the immediate creation of a soft authoritarian regime under Yeltsin as the only feasible way of forestalling the imposition of a truly hard future dictatorship by Zhirinovsky—or someone worse. The assumption that the "soft" authoritarian option will prevent the "hard" one is flawed, of course, but the very existence of such a debate may show just how tenuous the future of Russian democracy has become.

Toward Presidential Rule

Vladimir M. Lysenko

Vladimir M. Lysenko, the co-chair of the Republican Party of Russia, was elected in December 1993 as a deputy to the State Duma as a member of the Yabloko coalition.

Democracy requires an independent legislature that can represent the opinions and the interests of the people, but history shows that parliamentialism does not easily take root in Russian soil. Recall the first four State Dumas, which came into being after the Revolution of 1905. These Dumas were not even true parliaments, but rather legislative advisory bodies to the monarchy. The Czar changed the electoral rules at his pleasure (giving them an increasingly corporatist character), and banished recalcitrant deputies to Siberia. Nonetheless, even this limited representative organ did not last long; each of the first four State Dumas
wound up being dissolved by the autocratic Nicholas II, the last of them in 1916 on the eve of Czarism's overthrow.

In 1917, following the February Revolution, the Provisional Government called for a Constituent Assembly to be elected by universal suffrage. By the time this body met, however, Lenin had already seized power through the October Revolution. The Bolsheviks, who had received only about a quarter of the popular vote, forcibly dissolved this first democratically elected parliament in Russian history after a single day, thus precipitating a brutal civil war.

The representative organs dating from the 1980s, the period of Soviet perestroika, did not fare much better. The Congress of People's Deputies (CPD), which had been elected in a process with some democratic features in 1989, was dissolved along with the Soviet Union itself after the failed August 1991 putsch. The Russian parliament (elected in 1990), which inherited the CPD's role on the territory of the Russian Federation, was terminated by the September-October 1993 uprising.

It would be nice to think that the new Russian Federal Assembly elected this past December might have a happier future than its predecessors, but there is little ground for optimism. After the tragic events of September-October 1993, the legislative branch can have a stable existence only if it becomes a rubber-stamp parliament, regularly approving the decisions of the president and his government just as the parliaments of Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan do. That is exactly what President Yeltsin was hoping for when he issued his infamous decree of 21 September 1993 dissolving the old parliament. But he miscalculated. The people no longer believed Yeltsin's promises, and they elected a parliament irreconcilably opposed to radical economic reform of the Yeltsin-Gaidar variety. For the first time since 1985, the opponents of reform now enjoy greater support than its advocates.

In the December elections, more than half the votes went to procommunist and national-patriotic forces who are even more staunchly opposed to reform than were their predecessors in the old parliament. Animated by a spirit of rejectionism and revanchism, such forces are organically incompatible with the president, the current government, and the new Constitution. They are very different in this respect from the left-wing forces in Lithuania or Latvia, which have recently come to power by parliamentary means and accept the rules of the democratic game. The nationalist-communist opposition in Russia, which has wide support throughout the society, is addicted to the slogans of the past ("all power to the Soviets," "the restoration of the empire," etc.). It wants to use the parliament to achieve these revolutionary (one might
more accurately call them counterrevolutionary) goals, and to thwart
President Yeltsin's attempt to carry out a reformist "revolution from
above."

In a normal civilized society, parties of this extremist type gain the
support of no more than 5 to 10 percent of the electorate, and generally
occupy the fringes of the political process. But in chaotic transition
periods, amidst plummeting living standards, a weakening of state
authority, and immature democratic institutions, they may find the
opportunity to come to power, as happened in Russia in October 1917
and in Germany in 1933.

Russia today has not yet reached the point where various political
parties could succeed one another in power through the electoral process
without causing a cataclysm and the destabilization of the country.
Extremism still reigns supreme, and centrist forces remain very weak.
Especially under conditions of an ever-deepening economic crisis, this
points to the urgent need for a "regulated" democracy, one that is bound
to have some autocratic features.

The three months of direct presidential rule at the end of 1993
revealed the executive branch's belief that it is better off without the
checks and balances supplied by an independent legislature. Having
gathered all governmental powers to himself in September-October 1993,
President Yeltsin is not about to agree to give them up or share them
with anybody. One need not be a great prophet to see that the executive
wants the new parliament to be discredited, preferably by its own
actions. It does not wish parliament to mobilize popular opinion or to
elevate a contender for the presidential elections in 1996. Thus a pack
of politicians and presidential advisors even now are debating the most
opportune moment to invoke Article 111 of the new Constitution (which
allows the president to dissolve a Duma that thrice rejects his nominee
for a new prime minister), forestalling any attempt by the State Duma
to raise first the question of impeaching the president.

As for the State Duma, it finds itself at a crossroads. The election of
Ivan Rybkin of the Communist-allied Agrarian party as speaker means
that the red flag now flies over this body, and threatens a confrontation
with the president, the government, and even the Federation Council,
which is headed by Yeltsin supporter Vladimir Shumeiko. On the other
hand, an agreement among a majority of factions on a slate of
candidates for leadership posts in the Duma succeeded in keeping
Zhirinovsky's party off key committees: this may well have reflected an
instinct for self-preservation on the part of most of the deputies.

There are two different paths that the Duma may take, one leading
to temporary stability and the other to confrontation. According to the
"peaceful scenario," the Duma would survive until 1996 by taking a
moderate course. This would be supported not only by centrist forces
who care about the fate of parliamentarism in Russia, but also by the
Communists and Agrarians and even by Zhirinovsky, who might believe that the political pendulum will continue to swing in their direction, allowing them to hope for victory in the 1996 elections.

Another version of the peaceful scenario would involve a realignment of forces in the name of self-preservation of the Duma. Having achieved their main interim goal with the election of Ivan Rybkin as speaker, the Communists and Agrarians have already begun to distance themselves from their more extremist allies (including Zhirinovsky) and to lay claim to a center-left position. Division is also expected in the ranks of Russia's Choice, where the radicals are seeking to create a faction that would oppose not only the Chernomyrdin government but perhaps also President Yeltsin; other forces within Russia's Choice, however, are likely to form a center-right bloc. So there still could emerge a centrist majority uniting the center-left forces of the Agrarians and Communists, the centrist Democratic Party of Russia and Women of Russia, and the center-right forces of Russia's Choice, Yabloko, and PRES.

Such a coalition would be too diverse to achieve any common policy goals, but it could at least prevent the extremists from hurling the Duma into a direct confrontation with the president. Moreover, this kind of centrist grouping could give at least temporary support to the new Chernomyrdin government, which has announced its repudiation of "shock therapy" and its support for a more socially oriented, "go-slow" approach to economic policy. Following this course would significantly strengthen the position of the State Duma in Russian society.

More likely to occur, however, is some version of the "confrontational scenario," with the Duma waging an unrelenting battle against the president. The instigators of this approach would be representatives of the irreconcilable opposition among the Communists and national-patriots, who have already begun to attack the foundations of presidential power: they are demanding a parliamentary investigation of the October 1993 events; trying to annul the results of the constitutional referendum; backing amnesty for the 1991 coup plotters and the organizers of the 1993 uprising; proposing the repeal of presidential decrees on land ownership and on the Ministry of Security; calling for restoration of the former members of the Constitutional Court, which would then be charged with issuing a final judicial decision on the September-October 1993 events; and proposing a warlike declaration regarding foreign relations.

The basic goal of these forces is to undermine the legitimacy of the Duma (which owes its existence to what they view as the unconstitutional actions of the president), and to call for a termination of the "illegal regime" and a "return of the all-powerful Soviets." No longer believing in parliamentary methods, the irreconcilable opposition will not hesitate to resort to nonparliamentary ones. In their attempts to discredit the State Duma, the radical nationalists and Communists may
actually find allies among the more radical democrats within Russia’s Choice, who are dismayed by the balance of forces in the new parliament and would be pleased by its speedy dissolution.

If the confrontational scenario prevails, the State Duma may quickly be turned into a theater of the absurd. Then, if the Duma is paralyzed, it can be dissolved under Article 111 of the Constitution. The president would continue to rule the country, using the more compliant Federation Council, which could meet from time to time to ratify presidential decrees. Parliament would temporarily consist of only one chamber, and in Russia there is nothing so permanent as a temporary structure.

I believe that President Yeltsin learned a lesson from the December elections, and that he will do everything necessary to prevent the recurrence of a similar outcome in the 1996 elections (assuming, of course, that these take place at all). We may very well have a return to the kind of corporatist elections that were used for the Soviet Congress of People’s Deputies. In any case, the leader’s hand would rule. Russia is heading toward a system of “regulated” representative government. Since the likely alternative at this point is chaos, civil war, and military dictatorship, there are strong grounds for choosing this relatively benign form of autocracy as the lesser of two evils.

Instability and Fragmentation

Peter Reddaway

Peter Reddaway is professor of political science at George Washington University and Distinguished Fellow at the U.S. Institute of Peace.

The Russian elections of December 1993 were a further step in Russia’s transition from a fragile, embryonic democracy to a condition of chronic instability and at least partial disintegration. The already advanced process of gradual coming-apart-at-the-seams will probably continue, to be followed in due course by determined efforts to reunite the country, most likely led by forces of militant Russian nationalism.

Let me first summarize why I hold these views, before laying some of them out in more detail. I have argued since August 1991 that while conditions in Poland in 1989-90 were probably suitable for the policies of “shock therapy” to succeed, Russian conditions in 1991 were very different (see my “The Coming Soviet Collapse,” in Dick Clark, ed., United States-Soviet and East European Relations, Ninth Conference, Aspen Institute, Washington, D.C., 1991, pp. 9-17). I held that if shock therapy were to be introduced in Russia, as advocated at that time by Professor Jeffrey Sachs and others, it would be premature—and it would
fail. Neither the political nor the economic culture of Russia had matured sufficiently for such therapy to work. Unlike in Poland, there was nothing resembling a popular consensus in favor of it. Rather, society was riven by profound divisions on the most fundamental issues of political and economic values and institutions.

A few months later, in October 1991, urged on by Sachs and others in the West, President Yeltsin nonetheless decided to adopt a shock-therapy program with the aim of stabilizing the Russian economy. The IMF, acting for the G-7 governments, became Moscow’s principal foreign partner. By the spring of 1992, however, after having lifted many price controls, the Yeltsin administration found itself facing fierce domestic opposition. Anxious to ensure its own survival, it backed away from much of the medicine prescribed by the IMF, but neither side abandoned the whole enterprise. The Russian government kept trying, periodically, to meet the conditions it had agreed on with the IMF, even though it usually failed badly. The IMF, for its part, tried to bend its rules of conditionality, though not beyond reasonable limits. The predictable result of all this was that the IMF wound up handing over only a small proportion of the planned assistance.

In January 1994, deeply shaken by the unforeseen outcome of the elections, the dominant forces in the government decided—despite occasional rhetoric to the contrary—to renounce what they saw as the folly of “market romanticism.” They resolved to stop trying to meet the IMF’s politically unfeasible conditions, to liberate themselves psychologically from their humiliating feeling of dependency on foreign taskmasters, and to turn instead to some traditional, nonmarket means of controlling the economy.

Yet these decisions by the government are almost certain to move it out of the frying pan and into the proverbial fire. Although the reforms have not created a working market, they have destroyed most of the means by which the government once controlled the economy. Russia is caught in a no-man’s-land between the old “administrative-command” system and an as yet unattained market. The probable result will be hyperinflation, to be followed not by a recall of the economic reformers, but by increased opportunities for extremists and a further worsening of the political instability that has been highlighted up to now by the coup of August 1991 and the incipient civil war of October 1993. The central government is likely to lose much of its remaining control over the country, and Russians may be forced to struggle for survival in an increasingly regional framework. After a year or two of this, the ground could be ready for the emergence of an ultranationalist movement much more dynamic than the one that is now being led by Vladimir Zhirinovsky. Such a movement could capitalize on the prevailing sense of humiliation and impoverishment, and might well succeed in reuniting a fragmented country.
Lest readers think that I am exaggerating the extent or intensity of Russian disillusionment with Western recipes, let me adduce evidence from the December elections and then from some recent statements by top politicians. In the State Duma elections, the one party that in principle stood for radical economic reform, Russia’s Choice, got 15 percent of the popular vote. But in its electoral campaign it sensed the hostile, conservative mood of most voters, and played down reform. Its leader, Yegor Gaidar, actually took up some antireform positions, advocating protectionism to shield Russian producers from foreign competition, and backing Yeltsin’s imposition of curbs on banks more than half-owned by foreigners.

If one adds to the 15 percent for Russia’s Choice the vote received by three very mildly reformist parties, the reformist total comes to 34 percent. By contrast, the three main hard-line parties got 43 percent. While there were some policy differences between the hard-liners, generally speaking they were, in essence, against economic reform, against aid from the West, skeptical of (or hostile to) democracy, and militantly anti-Western. The leader of the party with the highest vote, Zhirinovsky, has already made clear on the world stage his extreme anti-Westernism and his expectation that he will soon be the dictator of Russia. As for the city and regional elections that began in late January, early indications suggested that—unless they are suddenly cancelled by a panicky Yeltsin administration—they will probably bring an even bigger triumph for the hard-line parties than did the national elections, and an even greater disaster for reformers (see *Izvestia*, February 2).

Russian hard-line groups have been profoundly anti-Western ever since glasnost allowed them to emerge in 1987. They have believed Gorbachev and then Yeltsin to be agents of the West, consciously working to destroy first the USSR and now Russia. Since 1992, their anti-Westernism has gradually been taken up by groups nearer to the political center. Now it has begun, if so far in fairly mild forms, to affect Russian officials. In the wake of the decisions quietly made by the Clinton administration in early February to modify the U.S. policies of backing Yeltsin uncritically and pressuring the IMF to help him at almost any cost, the rhetoric of Russian leaders will surely sharpen. The mutual recriminations that have already begun will intensify, not only between Russia and the West, but also between warring factions on either side who are keen to shift blame for the debacle onto each other—consider the polemics exchanged in early 1994 between Professor Sachs and IMF director Michel Camdessus.

The whole of this tragic cycle—the West pushing Russia into a shock-therapy program it was not ready for, the therapy therefore failing, and one of the results being bitter recriminations between East and West—is what I had warned against in my abovementioned article of 1991, before the cycle began.
Let us look, then, at the moderate—to date—rhetoric of the Russian government. On 21 January 1994, Prime Minister Chernomyrdin announced (through a spokesman) his view that “the mechanistic transfer of methods of Western economies to Russian soil does more harm than good.” A few days later, First Deputy Prime Minister Oleg Soskovets complained that international organizations were exerting political pressure on Russia, even though they had, as yet, provided “no tangible economic aid.” “As soon as we start talking about price regulation,” he continued, “voices can immediately be heard saying that this is not a promarket measure, and that neither the West nor the IMF will approve of it. But why should we use other people’s minds in our own country?” (Interfax, RFE/RL, January 26) Even Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev warned tartly on January 27 that Russia “will not listen to [the West’s] lessons and lectures.”

Why do I not share the optimism expressed by U.S. policymakers and others that the adoption of a new Constitution in Russia will usher in a period of greater political (if not economic) stability? There are several reasons. First, the Constitution is unfortunately a document of very limited legitimacy—and therefore authority. The final amendments to it were made unilaterally by Yeltsin. It was published only a month before the December referendum that approved it. During that month Yeltsin tried (unsuccessfully) to quash the strenuous criticism that was levelled against it from most points on the political spectrum by banning such criticism and censoring the media. In the referendum, only a third of the total electorate actually voted for the Constitution. If many of those voters decide that it has not reduced the gridlock in Russian government, they will probably lose faith in it. Given the lack of respect that the new parliament’s more powerful chamber, the State Duma, is already showing for the document, this development is likely.

Second, Yeltsin himself has been provoking some of this disrespect—and thus political instability—through his own often dismissive attitude toward the Duma. In addition, he has become increasingly erratic in his general behavior, saying one thing (especially to foreign leaders) but doing another; disappearing from Moscow for long periods of time; failing to resolve urgent matters with dispatch; and ignoring others altogether. He is widely thought to be suffering from depression, as well as excessive drinking and a heart problem. The executive that he heads is both permeated by corruption and badly disorganized. And his presidential administration has become bloated, overlapping and duplicating in many respects the parallel executive headed by the Council of Ministers.
Third, the deterioration of the economy is breeding instability. Recently, for example, the nonpayment of workers’ wages for weeks or even months at a time has led to a spate of strikes, strike threats, and go-slow in many enterprises. Even before the government’s turn away from the market, most of the economic indicators were negative. The GNP had declined by almost half in four years. tax revenues were low, investment was very low, capital flight was alarmingly high, monopolies were strongly entrenched, foreign capital was scared off by lawlessness and organized crime, and inflation was set to spiral again following Yeltsin’s campaign promises of handouts to various social groups and sectors of the economy. Then the military was given an expensive new target for total personnel of 2.1 million men, instead of 1.5 million. On January 24, the prime minister’s chief analyst announced that to cover all these additional payments, the government had instructed the Central Bank to print 17 trillion rubles in the first quarter of 1994, instead of the previously envisaged 7 trillion. He also calculated that the new emissions could raise the budget deficit for 1994 to 25 percent of GNP. Then the well-known economist Grigory Khanin declared that the attempt to create a market had completely failed, and advocated the temporary re-creation of the main institutions of the old command economy (ITAR-TASS, February 8)—something not likely to prove attainable under present circumstances.

Fourth, the strong centrifugal forces operating in Russia work against stability by making it quite uncertain which government laws and regulations are being observed in which parts of the country (if any). Senior politicians have sounded the alarm on this point. The minister for regional policy, Sergei Shakhrai, for example, sees the weakness of the ruble leading in 1994 to regional conflicts involving economic separatism and a resort to the primitivism of interregional barter (ITAR-TASS, January 24). Yuri Skokov, former chief executive of the Security Council, agrees with the widespread view that each region will henceforth be deciding economic reform and social policy for itself. In his view, the Kremlin has neither the administrative levers nor the revenue to perform such functions (Nezavisimaya gazeta, January 28). These factors also help to explain how three of Russia’s republics have forced Moscow to set precedents dangerous to the integrity of the state. Citizens of almost independent Tatarstan are not subject to the military draft; wealthy Sakha (formerly called Yakutia) does not have to pay taxes to Moscow; and Chechnia’s secession of 1991 remains in force and unpunished.

Fifth, a key institution in Russia, the military, is far from being a stabilizing influence on the situation. According to estimates by Vladimir Smirnov, assistant head of Yeltsin’s Analytical Center, a majority of the military voted for Zhirinovsky’s party. They did so partly because army educators had “reshaped the communist doctrine into a national-socialist
ideology," and partly because troops were not receiving their pay on time. With "no presidential or government control over the army," Smirnov warned, "the growing influence of national-socialist ideas on the Armed Forces poses a real threat to the security of Russia and to the development of democracy" (ITAR-TASS, 23 December 1993).

Sixth, there are no strong political parties, rooted in economic and professional interests, available to steady the polity. Those that exist are weak, focused on the personalities of their leaders, and lacking in well-developed programs. These facts, plus the election results, have caused Russian democrats to reflect on whether Russia is actually ready for democracy. After an address by their president, Yegor Gaidar, the members of Moscow’s Interaction Club debated this question and, according to Segodnya’s report (23 December 1993), concluded that “Russia is not yet ready for pure liberal democracy of the Western type.” Because it “lacks democratic traditions” and shows little promise of developing a middle class in the near future, the only way of preventing a fascist coup is to turn to “enlightened authoritarianism.” This “should be based on a deliberately cultivated oligarchy—a political and economic elite advocating liberal democratic positions” and consisting of senior businessmen, company directors, and reform-minded leaders of the military and police.

Later Gaidar made clear that he still believes in the need for a new party or movement to support the president (Izvestia, 20 January 1994): "Unless the democratic movement is consolidated," he said, "the slide toward fascism . . . will become reality." For "at present our state cannot be considered democratic. Once again the ossification of bureaucracy is taking place. Once again the alienation of the state and its apparatus from the people has been intensified. . . . The nomenklatura largely remains as it was before." All this was leading to the alliance of bureaucracy and corrupt capital and a “closed, rotten, truly ‘Weimar’ atmosphere in which the terrible homunculi of fascism are born.” Unfortunately, the democrats did not have "a new, powerful integrating political idea." This was urgently needed for use against the powerful appeals of the fascists. Yet it became clear in subsequent weeks that the democrats were deeply divided over personalities, how to proceed, and whether to keep supporting the declining Yeltsin even as they were strongly criticizing Chernomyrdin’s government.

With instability growing in these ways, what is Yeltsin doing about it? He is systematically trying to take the main levers of power into his own hands, with the apparent aim of reinforcing his own position against the hard-liners’ threat and adopting a more authoritarian style of rule. Thus he has increased his control of television and two key news agencies; has divided the state security organs into separate agencies and subordinated them to his personal apparatus; and has initiated plans to take similar action with the police and the military. He has also sharply
trimmed the powers of parliament and has drafted a law to do likewise
to the Constitutional Court; has purged the Council of Ministers and the
Security Council of most of their reformers; has moved to increase the
range of curbs on political parties; has promoted conservatives in his
own apparatus; and has adopted a more assertive and nationalistic
foreign policy.

In most of these initiatives Yeltsin seems to have had the support of
military, police, and security leaders, and of the small class of wealthy
new owners who have managed to acquire the former assets of the state
through the privatization process, and who urgently desire the securing
of these often ill-gotten gains. I do not believe, however, that either
Yeltsin, or the increasingly assertive Chernomyrdin, or the leaders of
any future coups can succeed in imposing an authoritarian order on
Russia over the next year or two. No matter how hard would-be
authoritarians may try, the forces of public order are too weak, divided,
and demoralized, and the regional leaders are too jealous of their newly
won autonomy, for such attempts to succeed. The current processes of
uncontrolled regionalization and fragmentation are likely to continue.

Thus the prospects for Russian democracy appear, for the foreseeable
future, regrettably bleak. Over the last six years I have often been
chided for excessive pessimism regarding first Gorbachev and the USSR,
and now Yeltsin and Russia. But alas, much of that pessimism seems
to have been justified. As a lifelong Russophile, I hope that my
assessment proves to be too gloomy. But as an analyst, I fear that it
will not.

A Return to Stability

Alexander Tsipko

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Programs at the Gorbachev Foundation, ran as a candidate for
parliament for the Civic Union.

Strictly speaking, one could not call the poor showing of the electoral
coalition formed by DemRossiya and Russia’s Choice in last December’s
parliamentary elections unexpected or very surprising. On the contrary,
the truly surprising, even incomprehensible, thing would have been a
massive show of popular support for Yegor Gaidar and his team after
all that had happened since August 1991, especially their abortive
“cavalry assault” on the Soviet economy and their call for an assault on
the Russian White House last autumn in order to dislodge the
parliamentarians who refused to abandon that building. After all,
President Yeltsin dissolved the parliament out of fear: he felt that this locus of opposition to his government's policies was gaining strength, especially in the provinces. The 15 percent of the vote that Russia's Choice wound up getting seems generous in light of the group's close identification with the assault on the parliament and the enormously unpopular policy of economic "shock therapy."

In the category of the unexpected one must also include the electoral performance of the Communists, who gained an aura of martyrdom after their futile defense of the White House, yet did even more poorly than Russia's Choice and ceded the title of "defender of Russia" to Zhirinovsky's LDP. But then again, it seemed clear even before the election that whoever exploited patriotism most effectively would win.

It was not just Gaidar and Russia's Choice that lost, but the so-called democratic revolution of August 1991. The tragedy of Gaidar and his party lies in their assumption of the burden of responsibility for this primordially doomed business. They believed that the idea of the market and of democratic reform would lend their movement legitimacy and mobilize society powerfully behind it, but they were badly mistaken.

The anticommunist, anti-Soviet revolutions of 1989 in Eastern Europe succeeded in bringing together the notions of democracy, national independence, and the recovery of national history. This fusion of the concept of democracy and the idea of national revival held within itself—if only for a single incandescent moment—an awesome mobilizing strength. Whether in Warsaw, Prague, or Budapest, it conveyed a sense of national victory and brought together huge numbers of people, practically whole nations, to push for the recouping of national identity and the overthrow of the communist nomenklatura.

Russia's democrats took an opposite tack from the one chosen by their counterparts in Eastern Europe. From the beginning, they linked the idea of democracy with the themes of defeat and deterioration: the defeat of the USSR in the Cold War, the discrediting of the October Revolution, the decay of the Great Russian empire, and so on.

Behind this preoccupation with failure and self-reproach lay a sincere and even healthy impulse: the desire to uncover and confront the truth. To many Russians, however, the democrats came to seem like the high priests of a cult of shame and defeatism. Their honesty was too withering. People could not bear to face the truth about Soviet and Russian history—the truth about themselves.

To make matters worse, our new democrats mechanically and counterproductively tried to stretch the notion of breaking with communism to cover a similar break with the traditions of Russian
statehood and Russian geopolitical interests. Ironically, DemRossiya and Russia's Choice were aping the Bolsheviks of 1917 in their attempt to break completely with the Russian past. The only difference was that Lenin and his commissars at least had the advantage of being able to offer the bait of communist utopianism and the prophesied advent of the "new Soviet man." Communism, for all its scientific pretensions, exalted the irrational and sacral over the rational.

Bereft of a messianic ideology, the new Russian democrats did not even bother to offer the people a clear explanation of why the old Soviet economy had to be destroyed or why the old Soviet ways had to be done away with. Appeals to "turn to the market" or "return to civilization" meant virtually nothing to millions of Russians. To them, talk of reform seemed abstract, unviable, and in no way connected with their own everyday fears and aspirations.

No mass political movement can be created in Russia with rhetoric about individual rights and liberties or calls for democracy. Democracy's blessings can interest only those who feel themselves in need of them; its ideals can move only those who profess them: intellectuals who were stripped of liberty under the Soviets; tiny groups of artists, writers, and other creative types; scientists who know personally the value of academic freedom, foreign travel, and historical truth. From the very start, Russia's liberal democratic movement has been a clique, its interests those of the minuscule pro-Western classes in Moscow and St. Petersburg.

The movement was most successful when it used the ideological equivalent of jujitsu on the communist elite and urged what amounted to the "expropriation of the expropriators." As long as the democrats were in opposition, condemning the Soviet ruling class for its love of privilege, its special clinics and stores, its country houses, and its Zil limousines, the people cheered. Yet once the democrats came to power in August 1991, taking over the nomenklatura's motor pool and becoming part of the powers that be, they became targets for popular ire. Now they were the alien and despised "authorities." Once the effects of economic shock therapy were felt and people began to lose their savings, pensions, guaranteed jobs, and tolerable health care, the common citizen's anger was multiplied a thousandfold.

Russia's Choice did not just lose the December 12 elections; it served as the unwitting agent of its own defeat, dealing just the cards that its opponents needed most for a big win. Still, one must admit that Zhirinovsky played his hand very skillfully, using the appeal to nationalist sentiment as a trump card. Before the inception of shock therapy, "patriotic" groups of all kinds had the support, as best we can tell, of no more than 17 percent of the voters; now that figure seems to be about 60 percent.

When the ruling party professes what looks and sounds very much
like an ideology of national defeat, oppositionists would have to be very stupid indeed not to play upon the oppressed national consciousness and bestir voters' memories with talk about the past triumphs of "great and invincible Russia." It should also go without saying that when a ruling party fails to give the voters a sense of hope about the future, its adversaries will be lavish with fulsome promises and magniloquent evocations of a grand national destiny. Zhirinovsky was very good at making such promises and stirring such memories, at salving psychic wounds and national humiliations. That is why he won.

Among the paradoxes of politics in Russia today is that even our new entrepreneurial class has very little interest in democracy as such. Indeed, many of its members fear democratic procedures because they seem to invite instability—sudden changes in the top echelons of power are not good for business. What most concerns the typical entrepreneur, therefore, is not democracy or even further economic reform, but rather his ability to hold on to his own share of newly privatized property. If an authoritarian regime promises to do a better job of safeguarding property, we can expect our new bourgeoisie to support such a regime.

Such a regime would most likely take the form of an "emergency" government of indefinite duration. The materials for it exist because the democrats, with their narrow social base and lack of a mobilizing idea, were never able to carry through the August Revolution. Their uphill struggle to purge the state apparatus and put their own people into key posts was a dismal failure. By the middle of 1993, power almost everywhere in provincial Russia had fallen back into the hands of the old nomenklatura. In and around Volgograd, for instance, former CPSU district secretaries dominate local governments. In "national autonomous units" within the Russian Federation like Tatarstan, Ossetia, and Kabardino-Balkaria, the former CPSU boss is now the president.

Even with their control over radio and television, the democrats are powerless to cure the alienation of the Russian periphery from Moscow and its ways of thinking. As for the non-Russian territories within the Federation, they have been rejecting the Moscow democrats' authority and political culture since the autumn of 1991.

The August Revolution was a lost cause long before last December's balloting. There was never any significant base of social support for radical economic reform or thoroughgoing democratization. Only a few dissidents and intellectuals had any zeal for going after the communist regime root and branch. The great bulk of the population wanted better living conditions and a predictable social order, not a revolution.

It is thus hardly surprising that the euphoria of August 1991 evaporated so quickly and completely. The first straw in the wind was Yeltsin's failure to put the CPSU on trial. By mid-1992, support for trying even the coup leaders themselves was fading, and they were soon released from prison. Even the desire to rid the streets, parks, and
squares of communist monuments has waned. It is now hard to find a single major politician who will offer sharp criticisms of the Soviet era; anticommunism is out of fashion.

Even though the political and ideological failure of the August Revolution is now an indisputable fact, this does not mean that the defeat of Gaidar and Russia’s Choice spells the end of democracy. It is important to remember that the crucial rights and liberties—to speak and publish, to assemble, to form parties, and so on—were won before the events of August 1991. Indeed, the very existence of these freedoms goes a long way toward explaining why the leaders of the August 1991 coup attempt discovered so quickly over those three summer days that they had bitten off vastly more than they could chew.

The democratic changes that stymied the coup plotters of three years ago are no more reversible today. For this reason, we should conceive of what is now happening in Russia as an episode of stabilization in the democratization process that took shape before August 1991. The essence of this process has been and will continue to be gradual, evolutionary reform from the top.

The return of the old-line commissars has never been a serious possibility; rather, it is the reform communists who are making a comeback. The path to reform that runs through destabilization, purges, and conflict has been revealed as a dead end. Today what Russia needs most are politicians who can ensure stability and strike a workable balance among competing interests. Last December, Gaidar lost not only to Zhirinovsky, but perhaps more importantly to Chernomyrdin and other supporters of stabilization such as First Deputy Prime Minister Oleg Soskovets. The age of meteoric political careers, when a junior academician could become a cabinet minister overnight, has ended for good. Now rising again in the ranks of government are those who know how to manage, who know the country and the economy, and whose experience and expertise give them a strong claim to leadership.

### A Communist Setback

*Stephen Sestanovich*

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For a long time it seemed that there was nothing new to be said about the relationship between fascism and communism. Now, unfortunately, the subject is fresh again. It is no longer confined to such remote questions as whether Stalin or Hitler was the purer totalitarian (and who
learned which repressive technique from whom). The strengths and weaknesses of these twin ideological enemies of democracy have become central to any analysis of what is happening in Russian politics, and of what lies ahead.

Before the December 1993 election, everyone knew that there would be a substantial protest vote; this is not what needs explaining. Both fascists and communists expected to draw strength from an increasingly negative popular mood. They aimed to exploit the failures of the government's economic program, the weakness of Russian political institutions (especially the party system), the psychological disorientation created by the collapse of the Soviet Union, and so on. In the end, what was surprising about the returns was not that the protest vote was so much larger than anticipated—it was not—but that so much of it went to what just a few weeks earlier would still have been considered the lunatic fringe.

Almost all analyses of the December results treat Zhirinovsky's success as a victory over the democratic parties. Too little has been made of the fact that it was also a setback for the Communists and their partners, the Agrarians (the voice of collectivized agriculture). Leaders of these two parties could hardly have hoped for an outright victory, but they clearly wanted to establish themselves as the only credible alternative to the market reformers who had been in charge of Russia's economic policies since the fall of 1991. On the eve of the election in Moscow it was common to hear the forecast that this de facto bloc might pull in close to a third of the vote. Yet its election-day totals, like those of the reformist parties themselves, fell well short of expectations. In the voting for party lists, Zhirinovsky got a higher percentage than the Communist and Agrarian vote combined.

In this round of voting, then, it was better to be crazy than communist. Protest voters were more likely to support those who represented something new than those so closely associated with the previous regime. Here Zhirinovsky displayed one of fascism's special strengths: it can play on nostalgia for the old order without being tainted by it. We have seen this pattern before, of course: those who rejected liberalism in Germany and Italy in the 1920s did not ordinarily find their political home in the House of Hohenzollern or the House of Savoy. They did not want a failed political formula, but a promising new one.

Russia's communists—themselves deposed monarchs of a sort—face similar problems in capitalizing on discontent with the new regime. That they can compete at all is due to considerable efforts at "modernizing" themselves. Gennady Zyuganov's Communist Party of the Russian Federation, unlike other descendants of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, did not join the defense of the Russian White House in October 1993, and it recognizes that Marx and Lenin have little popular
appeal. Asked by a reporter what principles of Marxism-Leninism the Party still embraces, Zyuganov’s deputy could come up with no better answer than “Justice.” (Wall Street Journal, 27 January 1994). Yet the Communists remain burdened by the past, and the mere fact that the elections gave them (with the Agrarians) enough seats to be a potent force in parliament does not mean that they will easily throw off this burden in future elections. Whether they can increase their vote will almost surely depend on whether they continue to refashion their program and give themselves a more democratic look.

When it comes to the Communists, the December elections, far from blocking the consolidation of democracy, may be said to have shown that it is still underway. The fact that parties with an antidemocratic past are under pressure to repudiate it means that over time they are likely to pose a diminishing threat to the democratic revolution. In this respect, Russia follows the path of Poland, whose communists have been obliged to persuade the electorate that they accept the democratic revolution.

What is true of the communists, however, is not necessarily true of the fascists. Zhirinovsky does not seem to feel the same obligation to pretend that he too is a democrat. Part of his appeal comes, in fact, from his disdain for liberal hypocrisies. He tries to demonstrate that he offers strong leadership precisely by defying democratic conventions. In this spirit, he has spoken of shooting large numbers of people when he is elected president. Coming from the communists, such declarations would almost certainly create far more outrage and controversy than when Zhirinovsky utters them. In him, they seem to be taken as a pose—a way of conveying his tough-minded decisiveness rather than a literal statement of intent. (There are other examples: the LDP has paramilitary formations that it does such units would be a source of much greater vulnerability for the

That antidemocratic parties face different tests of legitimacy suggests again the special character of fascism: it is based on open rejection of both the old regime and the new one, and is not easily discredited in their terms. Because this is so, Russian democracy may be unevenly consolidated against different opponents. For now, it seems better protected against a communist restoration than against a fascist takeover.

As for the future, it is conceivable that Zhirinovsky’s party will go from strength to strength, acquiring an ever larger popular following that will sweep it into power. But if such momentum builds, its first result
is likely to be a political crisis within the institutions of the Russian state. Generals, industrialists, legislators, and other political leaders will face the choice between countering and co-opting the fascists. One of the crucial factors in Weimar politics was that German elites chose the latter course. The Nazis, it was thought, might serve as front-men for a conservative restoration: Hitler might be a distasteful figure, but he could mobilize popular support that the old regime was no longer able to muster on its own. In this way, it was hoped, he would provide welcome stability at a time when Germany seemed to be coming apart.

Could this pattern be repeated in Russia? To most of those trying to fight off the final dismantlement of Soviet institutions, Zhirinovsky is presumably just as repulsive as Hitler was to German aristocrats, but their approach is not likely to be decided by taste alone. The real issue is whether Zhirinovsky will seem useful, or perhaps even necessary, to Soviet “aristocrats” who feel that they have nowhere else to turn.

There can hardly be any doubt that many influential Russian figures who would have dismissed the idea a few months ago are now saying to themselves that they need to get to know this fellow Zhirinovsky. (For that matter, even second-rank figures in the LDP are suddenly going to be in demand for lunch.) Over the next couple of years, Russian elite attitudes toward Zhirinovsky should be expected to evolve, as he cultivates potential apologists, fellow travelers, patrons, trimmers, and the like. Such a division within the elite will by itself make Russian politics more anarchic and less predictable.

So far, however, there are no serious signs of an emergent strategic alliance between fascism and any segment of the Russian establishment, old or new. On the contrary, Zhirinovsky’s success has had a very different effect. He has become the most powerful single argument against the continuation of radical reform. With Zhirinovsky as their bogeyman, self-styled “centrists” insist that slowing down reform is the only way to save democracy and keep the fascists from coming to power.

Although many in Russia make such arguments for purely self-serving reasons (the desire to protect their power and position), their motives alone do not prove that they are wrong. To the contrary, their case has an undeniable surface plausibility. Social upheaval does create openings for neo-totalitarians, and the weakness in Russia of what is commonly called “civil society” does mean that the country’s ability to weather prolonged disorder is in doubt.

Seen in this light, the gradualism of the government’s revised program seems only prudent, and after the shock of the December voting, it has easily carried the day—too easily, in fact, and with too little debate. We ought to ask whether this kind of centrism is as realistic as it claims to be. It pretends to discard romanticism and dogmatism in favor of down-to-earth practicality, but it makes very
wishful assumptions about what an obviously angry Russian electorate can be persuaded to accept. After a year of 1,000-percent inflation—which polls suggest is the greatest source of voter frustration—Russia’s centrists now propose another year of 1,000-percent inflation.

The pragmatists, in other words, talk about strong and competent leadership, but their policies suggest drift. They may in this way exacerbate the very conditions that they say—correctly—are giving fascism a chance. They claim that they are listening to the people; unfortunately, they may only be listening to themselves.

Zhirinovsky’s World

John B. Dunlop

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The December 1993 elections constituted an undeniable setback for democracy in Russia. Among the main causes of this reversal were the sense many voters had that Yegor Gaidar’s reforms had failed and in failing had damaged the economic prospects of the country; general concern that Russia was rudderless and drifting; and disillusionment with establishment politicians in the wake of ten excruciating months of “dual-power” rule culminating in the bloody crisis of October 1993. A fuller list would also have to note the upsurge in Russian self-awareness that was occurring as ethnic Russians came increasingly to reject their old “Soviet” identity and sought a return to national roots; a concomitant anger over the increase in separatist sentiment in non-Russian regions of the Russian Federation; a gnawing sense that Russia had ceased to be a “great power”; and, finally, a rising concern among Russians about the plight of their co-ethnics in the “near abroad” (as the territory of the former USSR outside Russia is called).

The largest beneficiary of voter disillusionment and alienation was, of course, Vladimir Zhirinovsky. If the geopolitical project sketched in Zhirinovsky’s recent book, The Last Thrust to the South, and in his campaign platform were to be implemented, then democracy would find itself massively threatened not only in Russia but throughout Europe, Asia, and probably Africa as well.

Like Adolf Hitler—another energetic “geopolitician” with whom he is often compared—Zhirinovsky views political life in purely Darwinian terms, recognizing neither God, nor conscience, nor morality. As he sees it, there is only an indifferent “world of nature” in which big fish
devour smaller ones and wolves test their strength by lunging at one another in the forest. Russia, for Zhirinovsky, is a powerful beast whose territorial appetite must be satiated. In addition, in Zhirinovsky’s view, Russia finds herself mortally imperiled on her southern borders by the dire threats of Islamic fundamentalism and “pan-Turkism.”

The solution that Zhirinovsky proposes for these and other problems is breathtaking in its scope. The world’s great powers, he believes, must boldly divide up the world into clearly delineated “spheres of influence.” Within its appointed sphere, each great power should be free to act as it chooses.

The entire “space” of the former Soviet Union, Zhirinovsky asserts, belongs to Russia, and she is obliged to take it all back. He notes that this new Russian empire will be Russian in name but ethnically diverse, as was the case with the Czarist empire. Russia, Zhirinovsky contends, is fully justified in undertaking a “last thrust to the south” to rid herself once and for all of the mortal threat from that quarter. As a result of this southward drive, three countries—Iran, Turkey, and Afghanistan—will be forcibly incorporated into Russia. On their territory, Russian will become the lingua franca and the ruble the official currency. Islam’s influence will be markedly curtailed. “Under the banner of the Russian Army and of the Orthodox Church,” notes the professed atheist Zhirinovsky, “we must finish with the Muslim danger” (Segodnya, 25 December 1993).

Zhirinovsky’s book concludes with a vision of Russian submarines surfacing off the coast of Iran; of Russian commandos storming ashore; of Russian bombers taking off from their bases and streaking south; of Russian tanks rumbling southward. We are, in short, treated to a glimpse of a future blitzkrieg.

Once Turkey, Iran, and Afghanistan have been devoured and ingested, Zhirinovsky assures us, Russia will then entertain no further expansionist designs. Unlike Alexander the Great, Hitler, and Napoleon—figures to whom he compares himself and his mission—Zhirinovsky tells us that he has no intention of ruling the world. As the reader may undoubtedly suspect, however, his candor on this matter is very much open to question.

As a geopolitician, Zhirinovsky knows that other powerful states also have large appetites. His carefully delineated “spheres of influence” are designed to remove this potential source of conflict. Thus China, under his scheme, would be free to consume Outer Mongolia, and then to compete with Japan for hegemony throughout Southeast Asia, Australia, and Oceania. (Korea is not mentioned in this connection, and it would
appear that Zhirinovsky has designs upon it.) Russia would stand aside from any southward drives made by China or Japan.

Germany, too, is seen as a powerful state whose appetites must be appeased. Zhirinovsky accordingly offers Germany a slab of Poland (East Prussia) and the entire Czech Republic for *lebensraum*. He also pledges to take all Turks presently living in Germany back to Turkey, a country which, as we have seen, is to be absorbed into the Russian empire. France is to receive North Africa as its sphere of influence, while Western Europe as a whole may do as it wishes in West (but not East) Africa.

Zhirinovsky is barely able to conceal his contempt for the United States, a once-great state now undergoing rapid disintegration. The U.S., he insists, must immediately pull its forces out of Europe, Asia, and Africa. Should the U.S. fail to comply, one day fairly soon it will find itself subjected to a new Nuremberg trial as punishment for its unreasonable geopolitical appetites. As Zhirinovsky sees it, the U.S. will be increasingly crippled by a huge national debt, and at some point in the next century will likely break up into a “Commonwealth of Independent American States.” California will secede and return to Mexico, while an independent black republic will form in Florida, and so forth. With an eventual “nonwhite” population of 100 million blacks and Latinos, the U.S. will find itself rent by ethnic and racial wars. By the middle of the next century, he predicts, it will probably be forced to ask Russia for military assistance—this will offer the opportunity for Russia to take back Alaska—and it will have to appeal to the IMF for desperately needed economic assistance.

In the meantime, before it disintegrates, the United States is to be apportioned Mexico, Latin America, and the Caribbean as its sphere of influence. The United States may devour Cuba if it wishes; Zhirinovsky could not care less.

Just as Adolf Hitler needed allies in his relentless quest for *lebensraum*, so Zhirinovsky has identified a number of states and peoples that he is counting on to assist Russia in accomplishing her historic “thrust to the south.” These include Saddam Hussein’s Iraq (“Russia’s strategic ally to the south”); India (“a great nuclear power” and “the largest and most reliable friend of Russia in the Asian region”); “our brothers in the Balkans, the Serbs and other Orthodox peoples”; the 30-million-strong Kurds, who are to be granted a state on present-day Turkish territory; the Armenians, who will be given a swath of Turkey and a port on the Black Sea; and finally, a hypothetical future white-supremacist regime in South Africa. Pakistan, it should be noted, will cease to exist as an independent state; its territory will presumably be divided up by Russia and India.

Zhirinovsky’s book indicates that all of the arrangements and concessions that he is willing to make in Eurasia (deals with China and
India excepted) should be regarded as temporary and conditional. Eventually, he informs us, there will be no ethnic-based territorial units anywhere in the vast sprawl of what he envisions as a reconstituted and expanded Russian empire extending “from the English Channel to Vladivostok” and from the Arctic to the Indian Ocean.

The reader will have noticed that Zhirinovsky’s geopolitical schemes presuppose genocide. Russia’s blitzkrieg thrust to the south could succeed militarily only if accompanied by the widespread use of weapons of mass destruction. Zhirinovsky contemptuously dismisses a number of the world’s peoples as untermenschen: specifically, all blacks and Latinos; all Turkic peoples (the great majority of one-time Soviet Muslims are, of course, Turks); all Iranians, Afghans, and Pakistanis; all Latvians, Czechs, and Moravians. These peoples may accordingly be subjected to “a final solution.” “Nothing would happen to the world,” Zhirinovsky chortles at one point, “if the whole Turkish nation should disappear....” (The fate of Israel, incidentally, is left unclear in Zhirinovsky’s book.)

Is Zhirinovsky a lone narcissistic madman? In my view, not at all. Russia’s prodemocratic press (whose future now appears problematic) has been looking carefully into the membership of Zhirinovsky’s 40-member “shadow cabinet” and into how he was able to obtain five billion rubles to finance his party’s 1993 election campaign. The “kernel” of Zhirinovsky’s shadow cabinet, the newspaper Segodnya has concluded, is made up of former officials of the Soviet military-industrial complex, especially figures from “the space and nuclear-energy industries, which were closely controlled by the KGB” (12 December 1993).

In addition to Segodnya, publications such as Komsomolskaya pravda and Rossiiskie vesti have detected the same pattern. The shadow prime minister in Zhirinovsky’s “cabinet,” Viktor Kobelev, is, to take one example, the former head of an important institute devoted to the preparation of cadres within the USSR Ministry of Heavy Industry. The shadow deputy prime minister, Aleksandr Vengerovskii, served for a number of years in the “military cosmonaut program,” as did the shadow deputy defense minister, Mikhail Musatov. Vladimir Gusev, whose name stood eleventh on the LDP list during the December elections, earlier served as a deputy prime minister under Soviet premier Nikolai Ryzhkov. Zhirinovsky’s shadow security minister, Sergei Abeltsev, is a former officer in Soviet military intelligence (the GRU) who is said to have maintained close operational ties to the KGB. The shadow foreign minister, Andrei Mitrofanov, represented the USSR Foreign Ministry at the International Atomic Energy Agency in Vienna. Zhirinovsky’s chief of administration, Valentin Minakov, served as an Intourist official and was, reportedly, at the same time an officer in the KGB. The picture becomes clear.
Mikhail Leontyev, the deputy editor of Segodnya, has pointed out on Russian television that Zhirinovsky’s election finances were channeled through “a whole series of structures” that are easily traceable to the secret police. These structures obtained large sums of money from Iraq; from right-wing groups in Germany, Austria, and France; from Trans-Dniestria (the breakaway Russian-nationalist republic in Moldova); from the military-industrial complex; and from certain large Russian enterprises. In his 1993 election campaign, Zhirinovsky made a host of overtures and concessions to the military-industrial complex, to the space program (for example, promising a rapidly developed Russian SDI program), to large enterprises, and especially to the secret police, whose ranks he vowed greatly to expand. Officers who had been dismissed in recent years for their hard-line views were to be recalled to service. Redundant army officers were to be reassigned to both the secret and the regular police. There have recently appeared several articles in the Russian press asserting that Zhirinovsky has been a long-serving officer with the secret police and that he is presently a member of that organization’s active reserve (See Chas pik [St. Petersburg], No. 1, 1994; and Literaturnaya gazeta, 12 January 1994).

“Zhirinovsky,” the prodemocratic newspaper Rossiiskie vesti has cautioned its readers, “has every chance of legally coming to power in the very near future” (4 January 1994). It should be noted in this connection that if President Yeltsin were to die in office, Russia’s new Constitution mandates that presidential elections would have to be held within 90 days. Through a brilliant and skillful use of television, Zhirinovsky erupted out of nowhere to place third in the 1991 presidential elections. His LDP presently boasts about 100,000 members spread across the territory of the former Soviet Union; one-third of these members are under age 30, and half are between 30 and 50. The average age of the voter (typically a male) who supported Zhirinovsky’s slate at the time of the December elections was 41.6.

There is today no democratic or “centrist” Russian politician who could be counted upon easily to defeat Zhirinovsky in a presidential election. It should be stressed that Russian public opinion polls failed to register Zhirinovsky’s potential strength with voters in either 1991 or 1993; on both occasions, bolstered by an expert use of television, he managed to make a surge in the final days leading up to the voting itself. He could do so once again, especially if a new election were to be held fairly soon. Zhirinovsky’s prospects might, on the other hand, begin to wane by 1996, the date of the next scheduled presidential elections.

A leading writer and active democrat, Ales Adamovich, cautioned a month before his untimely death in January of this year: “In the 1930’s people said: ‘Hitler means war.’ At the time, normal people did not want to believe this. Today, just as pressingly, there stands the
statement: ‘Zhirinovsky means war.’ And if our people do not believe this, and if they do nothing about it, then we shall indeed get war” (Stolitsa, December 1993). And so, of course, shall we in the West.

The Ascent of the Inflationists

Vladimir Mau

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The story of political and economic reform in Russia from the failed coup of August 1991 to the parliamentary elections of December 1993 is, among other things, a tale of falling and rising institutions and social groups. The changes that have taken place at the very core of the political system are inseparable from the radical economic transformations that have also occurred. Economic interest groups are now the key players in Russian politics; political parties, by contrast, have been and remain weak and unstable. In the corridors of power, they wield much less influence than associations of managers and entrepreneurs.

The configuration of interests that was reflected in last December’s election results had already become manifest earlier in the year. The newly elected Federal Assembly, and especially the State Duma, now solidly represents the views and interests of Russia’s most influential social groups. The State Duma, therefore, will be the arena in which these groups struggle over the future direction of economic policy, deciding which of the available economic paths Russia will follow.

What are the alternatives? Essentially there are only two, though each admits of certain nuances. The first, which I call the “inflationary” option, features the use of massive governmental subsidies to support uncompetitive, lame-duck enterprises; the attempt to reinstate centralized command mechanisms in hopes of “managing” the economy via its still-dominant state sector; and the enactment of overtly protectionist trade policies. Advocates of this model argue that the state must be intimately and pervasively involved in the structural transformation of the Russian economy; they recommend the restoration of a ramified structure of government management as a necessary means to this end.

The other alternative, which I call “anti-inflationary,” was formally embraced by the Yeltsin government when it launched radical economic reform in the fall of 1991. This scenario envisions sustained economic liberalization through the deregulation of foreign trade and investment, tight credit policies, and the steady privatization of state-sector assets
and enterprises. Those who defend this method of proceeding want to foster a state of affairs in which business entities themselves—and not some central political authority—can make everyday decisions about production, investment, industrial relations, and trade. Therein, they claim, lies Russia's only hope for economic recovery and prosperity.

The December 1993 balloting was a triumph for the inflationists, who now fill at least two-thirds of the seats in the State Duma. Here, however, the internal divisions within the inflationist camp are worth noting. The so-called soft option, which seems to enjoy the sympathy of Prime Minister Chernomyrdin, emphasizes increased government intervention in the way business is organized rather than unrestricted financial support for state enterprises. More specifically, the "soft-liners" call for:

- Active efforts by the government to determine which enterprises "deserve" priority backing from the state.
- Vigorous cultivation "from the top" of robust "financial and industrial groups."
- Protection of Russian industries and markets from foreign competition.
- A general "go-slow" approach to privatization.

While backers of the "hard" inflationary option generally agree with these kinds of organizational and structural changes, they place their main emphasis on what they see as the urgent need for looser financial and credit policies as part of an overall effort to support Russia's struggling productive enterprises and their employees.

In the medium term, the differences of emphasis between the two factions within the inflationary camp will probably count for far less than what unites them. The intervention and subsidy options will merge readily into a single policy stream. Experience and common sense alike suggest that the creation of monopolies that are closely tied to the government and shielded from customer preferences and foreign competition will furnish lucrative opportunities for those with good government connections.

It is clear that the Russia's Choice delegation is the most consistently anti-inflationist bloc in the State Duma, while the Communists and the Agrarians are the most thoroughgoing supporters of the inflationary alternative. The economic nationalism of Zhirinovsky's LDP will incline it to side with the Communists and Agrarians, whose proposals include a strong element of protectionism. To the extent that this "red-brown" coalition gets its way, the economy will be tightly bound to the state, with enterprises depending on the government to provide subsidies and maintain import restrictions and tariff barriers.

The December 12 Group gathered around Grigory Yavlinsky and Irina Khakamada is likely to side with Russia’s Choice on the reformist side. Sergei Shakhrai’s faction and the New Regional Policy group of
Vladimir Medvedev, on the other hand, will probably try to stake out some middle ground—whether they can occupy it for very long, however, is highly doubtful. The very nature of the current political struggle is likely soon to force them to cast their lot with one side or the other.

The battle between the inflationist and anti-inflationist forces will determine not only the course of Russian economic policy in particular, but also the shape of the country’s future political and social life in general.

Currently, the odds favor the inflationists. The vast majority of the State Duma’s newly elected members are closely connected with the interests of various industries, economic sectors, or local administrative units. The Federation Council, for its part, is totally dominated by regional leaders and their representatives. Even though private entrepreneurs have a larger presence in the new Federal Assembly than they had in the Russian Supreme Soviet that Yeltsin dissolved last September, the new body is disturbingly similar to the Supreme Soviet of Ukraine, where industrial and regional pressure groups reign almost unchecked.

Moreover, the consequences of the elections extend far beyond macroeconomic policy. The growing influence of the LDP bodes ill not only for market democracy in Russia, but also for peace—both internal and international. The real threat to the peaceful transformation of the country is no longer communism but “national capitalism”—a political trend that would exclude market democracy in favor of some form of dictatorship flying the banner of nationalism. Zhirinovsky should have no trouble forming alliances with left-wing groups like the Communists, who have rejected “proletarian internationalism” in favor of a nationalist posture, and the Agrarian party, which puts protectionism at the head of its economic agenda.

The elections leave Prime Minister Chernomyrdin in a strong position, especially vis-à-vis President Yeltsin. Although the premier maintained a very low profile during the campaign period, and although the parties with which he was most closely associated did rather poorly, he enjoys wide support in the State Duma as a figure broadly acceptable to most of the major lobbies and partisan factions. Yeltsin is unlikely to try to replace him, for to do so would invite a dangerous conflict with the new parliament.

Despite this advantage, Chernomyrdin and his government find themselves in a delicate predicament now that staunch reformers like Yegor Gaidar and Boris Fyodorov have resigned their posts in the wake of the elections. Responsibility for the results of economic policy now lies squarely with Chernomyrdin and his lieutenants, who can no longer blame their difficulties on the “monetarists” in the government. While the murky political situation of 1993 allowed Chernomyrdin to avoid a
choice between the inflationary and anti-inflationary options, he no longer enjoys this luxury. Taking into account the balance of political forces, he will probably decide to pursue what amounts to an inflationary policy while simultaneously doing everything he can to conceal this decision. An open embrace of the inflationary option would have disastrous political consequences for the government, but the substance of the inflationist position has strong backing among the Federal Assembly membership and the powerful regional and industrial interests whose representatives dominate the cabinet. Anti-inflationism, on the other hand, risks similarly prohibitive political costs yet has no significant political or social support—and that will make all the difference.

The weight of political circumstances will thus drive Russia more or less rapidly in the direction of hyperinflation, “Ukrainization,” and eventual economic catastrophe. When that comes to pass, Russia will once again find itself at a crossroads, as it was in 1991. Its choice, however, will no longer be between a communist and a market economy, but between two different variants of a market economy. Either there will be a new attempt at stabilization by means of the liberalization of the national economy and its integration into the system of global economic relations, or else the forces of “national capitalism” will come to power. The system that these forces envision would allow for broad and pervasive state interference in the national economy and the erection of high protectionist barriers to wall off Russian enterprises from international competition.

The latter outcome would almost certainly lead to dictatorship, but even a choice for economic liberalization will require a tough and possibly authoritarian political order. This might nonetheless be a constitutional regime, however. inasmuch as the new Constitution adopted by referendum on 12 December 1993 could provide a legal basis for presidential authoritarianism.

The Politics of Resentment

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After the strong showing of the bizarre Vladimir Zhirinovsky in Russia’s recent parliamentary elections, a consensus seems to be developing that Zhirinovsky is an imperialist, a fascist, and an anti-Semite, and that those who voted for his wildly misnamed Liberal
Democratic Party intended to support these political tendencies. Much of the alarming commentary on the election reads as though Russia was an established constitutional order in which well-defined constituencies or bodies of opinion vote for politicians whose program fits their conception of the public good. These commentators seemed further to assume that politicians say things in speeches because they plan to put these same policies into effect after they are elected. Even in the established democracies, such a view would be naive; in bewildered, chaotic Russia, it is utterly fantastic.

Most Russian voters grew up uninterested in politics and cynical about politicians to begin with. After all, they were raised under a system that displayed a stark contrast between the loftiest principles and an arbitrary and callous way of ruling. Perhaps this is one reason for Zhirinovsky’s popularity; he scarcely bothers to disguise his cynicism.

The Soviet system, by constantly exhorting the people to behave better and never admitting any mistakes, transmitted the message that if things go badly, it is the people’s fault, not the government’s. This message gives a content to the intense class prejudice that permeates Russian society. Ordinary people have felt scorned and blamed; one of the commonest Russian working-class gestures is the cupped hand moving downwards, expressive of the concept “contempt.” People who are blamed want to blame back; there is in Russia an enormous reservoir of free-floating resentment that is seeking an object.

Harnessing this resentment to a political agenda has proved difficult so far because the communist system bred political apathy: no action on your part could ever affect the behemoth that was grinding you down. Political participation takes two leaps of faith: first, that politics can in some way influence the concrete conditions of your life; second, that you can have any influence on politics. Most Russians understandably do not make either leap of faith. Without stable political parties, it is difficult to establish any connection between a vote and a policy.

I believe that much of the discussion of the December election has missed the underlying problem. The problem is less fascist politics than the absence of any genuine politics at all. Fascism you can fight, but how do you make politics appear out of nowhere?

The disintegration of the state makes it difficult for politics to deliver on its promises. Political choices will be most meaningful in the arena of provincial and city politics, an arena slighted by Yeltsin and Western diplomats alike. A sense that politics is meaningful might be created by organization and by patronage, but the universal aversion to anything that seems to smack of “neo-Bolshevism” will impede the formation of
parties, especially a government party capable of using patronage to hold together some sort of coherent ruling coalition.

Some of Zhirinovsky's voters do have real fascist attitudes, which are not rare in Russia. Most, however, are venting their resentments without any thought that there might be real consequences. I have noticed that supporters of Zhirinovsky often follow their announcement of this fact with a little nervous laugh, as if to say: "I know I'm being bad, but I don't care." Zhirinovsky is "bad"; he glories in it—that is part of his charm. By parading his own failures and inadequacies, moreover, as he does in his autobiography, he makes scorned people feel better.

To understand the social roots of the Zhirinovsky phenomenon, we must draw on a universe of discourse that is wider than that found in our Sovietology. The West Indian writer V.S. Naipaul in *The Middle Passage* describes the society of colonial Trinidad after the introduction of universal suffrage in this way:

Old attitudes persisted: the government was something removed, the local eminence was despised. The new politics were reserved for the enterprising, who had seen their prodigious commercial possibilities. There were no parties, only individuals. Corruption, not unexpected, aroused only amusement and even mild approval: Trinidad has always admired the "sharp character" who, like the sixteenth-century picaroon of Spanish literature, survives and triumphs by his wits in a place where it is felt that all eminence is arrived at by crookedness... This was an ugly world, a jungle, where the picaroon hero starved unless he stole;... where the weak were humiliated; where the powerful never appeared and were beyond reach; where no one was allowed any dignity and everyone had to impose himself.

Not every element of this picture is seen in Russia—there is more envy there—but most of it is. In such a society, there is no politics in any familiar sense because there is no public world constituted by a common good. Voters despise the authorities they raise up, and rulers resent serving them. The mere fact that you are a citizen and not a notable defines you as a failure in the ruthless competition that has succeeded communism.

Zhirinovsky gives the drifting resentments of ordinary Russians an outlet. Resentment is one of the main ingredients of the strange new kind of nationalism that is sprouting atop communism's grave. It results in hostility to other groups—to the point of inspiring ethnic cleansing—but it differs from nineteenth-century nationalism in that it does not help build a national *state*. This nationalism, as the Hungarian thinker G.M. Tamás has said, is not patriotism. Zhirinovsky has called for Russia to invade a long list of countries, but has proposed nothing to remedy Russia's lack of an effective army. Perhaps postcommunist nationalism can be described as the withering away of the state. The ethnic group
is a community that gives us significance, but without the need to obey anything external to ourselves.

This nationalism has about it something histrionic and false. It is not quite accidental that the new leader of Russian nationalism and anti-Semitism is apparently half-Jewish; its last leader, Ruslan Khasbulatov, was not an ethnic Russian either, but a Chechen Muslim from the Caucasus.

Russian public opinion has been mercurial, and it could shift again. Because the deepest roots of much of Russian opinion are not political, it is compatible with many specific types of politics. It is worth considering whether there is any kind of democratic appeal that could channel some of these feelings constructively.

Although we still know far too little about Zhirinovsky’s past, what we do know reveals a fascist of a strange kind. Zhirinovsky himself is “Jewish,” at least by an anti-Semite’s definition, and was even a leader of a Jewish KGB-front organization before the USSR crumbled. He was not, as far as we know, prominent in the Russian nationalist cultural and political activity that was going on so vigorously in the 1970s and early 1980s. It does seem clear that Zhirinovsky was moved into the political arena by the KGB, which put him forward as a candidate in the first Russian presidential election in June 1991 to take votes away from Boris Yeltsin and perhaps to scare the West. Zhirinovsky’s outrageous public statements seem to derive from a desire to get attention and to shock, and from a clownish urge to display his own inadequacies.

Until we know more about Zhirinovsky’s past, we must be willing to entertain alternative interpretations of the man himself. Zhirinovsky as committed fascist is not the only possibility: he might be unbalanced, but then again he might be a charlatan and mountebank. To a native of the southern United States, Zhirinovsky sounds less like Hitler than like the flamboyant Louisiana governor of the 1930s, Huey Long. Throughout his career, Zhirinovsky has served only causes that benefited him personally. Russians who have met privately with Zhirinovsky describe a Jekyll-and-Hyde transformation from the ranter of the public platform to a calm and reasonable man in the hotel suite. Of course, charlatanry need not exclude fanaticism altogether; consider Mussolini.

In the democracies, the political opportunist is a well-recognized type: the legislator who says whatever will please the voters or contributors, the bureaucrat who wants only to keep his record clean for a higher office or a lucrative job in the private sector. In settled times, opportunism conduces to safe, respectable politics; in unsettled, revolutionary times, to extremism. Revolutionary times typically cast up characters like Pierre Laval, who passed confidently from pacifism to socialism to Hitlerism, or Joseph Fouché, who went through successive incarnations as a fanatic Jacobin, and then as minister of police under the Directory, under Bonaparte, and under the restored Bourbons.
It is to such unstable periods that we must look if we wish to gain an understanding of the incentives that are now shaping Russian politicians and voters. Consider what a man like Zhirinovsky has lived through. He grew up under a system in which every utterance was closely regulated, and any deviation from orthodoxy very risky. Seven years ago, Gorbachev introduced glasnost; suddenly you could say almost anything. At first this new freedom was used by principled men like Andrei Sakharov to expound democratic principles. But Gorbachev’s attempt at “reform communism” failed; the Soviet Union disintegrated and the reformers who followed his flag were ruined. A new, more extreme wave of change started under the leadership of Boris Yeltsin, who used the Russian parliament against Gorbachev.

Then Yeltsin too seemed to be failing, at least in terms of the expectations that he originally aroused. A countermovement arose, employing against him the same bitter invective that he had so recently hurled at Gorbachev and also seeking to use the legislature as a weapon. In the final confrontation of autumn 1993, each side violated the Constitution and laws, and there was a final resort to force by both. Yeltsin won, and those who followed the other flag found themselves ruined, in some cases even jailed. Their prospects went up in smoke along with the Russian parliament building. Yeltsin’s people are the winners for now, but observing the fate of the losers in this game cannot help but make them anxious. The most alarming thing of all, however, is the realization that the prize—the state that they were fighting over—seems to have been damaged, perhaps beyond repair, in the course of the contest. First the Soviet Union fell apart, now Russia is doing so too; the provinces obey the central government only on some issues, and only some of the time. Even in Moscow, the army still seems to be deciding whether or not it will obey the president. This disintegration of the state is a problem of transition to democracy that social scientists did not foresee. Since October 1993, Yeltsin has had modest successes in reversing this drift, but the ultimate outcome is very uncertain.

What lesson can be gleaned from this sequence of events? To the sincere democrat, it teaches the need to be more serious, to learn from past failures, and somehow to find a way of gathering more and more dispersed resources to accomplish a more and more elusive goal. But what does it teach an intelligent, ambitious man who, like most people in the former Soviet Union, is not committed to any particular kind of politics? First, that politics, once so closed, is now wide open. Anyone can enter politics, and can say anything. Indeed, when there are
hundreds of ambitious candidates, dozens of parties without members, more than a dozen coalitions of parties competing in parliamentary elections, you can only distinguish yourself from the ruck of candidates and parties by saying what no one else will say, by calculated extremism and flamboyance. While the state may no longer be strong enough to enforce the law, it can still confer favors, so you can become rich and famous. Less clear, however, is whether you can achieve any public purpose. Public life is too chaotic, your footing too slippery, your public too fickle, exhausted, and disillusioned. Where such a process points has been better described by the great nineteenth-century historian of the French Revolution, Hippolyte Taine, than by the social science of our own day:

After ten years of mutual purges, among the three thousand legislators who had sat in the sovereign assemblies, there is not one who can count on the respect and the loyalty of a hundred Frenchmen. The social body is dissolved; for all its millions of disaggregated atoms, there does not remain even one nucleus of spontaneous cohesion and stable coordination. It is impossible for civic France to reconstruct itself; to do that is as impossible as to build a Cathedral of Notre Dame or St. Peter’s in Rome from the mud of the street and the dust of the roads.

Zhirinovsky has before him the example of figures like Ruslan Khasbulatov, who began as an apparently idealistic young advocate of perestroika and ended a few years later as a corrupt satrap who had gotten Brezhnev’s luxury apartment by pandering to communist and nationalist attitudes. The narrative I am sketching here might well be called “the education of Vladimir Zhirinovsky.”

The performance of Zhirinovsky’s party in December was not a victory of fascism, but the results were a further setback to the chances of a democratic future. The victory of the “right” in the December elections was less striking than the collapse of the center. Russia’s Choice, the culturally cosmopolitan party of rapid movement to the market, did passably, considering the disorder that has followed the partial implementation of its agenda, its cultural isolation from the Russian public, and Yeltsin’s mistake in not forming a “government” party. On the other hand, those parties and leaders that attempted to blend a basic acceptance of democracy and the market with the more and more popular “rightist” themes of Russian nationalism, continued subsidies for certain industries, and the “social safety net” did poorly: Sergei Shakhrai’s Russian Unity and Accord, the Russian Movement for Democratic Reforms of Anatoly Sobchak and Gavril Popov, and in a different sense, Arkady Volsky and his Civic Union were all in this group. The collapse of the center is no better news in Russia today than it was in Spain and Germany in the 1930s. Yeltsin has oddly chosen to entrust the government to a narrow bureaucratic segment of the defeated
center-right led by Prime Minister Chernomyrdin, although it was the radical populist and jingoist right that prospered in December.

As for Zhirinovsky, he could become president of Russia. Even if he is a charlatan who does not believe his own ideas, he will be partly their captive in the future. But even if Zhirinovsky does not gain power for himself, he has expanded the range of what can be successfully advocated in Russian politics. He will encourage more serious fascists, who certainly exist, and encourage Yeltsin to imitate his policy direction in the mistaken belief that its popularity is the sign of definite political views rather than of a vaguer malaise.

These developments will unfold in a Russia where the void created by the absence of a working constitutional order and economic system is filled only by a vague desire to live in a “normal” country, meaning one with Western constitutional practices, free elections, civil liberties, freedom of speech, markets, a nonbelligerent foreign policy, and so on. For most Russians, the prestige of these things rests not on their proven effectiveness but on a sense that they are now the only way. With Yeltsin and the Supreme Soviet in their struggle having broken most of these Western “rules,” however, it has become clear that they are not the only way. The rise of Zhirinovsky—a man who is willing to say anything—threatens to corrode these already fragile rules even further.

Many of the preconditions of fascism are now or will soon be present in Russia: hyperinflation, mass unemployment, seething status resentments, disillusion with democracy, a society that is de-Christianized but still craves “spirituality,” bitter border conflicts, constant fighting waged not by state armies but by freikorps-like volunteer groups, and residual socialist and nationalist feelings that have become disconnected from specific regimes and are awaiting fresh combinations. The aversion to violence, which was a barrier to any real fascism, has been breaking down since the Communists resorted to violence in a demonstration on 1 May 1993, and the Supreme Soviet and Yeltsin followed them in October.

The great remaining barrier to fascism is the overwhelming aversion to ideology, organization, and discipline found throughout Russian society. This aversion, obviously a reaction to communist excesses, is the source of many of Russia’s problems but also places a limit, for now, on how bad things can get. Without a disciplined organization to command, no leader, no matter how tyrannical his ambition, can move Russia. The recovery of a taste for organization and discipline thus would be a grave warning sign. Today, what separates Russia from Weimar is the experience of having lived under actual totalitarianism: Wilhelmine Germany was not comparable to Stalinist Russia. It is worth repeating that communism was unique in human history. If something terrible and inhumane follows it, that system will be as hard to recognize, and as hard to respond to, as fascism was in its time.