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What Has Happened to Russian Society?

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The human costs of the Soviet regime were unquestionably and unbearably high. Few would argue for a return to the political repression, pervasive economic and bureaucratic inefficiency, corruption, and general malaise that plagued late Soviet society. From the perspective of the Russian people, however, not everything about the Soviet Union was bad. In particular, an extensive and universal social safety net was an important positive element of Soviet rule. Free education and health care, a comprehensive and diverse system of pensions and social benefits, job security, extensively subsidized housing, basic foodstuffs, public transportation, child care, and vacations all contributed to a meager but reliable floor of living standards for the vast majority of the Soviet people. Upward social and economic mobility may have been severely limited, but there was little reason to worry about slipping down the socioeconomic ladder.

Despite ubiquitous and sarcastic undercurrents about the flaws in the safety net and the inadequate labor incentives provided by the command economy ("we pretend to work, they pretend to pay us" being the most popular expression of a common sentiment), the implied social contract of the Soviet era was a critical thread in the fabric of Soviet society. People accepted a low standard of living in exchange for economic and social security and equity. While economic inequalities did indeed exist in the form of an extensive network of perks and privileges for the politically powerful and well

connected, they were carefully and mostly successfully hidden. To the extent, therefore, that Soviet consumers were aware of and craved unavailable luxury or convenience items—or even basic essentials of decent quality—there was a sense that the lack of consumer goods affected everyone equally. Everyone enjoyed the security of a rudimentary but all-encompassing social welfare network. On the flip side, living standards were not high, and the routine inconveniences born of material shortages were a constant irritant, but these too were a universally shared fate.

This common economic and social circumstance, together with a slow but gradual improvement in living standards during the late Soviet period, was a critical source of societal cohesion. A significant portion of the Soviet Union's national identity and political legitimacy derived from its provision of social benefits. As long as everyone viewed the state as the guarantor of some basic level of material comfort and survival, and to the degree that this guarantee extended universally to all segments of the population, the Soviet people could "buy in" to at least some portion of the regime's propaganda about the success of the socialist experiment.

Over the last decade, the stress of market reform has ripped apart the Soviet safety net. The jolt of the sudden transition to capitalism has left the state unable to maintain the bulk of the social benefit package that generations took for granted, producing unprecedented poverty, material inequities, and socioeconomic schisms. As a result, Russian society has become unanchored. One of its major sources of national identity and cohesiveness—the perception of socialist equity—has been fractured. The high expectations engendered by the early promises of reform have been devastated by a decade's worth of suffering and hardship. The Russian people's well-documented yearning for order and stability derives at least in part from nostalgia for the days when the social safety net was intact, and when life for many was not consumed by a daily struggle for basic survival.

Collapse of the Safety Net and Its Social Implications

The Russian government's acceptance of fiscal responsibility in the early 1990s forced it to slash social spending. Budgets for schools, kindergartens, health facilities, sanatoria, day care, and myriad other formerly state-provided services plummeted. At the same time, workplace-based social benefits, substantial during the Soviet era, were also eroded by the sudden demand for enterprises to either become profitable or go out of business. Inflation decimated savings, and wage and benefit increases could not keep up with even more rapidly rising prices. The state could no longer afford to subsidize a basic floor of material living standards for the entire population.

As a result, a significant percentage of the Russian people has sunk into poverty. Anecdotal horror stories surrounding this phenomenon abound: the grandmother arrested in Ryazan in October 2000 for trying to sell her grandson for $90,000 so that his organs could be removed and sold in the West, or patients in Omsk with multi-drug-resistant tuberculosis marketing their disease-saturated phlegm to desperate customers anxious to infect themselves so that they can buy food with the money from a disability pension. But these sensationalist accounts should not mask the larger and more important fact that 30 to 40 percent of Russians now grind out a living below the poverty line, with those estimates varying depending on how poverty is defined. Most analysts agree, however, that the government's definition of a "minimum subsistence" income—the amount of money required to purchase a basket of basic food and other consumer goods, and the figure on which pensions, child allowances, and other post-Soviet-era benefits are based—is woefully meager. In other words, these poverty levels, at monthly incomes of around $30 to $45, or the equivalent of less than a dollar a day, represent real hardship. One analysis in early 2001 showed that the minimum monthly income in Novgorod oblast could barely feed five cats. Bread production in Russia continues to increase each year, since it remains one of the few affordable staples as the overall purchasing capacity of the population dwindles. For the average Russian citizen, consumption levels have fallen by half since 1992, and only one family in six is better off now than it was then.

The root causes of poverty in today's Russia are unemployment and low-paying jobs. Although official unemployment figures hover around 2 percent, these statistics are notoriously difficult to interpret. On the one hand, they mask a significant level of underemployment among workers still officially categorized as enterprise employees but who actually perform little or no work and therefore receive few or no wages. These "unpaid vacations" may encompass as much as another 7 to 8 percent of the workforce. On the other hand, the official statistics also miss what may be a significantly larger phenomenon, the substantial number of people working in the shadow economy, with wages paid off the books (largely for purposes of tax evasion). But these workers' unreported incomes most often involve unskilled labor,

poor work conditions, and low pay. Both reported and unreported wage rates in Russian industrial enterprises and business offices remain frequently at levels comparable to developing countries, meaning that getting a job is no security against poverty.

Poverty in today's Russia is also largely a female phenomenon. In the late 1990s, nearly 80 percent of Russia's unemployed people were women. The vast majority of single parents are women, and more than 80 percent of them have no job at all. The Russian labor code guarantees that a new mother can take a three-year unpaid leave without losing her job, but employers almost never comply, and many employers hesitate to hire a woman with small children for fear that she will take frequent sick leave. Few single mothers receive child support, and the alimony law is rarely enforced. Bureaucratic red tape has prevented many of the neediest single parents from claiming the scanty, traditionally untargeted child benefit offered by the state; only 30 percent of the poorest families claim their monthly child stipend.

Although Russian culture still prides itself on cherishing its children as a precious national asset, the declining material and social position of children has been one of the most alarming consequences of the post-Soviet transition. The single most potent predictor of poverty during the transition period has been the birth of an additional child to a family. The poverty rate among families rises steadily with the number of children, to the point where nearly three-fourths of families with four or more children are poor. Thanks to these economic trends, well over a million children in Russia aged fourteen to eighteen have been unable to finish high school in the last decade.

Substandard living conditions are taking their toll on children's health, starting at the very beginning of life. According to the Russian Academy of Medical Sciences, because of an overall decline in the health of the population, poor prenatal care, and other factors, only 30 percent of Russian births can now be classified as "normal." Leading Russian physicians speak of the "deceleration," or the mental and physical deterioration, of children and teenagers. More than 70 percent of Russian young people aged ten to fifteen suffer from chronic diseases, the number of disabled persons in that age group is growing at an alarming rate, and the incidence of mental disorders among teenagers has increased fourfold in the last decade.These statistics are troubling in and of themselves, but when put into sociodemographic context—this is the post-Soviet generation that is supposed to transform Russia into an energized, market democracy—they are genuinely alarming.

The most extreme manifestation of these negative trends is the problem of abandoned and orphaned children. In the words of one orphanage director, "I can tell how bad things are by the way families are starting to ask us to take their children. Families in Russia are falling apart." Networks of foster care and adoption services are still underdeveloped, and therefore almost 700,000 children must live in orphanages. Having been raised in an institutional environment, these children do not have positive long-term prospects. According to recent Russian government estimates, 40 percent of them will end up in prison, and another 30 percent will become alcoholics. Even more striking, the country is now home to between one and four million homeless children, with that number largely dependent on the weather; more kids take to the streets in the summer months and return home when the cold becomes unbearable. This seasonal variation hints at the peculiar nature of this "social orphanhood"—more than 90 percent of these street children have one or more living parents who have simply lost the psychological or material wherewithal to raise their offspring (usually due to alcoholism or unemployment). Either they have voluntarily abandoned their sons or daughters, or the state has stripped them of parental rights. The number of these social orphans at present is higher than that at any point in Russia's history, including any postwar period.

The plight of parentless children is but one manifestation of the breakdown of the Russian family. Elderly Russians are increasingly neglected, becoming known as the new *bezprizorniki* (unsupervised ones) because their adult children are too busy with their own lives to attend to the needs of their parents. On the whole, however, elders are generally better off than children and single parents, since the pension system is one of the few elements of the social safety net that has remained a political priority. Divorce, while remaining at about the same rate as in Soviet times, is increasingly costly for women and children. The number of weddings has declined over the last decade. More and more children are being born out of wedlock. An increasing number of intact families are opting not to have children at all, or to have just one child. In the last ten years, the number of children in Russia has dropped by over four million, a manifestation of declining birth and fertility rates. While some of this drop stems from medical infertility, much is due to conscious choice. Low birthrates are a direct message from people who have lost faith in their society and who have little confidence that their social and economic circumstance is likely to improve. A recent survey of new mothers in one Russian region showed that 14 percent had

reacted with horrified, suicidal feelings upon learning that they were pregnant, wondering how they would possibly support a new, dependent life. Little wonder that there are two abortions for every child born in Russia.

Women's degraded economic positions have caused them to suffer in other ways as well. Hundreds of thousands of women have voluntarily turned to a life of prostitution, and tens of thousands more have been duped into sex slavery through an extensive European and Asian network of trafficking in women. At home, Russian women are now, even more than in Soviet times, routinely the victims of domestic violence. Between 12,000 and 16,000 Russian women each year are killed by their spouses, and another 50,000 suffer severe injuries—ten times the comparable U.S. figures. Only six shelters for abused women exist in the entire country, all the result of private or local initiatives. Russian culture still sees victims as somehow "deserving" their fate, and a lack of legal protection follows those cultural assumptions.

This view of women is unsurprising, given the blatant sex discrimination and sexualization of women that have accompanied the market reform process. The ideological doctrine of socialist gender equity has given way to a routine of overtly sexist remarks during parliamentary debates, job advertisements that specify positions for "attractive" females under age thirty *bez komplexov* (without complexes, or willing to perform sexual favors), and open street vendor sales of sexually explicit publications. One mid-1990s survey indicated that over half of Russian women had been the recipient of sexual advances by their job supervisors.

Not surprisingly, breakdown at the societal and family level is producing individual-level pathologies as well. One in three Russians now has psychological problems, a 50 percent increase in the last decade, and the country's suicide rate is among the highest in the world (and four times the U.S. rate). Work hours lost to psychological problems have significantly affected the country's economic productivity. Over the last ten years, disability certification for mental health reasons has grown more dramatically than for any other kind of illness. Meanwhile, Russia's mental health care infrastructure can accommodate only about 200,000 people, far below the capacity needed to cope with this growing problem, and even that network of facilities is rapidly decaying for lack of resources and investment.

Of course, the most well-known and visible manifestation of Russians' inability to cope with the stresses of the post-Soviet transition is the vodka bottle. The average Russian man now drinks three half-liter bottles of vodka each week, and consumption levels appear to be steadily increasing. Alcohol is clearly a major contributor to the country's demographic crisis, accounting as it does for the growing rate of traffic and industrial accidents and cardiovascular disease in middle-aged men. Alcoholic parents produce many, if not most, of the country's abandoned children. If the country had a functioning network of battered women's shelters, it would be filled with victims of domestic violence perpetrated by drunken boyfriends and husbands. Yet vodka remains cheaper than milk, supported by a state that relies on almost $500 million in annual revenues from alcohol duties. Despite efforts by the health ministry to call attention to this problem, the government continues programs such as rewarding a few select oblasts over the May 2001 holidays with additional vodka allocations as a prize for "good work" carried out during the preceding twelve months. A draft law that would limit advertising for alcoholic beverages and promote public health campaigns about alcohol consumption has remained stalled for several years.

Illegal drug use is also a growing problem, to the point where the health ministry refers to it as an epidemic. Between three and five million Russians are regular drug users. One-third of the country's urban population has tried illegal substances at least once. The rate of drug addiction has increased more than sevenfold in the last decade, with an even greater explosion among children and teenagers and a pattern of usage in which Russian young people abandon "light drugs" for heroin and other more dangerous narcotics far more quickly than is the norm in other countries. Russian specialists are also concerned about a recent drop in the age threshold for drug use, from sixteen or seventeen a few years ago to twelve and thirteen today. Injectable drug use is the almost exclusive transmission vector for Russia's growing HIV/AIDS problem.

Illicit drugs have also been a major factor in the country's surge in violent crime. Although crime rates fell slightly in the late 1990s, current levels still represent a significant increase over the Soviet period. Coupled with an unwieldy, often arbitrary judicial system, these crime levels have bestowed Russia with the world's largest prison population. One out of every four Russian adults has either been in one of the country's overcrowded, brutality-ridden prisons or has had a family member there. The government's attempts to reform its penal system have generally involved mass amnesties, with the unfortunate result that tens of thousands of actively infected tuberculosis patients—Russia's jails are the main breeding

grounds for a sweeping tuberculosis epidemic—have been released into the general population.

Inequity and the Search for a Unifying Idea

Perhaps most important in terms of societal cohesiveness, the stratification of society according to income level has increased dramatically during the post-Soviet period. The gap between rich and poor is steadily growing, as is the absolute number of both very rich and very poor. At the end of the year 2000, salaries for the 10 percent of households with the highest income in Russia were thirty-two times those in the lowest income decile, and the richest households' total incomes were forty-four times higher. The new rich, or "New Russians"—former Communist Party leaders, bureaucrats, and others who had the skills, connections, and good fortune to take advantage of the opportunities presented by the transition—rapidly became objects of considerable scorn in the early and mid-1990s. Their combination of garish displays of excessive wealth and lack of education and manners made them the butts of a whole new genre of jokes. (Two New Russians meet on the street. "Hey, Vasya, where'd you get your nice tie?" "At the Valentino store. Cost me $2,000." "That's nothing, I know where you can get the same tie for $5,000!") But their profligate spending, particularly in Moscow and other major cities, drove up the price of new housing, public entertainment, and other goods to the point that ordinary people suddenly found those things out of reach. The new poor, by contrast, are those who work for the government or other still-public industries, including a wide array of skilled workers and former intelligentsia. They have suffered through the humiliation of meager and often late wage payments, or in-kind compensation in the form of goods like bras, caskets, and manure, and the need to supplement the scientific or technical positions that continue to harness their intellectual capacities with second and sometimes third jobs as taxi drivers, cooks, or janitors.

One of the Russian government's economic development strategy reports of late 2000 described the situation in these terms: Socioculturally and economically, two unequal social layers have formed over the last decade. About one-fifth of the population has maintained or improved its standard of living since the Soviet era, and a minority of those, about 5 to 7 percent of the population, have been able to adopt an essentially Western lifestyle, com-

plete with modern spending and consumption habits. These people hav been able to transcend Soviet assumptions and mind-sets regarding the per sonal work ethic and the appropriate role of the state. To them, the free mar ket rewards those with skills, tenacity, and ingenuity. Their post-Sovie success has rendered the collapse of the old safety net irrelevant to them they no longer need its protections. By contrast, the almost half of Russian who are subject to persistent poverty have become jealous and indignan over the new inequities. In their world, growing inequities have little to d with the natural results of free market competition. Instead, success for th few has stemmed not from hard work but from dishonesty and *blat* (polit ical and social connections). The gap between expectations and reality fo these people has been psychologically as well as economically devastating The disappointment and resentment among those who mistakenly though they would benefit from the marketization of the economy have been pro found, particularly when success seems often to stem from criminal behav ior and financial speculation rather than the production of legitimate good and services. Surveys have repeatedly shown that most Russians view th primary beneficiaries of the transition period as "swindlers and manipula tors," while few agree that ordinary, honest people have reasonable oppor tunities to increase their incomes and living standards. Hard work and good education do not necessarily translate into a better life, and to the lim ited extent that they do, the latter is increasingly difficult to obtain. Declin ing public support for education and the rise of expensive private school at all levels have seriously diminished one of the few remaining channels o social mobility.

The dynamic of this new, very public division of society into the have and have-nots has exacerbated centuries-old Russian anger at the separatio and exploitation of the masses by their masters. The well-known mantr about what the Russian people currently crave—order and stability— encompasses not just social and economic stability but also a fundamenta sense of social justice. The gap between winners and losers in post-Sovie Russia still may not match the level of inequality in the United States, bu the rate of explosion of inequality in Russia has been so rapid that peopl indoctrinated in the socialist mind-set have had little time to adjust. As result, Russia has lost all sense of a common national identity. In the mids of socioeconomic chaos, no common set of unifying principles has emerge to replace the ideal, flawed as it was, of Soviet socialism. Gorbachev's pere stroika undermined much of Russian tradition, forcing society to questio

its history, its political culture, its achievements as a superpower, the essence of its national dignity. For over a decade since then, the Russian people have been struggling with questions that cut to the core of their identity. What values do we hold? What values do we want to transmit to our next generation? How can we regain a sense of pride and patriotism? For a few, the answer has been found in Western-style individualism born of the free market and of liberal political democracy. For the majority, however, that path has been tainted by the stain of crass commercialism and materialism and the gross inequities produced by shock therapy.

Those people have struggled to find alternative social moorings. They feel isolated and abandoned. Most say that they can now count only on themselves in times of trouble; only a small minority claim they can rely even on family and friends. Only 30 percent are able to recall anything positive that has happened to them recently. Moscow's most popular radio station airs catchy tunes with lyrics that reflect the pessimism of post-Soviet life, songs about war, death from hepatitis, and, most strikingly, a number one single from early 2000 called "You Have AIDS (and That Means We Will Die)." This national malaise indicates that Russia continues to suffer a wrenching psychological upheaval. The symptoms of its discontent extend far beyond what would be considered "normal" for a country undergoing the pangs of economic development, or even the sacrifices now routine for a postsocialist transition. Almost nobody has had confidence in the ability of public authorities to put the country back on the right track.

A dramatic cultural sea change has formed an integral part of this national identity crisis. Even factory workers and taxi drivers in the Soviet era could recite Pushkin, wax lyrical about the latest achievements of the Kirov ballet and the Chekhov theater, or discuss the finer philosophical nuances of Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky. Stagnant as life may have been under Brezhnev, it afforded people time and energy to think private thoughts and to place those ideas within a rich cultural context. The transition to the market swept away this luxury. Pushkin and Tolstoy have been replaced with the most base and commercial representations of Western popular culture, with billboards sporting half-naked women advertising Levi-Strauss *dzhinsy* (jeans) or Marlboro cigarettes. The television and film industries have become similarly dominated by American imports. Only 10 percent of the movies shown in Russian theaters in the mid-1990s were actually produced in Russia. And the domestic Russian media have responded by sinking to the lowest common denominator. Representatives of the Russian Orthodox

Church have blamed Russian television and cinema for many of the pathologies currently plaguing Russian society, and one of Russia's leading film directors has accused Russian television of turning today's children into a "generation of monsters."

In practical terms, the most common response to the last decade's social and economic upheaval has been apathy, spiced with a generous dose of hopelessness. Cynicism reigns. There are no longer "honest" or "dishonest" ways to make money—just "easy" or "hard."[1] There have been practically no mass, public displays of discontent over the initial economic contraction in 1992, the financial crash in 1998, and the months' and years' worth of nonpayment of salaries. Instead, only a small minority of people express an interest in protest actions. Most Russians avoid reading about or discussing politics at all.

Those few who do seek political expression of discontent are increasingly turning to extremist outlets. A small but expanding number of young people, even those with good jobs and higher educations, are joining radical communist and socialist groups to protest wage inequalities and economic dislocations. Even more disturbing are the growing ranks of neo-Nazi youth groups across Russia that have been violently targeting non-Russians, particularly those from the Caucasus and Asia. Of the distinct minority of Russian youth who express a strong interest in politics—no more than 5 or 6 percent of the total—over half claim to favor fascism. The two Chechen wars have provided more than ample fuel to this fire. Although it would be inappropriate to exaggerate the scope of these trends at the present time, it is a situation likely to be exacerbated if the Russian government pursues its currently proposed policy of increased immigration as a solution to its demographic problems.

Russian youth, although more individualistic, entrepreneurial, and adaptable than their parents, may be the most severely impacted by this crisis of values. Society has not offered them the *vospitanie* (the process of deliberate instilling of society's positive values) that their parents enjoyed, primarily because society has been uncertain about what those values are. Their formative years have been ones of turbulence and upheaval. Unable to derive meaning from society as a whole, lacking crucial societal anchors, many of them seem to believe in nothing larger than themselves. While this may bode well for their ability to survive in a competitive market economy, it also has led a significant number of them into a life of crime; well over half of Russia's racketeers are under thirty years old, and the crime rate for juveniles

under eighteen is higher than that for adults. The country desperately needs a mechanism to reengage its young people and harness their considerable energies in a productive direction.

Sources of Societal Cohesion and Identity

How has Russian society survived this assault on its most basic structure and principles? Russian people and families have relied on a variety of coping mechanisms. Some involve social structures held over from the Soviet past; others have newly emerged from the chaos of market reform. Primary among the former are informal interpersonal networks. These "kitchen table" groups are close circles of family and friends that, during the Soviet era, served not only as trusted confidants but also as networks of mutual provision of scarce consumer goods. Now, in many cases, these informal circles continue to provide material and psychological support, serving as the primary or only remaining source of cohesion and stability for many people. A similar psychological and economic impact is being engendered by intergenerational transfers of wealth. It is well known that some young adults who have navigated the transition period relatively successfully have financially supported their less adaptable middle-aged parents throughout the last decade. Recent studies have further indicated that family survival in many other instances is being maintained almost entirely by older Russians "giving until it hurts" to their adult children and grandchildren, particularly in rural areas—food from the dacha, money, whatever they have.[2] The importance of these informal, uneven patterns of exchange, particularly in the villages, should not be underestimated. They have prevented famine in a country that has indeed known famine in the last century. They render a significant number of Russia's poor less so than they might appear on the surface and provide an important source of social "glue" that holds families and rural communities together.

In addition, many Russians are returning to the symbols, if not fully to the substance, of the Russian Orthodox Church. Well over half of Russians now call themselves Orthodox, and millions of baptisms were performed in the aftermath of the Soviet collapse. The Church has deliberately tried to place itself at the center of a post-Soviet Russian national identity, referring repeatedly to a uniquely Orthodox "Russian idea" or "Russian soul." But over the last decade, while successful in opening new parishes and monasteries,

the Church has been less effective in bringing its essence to the center of people's lives. Basic knowledge of Orthodox doctrine and theology remains low. As a result, many Russians have turned to other faiths, a phenomenon to which the Orthodox Church has responded jealously. It has masterminded a law that restricts, and may ban, the activity of many of the thousands of non-Orthodox religious groupings in Russia, excepting only those deemed "traditional," such as Islam and Judaism. Officially sanctioned discrimination against religious minorities, to the extent that it fosters a climate of divisiveness and intolerance, may undermine spirituality and religion as a sustainable source of family stability and societal cohesion.

Russia is also now home to a burgeoning network of over 300,000 nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), with many designed to provide families and individuals with social services and support. The obstacles these groups face are substantial, from ridiculous bureaucratic registration requirements to monitoring of their activities by the FSB. Fundraising also remains problematic for these groups, although some are now beginning to navigate the waters of public-private partnership, and others have been blessed by the largesse of well-known tycoons like Vladimir Potanin and Boris Berezovsky anxious to create positive public images for themselves through philanthropy. And many of them still suffer from public suspicion based on the fact that corrupt businessmen and politicians often set up illegitimate NGOs for purposes of money laundering. Nevertheless, some of Russia's most talented people are choosing careers in this "third sector." To the extent that they grow and thrive, these networks of NGOs may prove instrumental in progress toward a climate of self-generated social welfare to replace the paternalistic model of state provision. Even more important, to the extent that they can link their efforts through regional and national associations, they can provide the foundation for a genuine civil society, creating a sense of "common good" and perhaps also the foundation of a stable, liberal democracy.

Government authorities have also recently attempted quite deliberately to reestablish a positive, distinctively Russian national identity. In a transparent effort to build a new foundation for political legitimacy, President Putin is overtly cultivating a new patriotism, a new national pride—a sense that the country's past and present are nothing to be ashamed of and an attempt to step out of the shadow of a decade of socioeconomic turmoil and more recent disasters such as the sinking of the *Kursk*. The restoration of the old national anthem was the first step; the second was the return of basic

military training and patriotism classes to the public schools. In March 2001, the government announced a full-blown, $6 million "patriotic education" program designed to counter a wave of "indifference, individualism, cynicism, unmotivated aggression, and disrespect for the state" evident since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Over the next five years, the project will attempt to reshape the education system through new history and other textbooks, influence the mass media (with prizes offered to journalists, writers, and filmmakers whose work exemplifies the goals of the program), and create a network of "military-patriotic youth clubs" around the country. Whether these efforts are intended to foster positively directed Russian nationalism or a cult of personality around Putin himself is debatable, but in many ways they are clearly falling on fertile ground. Recent consumption patterns—Russian products are now preferred over Western brands, and not just because of the price differentials with imported goods resulting from the August 1998 ruble devaluation—and numerous public opinion polls are now revealing a rejection of things Western. Consumer nationalism is leading advertisers to stress the "Russian-ness" of their products, even if those products are made by Western firms. A newly launched candy bar from U.S. confectioner Mars, for example, is called "Derzhava"—the Russian word for "power" and an unofficial slogan of the strong Russian state.

One important constituency for this new, positive Russian nationalism is the emergent middle class. Significant evidence suggests that this new middle class has energetically arisen from the rubble of the 1998 financial crisis—middle class not only in income and wealth but also in outlook and behavior. They vacation abroad. They frequent cinemas and theaters and the country's most recent craze, bowling alleys. On average, they hold a significantly more optimistic view of the future than the rest of the population. Many of them are young professionals who believe in the virtue—and in the possibilities—of hard work, and they are determined to build a Russia within which they and their children can succeed. They manage to save some money, and they purchase major durables such as cars and houses. They typically invest whatever profit they make back into their ventures, creating jobs and the foundation for a stable economic base. Although it constitutes no more than 10 to 15 percent of the population, remains vulnerable to shifts in the economy, and is located primarily in Moscow and a handful of other major cities, this emergent social stratum, plugging the gap between rich and poor, could

serve as a powerful foundation of the necessary context for stability and cohesiveness. It is a significant cause for optimism.

Conclusion: Looking to the Future

The Russian people have been subjected to seemingly unbearable humiliation and hardship over the last decade. It is hard not to ask why they have tolerated it. Why are masses of impoverished, disaffected, alienated Russians not marching in the streets, demanding an improvement in their living conditions and in their social environment? Some Russian analysts cynically—but perhaps with a grain of truth—claim that the history of the Russian masses demonstrates a love of suffering, a craving for martyrdom. Others observe that many Russians have quite evidently chosen a more individualistic form of protest through withdrawal to the vodka bottle or the heroin needle or, more broadly, through withdrawal from active participation in society as a whole. Still others might cite a fear of disorder, of even more disruptive and destructive chaos if significant demands for change are made. And many observe that most Russians have been too preoccupied and exhausted by the daily struggle for survival to muster up the necessary energy to complain. Centuries-old Russian stoicism certainly goes a long way toward explaining the Russian people's acceptance of their fate; for example, an older Russian looking back on her life might observe that the last decade represents just one of many ups and downs for Soviet and Russian society.

Perhaps the cultivation of symbols and slogans can serve as a rallying point around which people can restore the national identity they so desperately need. But resurgent patriotism, no matter how heartfelt, will not erase the grinding poverty and gross inequities that continue to plague the Russian socioeconomic landscape. The most important social questions for Russia today cannot be solved by surface propaganda. They can be addressed only by moving a large number of the truly depressed people and places throughout the Russian Federation stably into that new middle class. Putin's call to patriotism will ring hollow—or hypocritical—unless supported by successfully implemented policy to achieve noticeable improvements in the lives of the majority of the Russian people.

Notes

1. Vladimir Chuprov and Julia Zubok, "Youth and Social Change," in *Russian Society in Transition*, ed. Christopher Williams, Vladimir Chuprov, and Vladimir Staroverov (Aldershot, U.K.: Dartmouth Publishing Group, 1996), p. 132.

2. Cynthia Buckley, "Family Matters: Intergenerational Wealth Transfers and Survival Networks," paper presented as part of the conference *From Red to Gray: Aging in the Russian Federation* at the University of Texas, Austin, April 6, 2001.