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A New Russia - or the Same Old Russia? An Alternative Worldview in the Making

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"Our life is like a tear trembling on the tip of an eyelash." For almost the entire past decade, this maxim has now proved to be true for most ordinary Russian citizens. During this time we have all lost a great deal and we have acquired a great deal.

A great many people have said many things about the losses and acquisitions of the last decade, which (following Nikolai Berdiaev's well-known periodization), I would call the Sixth Great Turning Point in Russian history. If we were talking about changes "external" to the lives of ordinary people—the economic, social and political transformations in Russian society - there would be little I could add. My aim, though, is to talk about the "internal" changes that have occurred, and are still occurring, in the psyche, consciousness and behavior of the ordinary people of this nation. And here there is much that is not known—either by the broad public or by specialists - including social scientists, politicians and government officials. These issues - the personal life, feelings and experiences of the common man - are usually ignored, considered immaterial against the backdrop of global social processes.

Which changes am I planning to discuss here? First: the magnitude and direction of emotional changes, the nature of the psychological experiences undergone by the general population, those engendered by the crisis of Russia's social and governmental system. Second: The transformation of social attitudes, changes in value systems, and the ensuing slow evolution of the worldview and stereotypes held by ordinary Russians. Third: the particular, often situationally adaptive changes in the Russian people's behavior in response to changes in the external, the "big" life.

Of course, in this essay I will only be able to examine superficially a few of the numerous and diverse adaptations Russians have made to the new conditions in their lives. As a social psychologist, I was able to record these changes during the 1992-1999 period, when I organized and conducted 19 sociological expeditions, studying problems in towns, regions, and the nation generally.

I began my observations of the changes occurring in the very depths of social life in 1992, the first and perhaps the most difficult year of "shock therapy," whose consequences our society experienced suddenly and painfully. At first my observations were episodic and unsystematic, partly because I lacked funds and partly because local officials had no interest in my work. But by 1995, the research became more systematic, thanks almost entirely to the assistance of the Russian State Foundation for the Humanities in Moscow, and later the Novosibirsk municipal administration as well.

In order to make the picture of changes taking place in Russia objective and complete, I chose as subjects for permanent observation members of three social-professional strata sharply differentiated by lifestyle and type of work (and who therefore reacted differently to external changes and understood the prospects of the social reforms and their own place in society in different ways). These groups were: (a) professional scholars, who are more capable than others of reflecting on the changes taking place in society; (b) the work force of a major industrial city as the "locomotive of contemporary history"—the main driving force of any social change (here I was limited to research only in Novosibirsk, population 1.6 million); and (c) ordinary folk living in the villages and small towns of provincial Russia. This last group comprises most of Russia, not only in the quantitative sense (no less than 60 percent of the population), but also as the most extensive social substratum. In this essay I

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will primarily discuss the results of my observations of the third category of the population. From my point of view, it is precisely the changes that remain hidden, or go unnoticed by those at the "heights" of society, those taking place among society's ordinary members, which will create, sooner or later, what will be the "Sixth Russia."

To be sure, the risk of error in extrapolating a multitude of individual facts is always great, but (to paraphrase Goethe) a fact, even when confirmed many times, is worth nothing without intellectual intuition. That is why, relying exclusively on my own research - on interviews with more than 5,000 people conducted over the course of the last eight years - I will permit myself to suggest several general observations about the "internal flow of life" in Russia and give my highly subjective prognoses about its future direction.

Which changes, from my point of view, in the psyche of the ordinary Russian are most important to consider? Three points seem essential: 1) how well-adapted people feel to the new life; 2) how they plan their personal futures; and 3) their everyday emotional states.

Adaptation to the New Life

A significant number of my compatriots, in spite of a decade of changes, simply cannot adapt to the "new life" yet. There are far too few people in society who consider themselves well adapted or completely adapted to present-day economic and even social conditions. Scholars lacking empirical data about public opinion and self-evaluation usually assume that in Russian society approximately one fifth of the population is well adapted to the new life ("the favorites"); approximately one fifth to one fourth is poorly adapted ("the outsiders"); while the remaining one half to three fifths remain in an uncertain transitional state.

However, according to my observations based on annual surveys of the population of "provincial" Russia, not of major Russian cities or the capital, the picture turns out to be much more dismal. No more than one out of every ten persons (one tenth, by no means one fifth of the population) considers that he is one of "the favorites" of the new life and has already completely adapted to it. No less than five or six out of every ten persons simply cannot adjust to it at all (three fourths are "outsiders," not one quarter, as is commonly thought, although only about 10 percent consider that they are completely incapable of mastering the new rules of the game). The remaining three to four out of every ten persons (from one third to two fifths) are in an uncertain state: they themselves are not entirely sure whether or not they have adapted to this life over the past 10 years.

Thus there are grounds to think that up to 90 percent of the ordinary people in the nation not only do not consider themselves "masters of their lives," but do not even expect the slightest success. The reasons for this are numerous. The primary and most obvious reason is economic.

Perhaps the paradox of present-day life of ordinary people in Russia will be more understandable to the reader if I say that up to 60 percent of them are "Thoreaus" who live in more dangerous and remote woods than Henry David Thoreau did. In his classic book, *Walden*, or *Life in the Woods*, Thoreau mentions with some pride that he managed to spend only about \$62 during the eight months he voluntarily spent in the woods in the cabin he built on the shores of Walden Pond. If you accept the accuracy of an estimate made by the Federal Reserve Bank of

Minneapolis calculating the level of inflation from the 1860s to our time, one dollar in 1860 is equivalent to \$19.44 in 1999. Thoreau's expenses would thus be about \$1,200 today, or nearly \$150 a month (excluding food he grew on his own, such as potatoes, beans, peas, and corn). Measured by this standard, most of my countrymen in Russia's villages and small towns far outstrip the great American romantic on a scale of thriftiness and endurance alike. Because, when it comes to hard cash (not money which accrues as unpaid wages and remains only "paper money" for years - people have many thousands of paper rubles, but this is akin to an interest-free loan to the government), these rural people have only 20 to 100 rubles in cash each month - not \$150, but only \$1-4 per person in a family per month. And they have lived the *Walden* recluse's life (I have in mind only its material side) not for two years, but for nearly a decade. And like him, they grow and process their own food themselves. (So that the reader does not reproach me for making overly low quantitative analyses, I will add that according to my estimates, for the past two years the monthly income of a resident of the major city of Novosibirsk has averaged between \$45 and \$80).

Sadly, it is significant that the number of people who consider themselves adapted to the - new life has not increased throughout almost the entire decade. In surveys from 1994 on, their percentage remains within the five to ten percent range. The number of people who do not consider themselves capable of fitting into the new economic and social conditions is not decreasing, either.

However, simple straight line reasoning assumes that an increasing number of people will feel comfortable in the new socioeconomic conditions as they "enter the market." Perhaps this outcome was to have been expected if the reforms had been sustained and positive, and if they had ultimately promoted the stabilization of society. Unfortunately, the chaos of reforms and complete uncertainty about the future causes people to choose behavior strategies which are adaptive only in the short term, and may even turn out to be maladaptive over one or two year periods. This is why people feel unable to adapt. They understand this well, they see that "external life" tosses them ever newer surprises, each more unpleasant than the last, in the form of contradictory laws and government directives. For this reason they are not at all certain that the weapon they chose to use in the battle for their existence today will be as useful tomorrow.

Planning the Future and Emotional Stress

People always want peace and stability. And many are irritated and disoriented by the fact that in Russia most of us must constantly invent numerous, diverse, but essentially the most basic survival strategies and tactics in the battle for existence. The immediate reaction to this dilemma is that people sharply cut back long-range planning in their personal and professional lives. Their emotional state, the background of their everyday moods, suffers a steady decline.

My observations, especially since 1994, give, on the whole, a highly pessimistic picture of how drastically people's ability to plan ahead has been curtailed. According to the estimates of social psychologists, ordinary people in the Soviet period planned their futures one to three years ahead on average, and many planned five and more years ahead. The onset of the economic crisis, the emergence and growth of unemployment, and the government's nonpayment of wages, threatening everybody with the loss of all means of survival, caused most Russians (not only, say, factory workers or village dwellers, but even professional scholars) to cut back on their advance planning, especially of work activities, to periods of months and even weeks. It can be said with certainty that people's prospects for their lives diminished greatly within a very short period of time. By 1996-1998, a short but steady increase in long-term advance planning occurred; in some social groups the average estimates approached eight to ten months and one year. Starting in 1999, however, people found their prospects illusory once again and sharply curtailed advance planning to time periods similar to 1994.

I will cite some facts that sum up the mood during the last two years. Up to half of the population (more than 49 percent) completely refuses to plan their lives ahead in any fashion; another 15 percent plan no farther than six months in advance. It turns out that almost three quarters of the population does not see any long-term personal prospects under the still evolving social, political and economic conditions. Only one fourth of the population evaluates life prospects as either normal (from one year to three to five years) or extended (from five to ten or more years).

The situation is somewhat better when it comes to advance planning for work. Here one third of the people (36 percent) refuse to plan their future work in any way, and another 14 percent plan their work activity from a month up to half a year in advance. Exactly half the population. Of the remainder, a third of the population (34 percent) view their work plans in segments of from one year to three to five years ahead, and twelve percent see even farther into the future.

A sharp reduction in the time segments of life planning is, in my view, one of the most reliable markers of social instability. As soon as instability increases, most people cut back these time segments. The life perspectives I record among ordinary people attest to the depth of the psychological crisis in Russian society.

The second psychological reaction I have noted is a deterioration in the previous emotional state. People feel badly. But how badly? Here sociologists, psychologists, and physicians all agree in their opinions and in quantitative estimates. I will cite my own survey data for the past year (1999). Only one person in every ten (more precisely, about nine percent throughout the entire sample) responded that he is usually in a good or fine frame of mind (naturally, this group closely corresponds with those who consider themselves as having more or less successfully adapted to the new life). Less than 30 percent describe themselves as being in a normal psychological state. Thus, just under 40 percent now feel normal or good, i.e., are not experiencing emotional stress. But nearly two thirds of the populace, about 62 percent, evaluate their frame of mind pessimistically, while thirteen percent consider that they are experiencing very severe emotional tension.

The same group of respondents, however, when asked to characterize the moods of kith and kin in their immediate surroundings, gives a less favorable evaluation. In their opinion, only one in every seven persons close to them (comprising nearly thirteen percent) lives with feelings of certainty about the future and with

optimism in their hearts. Six out of every ten (63 percent) are seen as experiencing tension and uncertainty, while every fourth person (nearly 25 percent) is judged to be on the edge of a nervous breakdown (respondents refer to alarm and fear, irritation and aggression, apathy and ennui).

An increase in the level of emotional stress in the population was observable almost as soon as the economic reforms began in 1991-1992 (actually, at that time such research was episodic). Emotional tension appears to have reached its most severe level in 1995 and 1996. To use medical language, observations showed that from one-half to two-thirds of the population was in a state of acute emotional tension, while one-fifth to one-quarter and more was in a stage of chronic tension capable of developing into the most diverse somatic illnesses and neuropsychic disturbances. Over time, as they adapted psychologically, those experiencing acute emotional tension began to decrease in number. To this day, however, no less than one quarter of the population has a pathological emotional reaction to stress characterized by depressive phenomena. Moreover, the two methods for assessing the level of chronic emotional tension in society, public opinion surveys and psychological testing, coincide, registering 25 and 24 percent, respectively. To put it in dramatic terms: a quarter of the population of the nation is on the edge of breakdown. This is the sorrowful reality.

The Importance of Being Human: Spontaneous Safety Nets

But, given Russian society's present extremely gloomy and dismal psychological state, is there at least something reassuring on the horizon?

Of course there is. Positive, favorable psychological aspects of our lives do exist, and they are just as obvious and visible as the signs of emotional stress. I will direct my readers' attention to only two facts, which from my point of view are very significant.

First is the support which a person receives from family, close friends and colleagues at work. In our society (naturally, first and foremost in the environment of ordinary people, different from that in Western society in many ways), an individual gets tremendous moral, emotional and material support from his kith and kin. After all, it is very important to know that you won't perish if something happens to you and that many people will come to your aid, lend you a helping hand and pull you out of the abyss.

What proportion of our society, then, is confident of help and support from their family and close friends? According to my observations, no less than three-quarters (75 percent). Only a handful of individuals (up to five percent) admit that they do not receive any material help or moral support at all from their close ones. Less than ten percent of non-elderly adults in our society feel lonely. As far as I know, this is a much smaller percentage than, say in Western Europe, where up to 40 percent of people in that age group consider themselves lonely.

And a second positive fact: respondents everywhere, no matter where they live, note that their relations with their neighbors remain normal and sincere, no matter what difficulties and cataclysms the "external" life brings their way. Their community of neighbors, be it a small village or town, rural district or major city, retains its cohesion, mutual altruism and people's willingness to help one another. For more than four fifths of all those I polled, the immediate social environment they inhabit is genuinely native and close, and relations between people are friendly and well-meaning. Less than fifteen percent note that they live in a tense relationship to their immediate surroundings. And only a few individuals, less than three percent, consider relations between people in their communities bad or tense.

From my point of view, these two circumstances - the considerable psychological support people give one another and the high degree of social cohesion in communities of neighbors - stand out as the most crucial factors which support and hold together our society at its deepest, most grassroots level, no matter what disasters the outside world may bring.

The issue of change in the worldview and the socially instilled values of contemporary Russian society, which social philosophers have interpreted as a structural crisis of values in a society in crisis and undergoing reform, is gradually losing both acuteness and novelty.

Everybody already knows that something is occurring in the mentality of Russian society. But what is it specifically? In what direction are the shifts in the worldview moving, especially where it concerns the "ordinary man?" The opinions of researchers reflect uncertainty and conflict in direct proportion to the multitude of studies. Nearly all the social psychologists direct their attention to studying the transformations in the consciousness of the general population living in mid-size and large cities. But this is by no means the same

thing as the mentality of those living in small towns and villages. I will introduce the reader to several areas of change in everyday consciousness (mentality) which have emerged, primarily changes in the hierarchy of basic values and meanings of life for ordinary people in provincial Russia. In fact, knowledge of these changes makes it possible to predict, at least to some degree, our society's tendency to move either in the direction of modernization and structural renewal or toward an increase in traditionalism and further disintegration.

Subtly Changing Kaleidoscope of Values

Studies of the structure of peoples' value preferences are usually based on the well-known concepts of Abraham Maslow[2]. Five categories of values are present in each individual's basic value system, ranging from the simplest values, related to biological needs and physical safety, and the values of social ties, to the highest values of the individual's self-realization and self-actualization. Although clusters of values are ordered hierarchically on a social-normative scale, each person has his own hierarchy of preferred values. Society's ideal is for the normative and the individual hierarchies to be in accord with each other or to coincide. But the higher groups of values are dependent on the extent to which the lower values are satisfied. If the lower-values are not satisfied, the individual will prefer them to the higher values.

This significant implication of Maslow's theory, although logically obvious, has not been verified in a mass sampling, since it is impossible to create experimentally the conditions in which significant groups of people would be simultaneously deprived of opportunities to satisfy their higher needs. Inglehart's widely known research [3], which deals specifically with the stable societies of Western Europe, demonstrates the distinct shift in the individual hierarchy of values of Europeans away from the material (generally speaking, lower values) and toward the post-material ones (higher ones).

In my research into the dynamics of basic values, I have used the uniquely sad situation in my country where virtually everyone is forced to think primarily about the means for obtaining nourishment and securing safety for oneself and his family on a daily basis. My observations confirmed that the decrease in opportunities for satisfying their lower needs has forced people to alter their individual value systems. From year to year, during the entire period of my observations (begun in 1995), a rapid shift in this structure occurred for both men and women. Larger numbers of people began to find the values of physical safety and material well-being more important. The intensification of the economic crisis in August 1998, unexpected by many, influenced this shift especially strongly. For example, by the end of 1998 the number of people who considered the values of material well-being and safety most important had risen from 42 percent in 1995-1996 to 81 percent for women and to 74 percent for men.

The cluster of values associated with man's primary social status (social relations with family and close friends, family, love), which should occupy a significant place in the individual's value structure, now retreats farther and farther into the background. (The number of people in the population for whom these values remain most important in their individual hierarchy does not change, however; their percentage remains at 25 to 30 percent.) Above all, the relative importance of such values as freedom, beauty, understanding, creativity, equality between people, and social justice, declines. These values are all pushed lower and lower, to the very bottom of the list of the individual's values, and become insignificant.

What immediate consequences can such a shift in the value hierarchy have for most Russians, a process which apparently is moving in a direction opposite to that which Inglehart records for Western societies? The hypothesis of "social swings of values," which I developed in 1995 may help answer the question. When social structure is stable, society strives, with the aid of socio-regulatory mechanisms (above all education), to attain an uninterrupted and steady movement "up" the scale of values and to secure the most favorable conditions for individual growth. When stable social development is disrupted, however, "social swings" occur. Regulating and controlling mechanisms begin to weaken; traditional socializing arrangements begin to fail; and the individual receives fewer incentives to make "positive social efforts." During the shift of priorities downward in the values hierarchy, the values of physical safety gradually move to the fore.

But the downward movement cannot last indefinitely, nor can it be massive, since that would threaten society's very existence. As a self-organizing system, society is forced either to sue more powerful methods of control and regulation or to form analogous new ones (such contingencies are extremely rare and always leave scars in the social consciousness; witness the Inquisition, the Fascist and other dictatorships). These instruments are switched on as the final means to accomplish a mass "homecoming" of a society's members to an acceptable level of ritual and social behavior. If the mechanisms prove to be ineffective, the process evolves to its extreme point, which leads to the destruction of that society.

But just as the "lower" pole brings with it the destruction of societal structure, so the "higher" pole means social stagnation. In attaining of the level of "socially valuable individuality," society turns into a system organized along lines of expediency, as described in Plato's Republic. We do not know whether there are examples of societies that possessed mechanisms powerful enough to achieve an "ideal state" for their members. Since the meaning of life is defined only in ideological and religious terms, this "ideal" state eliminates the goals of life for each person. In a real society, however, the individual is in a state of "stable disequilibrium," forced by virtue of "social drive" to move up the scale of values, but constantly aiming to roll downhill because of natural factors. The instability of social development which periodically arises in any given society forces most of its members to balance on the "social swings" of values development. We are now witnessing such a pendulum swing in Russian society, where these "Swings" have essentially reached their lowest point.

The Transformation of Life Meanings

Another important sign of the transformation of social consciousness in Russia is the change in the meaning of life. C.W. Morris's classical culture-independent typology of life meanings[4], supplemented in the 1960s and 1970s by Carl R. Rogers[5], provided the methodological basis of my research into the meaning of life for ordinary people in this country. I initially planned to study only the structure of people's preferences with respect to the meaning of their private lives. However, the recorded structure proved to have a certain temporal trend. The observations made during 1995-1996 indicate that, in four cases, a completely definite direction can be traced thanks to reasons of a social nature.

There is a definite increase in the number of people in Russian society who consider that a simple, uncomplicated life based on the satisfaction of basic organic and material needs is most important in life. The proportion of those thinking this way has grown from seventeen to twenty percent over the past several years. An obvious interpretation suggests itself: the pushed-to-the-limit difficulties related to the necessity of physical survival increasingly force people to re-evaluate the meaning of life in favor of the most simple forms of existence.

At the same time, the number of people in Russian society for whom the meaning of life is found in activity, in an individualistic striving toward success, toward the achievement of a result, irrespective of difficulties, is also increasing. This goal, often considered not particularly characteristic of Russians (in our mentality it is usually associated with the "American individualistic model of life"), turns out to be a priority now for every fourth person! I do not possess reliable data for any period earlier than 1995 but, by indirect estimates, this life meaning was a priority then for only about seven to ten percent of ordinary people. One can believe that the reform years, in spite of all the negative consequences for the vital activity of people, have influenced this two- to three-fold growth in the number of those who rely primarily on themselves in their choice of life direction, rejecting the usual paternalistic patterns of our socialism.

At the same time, public preference for a paternalistically determined life direction, such as living for the sake of other people and aspiring to be of service to society, is decreasing. The number of people who identified this direction as most important element in their lives has decreased over the past five years by a factor of two: from ten to eleven percent to five to six percent.

Another socially oriented goal, to live in good conscience and honorably, participating responsibly in the affairs of society, has also declined in importance. According to my 1995-1996 research, those who indicated a preference for such goals comprised fifteen to sixteen percent. By the end of the 1998-1999 period, however, their number had decreased to less than ten percent.

All these changes and preferences in central life goals (impermanent and reversible, I think) can be interpreted rather obviously. The internal social ties that support Russian society's stability through the deep programming of its members' worldview are weakening. People feel less and less obligated to make unconditional sacrifices for the sake of society and its prosperity. At the same time, external circumstances, such as material hardships and the undeniable appeal of ideologies once unacceptable or forbidden also exert a most powerful pressure on people's consciousness and force them to re-evaluate life's meanings and priorities.

Meanwhile, I cannot ignore another important aspect: Russians, especially those living in villages and small towns, show a marked preference for what might be called a "Rogerian" meaning of life. In his day, the great psychiatrist Carl R. Rogers suggested adding to Morris's list of five basic life meanings a sixth and very important category: "to be who you actually are, to remain yourself under any and all circumstances." This

meaning of life is precisely the one preferred by nearly 40 percent of ordinary Russians (although residents of major cities express a substantially lower preference).

I think that the explanation is easy to find here as well. During years of social instability and disorder, individuals are subjected to many tests and dangers threatening their dignity. Under these circumstances, it is essential to maintain respect toward oneself as an individual and to remain who one really is. Indeed, that is why preserving their own uniqueness and personality is now a primary aim for many Russians.

Media Addictions and an Archaic Religious Revival

Although it is extremely complicated and sometimes even impossible to record changes in the worldview of my compatriots, I will focus on three superficial, and thus easily observable aspects: the mentality of ordinary Russians; their susceptibility to the influence of the mass media; and their religious and ecological awareness.

Russian perceptions of the world are now powerfully influenced by the mass media; compared to the Soviet period, this influence has even increased. An average Russian whose perception of the world was formed in a "homogeneous" information environment, who has in his blood a reverence for the printed word (and a comparable respect for the word as spoken from the television screen), is now often incapable of responding critically to the pluralism of opinions. In the flood of highly distorted news broadcasts carried over the various mass media channels, he has lost his reference points. The ideological vacuum, now over a decade old, coupled with the lack of objectivity and prevalence of disagreement in the news, offers ordinary Russians a less integrated perception of a world increasingly subject to market forces. This difficulty especially affects the young, the under-thirties. Moral traditions and ideological prisms for perceiving the world are being increasingly destroyed through the rise of deviant (addictive) forms of behavior, which are widely advertised in the mass media (smoking, alcoholism, drugs and sexual promiscuity).

Russians themselves concede that their immersion in the mass media is excessive, and may be harmful. More than half (53 percent) of the inhabitants of villages and small towns admit that they watch television and listen to the radio constantly every day (they hardly ever subscribe to newspapers now). Only about one quarter of the people "immerse themselves" in the mass media "from time to time"; no respondents said they were not involved with the mass media at all. Without exception, everyone watches two types of programs: the news and soap operas. News programs support the sense of participating in the world and a feeling of not being too isolated; soap operas help makes people to "forget themselves," become distracted from distressing experiences and the need to engage in activities required for survival.

Russians admit that the influence of the mass media is harmful. The most striking example which ordinary people everywhere in the country cite in support of this conclusion is the presidential elections held on the summer of 1996. Right after the elections and as long as twelve to eighteen months later, I was told again and again in interviews that most people were opposed to the then president, but voted for him under the massive influence of the mass media. They then immediately regretted their choice. In nearly every local community the electorate was divided virtually in half, irrespective of age or sex. In almost all the interviews, the respondents who had voted for the president expressed regret about it, thereby providing an indirect indicator that no less than half of the population is subject to the influence of the mass media.

Most ordinary people equate religiosity with devotion to the Russian Orthodox Church and in this form, religion ranks very low. But true believers are also few in number. Many respondents are certain - as far as they and their fellow-villagers are concerned - that there is no true faith. If something of that order does indeed exist, then it belongs more to the realm of new-fangled superstitions and remnants of pagan notions. Judging from the opinions of the people themselves, as well as from external evidence, it should be acknowledged that the level of religious feeling in Russia has not significantly increased over the past decade, notwithstanding the well-known church restoration projects undertaken by the authorities.

Extremely little authentic religious activity (attending churches and praying - matters about which it is possible to judge by the presence of icons in people's homes) takes place either in small towns or in villages. On the basis of certain episodic observations, it is possible to conclude that genuine, actively religious believers comprise only two to five percent of the Russian population.

The active religious propaganda of the past few years notwithstanding, the number of true believers has apparently not grown at all. It has become fashionable, however, to be a believer not only in an urban setting, but

even in a peasant one; as a rule, the younger a person is, the more likely it is that he will draw attention to his religiosity.

The decline of religious feeling and the unexpected lack of receptivity to Orthodoxy can be explained to some extent by the fact that religious "surrogates" are developing in the public consciousness. First and foremost among these new forms is what might be called "ecological feeling."

This feeling, or, as it is customarily termed, "ecological awareness," is another indication of the nascent and radical change in the Russian worldview. In Soviet times, public indifference to ecological problems was as great as "ecological activism" became in the late 1980's and early 1990's. In my opinion, this turnaround was caused by the superficiality and "political correctness" of the ecological views that were shaped principally by the mass media. This relativity of ecological notions brought about a rapid change in these notions themselves. The public's ecological awareness derived primarily from utilitarian, and to a lesser degree, ethical attitudes to nature as a private domain (I would say, more precisely, to Nature as a private pantry. and warehouse of useful items). Russians see nature from the standpoint of its usefulness, profit, and harmfulness; less often, from the standpoint of its preservation and protection against destructive human activities. By the early 1990's, the ecological awareness of most-village dwellers was based on the dichotomies of "pollution-purity" and "usefulness-harmfulness."

In recent years, however, the ecological awareness of ordinary Russians has changed perceptibly. The aesthetic and ethical components of relating to Nature have grown in significance very rapidly and have become dominant, sharply diminishing the significance of the utilitarian component. Nowadays, for example, up to 50 percent of Russians consider esthetic principles, and another 28 percent ethical principles, as the primary determinants of their attitude to Nature and their interaction with it. Only about ten percent hold utilitarian or negative principles. Relating to Nature as to Beauty and Peace, not just as to something that is useful, is becoming increasingly important for broad circles of ordinary people. In this trend I see an indication that formerly suppressed religious feelings are undergoing a renaissance.

It would probably be accurate to say that the needs felt by many Russians for religion and religious feelings finds expression not so much in seeking out the Church (this is why, in spite of all the official efforts, the level of people's declared religiousness is so low), as in expressing a renewed ecological sensibility, one that profoundly appeals to the Russian sense of archaic unity with Nature. Given the vacuum of a worldview in Russia, especially a religious one, and given the absence of the Orthodox Church's essential authority (not only the Christian church, I think), it is entirely possible that these ecological notions can in future serve as the foundation on which a new worldview will be constructed.

Even the examples I have described of the changes that have occurred in the three aspects of societal consciousness over the last decade seem to me sufficient grounds for appreciating how profoundly the Russian mentality has changed and for sensing how latent these processes still are.

The Decline in Government Authority in the Provinces

Over the past decade, fundamental changes in Russian attitudes toward state power and in political preferences have occurred. Until 1994, one could say with assurance that among ordinary people, especially in village society, nearly everybody sympathized with Communist ideology. But by 1996-1997 a strong political polarization had developed, leading nearly half of the members of any given community to remain loyal to the former ideology, and the other half to gamble cautiously on the new organizational and political formations and move over to the camp, if not of the democrats, then of the "pluralists."

The political bacchanalia of 1997-1998 fostered among ordinary Russians an almost complete loss of interest in politics. The conflict between the Communist and democratic mindsets, in all its magnitude, disappeared into the depths of society: neither philosophy was popular any longer. However sharply the popularity of Communism has declined, sympathy toward its ideology and the Party still remains, whereas a deeply negative attitude has now developed toward democratic goals. This attitude is everywhere. One can grieve, but that's exactly what things have come to: the word "democrat" has become a bugaboo in the provinces. This is why practically every local politician who hopes to succeed diligently avoids practically all democratic slogans. The overwhelming majority of Russians in rural areas and small towns is now completely apolitical. They intend to support whichever political movement that can offer them, above all, strong authority.

During these years Russian attitudes toward state power developed along the same lines as their political passions. Throughout the entire decade, government, both local and federal, steadily lost authority, and in the eyes of ordinary people continues to lose it. If fear of the government was strong until 1993-1994, when memories of Soviet times were fresh and when people expected a swift change in the economic and political situation, by 1996-1997 an attitude close to indifference predominated. At the local level the government possessed ridiculously little authority, or none at all.

The power of the state wound up quietly and imperceptibly in the hands of the "brigadiers," the foremen—both in the literal and metaphorical senses of the word: foremen of agricultural cooperatives, which succeeded kolkhozes and sovkhozes, and leaders of criminal organizations. "Nature abhors a vacuum." Although their actual relations toward the local authorities are complicated, in general ordinary Russians see the semi-criminal, semi-production organizations in every region and district as the reference points of real power.

As far as recent years are concerned, the attitude of ordinary Russians toward central government authority has even become contemptuous, which never used to be the case. The complete impotence of the government is seen not just in the fact that people do not take it into account (even if local officials do not rely on the authority and power of criminal structures); rather, it is as if the government does not exist at all. (An amusing paradox: the executive branch in most regions has completely lost its power, but the number of its representatives has grown two- or three-fold almost everywhere: now there are as many as 80 staff members in almost every regional administration).

Very frequently (I think that this has now become the rule, although it is rather difficult for the outside observer to ascertain), regional leaders are tightly linked with local industrial and commercial firms and through them to shadow organizations. At least, respondents everywhere often allude to such a chain of influence linking local officials with the shadow economy and in turn with the criminal world. In the eyes of the people, such relationships, that have had a chance to develop, consolidate and take root, are justified. More than that, from their point of view, these relationships are even expedient. In one of his final interviews, one middle level entrepreneur from Tver Oblast expressed himself in frank terms: "Why should I be afraid of racketeers? They are not the same as they were five or seven years ago; now they are people with understanding, they are always ready to see things from your point of view, make concessions, even help you. But when it comes to our government, that is the main racketeer, and the cruelest one, any one of us is the enemy: give it everything and it will strip you, deceive you, kill you." And this opinion is not unique, it is fairly typical for those who try to do business in the provinces. People have no positive expectations at all from the present government.

But state authority and order are undeniably necessary, and many people emphasize this in their interviews. The dominant theme in people's political preferences remains the same as it was at the beginning of the decade: "Give us a Boss—then we'd make an effort." People don't care in the least about specific parties and programs. They need central state authority. Strong and consistent. Punitive, but also able to protect the ordinary person.

There is no state authority like that now. That is why people give in to two customary choices. In the first and simplest case, they appeal to representatives of the criminal world; finding protection and patronage there, they increasingly gravitate toward them. Although only a "pseudo-authority," criminal organizations are consistent and effective. Locally the criminal world is more powerful than the actual governmental authority. Worse than that, with the passage of time the criminal authorities in the regions (where they are often major businessmen and merchants) are beginning to realize that they have become invested with a new function, one that has been imperceptibly transferred to them by government authorities. Frequently there are situations in which not just ordinary people but regional bureaucrats openly take pride in their connections with the criminal "authorities": this increases their influence and power. How can this situation not be compared with the Sicily of old or with present-day Colombia? But only within the last two to three years has this process accelerated and become evident.

In Self-defense: The Appeal of Local Self-government

The population's second choice, in a situation where there is either little government authority or none at all, is the aspiration toward local self-governance. This trend emerged very clearly between 1992 and 1994. One of the most important reasons for it was the disintegration of collective and state farms, when Russians, especially in small villages, found themselves suddenly confronted with the necessity of assuring their physical survival, without either the money or an adequate farming system to do so.

The objective of supporting life with one's own efforts gave rise to an entirely natural aspiration: to regulate the life of the community independently of local governmental authority. In 1994, during my research in the Altai Mountain region, the resident of one village (Saidys) told me how, thanks to the self-rule organization which had formed in the village, they were protecting their rights in the face of hostile government authorities. This was a time of illegal activity by corrupt officials, who aided "shadow businessmen" in solving their problems at the expense of the local population. One of these businessmen, who was breeding Siberian reindeer in order to sell their antlers abroad illegally, tried, with the support of regional officials, to fence in an enormous stretch of woods which belonged to two neighboring villages. This land was the people's source of life, in the literal sense of the word. The conflict, in which ordinary rural turn with the criminal world. In the eyes of the people, such relationships, that have had a chance to develop, consolidate and take root, are justified. More than that, from their point of view, these relationships are even expedient. In one of his final interviews, one middle level entrepreneur from Tver Oblast expressed himself in frank terms: "Why should I be afraid of racketeers? They are not the same as they were five or seven years ago; now they are people with understanding, they are always ready to see things from your point of view, make concessions, even help you. But when it comes to our government, that is the main racketeer, and the cruelest one, any one of us is the enemy: give it everything and it will strip you, deceive you, kill you." And this opinion is not unique, it is fairly typical for those who try to do business in the provinces. People have no positive expectations at all from the present government.

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Most residents of small communities are turning to the idea of self-rule slowly, but with ever-increasing attention. The degree of sympathy for the idea is, naturally, directly proportional to the weakness of the legally constituted local officials and the arbitrary rule of their criminal deputies. In the past few years no less than two

thirds of our respondents stated that self-governance is either desirable or essential for their village or small town. Less than one fifth of the population opposed the idea of local self-rule. There are very few actual steps in this direction, however. Judging by the survey responses, less than one inhabited locality in every ten has put together the operational elements of self-governance; institutions necessary for it to function normally are lacking everywhere.

This deficiency is understandable. Only a handful of individuals have an idea of what really constitutes self-governance, or what political, social and economic conditions are needed if a small Russian town or village should want it. Not a single respondent expressed any notion whatever about specific mechanisms for implementing the idea of self-governance. At the present time we see only that the need for it is acknowledged, but that its implementation is not understood. The need is great, however. How long will it take to design an effective organizational model?

Survival Tactics in a Time of Troubles

Foreign scholars err when they talk about the low standard of living and the low quality of life in this country. What they actually should be talking about is survival, simple biological survival, a problem that much of the nation's population has faced for many years now. Survival means creating the minimal conditions that ensure the basic physical preservation of the individual. These minimal conditions at present are a small plot of land on which a family (a household) can grow potatoes, vegetables and fruit, as well as store hay for domestic cattle and fowl. In addition, a no less important task for many is stockpiling fuel (firewood or coal) for the long and cold winter. And, naturally, for all this one must have the strength to grow, store, process and preserve one's natural products. Most of the life energy of a great many Russians are now being expended in this way.'

During the first years of the economic reforms many people found themselves utterly unprepared for supporting themselves and their families almost entirely autonomously. In that period quite a few people starved, entire settlements of people—you see, many families lived only on their salaries and had no possibility of setting up farm plots right away. According to my data, in 1994-1996 up to one third of the children in the provinces were starving—not only in the forest settlements (where personal farm plots were not traditionally cultivated and people lived on their earnings and from hunting and fishing), but even in the villages (where personal plots had always been maintained). (The data on children was easier to obtain, but it implies that the adults in every third family were also starving). For example, in the Russian North, where economic activity was based on the large fishing communal farms, the population traditionally had no personal plots: on the average they had about 0.01 hectares of arable land per person and less than 0.3 head of any type of domestic cattle (in 1996 I counted only six pigs for 2,400 rural households).

The catastrophic state of household economies felt everywhere in the first half of this decade was offset rather quickly—it couldn't have been otherwise—by the active search for new forms of life support. Many diverse methods of autonomous survival were discovered and put into practice in every settlement and region. In one case, people began to prepare and sell hay because a neighboring oblast experienced a bad harvest. In another case, they joined together into something resembling a cooperative for a time to raise calves or pigs so that they could sell their meat in town in the winter, bypassing middlemen. In a third case, people acted as impoverished landlords, renting out their fishing boats for a minimal price or hiring crews from among the even poorer workers from Ukraine or Estonia.

Natural Farming: A New Life Support Model?

There are a great many new forms of economic activity. They are all extremely simple. And the simplest, as well as the most widespread (and the most astonishing) is the model of life support based on a return to natural farming, which provides a full life cycle for a family. Within one or two years many Russians went from industrial large-scale agricultural production to the form of natural farming described by historians as typical during the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries and recorded in chronicles of twelfth and thirteenth century Russia! An enduring image of our contemporary socioeconomic life took shape long ago. During the Soviet period, society resembled a massive, durable, homogeneous platform created over almost completely uniform economic activity, like congealed fat in a cast iron pot. In our difficult time of crisis, the fat has melted, come to a boil and is roiling, a multitude of bubbles constantly forming and rising to the surface—new, hitherto unseen forms (more accurately, models) of life support. Nearly all these bubbles burst instantly and disappear; but after all, the pot will stop boiling at some point - crises pass - and some of the newly formed bubbles - new models of life support - will not burst, but will have a chance to set, harden and become a point of crystallization for a new economic, and perhaps also societal, order in Russia.

What is the nature of these possible points of economic growth? Will they be justified politically, socially and morally? The question is no joking matter. With each year I observe the appearance or development of new "models of survival" which increasingly make me apprehensive. You see, for example, communities of entire settlements and towns, including women and children, beginning to support themselves by participating in transporting and dealing in drugs. And if this "model of survival" spreads widely and takes over nearly the entire population of even a small community, the government will be powerless to eliminate it. Isn't it better, while it's not too late, to promote the dissemination of other models for living?

Beyond Present Tribulations: A Heroic Legacy

I am not inclined to make prognoses or study the long-term prospects for the development of Russian society. In writing this essay, I saw my objective as merely to record empirically the changes taking place in our society. Changes had to occur in any case because they constitute the fertile ground of any social development. It is another matter that these changes have turned out not to be the ones which we (I have in mind not the politicians, but the scientific and creative intelligentsia) enthusiastically forecast as long ago as 1989 and even 1991. Truly, it's like the old saying, "We wanted to do better, but it turned out to be just the same."

And at the same time, all these changes are a completely explainable reaction of society to its own disease (and perhaps a predictable one, if only we could have known ahead of time). And because these changes can be explained, we can draw one seemingly trivial conclusion.

We see that Russia is changing, changing hastily, without getting its bearings. But what is the nature of these hurried changes? New political and economic institutions. Perhaps the elements of a new morality. But we discover that everything born within the depths of society, apparently out of nothing, had always existed there in its potential form. In any new political constellation, the same archetype of the national spirit that defines both the uniqueness of a people and the transformations they are undergoing reveals itself - independently of whether society experiences good times or tribulations during these transformations.

It is often the case that sorrowful times for the people living through them turn out to be heroic times for their descendants. A changing Russia still remains the same Russia.

NOTES:

1. - In Russia major cities have populations of 500,000 and more; smaller towns have, as a rule, populations of 12,000 to 100,000 people; residents of worker and resort settlements are included in city populations.
2. - Abraham Maslow, *Motivation and Personality*, New York: Harper & Bros., 1954.
3. - Ronald Inglehart, *Culture Shift in Advanced Industrial Society*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990.
4. - C.W. Morris, *Varieties of Human Value*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956.
5. - Carl R. Rogers, *On Becoming a Person. A Therapist's View of Psychotherapy*, Boston: HoughtonMifflinCo., 1961.

Translated by Anya Kucharev.