

Exhaustion: Russia's Precious Senior Intelligentsia Is Under Threat

by Konstantin Chermnykh

Six years ago, the Leontieff Center, regarded as a vanguard of liberal economic strategy, published research which forecast a decline in the population of St. Petersburg by 400,000 during the next decade. The tendency might change after a "positive social drift," wrote the authors. From the context, it was clear that the "positive social drift" meant the "natural" extinction of the aged part of the population.

The economic program of Yegor Gaidar's Democratic Choice Party, presented at its founding congress in 1994, included a proposal to raise the pension age by five years (above the age of 60 for men). By that time, the life-expectancy of men in Russia had dropped to 59 years.

As I had an opportunity to talk directly to one of the members of the research team, most of whom originated from the St. Petersburg Institute of Economy and Finance, I know precisely that the two above-cited examples are not accidental. They reflect the common viewpoint and intention of the masterminds of what was called the Russian liberal reform.

"You see," this person told me, "actually, these [Gaidar's] guys are not resolute enough. To my mind, people of so-called pension age should not be granted the right to vote. Because they cling to the outdated political system, and are unable to change themselves. Actually, pensions could be eliminated—"

"? ? ?"

"Why, their relatives should take care of them."

And what if the relatives are disabled or deceased, or never existed? I was too shocked to argue. This young, pleasant, and energetic person was talking about millions of people, with a careless smile that reminded me of something very relevant, though rather distant from white-collar theorizing in a cozy St. Petersburg flat.

The white-collar theoretician would find perfect mutual understanding with the practitioners, who appeared on the scene in Russia's big cities in 1992-93, in the period when the real estate market took shape—in the same anarcho-criminal way as any other market in newly transformed Russia, blessed by "progressive mankind" with a radical market change.

A person named Aleksei M., who began his career as a

journalist for real estate magazines, was exposed in 1994 as a serial murderer, his victims being mostly old people and alcoholics in the central districts of Moscow. He would find a lonely person, seeking to exchange his flat for a smaller one, then arrive at his place with a pile of prepared documents, which the victim needed only to sign. With a nice smile, he would offer to complete all the bureaucratic work. After the victim signed the documents, the young man would kill him and promptly resell the flat. The affair was exposed only after several corpses were dragged out of the garbage dumpster in a courtyard where the young man had several clients.

"Actually, President Boris Yeltsin should praise my work," Aleksei told the TV, with the same type of careless smile. "I've been carrying out sanitation work, eliminating unfit individuals."

The same "sanitation" was carried out by a number of criminal groups in St. Petersburg. One of them, a kind of "joint venture" between criminal types and policemen, was officially registered as a real estate agency. It is registered still today, although two of its founders are in jail, and the last director was murdered by a group of people, probably relatives of his former clients, who used pieces of drainpipe as a murder weapon. These anonymous Robin Hoods of the St. Petersburg real estate cesspool were apparently quite sure that it was useless to appeal to any law enforcement agencies.

If you enter any district court or almost any police station in St. Petersburg, avoiding a piece of plaster falling on your head, you will immediately get a sense of the atmosphere reigning in the local body designed to look after order and justice in the surrounding area. The scene at a local clinic or emergency rescue station is no less desperate.

I very seldom visit my local clinic center, which was lucky enough to acquire a new building shortly before the reforms started. The entire lobby is packed with small vendors who trade all kinds of small wares, like perfumes, stockings, shoes, porno magazines, and frying pans. It looks like a small market near a metro station, or anything but a medical institution. The traders pay rent, and the clinic thus manages to survive.

Most of the patients visiting the clinic are elderly, because a minority of the younger generation can afford to



Street vendors in St. Petersburg. Many of Russia's skilled workforce have been forced to become street vendors, or worse, to make ends meet.

visit private physicians, while the absolute majority, what is regarded as “middle class,” rushing between three or four jobs, has practically no time or opportunity to take care of their health. Many small private clinics, designed for patients with average or below-average incomes, have gone bankrupt during the last three or four years, as the “paying capability” of their clients could not keep up with their rent, not to mention the unofficial fees, which any director of a clinic, or of any enterprise or shop, is forced to pay to local racketeers.

In order to go on working under these humiliating conditions, and not to become an element of the ever farther penetrating criminal network, one needs specific human qualities. Regardless of the self-justifying complaints of those who failed to resist the pressure from the criminal milieu, it is a challenge more to one's moral integrity, than to physical security.

A resisting director, scholar, schoolteacher or physician constantly faces compromises with evil, such as being forced to rent a part of his building to a shady trading company in order to keep his institution alive; forced to use textbooks

provided by the Soros Foundation, while trying to compensate for their lies about culture and history, with his own knowledge and authority. Still, the most tragic choice faces a doctor who has no possibility of treating his patients, due to the lack of medicine or its exorbitant price, dictated by the thoroughly criminalized pharmaceuticals market. For him, the fact of ruthless and deliberate Darwinian selection is most obvious, and very often all he can say is the words of the old village woman from Solzhenitsyn's essay “Matryona's Yard”: “I am so tired of burying all of you. . . .”

Engineers as Fruit Vendors

Shortly before the 1996 elections, the Russian “democratic” leadership offered what should be regarded as a political kickback to the vast Russian criminal class, at the expense of other layers of society. According to the amended pension legislation, years of labor in prison were now included in the person's labor record, whereas years of higher education were not. Periods of work in the Far North and other areas with similar hard conditions, previously registered as two years for one in the personnel record, from which the amount of the pension is calculated, was now to be regarded like any other work.

This gift to organized crime, taken together with the humiliation of the intelligentsia, could be interpreted as just a recognition of the fact that the criminal class had become the ruling class in post-Soviet Russia, while various unnecessary intellectuals and useless skilled workers, were no longer regarded as an honored part of society.

In a way, this amendment was another version of Gaidar's proposal, noted above, for it forced millions of intellectuals, in order to earn a larger pension, to seek any job they could, after the age of 60. Often this was possible only by selling their intellect and experience to the new ruling class, which emerged (or, using the terminology of the Mont Pelerin Society's Vitali Naishul, was institutionalized) in the initial period of privatization.

During that process, the population of the big cities was divided by a red line, into a community of the filthy rich, with their own system of schools, clinics, and well-guarded clubs for a limited number of persons; the category of disabled and “hopelessly” aged people; and the majority, in between, filled with hostility and alienation, and always at risk of finding themselves on the bottom. This average working—or, rather, surviving—class coincides with the non-voting class, as most of them, despite hating the liberals profoundly, are able to survive due to possibilities provided by the petty, semi-anarchic and totally criminalized street market. Therefore they are terrified of the idea of a “society of order,” “dictatorship of law,” or anything like the former Soviet rule. The part of this majority which participates in local elections, usually expresses a preference for one racketeer or corrupt official over another. Only arbitrary police actions, as was the case in

Nizhny Novgorod, prevent the election of purely criminal figures to the posts of Mayor or Governor.

Striking up a conversation with a small-scale street vendor in the Luzhniki market of Moscow or Haymarket Square in St. Petersburg, you are startled at the academic language, surfacing through the superficial layer of street subculture. Soon you guess, although you're embarrassed to ask, that this woman with swollen hands and weather-beaten face is a former engineer, scientist, scholar, librarian, or archivist, thrown out of her milieu and left in the merciless wilderness of the street market, the only place where she, or he, is able to earn enough to support the family.

Those average former members of the intellectual professions, who missed the opportunity to sell themselves to George Soros, are hired by organized crime, with regard for their professional knowledge: a writer as an image-maker, an officer as a bodyguard, a chemist as a producer of synthetic drugs. All of them are treated like inferior beings, *Untermenschen*, or, if they're luckier, like servants. Most of them, however, have not yet forgotten that they once were more independent in their mind and behavior, despite the well-documented limitations of the Soviet system. Most of them realize that they have found themselves in a worse cage than the old one, but the everyday atmosphere of alienation, in which each is supposed to survive by himself, leaves no window of hope for some common purpose, which might suggest at least some higher justification of their efforts to survive. Nonetheless, most of them have not yet completely degenerated as human beings, as is evident from their desperate attempts to pull ends together for the sake of their children or grandchildren. And most of them would be happy, if some new political leadership were able to invent a labor exchange based on morals, not only on formal skills. The system of selection in the state bureaucracy, however, remains based on formal criteria of "professionalism," according to foreign teachers of recruiting (this term has been recently adopted into modern Russian), who worship at the Leontieff Center and related "strategic" entities, as well as PR services ("Don't *pi-ar* me!" is a common Russian expression these days), image-making companies, and so forth.

Beyond the 'Cadre Problem'

The new Russian leadership is either too busy at the heights of geopolitics, from which a single human being is not quite discernible, or is blindly relying upon the intelligence community's principles of personnel policy — a combination of these same criteria of "professionalism," with some record-based personal confidence. These principles are relatively functional for purposes of building up a small team for immediate tasks, including on the level of state policy, not for the objective of organizing the vitally necessary mobilization of the nation, its most efficient generations and communities, and their combined human potential. Instead of appealing

directly to the population, the majority of which expressed support for the new leadership, this leadership is bogged down in the linear logical calculations of a chess game, moving figures back and forth, and seemingly seeking some magic combination or mystical remedy for setting scattered elements into motion.

Playboy politician Boris Nemtsov, who arouses public hatred primarily with his permanent careless smile, is energetically pushing a proposal for a relatively large increase in salaries for the bureaucracy, although his experience as a model democratic Governor should have made him quite aware of the fact, that larger official incomes do not suppress the appetite for still larger off-the-books earnings. Even if the salaries of ministers were increased a dozen times over, they would still be remote from the incomes of the real elite, formed during the process of "liberal reform."

This real elite is comprised not only of the scandalously famous oligarchs, whose names are common in our newspapers, from the respectable *Vedomosti* to a yellow rag like *Moskovsky Komsomolets*. The business figures, who assembled at the Kremlin to meet the President on July 28, are not the richest people in Russia. The most luxurious country house, really a country castle, on the outskirts of Moscow is said to belong to the director of a former state trading entity, transformed into a foreign economic association (VEA), and then into a private concern, with a monopoly on such a "bottomless" branch of exports as the timber trade. His name does not appear in the mass media, nor does the name of the president of the Diamond Exchange, nor do the names of a lot of other former semi-state monopolies, founded in the late Gorbachov period of "the big sell-off." Names like Roskontrakt, Mashinoeksport, Raznoimport, Interprivatizatsiya, Rosvnesh-this, Rosvnesh-that, or the recently founded Rosspirtprom, are not on the surface of political struggle or media analysis. But, any Prime Minister has to contend with the fact of their existence, and his own complete inability to change anything in this sphere — because each of these semi-official, semi-private entities is needed for a potential occasion, especially in the election period, when the state leadership urgently needs to lay hands on easily accessible funds — even if he understands quite well, that immense financial flows, directed by the shadow "gray" and "black" oligarchs, are siphoned out of the real economy. The country's real economy remains underfinanced, undersupplied, underdeveloped, and *exhausted* for years and years — while the leadership fails to solve the notorious "personnel" issue in a way that would eliminate the unofficial practice of a 40% or larger kickback to a fat, semi-state, semi-official Ivan Ivanovich for each project, program, or venture.

The Salt of the Earth

Sooner or later, the official authorities acquire enough courage, if not to gather the scattered stones, then at least to count them.

A recently published report in *Kommersant*, authored by businessman Mikhail Khodorkovsky and based on reliable data from still functioning academic institutions, presented a horrible picture of the attrition of industrial facilities, which creates a chronic and increasing danger of all kinds of technological catastrophes. Fully half of the industrial facilities are out of service, and more than 10% of them are closed down each year, being completely destroyed or just stripped. The necessity of raising this issue has been evident for years to any honest specialist, or former skilled worker, turned bodyguard or a fruit vendor. A second horrible chapter must be added, however, in order to complete the realistic picture of today's Russia: about *human exhaustion*.

Most of all, this syndrome affects those decent persons who are strategically necessary for the existence of the state and its future, but remain neglected and overlooked. They are the people who don't need a thick packet of hard currency or a police order to make them work for the nation—those who take responsibility for the cause to which they have dedicated their lives (that is how they regard the results they achieved in the pre-reductionist era), and for the personal problems of their close colleagues and their families. This syndrome affects aging directors and senior specialists, who spent their whole lives in the real economy, for the sake of their country and people. This syndrome affects the veterans of war, who interpret the year 1991 as a second 1941, the year of the Nazi invasion. This syndrome affects all those who haven't abandoned their work, despite being underpaid or not paid for months, and forced to find supplementary jobs, often boring and disgusting, in order to preserve the results of their former work.

For such a person, the feeling of his own necessity in his job, the personal responsibility for the health of patients, or for the minds of pupils, works a powerful anti-entropic impetus, enabling a person, even in a most physically worn-out condition, to pull together and feel much younger and stronger. As long as an older, devoted physician or teacher still has a job, and, therefore, some possibility for serving the good, his spirit and body remain integrated. Sometimes you can witness a miraculous transformation of a person, emerging from inside and shining through his eyes.

One person of this type is often sufficient to keep a whole laboratory, workshop, clinic or school alive, attracting honest colleagues to himself and his cause by his personal example. And more and more often, when such a person passes on, a whole unit of scientific, educational, or social work falls apart. The vacuum is filled by petty younger persons, faceless lazybones or energetic swindlers, who sooner or later destroy what had been left by the predecessor and his generation.

Will Russian eye surgery survive after Svyatoslav Fyodorov? Does the Russian cinema for children exist after Rolan Bykov? Can Russian historical science recuperate after the deaths of Lev Gumilyov and Igor Dyakonov? What

is the St. Petersburg theater after Georgi Tovstonogov and Igor Vladimirov? Who can replace Yevgeni Mravinsky in Classical music, and Mikhail Anikushin in sculpture? Are there still figures of the scale of Yevgeni Yekhnin in ship-building technology? Are there really prominent figures in the St. Petersburg school of psychiatry after Dmitri Ozeretskovsky, Fyodor Sluchevsky, and Boris Lebedev? The teachers are leaving bleak shadows behind them, and that is the best case. More often than not, the careless heirs are capable sooner of distorting and falsifying the original thought of the founding father of their institution or the fundamentals of his contribution in art or science.

In economic management, where the "liberal reforms" have ousted the most capable figures, the picture is even more disastrous. Some of the experienced and highly moral and responsible figures were dismissed on ideological pretexts, others passed on from suicide or homicide. The degeneration of St. Petersburg, from a major industrial center to a capital of tourism and services, with the foreign-owned Baltika Brewery as the champion in production and incomes, is the result of an intentional extinction of top management cadres: the discharge of Baltic Shipyard's General Director Viktor Shershnyov, the murder of the St. Petersburg Fuel Company's Dmitri Filippov, the death of the Northern Machine-Building Plant's General Director German Gardymov, the unlawful incarceration of Baltic Shipping Company President Viktor Kharchenko. There are no appropriate figures to replace them. The new generation of managers cannot protect themselves and each other from the vicious epidemic of criminal violence, which is already carrying away the lives of the few skillful younger managers. There is a vacuum, left by the exhaustion of what had been the salt of Russia's earth.

A Vicious Circle

The first months of the new leadership of Russia made clear that the energy of youth cannot compensate for lack of education, experience, and morality. The new leaders will fail to live up to their capability, unless they make an emergency effort to save the remaining part of the older generation of specialists, before the merciless conditions of everyday survival eliminate them, one after another.

There is no more time left to wait, before addressing the problem of human exhaustion, than there is for the revival of exhausted industry.

The collapse of the physical economy, causing the deterioration of budget revenues; the wear on industrial facilities, resulting in accidents; the collapse of morality and responsibility in law enforcement bodies, making them an accessory of organized crime; the collapse of quality in public services, multiplying the challenges for physical survival—all this, taken together, disrupts the tissue of society and separates the surviving islands of thought and decent creativity from each other. It is a vicious circle, which revolves like Kafka's peni-

tentiary machine in the desert of public medical and social care, leaving the most precious and unique personalities, still surviving and still fighting for the survival of their institutions and their families, completely unprotected from any kind of emergency, whether it might come from a car driven by a drunk “new Russian,” from an incompetent surgeon, from an unscrupulous business partner, from a corrupt policeman, or from a careless paparazzo.

Sometimes, so little is needed to keep them safe: an audience of interested students; a good old movie on TV, at least once a week to provide an island of optimism and spiritual health in the ocean of hard porno, soft soap operas, and killer thrillers; a bus not packed like a can of fish; a suburban train which arrives on time; a doctor who is attentive enough to concentrate on his patient’s condition, despite his own hurry to get to a second job. . . .

“The greatest danger is far from the most evident,” it was sadly put by the author of *Kommersant’s* report on industrial attrition. How many years of Darwinist selection of the national human potential must pass, before the issue of human exhaustion, and primarily the exhaustion of the intellectual force, is raised on the level of state policy?

Sunstroke

My grandfather died in the hot and weary summer of 1954, which was later called “the year of the academicians”; one summer wiped out a whole galaxy of outstanding scientific minds. Popular explanations of this wave of deaths pointed to peculiarities of the calendar or the weather, but there was apparently a more significant underlying factor. When years of constant psychological tension, with a brother-in-law in exile and a lot of friends jailed, suddenly ceased, in what was later called the thaw, this weakened the threads that had been keeping the body and spirit on high alert, and provided an entryway for the vicious rot of entropy. Sunshine, hitting the separating seams, broke his heart, which he did not suspect was exhausted.

The implicit belief that the year 2000 was a kind of boundary which, in some miraculous way, would put an end to the disaster, along with a simple superstition associated with the turn of the millennium as a finish line in a sports race, after which one might, finally, have a little rest, was very common among the older generation of intellectual Russians, for whom 1991 marked the beginning of the new, ruthless era, in which knowledge was neglected, morals undermined, and human life, especially of an aged or disabled person, depreciated.

This year has carried away Professors Boris Zanegin and Elmer Murtazin, two of the most decent specialists in foreign relations, the founders of Russia’s Anti-Colonial League. One more of the League’s founders, Nikolai Korolyov, died last summer.

“I am so tired of burying all of you . . .”

On the night of July 17-18, Russia and mankind lost

Prof. Taras V. Muranivsky, the President of the Schiller Institute for Science and Culture in Moscow. A day later, Prof. Sergei B. Lavrov, President of the Russian Geographic Society, followed him to the Heavens. Both men had taken little care of their hearts, and disliked visiting doctors, and never had a physician on hand to monitor their health.

Late that night in the Schiller Institute’s Moscow office, I woke up, hearing somebody turning the key, walking along the lobby, coughing and opening doors. “Taras Vasilyevich?” I called out, forgetting in my sleep that he had been taken to the hospital. It was silent, still, and terribly hot.

I have never believed in anything mystical, and so I am just sure of the fact that before leaving this world, the soul of Taras entered the place of his creative work, which had become his cause and had been keeping his body and spirit alive and committed throughout these disastrous years in Russia, despite exhaustion, and against the entropy of despair. And I am still feeling giddy from this stroke of discovery, of this tragic and powerful evidence of the other world, where the heavenly Russia gathers its best sons, leaving the results of their labor for those who may once get up from their knees to raise the dropped banner of national and public dignity.

GENOCIDE RUSSIA AND THE NEW WORLD ORDER



Russia in the 1990s: “The rate of annual population loss has been more than double the rate of loss during the period of Stalinist repression and mass famine in the first half of the 1930s . . . There has been nothing like this in the thousand-year history of Russia.”

—Sergei Glazyev

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