

Russia's Fate Through Russian Eyes

Voices of the New Generation

Edited by
Heyward Isham



RUSSIA'S FATE THROUGH
RUSSIAN EYES



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*Voices of the
New Generation*

edited by

Heyward Isham

with

Natan M. Shklyar

with an introduction by

Jack F. Matlock Jr.



Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 2001 by Westview Press

Published 2019 by Routledge

52 Vanderbilt Avenue, New York, NY 10017

2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Russia's fate through Russian eyes / edited by Heyward Isham ; with Natan M. Shklyar ; with an introduction by Jack F. Matlock Jr.

p. cm.

Includes index.

ISBN 0-8133-3866-2

1. Russia (Federation)—Politics and government—1991– . 2. Russia (Federation)—Economic conditions—1991– . 3. Russia (Federation)—Social conditions—1991– . 4. Russia (Federation)—Intellectual life—1991– . I. Isham, Heyward. II. Shklyar, Natan M. III. Matlock, Jack F.

DK510.763 .R872 2000

947.086—dc21

ISBN 13: 978-0-367-28650-7 (hbk)

00-046224

*Dedicated to the memory of
Dmitry Sergeevich Likhachev (1906–1999),
intrepid investigator of the
Old Russian literary heritage from the tenth to
the seventeenth century and a source of
inspiration and wise counsel to the
new generation of Russian leaders of all ages.
“Our future lies in openness to
the entire world and in enlightenment.”*



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Preface

The young Russian men and women who record in these pages the hopes, fears, triumphs, and tragedies their country has undergone in recent years—altering their own lives profoundly in the process—all come from the first post-Soviet generation to achieve positions of leadership in Russia. They report on five challenges central to Russia's survival and stabilization: reshaping the state, coping with new economic rules, striving toward the rule of law, building a civil society, and preserving the national culture and educational capacity.

They love their country, while understanding all too well the crippling psychological legacy of seventy years of a dictatorship that was both cunning and cruel in dispensing a plausible utopian myth and exacting extraordinary sacrifices in the name of that myth. They understand the acute sense of disorientation that overcame all generations when the USSR abruptly dissolved in 1991 and the Communist Party simultaneously lost much, if not all, of its power. As several of our authors recall, it was like waking up one morning and finding yourself a citizen of an entirely different country, meanwhile discovering that your parents were not your real parents and that you had acquired a brand new surname.

But these young Russians waste no time in historical retrospectives. Unencumbered by fears of either a Communist restoration or a right-wing coup, they have no taste for recrimination or resentment: They go about their business briskly, boldly. From the voices caught in these pages we learn what the young generation of Russians are doing to help their country recover from its precipitous decline, and how they see the future. For example:

- a grain dealer deftly navigates the newly demonopolized commodities market and competes on the world market;
- a real estate developer, responding to pent-up demand, builds functional and affordable housing in the Moscow suburbs;

- an opponent of the compulsory registration system operates the first center for the homeless in St. Petersburg and publishes a newsletter advocating more humane treatment for them;
- a public-policy lawyer, using his advocacy and legislative drafting skills, protects consumers (unaccustomed to having a choice of goods and services) from buying defective equipment or succumbing to false advertisements;
- an anthropologist grounded in biology and philosophy explores the radically changed outlook among Siberia's urban and rural inhabitants who, with fortitude and ingenuity, struggle to adapt to the pervasive economic crisis, discounting any help from local authorities and meanwhile turning to the worship of nature as a traditional source of unity;
- an entrepreneurial couple organizes an agency to inform, educate, and support those engaged in the long process of building a civil society through a growing network of professional nongovernmental organizations;
- an independent publisher introduces readers to a wealth of undiscovered and unorthodox literary talents;
- a journalist directs a watchdog agency that publicizes reprisals against investigative journalists by government officials or businessmen exposed as corrupt;
- two scholar-administrators in St. Petersburg pioneer the country's first undergraduate program offering a cross-disciplinary liberal arts curriculum.

These are only a few of the articulate young leaders we meet in these pages.

The Russia they set their minds and energy to restore and modernize is a country that does not turn its back on the Bolshevik and Soviet past but acknowledges enduring bonds, common interests, and ethical values shared by every generation. It is a Russia that sets aside raw envy of others' entrepreneurial success, renounces the habit of subservience to the state, and distinguishes between universal principles of justice and cynical distortions of the law by bureaucrats. A Russia that can be roused from inertia to activism by reports of institutionalized torture, whether occurring under police interrogation, in Russia's overcrowded prisons, or in the army.

It is above all a Russia borne up in its many travails by a stubborn will to survive and by a capacity, especially in the new generation, to

adapt ingeniously and swiftly to changes imposed by the need to compete at home and abroad under unforgiving market conditions.

It is, finally, a Russia that wants the West to demonstrate its interest in a more informed, balanced, and respectful relationship, shedding disparaging stereotypes and a priori assumptions. Although increasingly confident of its regenerative capacity, the new Russia, our authors believe, welcomes an intelligent, sensible helping hand as its citizens, with the new generation in the lead, rebuild their country “from under the rubble.” The poet Boris Slutsky has written about the Russians: “worn out, like rails over which all the engines of the world have driven, they can still receive any signals sent out by good.”

* * *

The genesis of this collection of original essays on Russia's future was probably my service as second secretary at the American embassy in Moscow during the mid-1950s, when I discovered firsthand that Western assumptions about the totalitarian controls imposed by the Soviet system failed to take into account the marvelously ingenious protective devices developed within society against secret police informers and other forms of political intrusion into private lives.

In those years, apart from chance (and often very instructive) encounters and conversations in parks, restaurants, markets, or train compartments, diplomats seeking the reality behind the stage props had, for example, to plow through politburo speeches or Party Congress transcripts, note a change of emphasis here or a telling omission there in the official press reports, and compare how news was handled in Moscow and in the provinces. The evidence of political disillusionment and intellectual resistance even then was greater than many Western observers assumed. I was struck, for example, by the buzz of debate among Moscow State University students caused by the publication of Vladimir Dudintsev's *Not by Bread Alone*, a novel that portrayed a Party apparatchik in subtly unflattering tones altogether inconsistent with approved iconic forms. Although Dudintsev's indictment pales when compared to the torrent of revelations about Stalin's repressions and the Party's degeneration that emanated from both official and samizdat sources during the 1960s and 1970s, the reaction to the book reflected the passing of an illusion and foreshadowed the role that opposition-minded intellec-

tuals, some of them allied with Mikhail Gorbachev and his team, would play in the eventual destruction of the Party's monopoly on power and legitimacy in 1991.

The task of interpretation and analysis that faces foreign observers almost fifty years after Stalin's death and some fifteen years after the start of Gorbachev's glasnost and perestroika is of course altogether different. Deciphering post-Soviet puzzles requires a method that takes into account the proliferation and tendentiousness of print and electronic information, to the point that there seem to be not one but many Russias. Two of our authors, Sergei Vasil'ev and Vladimir Mirzoev, observe this phenomenon from the perspective of economic policymaker and theatrical producer. Fragmentation characterizes those who live in Moscow and St. Petersburg, the provincial cities, and rural villages and settlements; those over fifty and those under forty; citizens residing in republics or oblasts that border on West Europe, Central Asia, and the Far East; and those living in regions largely cut off from foreign ties, such as the Siberian North. Among the eighty-nine regions of Russia, a few are relatively stable and growth oriented but most are seriously impoverished and backward. And all such differences, of course, are compounded and manipulated by recurrent "information wars," the use of compromising material (*kompromat*) to crush political opponents, the hidden agendas of oligarchs who control much of the media, the intertwining of bureaucracy and organized crime, and mercurial changes in patterns of patronage. At the same time, the Internet links among universities and individual subscribers (some 3 million) are increasingly important in providing independent sources of information, although government monitoring is a latent threat. The rise and fall of confidants and courtiers, scoundrels and scholars, reformers and restorationists—such is the context in which these reflections, reminiscences, and observations must be viewed.

The approach I have taken in this book, therefore, follows that taken in my earlier volume, *Remaking Russia: Voices from Within*, published in 1995, which presented the views of some twenty outstanding intellectual figures of the older generation. For the present collection, I have concentrated on twenty-eight representatives of the new generation of Russian leaders, those roughly between the ages of twenty-five and forty, who were identified during field trips to Russia in March and May 1999 with the invaluable help of many in Moscow, St. Petersburg, and elsewhere (listed in the acknowledg-

ments). Their perspectives find an arresting counterpoint and commentary in the epilogue contributed by one of Russia's most respected scholars, the historian and Slavist Vyacheslav Ivanov.

My suggestion to the authors, once they were selected, was straightforward: Using your personal voice, as if you were writing a letter to American friends, share with us your professional evaluation of the profound changes in your country; note the implications for the future development of Russia; and describe what is necessary to move Russia toward a more civilized, responsible, and vibrant society. The classic questions—"Who are we? Where are we going? How do we get there?"—are within your power to answer.

The authors responded well to these proposals. Indeed, their written contributions (in some cases interviews) convey effectively the troubled, shocking, perplexing, contradictory evolution of their country from a coercive imperial system asserting a monopoly on faith and power to a national condition that seems far less clear, less predictable, less equitable, and certainly less effective than that which had preceded it, but one that increasingly offers new opportunities for independence of thought, collegiality of action, entrepreneurial boldness—and, above all, new hope for Russian society as a whole.

What these young leaders have to say also offers new ideas for the design and implementation of foreign assistance programs, for much has changed and continues to change since those programs were first initiated; and Russia under Vladimir Putin's presidency will present problems and opportunities of an altogether different order. The West more than ever will need to study the particular historical and psychological context, the nuances of words and actions, the smoke screens put up to mask weakness and confuse the potential antagonist—and it will also need to assess at its proper value the defiantly resilient and tenacious Russian character, imbued as it is with memories of a more coherent and authoritative past.

Heyward Isham



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Acknowledgments

Many friends and colleagues in the United States, Europe, and Russia endorsed the concept of publishing a second *sbornik*, or anthology, of Russian “voices from within,” suggested potential contributors, and in some cases helped arrange meetings. Their support and encouragement were invaluable. Special thanks go to John F. Tefft, deputy chief of mission at the American embassy in Moscow; Thomas E. Graham, former head of the embassy’s Internal Political Section; Dr. John H. Brown and Sharon Hudson-Dean of the U.S. Information Service in Moscow; Mark Koenig and Lisa Petter of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) mission in Moscow; Melissa Hudson, second secretary of the embassy; Elena Nemirovskaya, founder and director of the Moscow School of Political Studies, and her project director, Igor Gorely; Masha Gessen and Masha Lipman of *Itogi* magazine, Tatyana Zhdanova, director of the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation’s Moscow office; and Alan Rousso, director of the Carnegie Endowment’s Moscow Center.

I am grateful as well to Celestine Bohlen of the *New York Times* Moscow Bureau; Irene Stevenson, director of the American Center for International Labor Solidarity in Moscow; Bernadine Joselyn, director of the Eurasia Foundation’s Moscow office; Susan Wobst, director of the International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX) office in Moscow; Aleksei Barabashev, deputy director of the Institute of Public Administration and Social Studies at Moscow State University; Maksim Shevchenko, religious editor of *Nezavisimaya gazeta*; Evgenii Semenov, general director of the Russian Scientific Foundation for the Humanities; Susan H. Gillespie, director of the Institute for International Liberal Education at Bard College; Natal’ia B. Romanova, managing director of Jupiter Investments, Moscow; Ekaterina Genieva, director of the Soros Foundation, Russia; and Sergei Basov, director of the Soros Foundation’s St. Petersburg branch.

To my program associate Natan Shklyar go my special thanks; he has been an indefatigable, resourceful, and highly knowledgeable editorial partner and has made major contributions to the book, including the recording and translation of four interviews and the care and feeding of our authors. As one who was born in the USSR in a military family, came to the American Midwest to get a college education, and then forged his way brilliantly to a respected position among Russia specialists, Natan epitomizes the entrepreneurial spirit and intelligent altruism characterizing the authors in this collection. His successor since May 2000, Marisa Robertson-Textor, has speeded the final stage of publication.

We were fortunate in having an experienced team of translators, Antonina W. Bouis, Marian Schwartz, and Anna Kucharev, who dealt expeditiously and lucidly with texts that seldom reflected Anglo-Saxon notions of brevity but always conveyed the thoughts of the authors forcefully.

Beyond the unflagging intellectual and operational support of my colleagues at the EastWest Institute, particularly John Mroz, the president, and Stephen Heintz, the executive vice president from 1990 to 1999, I owe an incalculable debt of thanks to the foundations and individuals who supported this project: the Annie Laurie Aitken Lead Trust, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, the Kennan Institute, and the Alida B. and Steven H. Scheuer Foundation. To all of them, the many other friends, colleagues, mentors, and family members who have lent me their encouragement and wisdom over the years, and especially to my beloved wife, Sheila, my profound thanks.

H. I.

INTRODUCTION

Jack F. Matlock Jr.

When Mikhail Gorbachev had introduced glasnost to Soviet society and perestroika was under way, I was sometimes asked by Soviet citizens how long I thought it would take before the Soviet Union could become a “normal” country. (By “normal,” they meant to be like Western democracies.) My stock answer was, “two generations,” which always brought signs of disappointment to the face of my questioner. I would hasten to explain: “You’re going to have to create a system that in many respects is the opposite of what you have today. You will have to create democratic institutions. You will have to restore private property. You will have to develop the institutions and rules that make a market economy work. Most important of all, you will have to change the way people think, the way they deal with each other, and their attitude toward authority and personal responsibility. All these things take time, and nobody has a road map showing how to go from where you are to where you want to be. Inevitably, there will be much trial and error, steps forward and steps back. If your country is where you would like it to be in forty years, you’ll be lucky.”

This, however, was not the prevailing view among the reformers who suddenly metamorphosed out of once subservient academics, professionals, and even some Communist Party apparatchiks. The king—the Soviet system—had no clothes. Throw him out and, presto, we’ll have the opposite, capitalism with all the freedom it has protected and affluence it has created elsewhere. Five hundred days of the right policies would do the trick, they thought. And, of course, even temporary sacrifice was out of the question. “We will

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not carry out reform on the backs of the Russian people!” thundered Boris Yeltsin in the fall of 1990, as he attacked Gorbachev for not moving faster. It was going to be quick and painless, particularly if Russia could rid itself of those non-Russian Soviet republics that were considered drains on its economy and drags on its reconstruction. By the end of 1991, Yeltsin and his supporters had their way: no more Gorbachev, no more Soviet Union, no more communism. The road ahead seemed clear and unfettered. Free up prices, privatize state property, and then everything would fall into place, they reasoned.

The euphoria of 1991 of course could not last, and as problems developed it evaporated even faster than it had arisen. It was replaced by varying degrees of cynicism mixed with resentment and despair. “Democracy is not for us,” many concluded. “Nothing but high prices, unemployment, a government of thieves, and constant change.” And yet elections were held as scheduled, people kept coming out to vote, and few seemed to marvel that, for the first time in anyone’s memory, they could say anything they wished without being thrown in jail, could form whatever associations they desired, and could travel anywhere they wanted, so long as they could afford the fare.

Since a few heady, optimistic months in 1992, Russia has been getting a bad press. Stories of organized crime, rampant official corruption, disastrous health conditions, a deteriorating education system, and pensioners on the brink of starvation were daily fare even before the 1998 financial collapse and renewed war in Chechnya exacerbated many problems. The privations and horrors are real, but they are not the whole story, for they fail to encompass changes that are under way in Russia, changes that may have a greater impact on the future than the sensational events that capture the headlines. The problem of comprehension is more than an unfortunate propensity to generalize from the sensational; it is also a matter of historical amnesia. Many observers remember only what has happened in the past few months, or even in the past few days. For some, it is as if Russian history began in 1992, all the problems since then being the product of bad government or—a few would even suggest—the innate depravity of the Russian people.

In fact, nobody can begin to understand what is happening to Russia today unless they grasp the enormous damage seventy years of communism inflicted on the country, the economy, the society,

and the mores and mentality of the people. Totalitarianism exacted a toll in many dimensions, not just by its irrational and inefficient economic system, designed to feed a military behemoth rather than provide a better life for its people. It also atomized society, uprooting the fragile shoots of a civil society that had begun to sprout before the Bolshevik Revolution. It mocked legality with its “telephone law,” exercised by Communist Party apparatchiks dictating to government officials, courts, and legislators as organized criminals would: behind the scenes, secretively, protected by vows of silence. It created a system that not only inhibited creativity and change, but encouraged the proliferation of economic enterprises that absorbed more resources than the value of the goods they produced. It became, ultimately, an economy of negative value. As the late Mancur Olson remarked in his insightful book *Power and Prosperity*, “As communism devolved, it was bound to collapse.”¹

Russia’s political leaders in 1992 inherited not only the rubble of the collapsed economic system, the institutional fragments of totalitarian rule, and a society already mired in organized crime and corruption, but also a population conditioned to believe that prosperity and a better life depended on government, not on themselves. To become free and prosperous, Russia required simultaneous revolutions at the top of government and society, in the way the government ruled, in the structure of the economy, and, indeed, in the way the people thought. Not adjustments or modifications, but *revolutions*. Furthermore, if these revolutions were to succeed at all, they had to be peaceful. A country chock full of weapons of mass destruction could hardly have survived a violent revolution that brought on a civil war.

One can argue whether economic or political reform should have come first, and also whether either is possible in a society full of special interests determined to resist change. But this is a chicken-and-egg argument, since one revolution could not occur without the others. One can argue whether privatization of the economy was too fast or too slow, or whether it was conducted fairly.² But one cannot reasonably argue that Russia could have created a democracy and a market economy without privatization. At least there is no evidence that any country has been able to do that, and there are sound theoretical reasons that explain why this is so.

None of the required revolutions could be completed in months, or even a few years. The time they require is measured in genera-

tions. In a process that could only be gradual, steps along the way to reform the political system created barriers that delayed or blocked change in the economic structure. Increasingly, people came to blame the miseries caused by the Soviet economic collapse on the policies necessary to save them from that collapse. Their attitude created a hostile environment for the changes that were needed. Nevertheless, short-circuiting the democratic process has rarely brought lasting results. A civil society cannot be built top down, but must develop out of the successful efforts of individuals to form associations and groups to satisfy their interests and their needs. Although adopting appropriate laws is an essential element in any transition, the laws a market economy requires to function efficiently (for protection of property rights, enforcement of contracts, and disinterested resolution of disputes) do little good if their enforcement is subverted by corrupt bureaucrats or if they are flouted by the rich and the criminal. Russia's transition leaders faced a multitude of contradictions and vicious circles as they tried to create several revolutions simultaneously, none of which could be totally successful until they all were.

We are now almost halfway through the first transitional generation, and it is time we paid some attention to voices from that generation, rather than those of the gaggle of foreign journalists and self-styled "experts" whose vision rarely reaches past the newsworthy event, and whose historical perspective, in the words of American scholar Leon Aron, is that "of a fruit fly." The purpose of this collection of articles is to give voice to that generation.

What do we find? Not extended arguments about the past, or about who is responsible for the problems of today, subjects that seem to preoccupy many of the older generation of Russian intellectuals. Also absent is any penchant for facile theorizing, or of praising or blaming the "impenetrable Russian soul," topics that have of late absorbed so much attention of the chattering classes, East and West. This is not a place to look for grand schemes or transcendental speculation. What we have are descriptions of specific efforts in many different fields to create a Russia in the future that will differ greatly from that of the past, yet preserve the enduring values of the Russian tradition. Scholars, a provincial governor, federal officials, bankers, an entrepreneur, union leaders, lawyers, journalists, educators, leaders of fledgling nongovernmental organizations, a young Russian Orthodox priest—these authors represent a gamut of professions

and offer a variety of points of view. They are doubtless exceptional, but not unrepresentative of their generation.

These authors neither gloss over difficulties nor yield to despair. They simply describe what is happening in their lives and their professions, and what they are contributing to their society and nation. Each story, each study, each interview is interesting and important in itself. Collectively they provide us with insights into today's Russia that are usually ignored in our periodical press. What impressed me most in this varied cornucopia of ideas and experience is the implicit confidence most of the authors have in the future. They seem to understand—in contrast to many of their elders—that the future is in their hands. They have set about the job of taking control of it, without bombast, without unreasonable expectations, and yet with confidence that what they do can make a difference. This does not mean that all their messages are comforting. Yurii Plyusnin's study of rural attitudes in Novosibirsk oblast is distressing in many respects, yet just such thoughtful and objective studies are necessary for an informed public policy. The sort of policies Governor Mikhail Prusak has introduced in Novgorod oblast seem designed to prevent the preoccupation with mere survival that Plyusnin's research revealed among peasants in Siberia, but whether Prusak's policies are working to that effect or not cannot be determined as yet.

One thing, however, is certain. Russia is so vast and so varied that examples can be found of almost anything. There have been atrocities in Chechnya by soldiers in uniform and also the encouraging growth of voluntary welfare agencies in many of Russia's cities. These opposites neither balance nor justify one another, but in the first instance (the war in Chechnya) conditions are—one would hope—unique, whereas in the other (poverty and homelessness), more general. The new Russia is a work in progress, and its success will depend on its ability to diminish the role of violence and expand the role of social service, whether private or public. This will not happen without a healthy, productive economy, a strong, though limited and honest, government, and a civil society with a significant proportion of public-spirited citizens.

The authors of this volume are busy creating just such a society. If they are typical of their generation, a "normal" Russia of the sort my questioners in Gorbachev's Soviet Union sought may not, in fact, take all of the forty to fifty years I predicted.

Notes

1. Mancur Olson, *Power and Prosperity: Outgrowing Communist and Capitalist Dictatorships* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), p. 153.

2. Those who debate the timing rarely address the question: How can privatization occur and also be “fair” if there is no legitimate private capital, and if many of the “assets” themselves are not assets but burdens? The attempt to transform the economy in the former German Democratic Republic, which was beset with less severe problems than the Soviet economy, has cost the German Federal Republic hundreds of billions of deutsche marks, and even after ten years many in Germany’s eastern Laender are dissatisfied with the result. Most of the industrial enterprises were in fact not viable in a market economy and rather than representing value to an investor required a greater infusion of capital than an entirely new enterprise would have.

Part One

RESHAPING THE
RUSSIAN STATE



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A NEW RUSSIA — OR THE SAME OLD RUSSIA?

An Alternative Worldview in the Making

Yurii Plyusnin

“Our life is like a tear trembling on the tip of an eyelash.” For almost the entire 1990s, this maxim has 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 gains of the past 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 the Russian nation. And here there

Born in 1954 in a village near Kostroma, Yurii Mikhailovich Plyusnin studied zoology and sociology at Tomsk State University and has lived in Novosibirsk since graduation. He holds doctorates in both biology and philosophy, has had a long academic career, and is now a professor of sociology at Novosibirsk State University. The author of more than 150 publications, Plyusnin sits on the editorial boards of several academic journals. His research and writing focus on human behavior in differing physical and social environments. Translated by Anna Kucharev.

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, and those experiences engendered by the crisis of Russia's social and governmental system. Second: the transformation of social attitudes, the 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 nineteen 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 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 my research was limited to Novosibirsk, with a population of 1.6 million);

and (c) *ordinary folk living in the villages and small towns* of provincial Russia. This last group accounts for most of Russia, not only in the quantitative sense (no less than 60 percent of the population¹), but also as the most extensive social substratum. In this essay I 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 changes taking place among society’s ordinary members, that 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 over, 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 past 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 yet adapt to the “new life.” 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, as opposed to people living in major Russian cities and 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 fewer than five or six out of every ten persons simply cannot adjust 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 during the past ten 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 among ordinary people in Russia will be more understandable 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 compatriots in Russia’s villages and small towns far outstrip the great American romantic in terms of thriftiness and endurance. Because when it comes to hard cash (not money that accrues as unpaid wages and remains only “paper money” for years—people often 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 citing excessively low figures, I will add that according to my estimates, for the

past two years the monthly income of a resident 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 taken from 1994 on, their numbers remain within the 5 to 10 percent range. And the number of people who consider themselves incapable of fitting into the new economic and social environment 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 would 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 that are adaptive only to the short term, and may even turn out to be maladaptive over one or two years. 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 choose to use in the battle for survival 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 daily existence. The immediate response to this dilemma is that people sharply cut back any long-range planning in their personal and professional lives. Their emotional state, the basis for 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, threatened everybody with the loss of all means of survival and caused most Russians (not only, say, factory workers or village dwellers, but even professional scholars) to cut back on their advance planning to periods of months and even weeks. It can be said with certainty that people's overall prospects 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 those of 1994.

I will cite some facts that sum up the mood from 1998 to 2000. Up to half of the population (more than 49 percent) completely refuse to plan their lives ahead in any fashion; another 15 percent plan no further than six months in advance. Almost three-quarters of the population do not see any long-term personal prospects under the still evolving social, political, and economic conditions. Only one-fourth of the population evaluate their life prospects in normal fashion (looking ahead one to five years) or extended fashion (looking ahead five to ten years or more).

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 employment in any way, and another 14 percent plan their work activity from one to six months in advance—exactly half the population. Of the remainder, a third of the population (34 percent) view their future work plans in segments of one to five years, and 12 percent look even further ahead.

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

The second psychological reaction I noted is a deterioration in 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 1999. Only one person in every ten (more precisely, about 9 percent across the entire sample) responded that he is usually in a good or fine frame of mind (naturally, this group closely corresponds to 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, that they are not experiencing emotional stress. But nearly two-thirds of the populace, about 62 percent, evaluate their frame of mind pessimistically, of whom 13 percent consider that they are experiencing severe emotional tension.

The same group of respondents, however, when asked to characterize the moods of kith and kin in their immediate surroundings, give less favorable evaluations. In their opinion, only one in every seven persons close to them (making up nearly 13 percent) lives with feelings of certainty about the future and with heart-felt optimism. 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 verge 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 were in a state of acute emotional tension, while one-fifth to one-quarter or more had reached a stage of chronic tension capable of developing into the most diverse somatic illnesses and neuropsychiatric 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 experience a pathological emotional reaction to stress characterized by depressive phenomena. Moreover, the two methods used 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: One quarter of Russia's population are on the verge of breakdown. This is the sorrowful reality.

The Importance of Being Human: Spontaneous Safety Nets

Given Russian society's 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 point out only two facts that I consider to be particularly significant.

First, people tend to get support from family, close friends, and colleagues at work. In our society (and specifically 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 kith and kin. After all, it is very important to know that you won't perish if something happens to you and that there are many people who will come to your aid, lend you a helping hand, and pull you out of the abyss.

What proportion of Russian 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 5 percent) admit that they do not receive any material help or moral support at all from their close ones. Less than 10 percent of nonelderly 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 "external" life brings their way. Their community of neighbors, be it a small village or town, rural district, or major city, retains its cohesion and mutual altruism, people's willingness to help one another. For more than four-fifths of all the people I polled, the immediate social environment they inhabit is genuinely close, and relations between people are friendly and well meaning. Less than 15 percent report that they live in a tense relationship with their immediate surroundings. And only a few individuals, less than 3 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 that 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 that is itself 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 worldview moving, especially where it concerns “ordinary people?” The opinions of researchers reflect uncertainty and conflict in direct proportion to the multitude of studies undertaken. Nearly all social psychologists direct their attention to studying the transformations in the consciousness of the general population living in midsize and large cities. But this is by no means the same as the mentality of those living in small towns and villages. I will introduce several areas of change in everyday consciousness (mentality) that 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 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 According to Maslow, 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, to 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 coincide. But the higher groups of values are dependent on the extent to which the lower values have been 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. Ronald 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 postmaterial (higher values).

In my research into the dynamics of basic values, I have drawn data from 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 self and 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 people'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 further and further into the background. (The number of people for whom these values remain most important in their individual hierarchy does not change, however; they remain at 25 to 30 percent of the population.) Above all, the relative importance of such values as freedom, beauty, understanding, creativity, equality among 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? The process 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 socioregulatory mechanisms (above all education), to attain an uninterrupted and steady movement "up" the scale of values and to secure the most favorable conditions for individ-

ual 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 has fewer incentives to make “positive social efforts.” During the shift of priorities downward in the value hierarchy, the value of physical safety gradually moves 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 for 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, and 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 ends in social stagnation. In attaining the level of “socially valuable individuality,” society evolves 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 the social development that 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 classic culture-independent typology of basic life meanings,⁴ supple-

mented in the 1960s and 1970s by the work of 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 definite direction can be traced, thanks to reasons of a social nature.

There has been a marked increase in the number of people in Russian society who consider that a simple, uncomplicated life based on the satisfaction of fundamental organic and material needs is most desirable. The proportion of those thinking this way has grown from 17 to 20 percent over the past several years. An obvious interpretation suggests itself: The pushed-to-the-limit difficulties of ensuring physical survival have increasingly forced people to reevaluate 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 type of goal, often considered uncharacteristic 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 7 to 10 percent of ordinary people. One can believe that the reform years, in spite of all the negative consequences for vital human activities, have influenced this two- to threefold growth in the number of those who rely primarily on themselves in their choice of life direction, rejecting the usual paternalistic patterns of Russian 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 identify this direction as the most important element in their lives has decreased over the past five years by a factor of two: from 10 to 11 percent down to 5 to 6 percent.

Another socially oriented goal, to live honorably and in good conscience, 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 made up 15 to 16 percent of the population. By the end of the 1998–1999 period, however, their number had decreased to less than 10 percent.

All these changes in preference in central life goals (impermanent and reversible, I think) can be easily interpreted. 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 powerful pressure on people's consciousness and force them to reevaluate life's meanings and priorities.

Meanwhile, I cannot ignore another important factor: 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 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 trials and dangers that threaten their dignity. Under these circumstances, it is essential to maintain respect toward oneself as an individual, to sustain one's unique identity. 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; this influence has increased since the Soviet period.

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 more than 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-thirty. 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 portrayed in the mass media (smoking, alcoholism, drug abuse, 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 that they were not involved with the mass media at all. Without exception, everyone watches two types of television programs: the news and soap operas. News programs support the sense of participating in the world, of not being too isolated; soap operas help people to “forget themselves,” to 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 that ordinary people everywhere in the country cite in support of this conclusion is the presidential elections of 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 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 newfangled 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 make up only 2 to 5 percent of the Russian population.

The active religious propaganda of the late 1990s 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 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 (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 widespread as "ecological activism" became in the late 1980s and early 1990s. 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 1990s, 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 aesthetic principles, and another 28 percent ethical principles, as the primary determinants of their attitude to nature and their interaction with it. Only about 10 percent maintain the primacy of utilitarian or negative principles. Relating to nature as one relates to beauty and peace, not just 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 find 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 that of the Christian church, I think), it is entirely possible that these ecological notions can in the 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 past 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, espe-

cially in village society, nearly everybody sympathized with Communist ideology. But by 1996–1997, a strong political polarization had developed, with nearly half of the members of any given community remaining loyal to the former ideology and the other half gambling cautiously on the new organizational and political formations and moving 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 mourn, but things have come to this: 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 can offer them, above all, strong authority.

During the 1990s, 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 it 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—of agricultural cooperatives, which succeeded *kolkhozes* and *sovkhoses*, and the leaders of criminal organizations. “Nature abhors a vacuum.” Although their actual relations toward the local authorities are complicated, ordinary Russians generally see the semicriminal, semiproductive organizations in every region and district as the reference points of real power.

In recent years, 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 did 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 threefold almost everywhere. Now there are as many as eighty staff members in almost every regional administration.)

Very frequently (I think that this has now become the rule, although it is 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 are justified, as they have had a chance to develop, consolidate, and take root. More than that, from the people's point of view, these relationships are even expedient. In one of his final interviews with me, one midlevel 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.

This opinion is not unique; it is fairly typical among those who try to do business in the provinces. People have no positive expectations whatsoever 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