

HOPPE

Springs Eternal



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**The Association of Researchers of Russian Society
AIRO-XXI**





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HOPE springs ETERNAL

Moscow
2025

Cover *Robert Best*, Creative Director, The Nation
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Translation *Irina Davidian, Antonina Bouis, Ksenia Adamovich,*
Rochelle Ruthchild
Photo and visuals Vladimir Bogdanov, Yury Feklistov, Mark Shteinbock,
Sergey Scherbina, Katrina vanden Heuvel archive, Yuri Shchekochikhin
Foundation archive, Gorbachev Foundation, Victoria Zhuravleva article in
Common Past of Russians and Americans, Moccow, RGUH, 2022.

Azhgikhina Nadezda, vanden Heuvel Katrina.

Hope springs eternal. – M.: Serebrianye niti, 2025. – 269 p. : il.

ISBN 978-5-89163-401-5

The book is a deeply personal look at the Gorbachev era, the realities of glasnost, the role of US-Russian women's dialogues, and squandered historical alternatives. The book features interviews, articles, and never before seen photographs. It is designed not only to address history, hope and memory but to instigate those features-through a new book based on more than three decades of conversation between *The Nation* Editor and Publisher Katrina vanden Heuvel and PEN Moscow director and journalist Nadezda Azhgikhina. It is a spirited dialogue between two journalists, writers and feminists who met in Moscow during the early days of glasnost – and it reveals how their dialogue has continued for more than three decades. Azhgikhina and vanden Heuvel focus on several key points of the Gorbachev era, including the emerging – and contested freedom of expression, the role of independent media, the centrality of history and memory in glasnost, the politics and journalism of De-stalinization, key controversies of the de-democratization and turbulence of the 1990s, the emergence of an independent women's movement in Russia and its ties to the US women's and global women's movement.

The key idea of the book is an abiding belief in the crucial role of a people's dialogue – in this case, of Americans and Russians. One compelling example of that is the Russian – American women's magazine *VYi i Myi* (1992–2003), in addition, *The Nation* InterNational media project, Second Track civil society activities, and others.

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ISBN 978-5-89163-401-5

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Introduction

e wrote the first words of this book the very day Donald Trump was inaugurated as US president for the second time.

We both – like many people in our own countries and the world – followed election 2024 with complex feelings.

It is clear we are witnessing the end of an old order and the birth of a new one – and like millions we feel a sense of dread and anxiety, yet we are also inspired by the new challenges and issues.

We started our dialogue project several years ago – in the belief that it could help us and others understand better where we are, why we find ourselves here and what options – and alternatives – exist.

Our dialogue, as well as our friendship, started in Moscow during the mid 1980s – the Gorbachev years of Perestroika and glasnost, when many Soviet and American people had hope that the Cold War was ending. There was a sense that new thinking about the arms race, for one, would lead to revived trust and, yes, dialogue. This spirit coincided with a rebirth of citizen diplomacy.

We are not naïve. We are longtime editors and journalists who have seen war and militarism engulf our countries; we know that such forces strengthen distrust and lead to characterizing needed diplomacy as appeasement.

But we still believe that dialogue is vital; perhaps the only option for a secure and a hopeful future, not only for Russians

and Americans but for all. So in this humble book, we offer our own personal (and, yes, political) observations from the late 1980s to 2025.

And we amplify our conversations about media, politics, society, family, adventures and even misadventures by republishing here several of our articles over the years – from the US and Russian media.

The idea for this book came to us soon after the pandemic. We were on a media panel at the Harriman Institute in NYC. The world was changing dramatically, a new wave of hostility, propaganda and mistrust was spreading, as well as a new arms race. The new Cold War dominated not only the Russian and US landscape – but the global one. In fact, Russia watchers of long standing described the Russia-US relationship as worse than at any time in history.

There is much work to be done to revive relations. We believe one small part was engaging with honesty and integrity in our dialogue. We hope it will inspire others.

We are indeed inspired by those who devoted their lives to dialogue. We think especially of Katrina's late husband Stephen Cohen who never stopped seeking dialogue and who understood how important alternatives were; and to Nadia's late spouse Yury Shchekochikhin, whose remarkable journalism exposed corruption and opened the doors to change.

We devote our book to their memory. And for our grandchildren, Misha, Ilya and Van – to keeping hope alive.

I

We met because of Gorbachev

NA: We met thanks to Gorbachev's Perestroika and glasnost.

It was an extraordinary time, one that changed the world and, of course, Russian-American relations.

It sometimes seemed that the dream of decades, even centuries, of Russian intellectuals – for civil freedom, democracy and openness, were realized. Gorbachev's reforms marked a shift from ideological and military competition with the West, to disarmament, universal values and thinking about a common future. Despite everything, the life of millions of people, first of all Soviet people, has changed. I feel my generation is the children of Gorbachev's Perestroika. We were already adults and had professions, and at the same time young enough to try to do our best in a new reality, in an exciting world which opened for us.



KvH: It was the early 80s. The possibility of being kicked out of the country or arrested for books was a real one. So Anton Antonov-Ovseenko, who founded the Gulag Museum, whose father stormed the Winter Palace in 1917, and was later killed in Stalin's purges, used to tell Steve: «Never leave books in your hotel.» So then the KGB arrives at Anton's



Drawing by Mark Weisbord

apartment and Anna Mikhailovna, Bukharin's widow, is there and there are all these typescript manuscripts, including Anton's «On Tyrant Stalin.» So, one result: Steve couldn't get a visa for several years, 1980–82, partly because of manuscripts he was taking out of Moscow to the West, which seems so innocent today. And there was a real fear among party apparatchiks of Steve seeing the Bukharin family, and of his samizdat book – a book and a history which had been a suppressed part of Soviet history. I remember sitting in the US-Canada Institute with its head, Georgi Arbatov, who not so politely warned Steve, «Don't mess around with this.»

That there was such fear and anxiety about history makes the breakthrough to Perestroika and especially glasnost even more striking. In retrospect, we think change came quickly, but it took time. What you must have felt so keenly, which I found so exciting as an American journalist, was every day



https://b.backbook.me/file/2019/07/31/9c/preview_rect_3d181f99co.jpg

there was a new revelation, usually about history, often from long censored archives, forcing people to rethink their history.

My country was being «Reaganized» – at home, there was a sense of rolling back the civilizing advances of the 20th century.

In Russia, I felt a country opening up every day. From de-Stalinization to re-stalinization and back, a roller coaster.

NA: People were tired of stagnation, fed up with old leaders dying one after another, Brezhnev. Andropov, Chernenko. People were waiting for something new, though they had little real hope.

Nobody in the first days or weeks had high expectations of Gorbachev, a typical party «nomenklatura» person, people thought.



People in front of Moscow News stand in Moscow, 1980th. Photo by L. Bergoltsev, Moscow Archive

Yet Glasnost was welcomed. Many wanted a renovation of society. Even ordinary people. I was writing my PhD and sometimes I took a local train to the Moscow-Petushki stop. There were several factories there, and usually, workers were drinking beer on the way there and drinking vodka on the way back.

I saw firsthand that during Perestroika the workers forgot about beer and vodka, Instead they were discussing recent articles in *Ogonyok*, *Moscow News*, *Novy mir*. About Solzhenitsyn, archive revelations, everything. It was important.

KvH: I loved to watch people stop, even line up, on cold snowy streets in order to read the «Sten-gazeti» – the wall papers. *Moscow News* had one outside its offices on Pushkin Square.

NA: Yes, people organized lines on the streets to read them. People trusted newspapers, and even believed that the truth could bring us a better life. Even before perestroika, in fact, people believed that journalists could manage to bring justice, expose corruption. And Russians were skilled in reading «between the lines», «mezhdustrochkami» – It was a long-standing tradition. The art of association, metaphoric image helped to transmit messages to readers even in a controlled press.

Even before Gorbachev, some journalists managed to help people with fighting corruption or exposing abuses. That's why people trusted journalists more than the communist party, the government or Soviet courts. People would write letters to journalists, travel for days to visit editorial offices. These were people of the Khrushchev «Thaw», people often called «Shestidesiatniki» («People of the Sixties») who had been inspired by the revelations of the 20th party Congress and Destalinization. Many journalists, writers and editors-in-chief shared the ideas of democratization, reforms and openness that the Thaw of 1960s helped launch. Most of my teachers of journalism and literature were of that era and tradition.

KvH: I remember there were also fights and battles. What I value about European and Russian media, this isn't the case in the US, was the idea you could ask: «Tell me what you read and I'll tell you who you are.» There is a pretense in my country that newspapers are reporting objectively. Take the New York Times – it is not supposed to express an opinion in its news columns. But that pretense is breaking down, more on that later! But I vividly remember the publication in 1987 in Sovetskaya Russia of Nina Andreeva's letter.

NA: Yes, it revealed a real political fight, between liberals and more orthodox forces, a battle which has repeated in Russia over the ages. Nina Andreeva was giving voice to the Soviet



Nina Andreeva with students, 1989

nomenklatura of an older and more traditional style, those who did not want a new opening to the West or even the world. It was a fight, which spread out to all spheres of society, and took place in many families. In literature as well, critics wrote about the «civil war» in literature – between the two ways of thinking and political development. By the way, today we face something similar.

How did the American media cover the Soviet Union after Gorbachev came to office? Did some understand the change? Were they blinded by decades of ideological division? Stereotypes?

KvH: It took a while. You said something important the other day about the media. I believe there's a hybrid media – two, three, four media in the US. There's elite media, there's tabloid media, digital, others. So what did people think?



Bush and Gorbachev in Camp David

Those who studied Russia, I mean, my late husband Stephen Cohen, believed he'd been vindicated! A reformer had emerged from a system so many thought was unreformable. People like Al Haig, Reagan's Chief of Staff, called Gorbachev «Stalin in Gucci shoes.» And that was 1986. There was a battle within the American establishment as to whether Gorbachev was real, or was he tricking us. People who had spent their lives dealing with the Soviet Union as the enemy just couldn't accept change.

But by 1988/1989 things began to change. In November 1989, a then young National Security Council aide Condoleezza Rice invited two Russia specialists to the Presidential «dacha» Camp David to meet President George H.W. Bush: Harvard University hardliner and neocon Richard Pipes and Steve. They had a long, public history of opposing views and were frequent sparring partners on television and radio.

Steve turned to me after he hung up and said, things are changing. Then he said, «but it's gam, too early for me.» I replied, «you're going.»

So, Steve went to Camp David, and the two scholars debated how the president might best approach Gorbachev at the upcoming summit in Malta a debate probably already determined: George H.W. Bush believed Reagan was right. All of the high command was there, Rice and Sununu and Gates, Steve later told me, he knew he had «won» the day when Bush asked him to sit next to him at lunch, and told the room, «Steve is my kind of Russianist.»

When Gorbachev came to Washington in 1987, he had a gathering at the Soviet embassy and invited American «progressive intelligentsia.» That meant Jesse Jackson, Jane Fonda, Paul Newman, Steve. That's where Steve first met Gorbachev. Within a few minutes of arriving a Kremlin aide told Steve that the General Secretary wanted to talk to him. Minutes later, Mikhail Sergeevich approached and asked Steve, assuming the author of «Bukharin and the bolshevik revolution» must be eminent and of a «serious» age – «Really, you wrote the book, or was it your father.» And Gorbachev said: «Where's your father?» – because he thought Steve was too young to have written the book. I love that, he said: «Where's your father?» – Steve was so happy.

And that began as you know, a professional & personal relationship with someone he greatly admired – a figure of history. You know, many people «blame» Steve for Perestroika, but Steve believes he foresaw the possibility of someone who opened the door to democracy. And the door closed fairly quickly.

When you think of Putin now, 25 years in power, with another 6 now assured; and Gorbachev had only six.

NA: Six years, but it was a very important time.



With Evgeny Evtushenko

He managed to accomplish much. He started nuclear disarmament and the conversion of the military sphere. And he gave us freedom. Not everybody remembers that it was him, not Yeltsin. Glasnost was a great concept, there was no language, there was no experience – and for us journalists and writers first of all. We jumped to develop it. *Ogonyok* magazine was a fantastic example of this experiment. By the way, the everyday joke was who would be arrested after our chief editor Vitaly Korotich. It was still the USSR, with its Central Party Committee ideological department and official censorship. But our chief editor, like Yegor Yakovlev of Moscow News, and Alexander Chakovsky from *Literaturnaya Gazeta* took personal responsibility for new groundbreaking publications, first of all about Stalin's time, GULAG, repressions and alternatives for Russia. During first years of Perestroika the idea of socialist alternatives was very important.

And Steve's biography of Bukharin and his other publications in Russia played a crucial role in re-thinking the Soviet past. The publication so Bukharin's last letter in *Ogonyok*, the one his widow remembered by hear, felt like a bomb was dropped. We received tens of thousands of letters from people who confessed that they were waiting for such a moment for all their lives...

Tell me about Steve and Bukharin's story. I know it became part of your family life story as well. You collected memories and taped survivors of Gulag and their families and so on. How did Steve decide to devote such serious attention and time to a book on Bukharin?

KvH: Steve was always interested in alternatives. Perhaps, that came because he grew up in the South, and in the South you could see the impact of racism, the cruelty of racism, firsthand and hold the belief that there had been alternatives and there were alternatives now.

And then he spoke to Robert Conquest who was a great friend of his (and they stayed great friends until Bob died, and Steve would bring him back all this material, and they'd gossip about Gulag revelations).

Robert C. Tucker was his great mentor – and professor at Indiana University. They were talking about what Steve do and Steve said: «I'm interested in alternatives.» When he mentioned Bukharin, Tucker and certainly Conquest said it could be an important subject. No one has really treated it.

Steve did go see E.H. Carr, one of the greatest historians of the Soviet Union who said: «Why are you, a young man, wasting your time on Bukharin?» But Steve's book is not only a biography of Bukharin, it's a biography of an alternative narrative history.

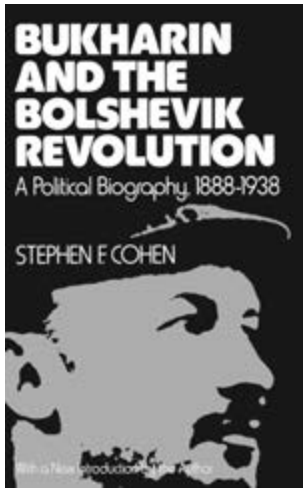
NA: And its publication – well, first smuggled into Russia in late 70s, and then published officially in a «tirazh» of 250 000 copies–was like a bomb, it was a sign of an epoch.



At Anna Larina and Nikolay Bukharin Moscow apartment, 1989

KvH: And it was a sign of Glasnost. I think of Aleksandr Avelitchev, Progress's head. At the time «Progress» was really run by Aleksandr Yakovlev, the Glasnost member of Politburo.

Later, in the 1990s, Steve wanted to do a new version, updated because he hadn't met the family when he first wrote the 1973 version. But that will have to wait, someone with the right approach and the archival materials could do it. But we would have loving arguments about it because Steve wanted to «open up» the book, revise throughout, and I said: «I think you should do a 50-page postscript». I believed the original was a classic, and it's difficult to revise so easily when it's a classic.



But anyway, we lived with the Bukharins. I mean, they became, for all purposes, our family in Moscow.

Steve's mother died in 1978, so Anna Mikhaylovna became his mother and Yuri, the son, became his brother, Nadia too, the whole family. When we arrived in Moscow, we would go two-three times a year, we lived there a few months a year, we would go to the Bukharins, we would stop and buy the food. And you know, go to the Bukharins that night and then see them through the trip.

But Yuri fell ill, he had a brain tumour. And Valery Pisigin, the young Bukharinist in Naberezhnye Chelny approached Anna Mikhailovna and later was very close to Steve. He wrote quite beautiful two books about the countryside – in the tradition of best village writers. They were about Russia's women, especially women in towns and how they quietly hold the sky aloft. And then he got into the study of the blues and American folk music I introduced him to Pete Seeger.

In 1990, Anna Mikhailovna came to New York, she went on the Vladimir Posner and Phil Donahue show – and she went to Italy because they made a film about Bukharin, and she travelled in Europe. It was wonderful to see her become a star.

NA: Yes, and people learned about her and about Bukharin and about this till then absolutely unknown part of history.

KvH: I think it's important. We went to Cuba a few years ago and Steve met the former finance minister. It's obviously a smaller country, but they're trying to do a version of NEP, the New Economic Policy. They're trying to have cafes, hotels, and shoe repairs in the private sector, yet with the «commanding



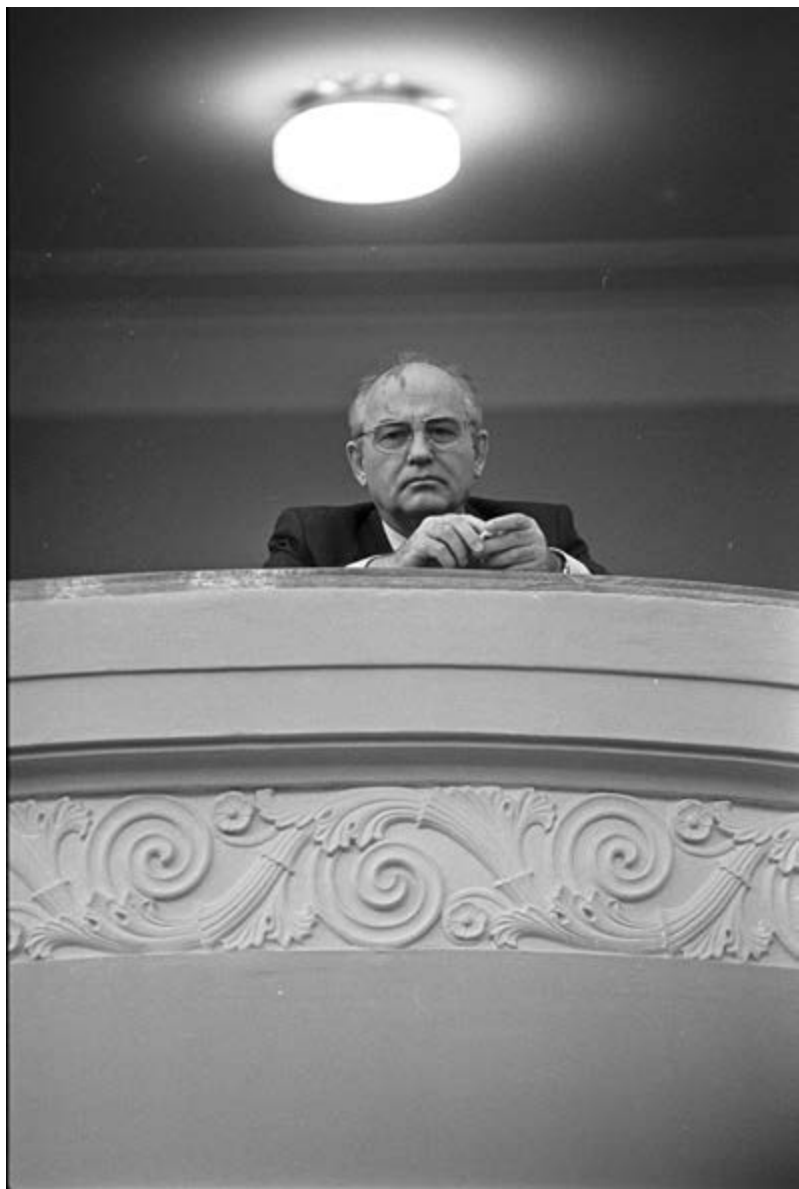
From Gorbachev Foundation archive

heights», railways, and utilities remaining as part of the state. It is an alternative model. Steve used to say there are as many kinds of communism as there are democracies.

NA: There's social democracy.

KvH: And you know what? In the end, Gorbachev was a social democrat.

NA: Yes, he was. Many people were in the late 1980s. I think the tragedy is in fact that people did not understand that social democracy could be a path. Everyone was so charmed with neoliberal ideas, and glossy pictures of a world that didn't exist...



Gorbachov. Congress of People's Deputies. 1990. Photo Yury Feklistov

KvH: Gorbachev was a social democrat, and when you think of the fact that there was only one party, you would have different factions in it – you had in it, conservative Yegor Ligachev, reform Social Democrat Gorbachev, and you had Russian Communist Party head Gennadi Zyuganov, right?

And the communists, I mean, what is Russian communism today? If you go into Zyuganov's office, you see Gagarin, Icons, World War II and Stalin posters!

Katrina vanden Heuvel

Here's what leaders facing global crises can learn from Mikhail Gorbachev^{*}

«What we urgently need now,» former Soviet president Mikhail Gorbachev wrote last year, just a month after the Covid-19 pandemic ground life to a halt across the world, «is a rethinking of the entire concept of security.» Rather than measure security purely in military terms, as we usually do, «the overriding goal must be human security: providing food, water and a clean environment and caring for people's health.»

Gorbachev, who celebrates his 90th birthday on March 2, was perhaps the most radical thinker about security to ever lead a major world power – and certainly the most radical to ever lead a nuclear country. As Soviet president, he reversed generations of perilous military buildup and democratized the Soviet Union to help put an end to the Cold War – a struggle that won him the Nobel Peace Prize. Since the end of his tenure,

^{*} The Washington Post, February 23, 2021



In Gorbachov Foundation, 1992

Gorbachev has continued to argue for new thinking about security, and recent events have vindicated his prescience. In the face of mounting global crises, today's leaders should heed three lessons Gorbachev has promoted for decades.

First, militarization does not make us safer. As Soviet leader, Gorbachev saw firsthand how it instead often escalates the threat of violence by driving other countries to build up their militaries as well. These expensive investments divert resources from investments in basic needs such as health care and education that truly can deepen human security.

Gorbachev, one of the most committed arms reductionists to ever lead a nuclear country, was revolutionary when in the 1980s he called for the complete abolition of nuclear weapons. Due in large part to his leadership, by 2015, 85 percent of the U.S. and Russian nuclear arsenals had been decommissioned from their Cold War-era heights.

Yet his vision of demilitarization remains not only unfinished but increasingly under threat. Key arms treaties have been allowed to expire, and some nations, including the United States, Russia and China, are now modernizing their arsenals. The United States, for example, plans to order 600 new long-range missiles, each 20 times more powerful than the bomb dropped on Hiroshima. The total cost? \$100 billion – \$100 billion that, as Elisabeth Eaves of the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists points out, could «pay 1.24 million elementary school teacher salaries for a year, provide 2.84 million four-year university scholarships, or cover 3.3 million hospital stays for covid-19 patients.» We gain far greater security by investing in our civilization's health and well-being than by purchasing 600 new ways to destroy it.

Gorbachev's second vital insight is that security starts with cooperation – even when that cooperation seems impossible. President Ronald Reagan famously called the Soviet Union an «evil empire.» That initial position would deter many in Gorbachev's position from even attempting to open a dialogue. But, as I have often heard Gorbachev say in gatherings over the years, «if we don't attempt what seems impossible, we will risk facing the unthinkable.» So he persevered – and, eventually, both leaders came to see that no one could win the Cold War. As Gorbachev put it, «We only won when the Cold War ended.» The improbable partnership with Reagan made the entire world safer.

Of course, this cooperation is even more important today, as the «unthinkable» also includes diseases that know no borders and an environmental crisis that threatens the planet itself. The Biden administration rejoining the World Health Organization and the Paris climate accord and, hopefully, signing back onto the Iran nuclear deal are important steps.

Finally, Gorbachev reminds us that one of the best ways to safeguard our national security is to preserve and advance our democratic institutions. Gorbachev showed how even leaders



The first handshake of Reagan and Gorbachev. Geneva, 1985. Photo Yuri Abramochkin

who emerge from authoritarian systems can implement key reforms that promote democracy. From 1985, when he came to power, Gorbachev introduced presidential and parliamentary elections that remain the freest, fairest elections in Russia's history. His signature policy of *glasnost* – or openness – rolled back seven decades of government censorship. He even invested in independent journalism, committing part of his Nobel Prize money to *Novaya Gazeta*, the country's leading democratic opposition paper that continues to publish important investigative reporting.

But, here too, Gorbachev's vision remains tragically unfulfilled. The Russian leaders who followed him, including Boris Yeltsin, who used tanks in 1993 to disband and destroy Russia's most freely elected parliament, rolled back many of his

reforms. And, in recent years, anti-democratic and authoritarian practices have been on the rise in countries around the world, including in the United States.

It has been 30 years since Gorbachev left power. But his fundamental insight that true security can better be achieved through demilitarization, cooperation and democratization is even more true today, when the threats to our security come in more forms than ever. Understanding this new security reality is not idealism. It is realism.

Nadezhda Azhgikhina

13 Days That Changed the World^{*}

Editor's note: In these years of war when restrictions affect Russian society and politics, correspondent Nadezhda Azhgikhina recalls a time of great breakthrough, when Russian leader Mikhail Gorbachev's reforms of Perestroika and Glasnost offered hope that change was possible – let's hope such reforms emerge again.

Perestroika became irreversible in June 1989. That was made clear at the clunkily named First Congress of People's Deputies of the Supreme Soviet USSR. The year before in June 1988 at the 19th Party Conference, General Secretary Gorbachev declared a course of political reform. In his book *Understanding Perestroika* (2006), he wrote: «If we try to define the meaning of political reform, we can say that it was a transfer of power from the hands of

^{*} The Nation. 2024. September. On the 35th anniversary of the First Congress of People's Deputies in Moscow.

the Communist Party into the hands of those to whom it should belong according to the Constitution – the Soviets... It was a devilishly complicated political operation, one could say, ‘with a fatal outcome’ for the party nomenklatura.»

Gorbachev decided to try the inconceivable: real parliamentary elections, instead of the usual formal ones. For the first time, Soviet citizens could choose among several candidates, and candidates could be nominated not only by party organizations, collective farms, and unions but also by creative organizations, academies of science, and collectives in any city. For the first time, people felt that their votes had meaning. Every republic and city and town saw energetic campaigns for election of people’s deputies, a real battle between the old party nomenklatura and new people, the people of Gorbachev’s Perestroika.

I saw this up close.

My husband, the investigative journalist Yuri Shchekochikhin, the first to write about the mafia and organized crime in the USSR in *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, was nominated by the young engineers of Lenin Factory in the Ukrainian city of Voroshilovgrad to run against the region’s party leader. He had never been to the city before. His campaign united the most varied people, young and old, professors, students, and workers – everyone who wanted change. They won, and Yuri became a people’s deputy. In the next two years he worked with his supporters to fulfill his constituents’ demands, returning the city’s historical name of Lugansk, getting rehabilitation for victims of Stalin’s repression, and helping individuals. He also worked in the democratic Interregional Group of deputies with Andrei Sakharov.

The new cohort of deputies of the First Congress included many writers and journalists and scholars and scientists, some of whom later became politicians: the Belarus writer Ales Adamovich; Vitaly Korotich, editor-in-chief of the *Glasnost* magazine *Ogonek*; Yegor Yakovlev, editor-in-chief of *Moscow*



*People's Deputy Yuri Shchekochikhin in the Kremlin Congress Palace, 1990.
Photo Vladimir Bogdanov*

News; historian Yuri Afanasyev; future Moscow mayor Gavriil Popov; leader of the Lithuanian Sajudis Vitautas Landsbergis; the future leader of Belarus, Stanislav Shushkevich; ethnographer and dissident politician Galina Starovoitova; future St. Petersburg mayor Anatoly Sobchak; the poets Yevgeny Yevtushenko, Olzhas Suleimenov, and David Kugultinov; and the prose writers Grigory Baklanov and Valentin Rasputin.

Nobel Peace Prize laureate Andrei Sakharov, recently returned from exile in Gorky, became the leader of the democratic minority (of the 2,225 deputies, the majority of 1,958 belonged to the Communist Party). The heated discussion between Gorbachev and Sakharov, who harshly criticized the Soviet political system, was one of the most important aspects of the congress. The entire country was glued to television screens and portable radios as it followed their polemics. The



Meeting of Inter regional people deputies group, 1989

sessions were broadcast live – also a first. Millions of Soviet people tried to catch every bit of the discussions for all 13 days. People carried radios with them everywhere – listening at work, in public transportation, in cars. Groups gathered around television sets in stores, hair salons, and hotel lobbies. The whole country observed the discussion of the past (which they had been afraid to talk about out loud), the present, and the future. Productivity rates collapsed.

People wrote to and called their deputies, asking them to speak out. They discussed the events with family and friends, often through the night, trying to understand and put a precise name to what was happening and to elaborate their own positions.

Everything about the forum was extraordinary.

At the beginning of the Congress, for the first time, an alternative candidate for chair was proposed: Deputy Alexander Obolensky ran against Gorbachev as a sign that the practice of single-candidate elections should be done away with. Deputy

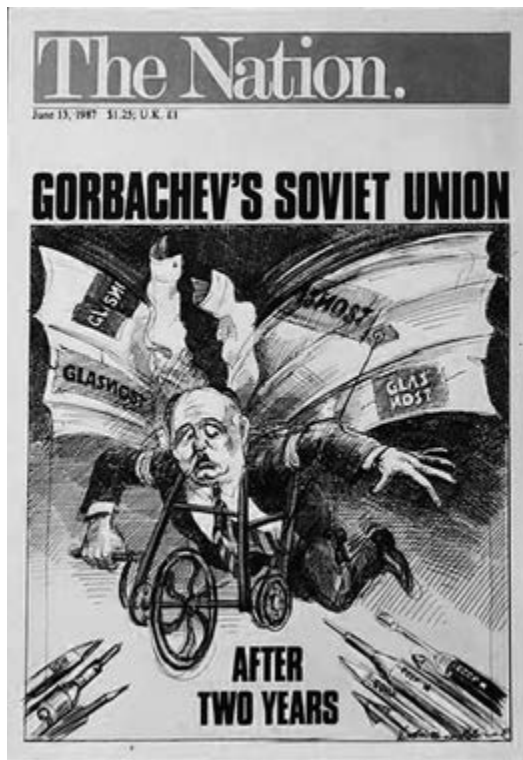


Boris Yeltsin and Alexey Kazannik

Alexei Kazannik gave his mandate to Boris Yeltsin. The discussion between Boris Yeltsin and the «orthodox» Yegor Ligachev, proposals for a new Union Treaty, discussion of the past, and changes to the Constitution were the main topics of discussion. The battle between the old and the new in each of them was impassioned, and sometimes raged through the evening hours.

The congress adopted a resolution on the main directions of the domestic and foreign policy of the USSR and a proclamation to the peoples of the world, which reaffirmed a commitment to democratization of the country, pledged to open international dialogue instead of confrontation, and called for the renunciation of nuclear weapons.

On the final day of the congress, the democratic minority created the Interregional Deputies Group (the co-chairs were Andrei Sakharov, Boris Yeltsin, Yuri Afanasyev, Gavriil Popov, and Victor Palm), which called for a radical reform of the country's economic and political system. In the course of the subsequent congresses in 1989–91, the group won hard-fought battles



The Nation special issue,, June 1987

for the passage of important decisions, including the repeal of the notorious Article 6 of the USSR Constitution that stated that the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) was the leading and guiding force of the Soviet society, the condemnation of the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact, the repeal of censorship, and a declaration of the freedom of the press and civil rights.

Five Congresses of People's Deputies (1989–91) laid the foundation of a democratic political system and, just as importantly, the foundation of a democratic consciousness. In the fall of 1991, the congress voted to dissolve itself.

There was much that the deputies did not manage to do in that short period. The party nomenklatura, the bureaucracy that resisted renewal in the Perestroika years, transformed and strengthened its positions in the era of market economics and shock therapy.

It makes it all the more important to recall the experience of the first Congress of People's Deputies, the national desire for change, the experience of hope and the first steps of freedom and civil solidarity. The desire for dialogue with people from different countries free of confrontation. That dialogue did begin! Those who remember it believe that it will be revived.

«Thirteen days that changed the world» was the description given to the First Congress of People's Deputies at a conference held at the Gorbachev Foundation in last month, attended by historians, analysts, and participants of the historic event that Andrei Sakharov called revolutionary.

Nor can we disagree with the words of the proclamation to the people of different countries, issued in June 1989: «We appeal to the world to fully develop the exchange of ideas and people, cultural and values, dialogue at all levels and in all spheres, to jointly seek and find mutually acceptable compromises for the sake of preserving peace on earth, for the prosperity and progress of all mankind.»

Back then, I believe most Russians believed that the Cold War and the arms race would be a thing of the past. And not only in Russia. Thirty-five years ago, Perestroika, the most peaceful Russian revolution, acquired a legislative framework and involved millions of people in direct political participation, not as a faceless mass but as a sum of individuals imbued with voice and dignity. It has entered collective memory.



Ekaterina Bauman. New Year in USSR



Christmas in USA. <https://ru.pinterest.com/pin/174021973073286658/>

II

Family, Childhood. Cold War



NA: Let's start from the very beginning. With our first meeting. Was it in *Ogonyok* magazine, I think? I was working there, in the literary department, *Ogonyok* was a symbol of perestroika and glasnost, a well illustrated weekly, and you published your articles there. But before that magazine published extraordinary texts by your husband Steve, about Bukharin, and the GULAG. It

was like a bomb, and opened a new dimension of perestroika. We got thousands of letters of people from all over USSR, they wrote they were waiting for the Bukharin letter for all their lives... They believed in socialism with a human face.

KvH: We met around 1989. You were at *Ogonyok*. I was working at Moscow News, for three months. And we, you know, we found each other. I remember we semi-organized a conversation at Moscow News about women and feminism. *Ogonyok*, and Moscow News maybe were the most important Glasnost publications.



NA: And *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, three weeklies were on the frontline. My husband Yura was working there, he was top correspondent on crime and published the first article on corruption and mafia in USSR in 1988... It was also like a bomb.

So we found ourselves in the middle of this fantastic, energetic time, in Moscow – and then met in both Moscow and NYC for many years. We were young, around 30, and our generation in both countries contributed a lot to the general development after the end of Cold War. And our partners did a much for the dialogue and the end of Cold War as well, each in his own way... And our experience, is really unique. Some time I can't believe that all these events really happened to us, and we did what we did in last 30 years, and participated in these transformations. Too much for one life maybe...

Don't you think so?

Tell me about your family. You have Russian roots, your grandfather was an extraordinary person, Hollywood legend... Did your Russian roots matter for your path? And your father, a political figure and diplomat contributed to global politics of détente.

KvH: So I have two sides but they unite. I'll begin with Vilnius. My mother's family, Stein, my grandfather, Julius Caesar Stein, his family came from outside Vilnius, Kalvarija, and he had rabbinical educators in his family back a few cycles. He was not born there, but his mother and father were. He was born in South Bend, Indiana, because, like many Jews, they ended up in the heartland of America and his father ran a store, his mother ran the family, they had five kids and my grandfather got out of there pretty quickly grandfather went to Chicago and he was an ophthalmologist, an eye doctor. And he studied in Vienna for a year, he came back and he worked at Cook County Hospital, but he was booking bands, music bands on the side. And it finally took up too much of his time. So his idea was: you book a band one night in a hotel and then move on. But he ended up leaving ophthalmology to start a company called «Music Corporation of America» in Chicago. And they booked groups like Benny Goodman and Guy Lombardo. These are the big ones.



Katrina in Hollywood near her grandfather Star



Katrina with mother Jean Stein, sister Wendy, father William vanden Huvel in her New York apartment, 1994

My mother grew up in Chicago and then in Los Angeles. My grandfather got involved in movies and music. He established the Music Corporation America (MCA) company, and then they bought Universal Studios. So my mother grew up in this atmosphere. She wrote a book just a few years ago called «West of Eden.» She found her way in this atmosphere. Their house was quite beautiful overlooking Los Angeles. Rupert Murdoch bought it a few years ago and then sold it to his son.

And my sister and I would go out to Los Angeles a lot growing up because they were like babysitter grandparents. We had a lot of friends. And you know, this kind of scene, but to some extent I'll come back to the McCarthy period, which got me interested in Russia.

My father, on the other hand, grew up in Rochester, New York. His father worked in French's mustard seed factory. His mother ran a boarding house for French's workers. They spoke little English. They met in Rochester in 1926. My grandmother lived 10 miles from Ypres in Belgium. She lived the First World War and its horrors. She left her hometown Lisseweghe in 1916 with two boys, and traveled to America, and met her second husband in Rochester. And my father grew up in that environment until he was about 16. There was one bathroom in the boarding house. It was, you know, tough working class scene. He would pick up his father at the saloon down the street many nights.

My father was really smart. And the principal at his school in Rochester said: «You have to go to this school in Death Valley, California.» Deep Springs it was called. So for two years, my father was in Deep Springs and it changed his life. Music, literature, Latin and then two years in Cornell and then two years at law school. And then he stayed close to his family but they did not speak English. He was a classic poor kid using his brain to advance.

He was very close to Robert Kennedy. He was proud of his work in Prince Edward County, Virginia, and spending a year reopening schools for black kids and later desegregating the town's schools.

He had two mentors. One was my godfather Roger Baldwin who founded the American Civil Liberties Union in 1920, who was a conscientious objector in World War I. Went to prison not to serve. He wrote a beautiful statement for the nation explaining his reasons. My father's other mentor was Wild Bill Donovan, who was the most acclaimed hero of World War I and the creator of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) which became the CIA. So in this mix, he had this.

But the influence in Hollywood, I was always influenced by these hearings, you know, the communist hearings who, in so many instances to call someone a communist was to demean

and demonize them, and in many cases, they were working for labour rights and civil liberties and civil rights. It wasn't Russia for many people but it became linked to what did these people see in the Soviet Union. And you know we were allies for years so there was all this collaboration which quickly turned at the end of World War II into McCarthyism and into, you know, Soviet puppet, we've heard that, and the people did not go to the Gulag, but people went to jail and some people left the country out of fear. So it was kind of our political trauma which continues to resonate today, which strikes me, because we can see with what is happening that there is this distinctive relationship, as Arbatov said: «You need an enemy to prove yourself.»

And even with all the changes in the world and China and this, the Soviet Union remains, I think, in the memory.

NA: I was born in Siberia, in the city of Tomsk, my parents were post-graduate and a student. My grandma from my mother side came from poorest working class family from town Anzhero-Sudzhansk, in Kuzbass coal mines. Her father came to Siberia as a coal mine worker from Arkhangelsk region, he served as a marine during Russian-Japanese war, he died from pneumonia rather young and left his wife with 8 kids. They lived in awful conditions, and the oldest joined the revolutionary movement. My grandmother was one of the first Young Pioneers, then «Young Communist League» activist, and after the institute was sent to a coal mine as a chief geologist. I think she was the first woman chief geologist in the world! Every week she was walking many kilometers underground, it was dangerous, to check the right direction of coal. Several times rocks were collapsing in front of her or behind. She was a chief, but she could not change her job, 25 years in one mine, and she had to give lectures for workers during weekends. Her two children were cared for by women in exile, a German housekeeper and Polish nanny, former lover of



Nadezhda Azhgikhina with parents Ilya and Alina, 1967

Tukhachevsky and widow of executed general Petin. My grandmother was a real feminist, I think, and real boss, My grandpa was a son of chief manager of Mikhelson mine company in Kusbass, «from a wrong background», so my grandma saved him, not only once... From my father side I do not know much. According to the family legend his grandpa was a Swedish man from those Swedish people arriving since Northern war with Peter the Great, married a tatar girl. Grandma was from Ukraine. But all document were burned when my uncle was arrested and died in Gulag. Then my young father was arrested and studied medicine first in Gulag hospital under leadership of Austrian communist. Both were released after Stalin died. My father went to Moscow for post-graduate way and we came with him. He became a professor of pharmacology, and my mother worked in a lab for some se-

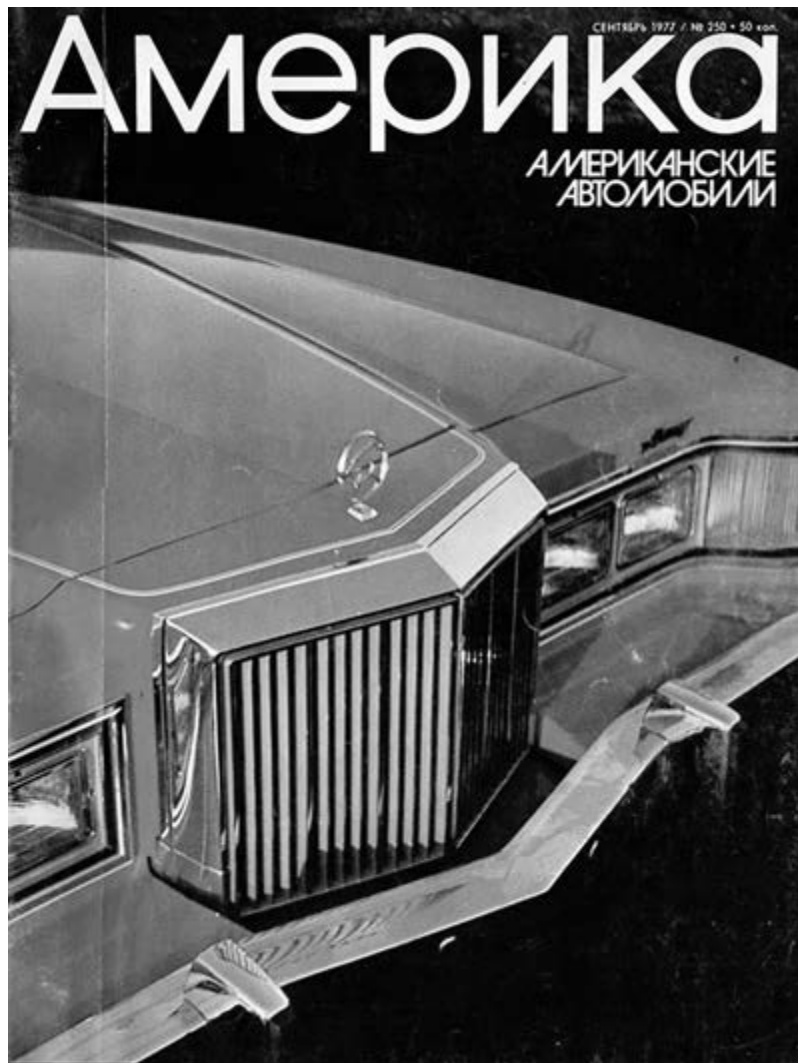
cret space stuff. She never went abroad, her dream as to go to Paris, she collected books about French art, I still have it in my library. My father and my grandpa were listening Western radio voices, and discussed a lot, for as long as I remember myself.

I remember America magazine in Russian. It was interesting to look at the pictures of New York, Chicago, Detroit, to read articles about lifestyle, arts, science.

America in my childhood appeared in books, in Uncle Remus stories about Mr. Rabbit and Mr. Fox by Joel Chandler Harris, Uncle Tom's Cabin by Harriet Beecher Stowe, novels of James Fenimore Cooper... Of course, Mark Twain, Jack London, Edgar Allan Poe, Theodor Dreiser, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Steinbeck, Hemingway and Faulkner were on bookshelves. And later, in high school it was the time of Kurt Vonnegut, E.L. Doctorow, Bob Dylan and Toni Morrison, we read in *Inostrannaya literatura* (Foreign Literature) magazine. What is remarkable, the Soviet Union had a very strong tradition of translation, and Soviet people could enjoy literature in all languages.

My interest was not exceptional. Many Soviet families of intellectuals collected international literature, subscribed to series of books and spent money on it, reading was a rare luxury, officially allowed and available. Don't forget that the USSR popular culture did not present lots of diversity, it was rather boring and rigid, and Soviet people had a habit to read and to discuss books. Foreign literature was sort of virtual traveling, and books brought us to fantastic adventures and showed to us the past and the world outside the Iron Curtain.

And we enjoyed it. Of course we had a very surrealistic perception about outside world, and about America in particular. And of course ordinary Soviet children could not even dream of going to the US. Ever. It was possible only for diplomats, or other top officials.



America Magazine, 1977

KvH: Yes, both of my parents were civilized and cultured people. My mother was very close to Igor Stravinsky at one point, and his aide Robert Kraft, so she felt comfortable with cultured, intellectual Russians. My father did too. He was involved, as someone who was at the White House, in Cuban Missile Crisis, peripherally, but he cared about Russia. He visited a few times, he came to visit us in 1989 and he was on the stage at Dom Kino within an hour of getting off the plane because they had an evening in honor of Khrushchev. So it was Roy Medvedev, Anna Mikhailovna, Steve and my father. There were terrible interpreters, so Steve started interpreting, my father was off the plane for only hour and he was happy, it was very funny. But he was interested in ensuring that were good Russian – US relations. He participated with Steve in reviving the American Committee on US – Russia Accord.

He would be horrified because he wanted to devote his last years to peace and he understood the importance of the US–Soviet relationship in World War II and after. He greatly admired Roosevelt. The question also about Roosevelt is what interested Steve. What IS the alternative, right? What moved him to write about Bukharin was the idea that there were alternatives to Stalinism. And I think the idea of alternatives has shaped my life.

I am happy I decided to work at *The Nation*. We are honest about our values, our passions, never forgetting that as someone once said, «You have a right to your own views, but not to your own facts.»

So I graduated from Princeton, I took a summer Russian language immersion course at Columbia. I did my best. I did two weeks at the School of International Affairs and Public Diplomacy (SIPA) and I realized it wasn't for me, partly because of the statistics! So I went to work for ABC Closeup, the documentary division. One of the documentaries: was partly based on my senior thesis called «The American Inquisition.»

It was about ordinary people and how they got caught up in the great fear of what is loosely called McCarthyism. It is endlessly interesting, the McCarthy period.

NA: Yes, Victor Navasky wrote a great book about those times in Hollywood, «Naming names.» I have it as a present, since my first visit to *The Nation* in 1991...

KvH: Victor was my mentor, former *Nation* editor, and his book *Naming Names* is about more than McCarthyism, it is about morality and integrity and informing. I was a fact-checker on the paperback. The *Nation* really distinguished itself during the McCarthy years because people were cowardly, but Victor and the previous editor Carey McWilliams were noble watchmen. We see McCarthyism coming back again.

You know, people used to make fun of Steve because he'd be on TV and he'd say: «You know, we may have, we may go to war with Russia. And they were: «Oh, he's too sensationalistic.»

I do penance. My grandfather at Music Corporation of America (MCA) along with his colleagues were largely responsible in some way for Reagan. Reagan was four times Head of the Screen Actors Guild Director. He voted for Roosevelt, but he also went on TV every week for General Electric (GE), the company, so he came into your living room, like Trump would come in on TV decades later, and that helped him run and win for governor, and then president.

NA: So tell me about your first impression of Russians and Russia.

KvH: In 1978, I went to Russia on Princeton alumni tour with 15 other people. The weirdest way to go. So we flew, I don't know what it was then, Leningrad, St Petersburg, Petrograd. And it was very grey, and it was November. It was Thanksgiving

week, and I remember thinking «Where are we?» And we stayed at a grey Soviet hotel like Intourist, bad food and grey.

And looking out of window that first morning I saw all these people waiting for grey buses, and it was so cold out, and 5.30 and I felt that St Petersburg seemed grey. I later visited a few times, but I never connected to this truly amazing city. Then we got a bus and drove to Tver.

NA: It was Kalinin that time.

KvH: That's where we stayed, Kalinin. Then we drive into Moscow. Moscow is not beautiful, but it redirected power. We stayed in Intourist hotel.

NA: Which is now The Four Seasons hotel.

KvH: I met Steve because he thought I had a diplomatic passport.

NA: Because your father was at the United Nations?

KvH: He was at the United Nations in Geneva and then in New York. He had managed Jimmy Carter's NY campaign and Steve thought I had a diplomatic passport. I did not. But he asked me to call the New York Times correspondent David Shippler. To see if there was anything I should take out using a diplomatic passport. But Shippler did not want to talk to me. I don't blame him. You know it was 1978. And you call. So I came back and then Steve and I, we had dinner and then, you know, one thing led to another. So, sud'ba!

NA: And next time you visited Russia it was with Steve?

KvH: Yes, then we went back, in 1980. He told the Bukharin family and Tanya Bayeva that I was his French translator

his friend, former student. This I learned later. I said: «Steev-eeee! Isn't it hysterical!?» Because he was like: «Oh-oh!» And he thought I looked too young and he didn't know what to do. But then I became a part of the family, and Tanya was a character. And we saw a lot of the Bukharin family, and for Steve it was still early because he only first met them in 1975. They had heard him on Radio Free Europe, and Radio Liberty and then there was a Scandinavian correspondent who introduced them. It was a big thing, and then he became part of their family and I became part of their family, and Nika became part of the family. They did know Lynn, Steve's ex-wife and the two kids when they were little. Dusty visited us when Nika was one year old.

I remember in 1981 we went to the writer Vasily Aksyonov's dacha. The most interesting thing was that Aksyonov's father came from his village, very upset that his son was emigrating.

Yes, he was a former mayor of Kazan, the city of Kazan.

And his mother, Aksyonov's mother, wrote the two great books about Gulag.



III

Our Steve

Katrina vanden Heuvel

A Personal Recollection of Stephen F. Cohen

I first «met» Steve through his 1977 essay «Bolshevism and Stalinism.» His cogent, persuasive, revisionist argument that there are always alternatives in history and politics deeply influenced me. And his seminal biography, *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution*, challenging prevailing interpretations of Soviet history, was to me, and many, a model of how biography should be written: engaged and sympathetically critical. At the time, I was too accepting of conventional wisdom. Steve's work – and soon, Steve himself – challenged me to be critically-minded, to seek alternatives to the status quo, to stay true to my beliefs (even if they weren't popular), and to ask unpopular questions of even the most powerful. These are values I carry with me to this day as editorial director of *The Nation*, which Steve introduced me to (and its editor, Victor Navasky) and for which he wrote a column («Sovieticus») from 1982 to 1987, and many articles and essays beginning in 1979. His last book, *War with Russia?*, was a collection of dispatches (almost all posted at the nation.com) distilled from Steve's weekly radio broadcasts – beginning in 2014-on The John Batchelor Show.



The experiences we shared in Moscow beginning in 1980 are in many ways my life's most meaningful. Steve introduced me to realms of politics, history, and life I might never have experienced: to Bukharin's widow, the extraordinary Anna Mikhailovna Larina, matriarch of his second family, and to his eclectic and fascinating circle of friends – survivors of the Gulag, (whom he later wrote about in *The Victims Return*) dissidents and freethinkers – both outside and inside officialdom.

From 1985 to 1991, when we lived frequently in Moscow, we shared the intellectual and political excitement, the hopes and the great achievements of those Perestroika years. We later developed a close friendship with Mikhail Gorbachev, a man we both deeply admired as an individual and as a political leader who used his power so courageously to change his country and the world. Gorbachev also changed our lives in several ways. Our marriage coincided with Perestroika. In fact, Steve spent the very first day after our wedding, our so-called honeymoon, at the United Nations with Gorbachev and the news anchor Dan Rather (Steve was consulting for CBS News at the time). Then, on our first anniversary, in 1989, we were with President Bush (the first) and Gorbachev on Malta when they declared the end of the Cold War. And we think of our daughter, Nika, now 29 years old, as a Perestroika baby because she was conceived in Russia during the Gorbachev years, made her first visit to Moscow in July 1991 and since then has been back some 40 times. In a moving moment, a year after Raisa Maksimovna died, Gorbachev remarked to Steve that our marriage and partnership reminded him of his with Raisa because we too seemed inseparable.

Steve has often regretted that many of the Russian friends he made after 1985 did not know about his earlier Moscow life. He first visited the Soviet Union in 1959. But it was those pre-Perestroika years, 1975 to 1982, that gave Steve what he once told me was his «real education... Not only in Russian society but in Russian politics, because I began to understand



the connection between trends in society, trends in the dissident movement, and trends in the nomenklatura.» They were «utterly formative years for me.» They also informed his writings, especially his pathbreaking book, *Rethinking the Soviet Experience*, which was published at the very time Gorbachev came to power. «There was a lot of tragedy,» Steve used to say, «but also a lot of humor and warmth when people had little more than personal friendships and ideas to keep them company.» From 1980, when I first traveled to Moscow with Steve, to 1982 when neither of us could get a visa (until 1985 when Gorbachev came to power), we lived in that Russia,

spending many nights in friends' apartments and kitchens drinking into the night, and listening to uncensored, often pessimistic, thinking about the present and future of Russia.

I later became Steve's collaborator in smuggling samizdat manuscripts out of Russia to the West, and bringing samizdat books back to Russia and distributing them. By the time I joined him, Steve had managed to send dozens of such books to Moscow, and satisfying friends with a selection ranging from Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, Varlam Shalamov, George Orwell, and Robert Conquest to the Kama Sutra and, of course, the samizdat version of Steve's own book on Bukharin. I learned from Steve that one had to keep forbidden documents and manuscripts on one's person at all times, knowing that the KGB frequently searched apartments and hotel rooms. At a certain point, Steve's shoulder bag became so heavy that he developed a hernia on his right side. After surgery, he started carrying his bag on his left side, but developed a second hernia there, as well. He liked to say that the worst the KGB ever did to him was cause him two hernias!

In fact, it was samizdat manuscripts that first brought us together. In 1978, Steve heard that I had a diplomatic passport, which would have exempted me from a customs search, and was about to travel to Moscow. (At the time my father was the United States representative to the United Nations in Geneva.) Through a mutual friend, Steve asked if I would bring out samizdat documents being held for him in Moscow. I would have been happy to do so, but Steve had been misinformed. I didn't have a diplomatic passport.

Steve could sometimes seem like a tough guy, but those who won his trust knew he was a person of great generosity, loyalty, and kindness. He was known in our New York City neighborhood on the Upper West Side as an impresario/organizer and longtime supporter of basketball tournaments for local, often poor, kids. In the United States and Russia, Steve mentored and supported young scholars. In the

last decade, he set up fellowships for young scholars of Russian history at the several universities where he'd studied and taught: Indiana University, Princeton, New York University, and Columbia. He lent his support to the establishment of Moscow's State Museum of History of Gulag – and to its young director and team.

Life with Steve was never boring. He was supremely independent, the true radical in our family, unfailingly going to the root of the problem. He spoke his mind. He had a CD with a dozen variations of «My Way» – from Billy Bragg to Frank Sinatra. And as *The Chronicle of Higher Education* subtitled its 2017 profile of Steve, he «was the most controversial Russia expert in America.»

Through all of our years together, Steve was my backbone, fortifying me for the battles *Nation* editors must wage (often with their own writers, sometimes including Steve himself!), and giving me the personal and political courage to do the right thing. But never more so than when we entered what might be called the «Russiagate era.»

While Steve liked to say it's healthy to rethink, to have more questions than answers, there was a wise consistency to his political analysis. For example, as is clear from his many articles in *The Nation* in these last decades, he unwaveringly opposed American Cold War thinking both during the Cold War and since the end of the Soviet Union. He was consistent in his refusal to sermonize, lecture, or moralize about what Russia should do. He preferred to listen rather than preach, to analyze rather than demonize. This stance was no recipe for popularity, which Steve professed to care little about. He was courageous and fearless in continuing to question the increasingly rigid orthodoxies about the Soviet Union and Russia. But in the last months, such criticism did take its toll on him. Along with others who sought to avert a new and more dangerous Cold War, Steve despaired that the public debate so desperately needed had become increas-

ingly impossible in mainstream politics or media. Until his death he'd been working on a short article about what he saw as the «criminalization of détente.» The organization he established, the American Committee on East-West Accord, tried mightily to argue for a more sane US policy toward Russia.

He fared better than I often did confronting the controversies surrounding him since 2014, in reaction to his views on Ukraine, Putin, election interference, and more. Positions he took often elicited slurs and scurrilous attacks. How many times could he be labeled «Putin's puppet»? «Putin's No.1 American apologist»? Endlessly, it seemed. But Steve chose not to respond directly to the attacks, believing – as he told me many times when I urged him to respond – that they offered no truly substantive criticism of his arguments, but were merely Ad Hominem attacks. What he did write about – he was increasingly concerned about the fate of a younger generation of scholars – was the danger of smearing those who thought differently about US policy toward Russia, thereby silencing skeptics and contributing to the absence of a needed debate in our politics, media, and academy.

Mikhail Gorbachev often told Steve how deeply influenced he was by his writings, especially his biography of Bukharin. Steve first met Gorbachev in 1987 at the Soviet Embassy in Washington. It was a reception for America's «progressive intelligentsia» – which Steve found funny, because he considered himself a maverick and didn't like labels. But he was there that day, and within a few minutes a Kremlin aide told Steve that the general secretary wanted to talk to him. Minutes later, Mikhail Sergeevich approached and asked Steve, assuming the author of Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution must be eminent and of a «serious» age: «Deistvitelno [really] – you wrote the book, or was it your father?»

Steve finally achieved that «serious» age Gorbachev spoke of! But his heart, spirit and mind remained youthful till the



Celebration of Steve's 75 in Novaya Gazeta, Moscow, December 4, 2013. Photo Sergey Shcherbina

very end. Maybe it's because of his love of Jerry Lee Lewis's rock and roll, or New Orleans blues or Kentucky blue grass, or his passion for basketball (shared with our daughter Nika and his 16-year-old grandson, Lucas), or his quest for a good anecdote (his annual anecdote lectures at Princeton and later NYU drew large crowds). Maybe it's because we continued our walks in nearby Riverside Park for as long as was possible – walks full of loving and spirited argument and talk. Perhaps it's because, while Steve was a very serious person, he didn't take himself seriously.

On Saturday, Mikhail Gorbachev sent these words about Steve:

Dear Katrina, Please accept my sincere condolences on Steve's passing. He was one of the closest people to me in his views and understanding of the enormous events that occurred in the late 1980s in Russia and changed the world. Steve was a brilliant historian and a man of democratic convictions. He loved Russia, the Russian intelligentsia, and believed in our country's future. I always considered Steve and you my true friends. During Perestroika and all the subsequent years, I felt your understanding and unwavering support. I thank you both.

19.09.20

I asked Steve many years earlier why he had never attempted (even) a monograph about Gorbachev. He told me that he felt too close to Mikhail Sergeevich, he had become a friend – perhaps I am stating it crudely, but it was a real factor for Steve. Steve did have a file of personal correspondence with MS, and I am beginning to go through it, as well as organizing voluminous files and archive materials. By next year, I hope that Princeton will house Steve's archives.

For 40 years, Steve was my partner, companion, co-conspirator, best friend, fellow traveler, mentor, husband (for 32 years), co-author. I will be forever grateful to him for introducing me to *The Nation*, to Russia, for a life that has been full of shared adventure, friendship and passion, and for our beloved daughter, Nika.

Published: The Nation. 2020. September 21. [https:// www.the nation.com/article/world/stephen-cohen-obituary-russia/](https://www.thenation.com/article/world/stephen-cohen-obituary-russia/)

Nadezhda Azhgikhina

**He Taught Gorbachev.
Stephen Cohen was an active participant in
the democratic changes in Russia, and he
will always be remembered as such**

Without Stephen Cohen, it is impossible to imagine Perestroika, Moscow. He attended rallies and meetings of former Gulag prisoners, participated in public debates and scholarly symposia, spoke out with equal passion at forums and friends' homes, and he talked and talked with everyone – the «architects of Perestroika,» young journalists, people on the street.



Without his figure, constant cigarette, and light accent, the picture of the era would be deficient. Without the evenings he and Katrina spent with friends, Russians and Americans, the perception would be inadequate of the atmosphere of mutual openness, the passionate desire on both sides to end the Cold War, to start a new path of cooperation and to be free of the Sword of Damocles of nuclear confrontation.

Without his publications in the magazine *Ogonyok*, the history of independent journalism and the history of understanding our past and present would be incomplete.

Cohen's significance in historical scholarship is not solely about his important contribution to the Western academic community through





In Literaturnaya Gazeta, after meeting with journalists and writers, fall 1992

his biography of Bukharin – and other figures in the early Soviet leadership who were opposed to Stalin. Just as important was his study of the nature of Stalinist and post-Stalinist repression, bringing the true faces and voices of Gulag prisoners to the world, as well as the faces of the Soviet dissidents with whom he lived side by side for many months throughout his long professional life.

He taught young historians the methodology and approaches of Western research, which gave many of them new perspectives and brought them into the international scholarly community. He documented daily life and was one of the first to have access to decades of closed archives. But, most importantly, he was part of the process of democratization and liberation from the Stalinist legacy. His significance is not

only in that he helped establish the Gulag Museum and supported many former prisoners and their families, whom he had met back in the Brezhnev era of «stagnation.» He essentially offered a new language for talking about the past, reasoned and factual, and he formulated the need for a fundamental evaluation of the past, together with Soviet writers, journalists, and activists.

I think his articles and formulations helped politicians, including Gorbachev, to articulate their own positions more clearly about the past, at least until 1989. Cohen, like many romantics of perestroika, was profoundly idealistic. He believed in Bukharin. He believed in the possibility of socialism with a human face, and I think he kept that faith throughout his life.

Millions of Soviet people shared that faith in the late 1980s. I remember the flood of letters to *Ogonyok* after the publication of Bukharin's famous «last letter» warning of Stalin. Elderly people, frontline soldiers, former prisoners, bosses, and the most ordinary people wrote to say that they had been waiting for this publication all their lives. Young people wrote that they had finally seen meaning and direction. That Glasnost period passed rather quickly, and many political figures tried to erase its achievements, but Steve always remembered. He kept his faith in the possibility of preventing a new Cold War and nuclear catastrophe, which he wrote about frequently in recent years.

I used his book *The Victims Return* in my curriculum at journalism school, and I am pleased that 20-year-olds studied it with great interest and then used it in their subsequent work on Russian history and the problem of historical memory.

Stephen Cohen was an active participant in the democratic changes in Russia. He will always be remembered as such.

Published: The Nation. 2020, September 25.

*Roy Medvedev***My meetings with Stephen Cohen**

I became acquainted with Stephen Cohen in 1969. He completed his thesis about Bukharin by then but had not yet published it as a book.

I, for my part, already finished my book «Let History Judge» by that time and sent its microfilmed copy to the USA. But my book had not yet been released then, so Cohen did not read it. He visited me car-



rying a letter of recommendation from renowned American Sovietologist Robert Tucker, who was very well disposed to the Soviet Union. Tucker was Cohen's academic advisor who actually suggested to the beginning Russia scholar that Bukharin was a research subject well worth looking into. Moreover, Tucker arguably founded an entire school of Russia / Soviet studies.

When World War II began, Tucker was still very young. After completing a course of study at Harvard, he worked for a while at the Office of Strategic Services, the CIA's predecessor, and later, with the war still on, was stationed at the U.S. embassy in Moscow as a translator. Soviet people were then very amiably disposed to Americans, all the more so because the allies were already mounting their offensive then, so the embassy's young staffer always met only with good feeling and kindness. In May 1945, together with Muscovites he watched the victory fireworks and rejoiced that the war was over. Here, in Moscow, he met a young woman whom he soon married. In Moscow he began collecting materials for a book on Stalin. This book, containing critical passages about the leader,

would be published in the USA several decades later. But initially, when he was still working in Moscow, Tucker, like most Soviet people, was fascinated by Stalin. And only years later, after the 20th Party Congress, when an ample evidence related to the Stalin regime's crimes emerged, Tucker, already living and teaching in the USA, would change his views completely. I would not be greatly surprised to learn that I played some role in the reversal of Tucker's opinion about Stalin, from admiration to its opposite. Tucker and I were exchanging letters in the 1960s, and I told him a lot about Stalin and his era. So, when his student Cohen was offered a grant to travel to the Soviet Union and write a book about Bukharin, Tucker recommended that the young expert on Soviet history should meet with me.

I remember well our first meeting with Cohen. He was accompanied by his first wife and two little kids. We met several times. I could not tell him much about Bukharin – I spoke only about Bukharin's relations with Stalin and the Bukharin trial, but this information, too, proved useful to Cohen. He asked me to introduce him to people who personally knew Bukharin, and I was able to oblige. Later Cohen would bring up this episode and thank me for the help. After this trip to the USSR Cohen published a book about Bukharin. It enjoyed immense success among American sovietologists and was translated into main European languages.

A new stage in Cohen's life began in 1982, when a small American publisher brought out a Russian translation of his book about Bukharin. Bukharin's son, artist Yuri Larin, was a co-translator of the book. I was acquainted with him and his mother, Anna Larina, and Cohen first had a chance to meet them in the mid-1970s, during one of his visits to the USSR. Cohen and Larin became friends. Which reminds me of an episode that few people know about. It took place in March 1978. In the autumn of that year, there would be Bukharin's 90th birthday, and another anniversary – 40 years since his



Stephen Cohen with Roy Medvedev. Moscow, 1981

execution – in mid-March. So Larin and I had the idea to mark – unofficially, of course – both anniversaries. Cohen was then on one of his visits to Moscow. And we had a get-together in my Khovrino apartment on Dybenko Street. I also invited two Italian reporters who took interest in Bukharin's life story. A table was laid – a funeral feast, one might say; it was a quiet, family-style gathering. By the way, right after the release of the Russian translation of the Bukharin book, which immediately began to be unofficially copied and passed around in the Soviet Union, Cohen became a persona non grata in the country, and it was only after the beginning of the Perestroika that he again was able to get a visa.

Thanks to his contacts with the Larins, Cohen gathered a large trove of materials about Bukharin, including the last years of his life. For some reason, however, he chose not to get his book into shape, although the 1930s are treated in it fairly

superficially: when Cohen was writing his thesis, and later reworking it into a monograph, he had very little information about those times. I, for my part, amassed a colossal Bukharin archive covering the period until the very moment of his arrest. And I wrote a book called «Bukharin: The Last Years», in which I systematized the information I gathered. The book was first published in Rome in 1977, and next year, in New York. Named «The Murder of Bukharin,» it was included into the volume called «Unknown Stalin» of my and Zhores's collected works. Cohen was the first person to whom I gifted the first edition of my book; he wrote a very positive review of it and later often referenced it in his bibliographies.

So it can be said that a book about Bukharin was written by me instead of by Cohen, but I did it in large measure thanks to my acquaintance with him. I was willing to yield precedence to Cohen, but Americans usually do not undertake a large project without securing a relevant grant first. And Cohen, after the publication of his reworked thesis, was not offered any research opportunity related to «the Bukharin theme.» When in 1988 the Moscow publisher Progress released his Bukharin book, he was no longer studying the subject.

I happened to be of use to Cohen also in another project he undertook – a study of the return of prisoners of Stalin's camps to normal life and their adaptation to this life. I knew a lot about this subject as well since I had talked with these former prisoners. And my contacts included people who were indeed in opposition to the regime. They included Mensheviks, one Trotskyist, several supporters of Zinoviev and Bukharin. It needs to be said that for the most part their living conditions in the camps were fairly good because they had to collaborate with the camps' administration. This is a big subject to broach in passing. But that was how matters stood then: in order to survive, you either had to work in the healthcare section or collaborate with your camp's administration. In a word, I had learned a lot from the returnees

about their life in the camps. I shared with Cohen the information I had and introduced him to several former prisoners – in particular, to Antonov-Ovseyenko.

And when the Perestroika was afoot, I regularly sent to Cohen my articles about current affairs in the USSR. Cohen read them carefully, often asking clarifying questions. He held Gorbachev in high esteem and published in the USA a lot of articles about the changes in the USSR. Cohen never met Gorbachev while the latter was in power; they were introduced to each other later, at the Gorbachev Foundation. Later they would meet and talk on several occasions at the Foundation. I too was invited to these meetings, and once I was accompanied by Zhores.

In post-Soviet period I came across Cohen several times at conferences. I remember that once Cohen and I sat on the panel and he took the floor to say that he wrote a book about Bukharin but now there was little interest in the subject. I interjected and said that that was not at all so, that all of Bukharin's ideas had been thoroughly studied and taken seriously in China, that the Bukharin alternative was undoubtedly familiar to Deng Xiaoping and had a strong impact on him.

The history of my acquaintance with Cohen included, inter alia, such a remarkable episode as co-authoring a book. This is how it happened. When Khrushchev was deposed, I began to receive from different people pieces of information about how the whole thing was being prepared and carried out in October 1964. I was also told stories about his life as a recluse after his dismissal. I started putting it all down as a political diary. I kept this diary for six years, from late 1964 to late 1970, and gave several hand-written copies of the text only to people closest to me. When I stopped keeping the diary, Zhores told me it was a very interesting text which had to be published. And Zhores arranged for the publication of a month's worth of most interesting entries, unsigned, in the *Washington Post* and *New York Times*. Consisting of entries for 1969, the



Stephen Cohen with Anton Antonov-Ovseyenko. 1980

selection highlighted the Sino-Soviet border conflict near Damansky Island. At that time I wrote down my conversations with Sakharov, Nekrich and an army general about the possibility of a full-blown war with China.

The publication elicited a wide response while also causing me some trouble: despite the anonymity of the publication, my apartment was searched for the first time and all my archives were confiscated. Truth be told, I was prepared for such a development, keeping all the most important stuff outside my home. So the searchers did not find any political diary in my apartment. The publication in the American newspapers caused a great stir and I started receiving offers to publish the diary as a book. Ultimately I signed up with the Dutch Alexander Herzen Foundation, which printed two volumes of my political diary, with my name on the cover. After the death

of the organization's founder, however, there was nobody left to continue the project, so there were just two printed volumes and that was all. It was at that moment that I was contacted by Cohen, who, of course, knew about this Dutch publication. He offered his help in carrying on publishing the texts. I agreed and passed to him the third volume – Cohen published it, under the title «An End to Silence,» in English with his comments. The volume had two names on the cover, mine and Cohen's, but because in both Latin and Cyrillic alphabets «C» precedes «M», in all bibliographies the book has been presented as Cohen's work.

Cohen gave me much help with books. A lot of books were published in Russian in the USA, for the purpose of sending them to the USSR using available channels. These publishing ventures were effectively run by the CIA, but it doesn't matter – what does is that these books were printed and somehow brought to our country. Importantly, the publications included not only books censored in the USSR due to political considerations, such as Solzhenitsyn's, but also classical texts shunned for no other reason than that the authors – such as, for instance, Akhmatova, Gumilev, Nabokov – did not subscribe to the official Soviet ideology. I made many requests to Cohen and he always obliged. He usually sent the books via diplomatic channels – first to an employee of the U.S. embassy in Helsinki, later informing him or her that the package had to be forwarded to Moscow. And so these parcels were brought to me from the embassy sealed. It was very important for me. Some writers asked me to help them to get certain books, and I would then place an order with Cohen. That was how I supplied books for Tvardovsky, Lakshin, Trifonov. I sold some books, but only those that could not be labeled as anti-Soviet – for instance, Gumilev's collected works.

And this is what happened once. Suddenly I got a call from the KGB and was invited for a conversation. I came and was received by a fairly high-ranking officer. The security police

regarded me as a bigwig of sorts because both the search of my apartment and my arrest had to be authorized personally by Andropov. I know for a fact that preparations for my arrest were made twice but on both occasions Andropov withheld his authorization. Well, when I came to the KGB office, I saw on this senior officer's desk a large stack of books, a package ripped open, and a letter from Cohen. I was told that the lid of the trunk popped open in the car carrying diplomatic pouches, a package fell out and was torn. The package was brought to the KGB, and now officers at this organization were expecting an explanation from me.

My response was laughter. The fact of the matter was that the American embassy in Moscow filled low-level positions, such as cleaners, drivers, technicians, with Soviet citizens. I was amazed by such lack of caution on the part of the Americans because all these Soviet people were at the same time working for the KGB, providing the most valuable information they could quite easily access working at the embassy. It could well be that the embassy's driver who carried the mail was in the KGB's employ as well: there was no way that precisely this parcel, addressed to Medvedev, would have slipped out of a closed car; no, all this was staged. And I said to the KGB officer who was talking with me that Cohen was my good American friend, we were cooperating like scholars, he sent me books that I asked for, it was a friendly book exchange. Besides, there was nothing anti-Soviet in the books that slipped out of the car, and if anyone would find anything anti-Soviet in them, then it would be a different matter. In the Soviet times punishment was applied for disseminating anti-Soviet literature but not for keeping it. So even if Cohen had sent me something anti-Soviet, I would not have been punished because the people at the KGB knew for a fact that I was not disseminating the stuff. I think the whole purpose of the stunt was to let me know I was being surveilled. The books were returned to me and the incident had no consequences either for me or for Cohen.

I also remember the last meeting with Cohen's teacher, Tucker. Before his demise – and probably anticipating it – he decided to visit Moscow, to recall the times when he worked here and met his beloved. His students, including Cohen, helped raise funds for this trip. Tucker came, stayed for two or three weeks at the National Hotel and I met with him. This was not long ago before his passing in 2010.

Sure enough, in the last years of his life, when anti-Russian and anti-Putin sentiment in the USA had been on the rise, Cohen had had a difficult time. Difficult because, first of all, the USA no longer takes interest in our country and American Russia experts are not in demand. And second, because Cohen had always had a very sympathetic attitude to the Soviet Union and Russia, this outburst of Russophobia caused him much pain. And what's important he was holding his own against this mob mentality. Moreover, he started supporting Putin – not openly, which was simply impossible, but indirectly, engaging in debates with critics of the Russian president, arguing that he was no evil doer and the USA was making him out to be something that he wasn't. In the last years of his life he was regularly exchanging letters with Zhores, and I know from his letters that he was anxious about his pension and professorship – presumably he could be stripped of them because of his pro-Russian stance. But at the same time he took great pride in the fact that he was held in high esteem and published in Russia.

Kevin Murphy

Stephen F. Cohen Helped Us Understand the Russian Revolution and Nikolai Bukharin

Stephen Cohen, who passed away earlier this year, resisted ideological conformity at every turn. The great historian of Nikolai Bukharin and the Russian Revolution left behind a deep body of work that will remain invaluable for generations of socialists to come.



Stephen Cohen, historian of the Russian Revolution and commentator on Russian-American relations, passed away earlier this year.

His most important and enduring contribution was a groundbreaking 1973 biography of Nikolai Bukharin. Cohen was born in 1938, the same year Bukharin was executed by Stalin, and his work encouraged socialists and historians to engage with both the neglected legacy of one of the true geniuses of the Russian Revolution and larger interpretive questions about the rise of Stalinism.

Taking issue with the anti-Communist narrative of the Russian Revolution leading inexorably to Stalinism, Cohen argued that Bolshevism «was a diverse movement» with «endless disputes over fundamental issues.» The 1920s was a «golden era» of Marxist thought, with «contrary theories and rival schools.» Bukharin, «rightly considered the favorite of the whole party,» according to Lenin, was at the center of many of these controversies. More than a political biography, *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution: A Political Biography, 1888–1938* offered «a way of reexamining the Bolshevik revolution» and the formative years of Soviet history.



People Magazine photo, NYC, 1989

Unearthing the Real Bukharin

At age seventeen, Bukharin joined the Bolsheviks during the 1905 Revolution and helped rally Moscow youth groups into a citywide organization. Along with fellow students Valerian Osinsky and Vladimir Smirnov, he spearheaded «theoretical raids» at Moscow University seminars, putting forward Marxist critiques against liberal professors. He was also involved in the workers' movement and by age twenty was elected to the Bolshevik Moscow Committee.

Bukharin made his mark, however, as an economist and theoretician. The free enterprise system analyzed in *Capital* had undergone profound changes that he examined in *Imperialism and World Economy*. Influenced by Rudolf Hilferding's *Finance Capital*, Bukharin described how free com-

petition of early capitalism was supplanted by «monopoly alliances of entrepreneurs» in which «state capitalist trusts» of «several hundred billionaires and millionaires hold in their hands the fate of the whole world.» During the war, state power was «sucking in almost all branches of production» and «more and more became a direct exploiter, organizing and directing production as a collective capitalist.»

But the major issue that placed the rising young star at loggerheads with Lenin was over the Marxist theory of the state. Several European Marxists, including Anton Pannekoek and Zeth Höglund, had rehabilitated the anti-statism of Marx, while Bukharin became the first Bolshevik to do so in his *Toward a Theory of the Imperialist State*. Lenin refused to publish the essay and accused Bukharin of «semi-anarchism» for advocating the «exploding of the state.» Bukharin complained to Lenin of rumors that the leader had surrounded himself with an obsequious coterie (presumably Lev Kamenev and Grigory Zinoviev) and would not tolerate anyone «with brains.»

When Bukharin returned to Moscow in May 1917, Nadezhda Krupskaya's first words to him were that Lenin «no longer has any disagreements with you on the question of the state.» Lenin had undertaken his own research on Marxism on the State before he returned to Russia that would guide much of his 1917 strategy. Lenin's arguments for insurrection were seen by many of his lieutenants, including Kamenev and Zinoviev in Petrograd and Viktor Nogin in Moscow, as «almost a betrayal of accepted Marxist ideology» according to Bukharin. Cohen posits that Lenin relied on new leaders such as Leon Trotsky and Interdistricters in Petrograd and Bukharin and young Moscow Lefts to overcome the Bolshevik rightwing and push his party toward the October Revolution later that year.

In early 1918, Bukharin headed «the largest and powerful Bolshevik opposition in the history of the Soviet Union.» Bukharin and his young Moscow comrades inspired the Left

Communists to oppose the peace treaty with Germany, calling for a guerilla «holy war against militarism and imperialism» and produced their own journal, *Kommunist*. The future defender of «socialism in one country» was the most resolute internationalist, asserting that it was their duty to aid the fledgling European rebellion that was under way in Berlin, Vienna, and Budapest.

With the young Soviet state's resources stretched and a population eager for peace, support for the Left Communists quickly melted, but the faction persisted in defending their differences with Lenin over the transition to socialism. With the economic catastrophe worsening, Lenin called for an end to nationalizations, giving commissars «dictatorial powers,» technical and financial collaboration with capitalists, and increased labor discipline to restore productivity (supplanting workers' control in the process). Bukharin reviewed Lenin's *State and Revolution* enthusiastically in *Kommunist*, with its repudiation of bureaucratic political and economic authority. For Bukharin and the Left, Lenin's volte-face represented an abandonment of the ideals of the «commune state.»

Cohen describes Bukharin's 1920 *Economics of the Transition Period* as his «ode to war communism.» During the Civil War, it provided «a theoretical justification of voluntarism and social leaps,» as well as coercion against the peasantry to feed the Red Army. Bukharin claimed there was «a struggle between the organizing tendencies of the proletariat and the commodity-anarchical tendencies of the peasantry.» With the Civil War over and the Soviet Union ravaged by economic catastrophe and famine, Bukharin revised his earlier positions. Within a year, he argued that this same working class itself «has been peasantized» and later would assert that war communism had been a «caricature of socialism.»

Lenin's more lenient New Economic Policy (NEP), introduced in 1921, emphasized persuasion instead of coercion and encouraged peasants to cultivate their own land and to sell

their produce on the market. Bukharin was Lenin's closest collaborator after his second stroke at the end of 1922. By April 1923, Bukharin had become «the most convinced and consistent defender» of the *smychka* («alliance») between the working class and peasantry and advocate of the NEP. Citing Lenin's last five articles before his January 1924 death, Cohen shows that Bukharin reiterated arguments initially made by the Bolshevik leader. Lenin warned against «exaggerated revolutionism» and the need for a «'reformist,' gradualist, cautiously roundabout method of activity of economic construction.»

To get the entire population participating in cooperatives, posited Lenin, would take a «whole historical epoch,» at best, «one or two decades.» Collaboration between the working class and the peasantry was crucial, as a split «would be fatal for the Soviet Republic.»

Central to Bukharin's vision of the worker-peasant *smychka* was lowering industrial prices for peasants as consumers. Instead of focusing on production, as had the Preobrazhensky and the forces now on the party's left, Bukharin envisioned expanding peasant demand as the driving force to stimulate all branches of industry. Bukharin's call for peasants to «enrich themselves» was aimed at the middle peasants, «the most important stratum» that had to be won by Soviet power.

The task was to pull the lower strata up through increasing output, rather than have them dwell in «equality in poverty.» Above all, Bukharin maintained the transition to socialism should not be «parasitic» based on «socialist primitive accumulation» and the rapid transfer of surplus from the country side to the cities, as suggested by Preobrazhensky, since this would endanger the *smychka* and the Bolshevik government's very survival.

Bukharin himself had used the term «socialist primitive accumulation» in his 1920 *Economics of the Transition Period*, but Cohen did not include Lenin's commentary that this was «ex-

tremely unfortunate. A childish game in its imitation of terms, used by adults.» Given the brutal historical role that «primitive capitalist accumulation» had played in the early development of capitalism, it was preposterous to suggest that either the workers or peasants should be exploited under a workers' state. Similarly, Bukharin himself later criticized Preobrazhensky's method of treating the peasantry as objects outside the early socialist system, to be manipulated in the state's interests in collectivization and forced industrialization.

With rising urban unemployment and without foreign investment, the late NEP crisis renewed the economic conundrum of how an isolated Soviet Union was to pay for further industrial expansion beyond the recovery of the early NEP. When Great Britain broke off diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union in 1927, an exaggerated war scare ensued and brought Bukharin much closer to the Left on the need for increased state planning and spending on heavy industry. But as Bukharin asked, «the major problem: how is a poverty-ridden country to scrap together the abundant capital for industrialization?»

As Mike Haynes has argued, no democratic solution was possible for overcoming economic backwardness. Bukharin advocated a policy of a modest «belt-tightening» that included increased labor productivity. The Left favored increased taxation of so-called kulaks («wealthy peasants») and NEPmen (businessmen). Cohen points out that both strategies were framed within the confines of the NEP and both were far less draconian than Stalin's ultimate solution of war against the entire peasantry and working class to pay for industrialization. As Cohen asserted, Bukharin and the Left «fought over principles while an intriguer gradually acquired the power to destroy them all.»

Cohen pulls no punches in critiquing the division of labor between Bukharin's defense of the NEP and Stalin's increasingly ruthless control of the party apparatus, closing his eyes to what he knew were «the opposition's legitimate griev-

ances.» Bukharin went so far as to rationalize the substitution problem in which the party had replaced the rule of an «immature» working class for its own rule – a deferral of self-emancipation that would become one of the pillars of Stalinism in the twentieth century. Bukharin never connected his analysis of Stalinism with his conception of state capitalism, as his old comrade Osinsky and the Democratic Centralist opposition had when they wrote that «Socialism and socialist organization must be built by the proletariat itself, otherwise it will not be built at all...»

The July 1928 Central Committee plenum, claims Cohen, was the crucial event in the confrontation with Stalin's loyalists. By then Bukharin saw Stalin as «an unprincipled intriguer who subordinates everything to the preservation of his power» and who «changes theories depending on whom he wants to get rid of the most.» Support for Bukharin's policies was substantial, but Stalin controlled the party apparatus as all the uncommitted members sided with him. For the first time, Stalin talked openly about a new Soviet agrarian policy, that the peasantry would have to pay «something in the nature of a 'tribute'» to fund industrialization.

Before the plenum dispersed, Bukharin met secretly with former Left leader Kamenev. Bukharin described Stalin as a «Ghengis Khan» whose policies would destroy the revolution and that his disagreements with Stalin were «many times more serious than were our disagreements with you.» Kamenev recounted that Bukharin talked as «a man who is doomed.»

Much more was at stake than Bukharin's personal fate. Cohen demonstrates that by mid-1928 Bukharin had understood, much better than the Left, the implications of Stalin and the bureaucracy's new turn. The peasants' «tribute» to the state was in fact the «military-feudal exploitation of the peasantry» to pay for industrialization. Stalin's anti-kulak campaign was a war against the entire peasantry, which had created a «united village against us.» And Bukharin predicted



Anna Larina and Stephen Cohen at the Museum of the Revolution, attending the exhibition devoted to the official rehabilitation of Bukharin, 50th anniversary of his execution, and the centennial of his birth. 1988

that such policies would mean driving the peasants into collectives «by force.» Stalin was determined to «cut our throats,» while his policies were «leading to civil war. He will have to drown the uprisings in blood.»

Bukharin's prognosis proved accurate. We now know the scale of resistance to Stalinism's war against the peasantry, even without organized direction. In 1930 alone, 2,468,000 peasants participated in 13,754 mass disturbances, 176 of which were described by the OGPU (secret police) as of an «insurrectionary nature.» We also know that Ivanovo textile workers rebelled against the regime's policies, that discontent spread to metal workers in Moscow, and that OGPU reports to Stalin record similar sentiments around the Soviet Union.

The OGPU was particularly alarmed by workers' and soldiers' sympathetic attitudes to the peasants – the possibility of a *smychka* against Stalinism was a very real possibility.

Bukharin's tragedy, according to Cohen, was his «unwillingness to appeal» to such «popular sentiment,» limiting the discussion over the fate of revolution to «a small private arena.» The larger tragedy was that the Left Opposition of Trotsky and the Bukharinists did not find common ground when Stalinism launched its bloody four-year war against the peasantry and working class. Trotsky himself had incorrectly depicted Stalinism as a centrist «Bonapartist» regime, wavering between the interests of the working class and phantom kulaks. «The problem of Thermidor and Bonapartism is at bottom the problem of the kulak» which meant «With Stalin against Bukharin–Yes. With Bukharin against Stalin–Never!»

Cohen After Bukharin

Cohen's work on the Soviet experience continued in the years after Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution's release. His 1985 essay *Rethinking the Soviet Experience: Politics and History Since 1917* took direct aim at what he termed the perva-

sive «continuity thesis.» This was the standard scholarly interpretation of the Russian Revolution that views Stalinism as the natural and even inevitable outcome of the revolution. «A remarkable consensus of interpretation formed» that saw «no meaningful differences or discontinuity existed between Bolshevism and Stalinism, which were fundamentally the same, politically and ideologically.» From this perspective, policies before 1929 are treated «as merely the antechamber of Stalinism, as half-blown totalitarianism,» while the terms «Bolshevik, Leninist, Stalinist» are used «interchangeably.»

Cohen expertly disputed the simplistic assumptions and logic of this rendering of Soviet history. «Bolshevism was a far more diverse political movement – ideologically, programmatically, generationally...than is usually acknowledged in our scholarship.» In addition to Bukharin's policies, he pointed out that it was «factually incorrect» to assert that «Trotsky and Left opposition are said to have been anti-NEP and even embryonic Stalinist, the progenitors of almost every major item in the political program that Stalin carried out.»

Cohen suggested to me several months ago that this essay was an even larger contribution to Soviet history than even his study of Bukharin. Unfortunately, thirty-five years after this essay was published, only a handful of studies have directly confronted the «continuity thesis.» As he argued in his 1985 essay, «All the basic tenets of Sovietological literature grew repetition and intellectually state, as it retold or amplified the same basic story.»

In *Voices of Glasnost*, Cohen and his partner and co-editor Katrina vanden Heuvel interviewed fourteen leading Soviet reformers for glasnost (openness) and Perestroika (restructuring). Cohen states that his personal friend, General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev, made it clear that «lessons of NEP» are an essential part of their «renewal of socialism.» Among the enormous obstacles that they had to overcome, argued Cohen, were massive corruption, Communist Party anti-

reformers, a bloated state bureaucracy that employed 17.7 million, and an economy that had «virtually stopped.»

Gorbachev's economic restructuring had counted on the initiative «from below» for the non-state sector, but as this collection illustrates, it offered few specifics. In their discussion with Alexander Yakovlev, «Perestroika's leading ideologist,» vanden Heuvel and Cohen repeated Gorbachev's admission that economic reforms were not going well and commented, «Now in late 1989, it seems the economic situation is even worse than it was before the Gorbachev leadership came to power in early 1985.» Such failures emboldened both those pushing for privatization schemes and anti-reform Communists who wanted to go back to the Brezhnev years. As writer Yuri Bondarev quipped, Perestroika was like «a plane that took off without knowing where it would land.»

Studying the Post-Soviet Disaster

After the failure of the reformers and the USSR's demise, in *Failed Crusade: America and the Tragedy of Post-Communist Russia*, Cohen confronted the overwhelming Western portrayal of the post-Soviet transition. In a series of *Nation* essays published during the 1990s, he disputed «the basic assumption underpinning the entire U.S. crusade – the idea that Russia was in transition to American-style capitalism and democracy.»

The dominant «crusade» rendering identified Boris Yeltsin with «radical reform,» claimed that a new «middleclass» was developing, that setbacks were caused by the «legacy of communism,» and repeatedly asserted that the benefits of the reforms were always just around the corner. Hundreds of citations by a «Who's Who?» of Western expert «transitionologists» prove how ubiquitous this account was. «Smitten with the Yeltsin government's reforms, some became not merely its

boosters but, with US government and foundation support, its employees and advisors.»

Cohen contends that the Soviet Union did not «collapse» but was «conspiratorially abolished by Yeltsin and his allies in Ukraine and Belarus...» in December 1991. He points out that this maneuver ignored the March 1991 referendum in which 77 per cent voted in favor of preserving the Soviet Union, and that in 1992, 95 per cent of Russia's economy remained in the state's hands. For Cohen, the catastrophe occurred under Yeltsin, backed by the IMF and the Clinton administration, one of whom explained, «Yeltsin represents the direction toward the kind of Russia we want.»

That kind of Russia was to be brought about through «shock therapy» – or as Cohen suggested, «shock without therapy» – severe budgetary austerity, an end to Soviet-era consumer and welfare subsidies, and wholesale privatization of state enterprises. As former national security adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski put it, «the economic and even political destiny of what was not long ago a threatening superpower is now increasingly passing into defacto Western receivership.»

US policy assumed it should «intervene deeply in Russia's internal affairs to transform that nation into an American-style system at home and a compliant junior partner abroad.» The Clinton administration supported Yeltsin's resort to «special powers» to dissolve Parliament in September 1993, a move even right-wing historian Richard Pipes acknowledged that «in the West would be unacceptable.»

Cohen's essays described how before the 1996 Russian presidential run of election, the Clinton administration helped arrange a \$10 billion IMF loan to pay workers' back wages and how the White House helped finance every Yeltsin government, including bankrolling the First Chechen War of 1994–96.

In August 1997, finance minister and architect of privatization, Anatoly Chubais, by then known as «Russia's most hated

man,» announced a new round of «shock therapy,» removing subsidies for rent and utilities. Cohen commented, «People don't receive their wages and now the government is going to raise their rents!» The same Chubais received a \$5 million interest-free loan that he used to take control of a large oil company. The banking system was so mired in the shady dealings of the rich and powerful that a member of Boris Yeltsin's inner circle three years later admitted that Russian banks «have never been banks in the real sense.»

For some advocates of the «transition,» the failure to sustain institutional structures did not matter. Eugene Huskey, one of the main proponents, argued that the «transition...requires the razing of the entire edifice» of the pre-1992 order. Similarly, Richard Pipes argued it was «desirable» for «Russia to keep on disintegrating until nothing remains of its institutional structures» or, as Richard Ericson claimed, «A successful reform program must be trenchantly negative... It must aim at destroying institutions.»

The result was that cronyism and corruption dominated the firesale of the century, an insider affair at bargain-basement prices. The sell-off saw «billions of dollars of state property that Yeltsin's Kremlin has handed over to a small segment of the former Soviet ruling class and others...» Little of this booty was reinvested as capital flight from Russia soared to two billion dollars a month.

Rather than modernization, Cohen shows that the «transitionology» experts missed «the most important development of Russia since 1991, the exact reverse of the process...the country's year-by-year demodernization.»

Any attempts to change course, even slightly, were actively opposed by Western capital.

When Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov made moves toward state regulation and deficit spending in the late 1990s, the IMF refused financial help, only to renew it once he was unceremoniously ousted after only eight months in office.

By 2000, half of Russia lived below the official poverty line of just \$45 a month and another 25–30 per cent close to it. Reports from the provinces depict the infrastructure of production, technology, science, transportation, heating, sewage disposal had «disintegrated.» Even highly educated professionals had to grow their own food in order to survive, over half the nation's transactions were bartered and doctors in one town compensated in manure.

One resident asserted, «The twenty-first century does not matter. It's the nineteenth century here.» Another report noted that «There is no work at all. People are eating dogs... Apartments have broken toilets, no gas, running water only in the kitchen.» Argued Cohen, «Since 1991, Russia's realities have included the worst peacetime industrial depression of the twentieth century...the impoverishment or near impoverishment of some 75 per cent or more...the transformation of superpower into a beggarstate...»

By the end of the decade with Yeltsin's popularity sinking to single digits, more Western reports started to question the previous rosy version of events. A 1999 study of the *Wall Street Journal* Moscow bureau concluded that its reporting had been «little more than a PR conduit for a corrupt regime.» A *New York Times* investigative piece argued that «The whole political struggle in Russia between 1992 and 1998 was between different groups trying to take control of state assets. It was not about democracy or market reform.» Many Russian democrats openly characterized the 1990s as a «great civil war over property.» By 2000, a Yeltsin newspaper acknowledged «Russia has dropped out of the community of developed nations.»

Anything, it would seem, would be better than life for working people in 1990s Russia.

Surveying what happened after, *War with Russia?*, another collection of *Nation* essays, was Cohen's last and most controversial book. Cohen argued that the United States and the

West had continued to treat post-Soviet Russia as a «defeated nation,» including Obama's declaration to «isolate Putin's Russia,» leading to a return to Cold War-like tensions. The United States was repeatedly the aggressor, contends Cohen, such as in Ukraine in 2014 when US-NATO placed «heavy weapons and troops near Russia's western borders.»

Cohen's solution to this escalation was a return to *détente*, in which both sides recognized «spheres of influence» with «redlines that should not be challenged» and noninterference in each other's internal affairs. He believed in a kinder US foreign policy without regime change and an end to «Washington's quest for international hegemony.» But such a solution ignores more than a century of US imperialism, including 1917 when Wilson began funding anti-Bolshevik warlords in an effort to install a «military dictatorship» amenable to American interests. Why would the United States suddenly renounce its victory that George H.W. Bush declared in 1992 had been won «by the grace of God?»

Cohen also asserted that Putin's annexation of Crimea and invasion of Ukraine «were largely reactive» and a «predictable response to US and NATO expansionist policies.» Cohen knew the scale of Putin's «many repugnant policies» but chose not to mention what they were. And he cites an academic review praising how Putin «skillfully managed Russia's economic fortunes.»

Yet thirty-four years after Perestroika began, aside from weapons, Russia manufactures almost no commodities for a much more integrated capitalist world – indeed, three-quarters of Russian exports are still natural resources. Moscow's aspirations for European integration were indeed «rebuffed by the West» in favor of isolating Russia. However, as Tony Wood notes, Russia's annexation of Crimea and military interventions in Syria and Donbas as not merely reactive, but attempts to reassert its unresolved «global relevance» as a second-tier rather than equal power, in a «much less stable» world.

In an academic field still dominated by dull anti-communist ideological conformity, Stephen Cohen was a rare maverick, a man of principles invariably taking minority and sometimes solitary stances that disputed orthodox interpretations. For socialists interested in understanding early Soviet society, Stalinism, and the catastrophe of post-Soviet Russia, Cohen's provocative studies are and will remain invaluable.

Published: Jacobin. 2020, December 5. <https://jacobinmag.com/2020/12/stephen-cohen-russian-revolution-nikolai-bukharin>

*Jonathan Steele**

On Stephen Cohen

US historian who argued that the Soviet Union could have been reformed and need not have ended when it did.

**The
Guardian**

The scholar of Russian history and politics Stephen Cohen, who has died aged 81 of lung cancer, challenged the orthodox western analysis of the Soviet Union and post-Soviet affairs. In his magisterial book *Soviet Fates and Lost Alternatives* (2009), he demolished the claim that Leninism led inevitably to totalitarian dictatorship under Stalin and that the Soviet system of one-party rule and state ownership of property could never be reformed.



* Jonathan Steele is a British journalist, columnist, and writer. He has worked for The Guardian since 1965.

He cited three periods when developments could have gone differently from what actually happened: in the late 1920s, when debates within the Politburo came to a head over the New Economic Policy (NEP), which allowed for private enterprise and ownership of land and property; in the early 60s, when Nikita Khrushchev launched key political reforms; and in 1990 and 1991, after Mikhail Gorbachev introduced a mixed economy and social democratic solutions based on political pluralism in place of the Communist party's monopoly of power.

With his sense of humour, gravelly voice and iconoclastic arguments, Cohen entranced generations of students from his academic perch at Princeton University for the three decades from 1968, in which he rose to be professor of Politics and Russian Studies, and then at New York University (1998–2011).

He wrote a column in *The Nation*, under the byline *Sovieticus* from 1982 to 1987 and in recent years guested on a weekly radio broadcast on Russian-American relations, which he feared were leading to a new Cold War. He blamed Bill Clinton and policymakers in Washington for failing to include Russia in a new European order after the Soviet Union came to an end and for expanding Nato eastwards in a spirit of «we won» triumphalism. George W. Bush and Barack Obama compounded the failure by siting US anti-ballistic missile systems on Russia's borders.

During the Soviet period, Cohen was unusual among Western specialists on Russia in having friends among dissidents as well as reformist intellectuals in the Moscow think-tanks. His book *The Victims Return* was based on interviews with dozens of survivors of Stalin's labour camps about their problems in returning to freedom.

Amid the new freedoms permitted by Gorbachev after 1985, Cohen and his wife, Katrina vanden Heuvel, the publisher and editor of *The Nation*, made frequent long trips to Moscow and got to know the new Soviet leader personally. At one of the last

May Day celebrations in Red Square, Gorbachev invited them both to stand beside the Lenin mausoleum to watch the parade. On Cohen's death, the former Soviet president sent Vanden Heuvel a tribute about her husband, saying: «He was one of the closest people to me in his views and understanding of the enormous events that occurred in the late 80s in Russia and changed the world. Steve was a brilliant historian and a man of democratic convictions. He loved Russia, the Russian intelligentsia and believed in our country's future.»

A Russian version of Cohen's 1973 biography of Nikolai Bukharin, a brilliant young Bolshevik who championed the NEP in the 20s, was later published in Moscow and had a wide readership amid new interest in Bukharin's liberalising ideas. Gorbachev told Cohen he had learned much from the book.

Discussion of the NEP was banned in the Soviet Union after Stalin changed course and embarked on the forced collectivization of agriculture. Bukharin was arrested and shot after long interrogations and a show trial in Moscow.

During his 70s researches, Cohen had tracked down and met Bukharin's widow, Anna Larina, and they became friends. She appointed Cohen as proxy to examine the archives for her husband's papers.

Born in Indianapolis, Stephen was the older of two children of Marvin Cohen and his wife, Ruth (nee Frand). His father owned a jewellery shop and a golfcourse in Hollywood. Stephen went to school in Owensboro, Kentucky, and then to Pine Crest School, Fort Lauderdale, Florida, which he left in 1956.

As an undergraduate at Indiana University, he went to Britain on a study-abroad scheme and then on a 30-day trip to the Soviet Union. Intrigued by what he saw, he abandoned plans to become a professional golfer and took up Russian studies. He earned a bachelor's degree in economics and public policy (1960) and a master's in Russian Studies (1962). He went onto Columbia University and gained a PhD in 1969 with a dissertation on Bukharin's economic thinking.



With son Andrew and Sandra Tsang (Andrew's future wife) at Red Square after an appearance on Soviet television. May 1, 1989

In 1962, he married an opera singer, Lynn Blair, but the marriage ended in divorce. He and Katrina married in 1988.

It was Cohen's early work on Bukharin that led him to the themes that became central to his preoccupations: was the Soviet Union reformable and why did it come to an end? He did not agree with the consensus among Western analysts who, with the advantage of hindsight since 1991, claimed that the Soviet Union was doomed to die. He took particular issue with the view that the Soviet Union had come into existence

in an illegitimate way in 1917 and had committed so many crimes that it could never become a democracy.

Cohen called himself a «boy from Kentucky» who had accepted segregation until adulthood. He suggested that the gap between the Soviet Union's professed ideals and Soviet reality was comparable to the long US history of tolerating slavery and discrimination while professing democracy. If the US could change, so could the Soviet Union.

Cohen challenged other arguments. To those who said the Soviet system was unreformable because the communist ruling class would never permit changes that threatened its power, Cohen pointed out that Gorbachev's main reforms, the introduction of contested elections and the abolition of the party's monopoly of power, were ratified in the politburo, Central Committee and two-party congresses.

To those who argued that the Soviet system was swept away by a popular revolution from below, Cohen replied that there was no such anti-Soviet movement. The evidence from public opinion surveys up to 1991 was that many Soviet citizens continued to oppose free-market capitalism and to support basic features of the Soviet system, such as public ownership of large industries.

As for the fate of the multi-national federation, Cohen argued that as late as November 1991, during negotiations with Gorbachev, Boris Yeltsin, the Russian president, was expressing support for a new kind of union. Three weeks later he invited the presidents of Ukraine and Belarus to join him in declaring the Soviet Union dead. So it was destroyed by personal ambition in a coup d'état. It did not implode or fall apart.

Cohen's last book, *War With Russia?*, published last year, was a collection of articles and broadcasts from the previous five years during the time when US-Russian relations descended into name-calling. He described himself as an «American patriot» who wanted to see a partnership between

the US and Russia to tackle common threats, such as international terrorism.

He passionately opposed what he felt was blind anti-Russian hysteria and the demonization of Vladimir Putin. «In the three cases widely given as examples of Putin's 'aggression' the evidence points to US-led instigation,» he wrote. The proxy US-Russian war in Georgia in 2008 was started by the US-backed Georgian president who had been encouraged to aspire to NATO membership. The crisis and war in Ukraine resulted from Washington's long-standing effort to bring that country into NATO despite Ukraine's shared civilization with Russia.

Putin's intervention in Syria was done on a valid premise: to defeat the Islamic State group after Obama refused to join Russia in an anti-ISIS alliance.

Cohen was often denounced as «Putin's Number One American apologist.» Yanni Kotsonis, a colleague at New York University, summed up Cohen's life differently: «He was one of the few remaining American public intellectuals who did not make a career of trashing Russia or reducing Russia to one man and his critics.»

Cohen is survived by Katrina, his children, Andrew and Alexandra, from his first marriage, and Nicola from his second; four grandchildren, and a sister, Judith.

Published: Guardian. 2020. October 13: <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2020/oct/13/stephen-cohen-obituary>

Gennady Bordyugov^{*}

The Future Through the Past

How can we now find the right words to speak of the significance of Stephen Cohen for our country and its history? To evaluate the full measure of the creative legacy that he has left us – a legacy tied up in large measure with the history of the Soviet Union/Russia – is impossible. But one thing cannot be doubted: he was always faithful to an ethical maximalism that is no longer fashionable – always faithful to the ideals that he acquired already at the very beginnings of his creative journey in the changing America of the 1960s.



At that time, as a student of Robert Tucker at the University of Indiana, he was just beginning to master Soviet history, but later, in the 1980s when the Soviet Union was changing rapidly during Perestroika times, his readiness to stand up for historical truth made a striking appearance. During this period, he provided a model of how to write about the past – especially on issues where there was as yet no consensus in public opinion, so that they could at any time provoke public resistance. Under these circumstances, history writing cannot simply remain the colorless reconstruction of everyday life in earlier times. No, it then transforms itself into a weapon in a genuine struggle to see the past correctly – and thus to shape the future.

Cohen's creative(scholarly) legacy had three dimensions. Retrospective: about the past, that is, about Bukharin's own efforts to achieve a Perestroika, an effort that was tragically cut short.

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Synchronous: about the ongoing Gorbachev experiment and its fatal conclusion. Prophetic: about today, when once again 'objective necessity', 'situational inevitability' and 'clear hopelessness(stalemate)' threaten to trample a fragile, weak, but perfectly real alternative to the threatening flames of a new Cold War.

The relationship of Cohen to Nikolai Bukharin, of course, had nothing to do with jumping on board the bandwagon of a fashionable theme of the perestroika period, or choosing just the right moment to reap maximum dividends in the role of Bukharin's 'discoverer'. To make the point even sharper: when Cohen's book about Bukharin was published in Russian at the height of perestroika, the conceptual framework of the historian was simply incomprehensible to people during that period of Soviet history, when various scenarios and possible outcomes of Perestroika were very much undecided, open to alternatives, exploratory. After all, at that time, our society was not really ready to think through the alternatives that presented themselves sixty years earlier. Instead, it was seized by a Bolshevik-like passion to settle historical accounts, to identify guilty parties and to put the blame on them for obstructing progress.

Of course, Stephen Cohen did not stay away from heated themes such as 'the relationship of the executioners and their victims,' but he described 'life after the Gulag' in a very different key from most. Not rejecting emotions inherent in the subject, but transmitting them through facts and reasoned arguments. Not turning the tragedy of an entire generation into an opportunity to 'reconsider' the whole historical experience of a people and a country, but seeing in it the roots of the political struggle in today's Russia.

The puzzle of the collapse of the Soviet system at the beginning of the 1990s constantly bothered this observer from America. He argued that the disappearance of the USSR was not at all an inevitable result of objective laws of development, but rather it came about as the result of very specific political decisions. This argument constituted one more audacious and even



At the presentation of Stephen Cohen's book «The Victims Return: Survivors of the Gulag After Stalin» GULAG History Museum. Moscow. February 21, 2011. Photo Sergey Shcherbina

heretical suggestion from Cohen; it challenged the consensus that had emerged during the last quarter-century, not only among professional historians and political scientists, but also in public opinion. And indeed, any attempt to cast doubt on this consensus was extremely inconvenient and undesirable from the point of view of too many influential people, who either participated in the dismantling of the Soviet system, or who rely on this dismantling for their own legitimacy.



But Stephen Cohen didn't simply fall by chance into the habit of going against the authorities – rather, his scholarly audacity and the insistent refusal to act in the tow of fashionable views are explained by his professional biography. He came to American Sovietology at a time when it was undergoing a fundamental transformation; instead of simply fill the role of providing ideological back-up to the US State Department, it now became an independent and aggressive branch of the humanities, with a predominantly left orientation arising out of the year 1968 and its global impact.

Stephen Cohen's atypicality as a researcher showed itself in his final series of articles and public pronouncements about the ever-worsening US-Russian relations, where he tried to find a way to halt the slide into the abyss of a new Cold War. Cohen was critical-minded but refused to ever give up on his optimism. Did this outlook fit in with the prevailing mood, both in Russia and the West, concerning Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin? In the case of Trump, a negative answer is clear. The opponents of the American president subjected him to a crescendo of fierce abuse, while his friends and supporters defended him so clumsily that doing nothing would have been better. More or less the same can be said about President Putin; demonization of him personally has long ago surpassed all other arguments, so that any attempt at rational explanation of this or that political course is lost in a chorus of those who curse him vs. those who provide him official protection. In a word, a strange situation has grown up around both these world leaders, with no evident way out; a flood of accusations is flung at them, but not a serious and substantive critique.

Alas, both in Russia and in the USA, those who come out with this kind of critique are hard to find. But among them was Stephen Cohen. And indeed, the historian was very much more severe and judgmental about his own president than about the Russian leader. He never wearied insisting that Russia under

Putin 'lashed out' precisely because it had no other choice. The US administrations of Clinton, Bush and Obama had adopted a 'triumphalist' course and stubbornly refused to abandon the project of using the victory of the US in the Cold War to maximal advantage in order to weaken its most likely adversary – and never for a minute did they regard Russia as anything else. This was true even under President Yeltsin, in that bygone era of pretend friendship combined with an artificial show of confidence between the leaders of both countries.

Whatever issue Cohen took on, he never lowered himself to the cheap tricks of winking at his audience via obvious hints or transparent riddles. He remained loyal to the principle that is sacred to any historian: the primacy of the sources, of the evidence. This principle demands that the only method of conveying the opinion of the author be, not simply presenting an unadorned set of bare facts, but rather achieving a reconstruction of the whole picture, a reconstruction that provides a vivid and indeed almost tactile understanding of the recreated reality.

He loved Russia with his whole heart, suffered with her sufferings, and personally participated in its history. For over three decades he was a staunch partner of the Association of Researchers of Russian Society (AIRO-XXI), and supported in particular its most important publishing project – 'First Monograph' – that provided a ticket into professional life for many of those who today set the tone in Russian historical science.

The loss of Stephen Cohen is an irreplaceable one for all Russians who care deeply about the history of their country. Among historians here in Russia, there is a widespread and rather condescending attitude toward our foreign colleagues: maybe they can do some useful note-taking in the archives, but penetrating the hidden in-and-outs of the Russian soul is (it is said) beyond their power. Maybe this attitude is sound enough in regard to this or that scholar – but certainly not in the case of Stephen Cohen. All his life he avoided easy and

over-simplified value judgments; he regarded those he studied as first of all real persons, with all their problems, joys and sorrows. Indeed, he has been criticized for excessive personification in his research, thus allegedly preventing him from seeing the context and from fitting the individual under investigation into this context. In other words, the charge is that Cohen studied our history in a way that was too Russian and too centered on real humans! A history that throughout its entire course – from the ancient Slavs right up to today's Russia – has suffered from a clear deficit of human feeling.

We who were Cohen's friends, family and colleagues consider it our duty to do all in our power to prevent his scholarly legacy from being swallowed up in the unpredictable and overpowering concerns of a world that is engulfed in its momentary concerns. Our task is to constantly remind both veteran scholars and those who are just beginning to master our history about the works of this American *rusist*(*Russianist*), this foreign specialist on our country, and to ensure that he does not drop out of active historiographical memory. Of course, the time will come when much of what he has written will call for some rethinking and refinement. And this is entirely to be expected. Certainly an honest and principled researcher such as Cohen would only be too glad if his works met this fate: to serve as a signpost in the development of historical knowledge and as a foundation for its further achievements and its liberation from the chaff of passing partisan debate.

And there is no doubt that this was indeed Cohen's attitude toward his own work, since he was not only a great historian, but a person who literally felt a personal responsibility toward the past, almost as if he was creating it, and not as someone who simply viewed it and analyzed it from a comfortable distance. And this attitude toward one's own work and toward its results is one from which we can and should learn.

Published: Novaya Gazeta. 2020, September 21.



Steve's birthday, Novaya Gazeta, 2013. Photo Sergey Shcherbina

* * *

Dear Katrina,

Please accept my sincere condolences on Steve's passing. He was one of the closest people to me in his views and understanding of the enormous events that occurred in the late 1980s in Russia and changed the world. Steve was a brilliant historian and a man of democratic convictions. He loved Russia, the Russian intelligentsia, and believed in our country's future. I always considered Steve and you my true friends. During Perestroika and all the subsequent years, I felt your understanding and unwavering support. I thank you both. Dear Katrina, I feel deep sympathy for your grief and I mourn together with you and Nika. Blessed memory for Steve.

*I embrace you,
Mikhail Gorbachev
19.09.2020*



Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov presents Stephen Cohen with the Order of Friendship at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. Moscow, 2009, March 19

* * *

It is with great sorrow that I learnt of the passing away of your husband. An outstanding scholar, Professor of Princeton and New York Universities, Dr. Stephen Cohen did a lot to study and objectively describe the most important events of the Russian history of the 20th century. Through his works, he became well-known and respected within the scientific community and made a significant contribution to the development of American and world history. Professor Cohen was rightfully awarded for his achievements with the Russian Order of Friendship, as well as other signs of professional and public recognition. His teaching, publishing and social activity, which was aimed at preserving historical truth, earned wide respect. He always

strove, to the best of his ability, to help defuse international tensions, as well as to find ways to improve relations between such great powers as Russia and the USA. Please accept my words of condolences and sympathy.

Sergey Lavrov
September 19, 2020

* * *

Dear Katrina,

In the seemingly endless flood of awful and dispiriting news, I was so sorry to read of Steve's death. Dee Dee joins me in sending our heartfelt sympathy to you and Nicola on this great loss.

I know that you have had more than your share of loss and sadness in these last years, so I'm doubly sorry that this blow should come at time of such dislocation in the wider world. I just hope that memories of happier days over these last nearly 40 years can bring you a measure of comfort in the hard weeks and months ahead, and, with time, a measure of peace as well. I have fond memories of Steve's Soviet Politics class (I think you were in the same precept?) but some chagrin, too.

I took the course in my junior year, and was so wrapped up in my JP on the Eisenhower-era State Department and McCarthyism that I'm afraid I did not avail myself fully of the professor's wisdom and the course's syllabus. If memory serves, I turned in a final paper, which came back with a B or B-minus, and this query from Professor Cohen: «Did you do any of the assigned reading?» I suppose the B was a sign of preparation for the slapdash standards of journalism, but I've often had occasion to regret how much I must have missed! When I read my old colleague Bob McFadden's wonderful obituary, I confess this regret was the first thing that came to mind. I hope you are safe and healthy in these strange, dark days, and

that before too long we may have occasion to see each other on one coast or another. Meantime, please know that your friends are holding you in our thoughts and sending all best,

*Fondly, Todd
September 21, 2020*

David J. Remnick is an American journalist and writer, and a Pulitzer Prize winner. He has been editor of the New Yorker magazine since 1998. In the 1990s he was a reporter and a Moscow correspondent for the Washington Post.



* * *

It is difficult to write because it is hard to imagine that you, Steve, are no longer with us. It seemed that this could never happen, that you would live forever, that we shall always be asking your opinion on one or another matter, that we shall be always arguing, agreeing or disagreeing while understanding that you love us and Russia and that we love you very much. In 1974, we received your book about Bukharin, and nobody could imagine at that moment that we would once be able to meet its author. And then, in 1975, 45 years ago, you literally burst into our life, into the life of our family, at the time when contacts with foreigners in our country were still a risky matter. For our mother you practically became yet another son; and for us, a brother; and for our children, uncle Styopa! And when your book was published in Russian, our mother said: «He lifted a little the lid of Bukharin's coffin!» Together we were rejoicing over the Perestroika, Bukharin's rehabilitation, the birth of baby Nika. All these years, through thick and thin, you were with us, and when our mother was gone, somewhere in the heart of hearts,



With Yuri Larin and Anna Mikhailovna Larina-Bukharina, Moscow, 1990

we thought that we still had Steve! It was you who used to bring us all together when you came to Moscow with Katya, and then with Nika. And even now, when Eka and I live outside Russia, we nonetheless tried to come to Moscow when you and Katya were there. And now, you're no longer around. And now, this fact will have to be dealt with somehow by Katya, who was your faithful wife and loyal friend, and by Nika, and by Dusty, and by Andrew and by your grandchildren. And by us! And even, we think, by those who disagree with you! They lost a fine opponent! And if we were religious, we would know for sure that «somewhere out there» you are awaited by our mother, and Bukharin, and Yura, and many of our common friends, who loved you and who are no longer with us. And we love you and shall remember you, always asking ourselves «And what would Steve have to say about this or that?»

*The family of Anna Larina-Bukharin –
with enormous gratitude for everything!*



IV

Our Yura

Nadezhda Azhgikhina

Short Time Together

When we first met, Yura told me that one day he'd get killed for what he wrote. He sounded insane. It was 1984, and many things could happen to a Soviet journalist in 1984 – they could be fired, they could be blacklisted from being published anywhere, they could even be imprisoned. But killed? No way. It just couldn't happen. So, I didn't believe him.

We met at a gathering hosted by some mutual friends. Back then, during the last years of «zastoi», getting together with one's friends was the most important part of the intelligentsia's social life. It was an alternative to the strictly regulated, thoroughly false and hypocritical official lifestyle. Nathan Aidelman, a wonderful historian who later became a close friend of ours, often said: «The macroworld is terrible, but the microworld is wonderful!»

That phase brings one closer to understanding life in the late Soviet era, or, at that very least, the part of that era that came after the 20th Party Congress (1956) that denounced Stalin's repressions and paved the way for the first Soviet «Thaw» – a kind of early democratization. «Shestidesiatniki», the generation inspired by Khrushchev's Thaw, would gather and have heated discussions about anything and everything, oftentimes meeting in tiny city apartments, at night, with the kids asleep, gathering in the kitchens (which, really, were another one of Khrushchev's achievements – he'd built a series



«Kvartirnik.» Yuly Kim in the center. <http://filial.shpl.ru/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/memo.jpg>

of buildings with private apartments, giving many of those living in Stalin's communal apartments (quaintly described in a song as «for those forty-eight bedrooms, the bathrooms number only one») a corner to call their own). A new, special subculture was being born in those kitchens. Much would be written about it later, during the Perestroika years – the poet Yuli Kim wrote a play about it, which was produced in many theaters during the Gorbachev years.

People argued about all sorts of things in those kitchens – about the history of Russia, about world problems, about literature, about the issues of the day. This was the birthplace of future art projects, the beginnings of imaginative concepts of a free and wonderful future. The «Thaw» romantics firmly believed that this future was possible, and even if it didn't

come soon, it would come, eventually, – and there could be no doubt about that.

All in all, the Shestidesiatniki were a generation of hope. It's as if they foresaw Perestroika – so it's no accident that many of them became «Perestroika architects» during the Gorbachev years. And Mikhail Sergeevich was, no doubt, if not one of that generation himself, then at least someone who felt very close to it.

A sign of the times, these nightly gatherings, «kvartirniks»*, as we called them, were a place where those censored by the Soviet state could express themselves freely. Poets who were denied publication in Soviet literary journals read their poems, others would read aloud censored books by Solzhenitsyn, Zinoviev, Voynovich, or sing songs with lyrics by Brodsky, Okudzhava, Galich, Vysotsky. These gatherings often went on until dawn.

And many who were there with us, who knew and loved Yura, still remember him as he was back then – sitting there, with his guitar, among friends...

He was younger than the Shestidesiatniki, younger than his friends and teachers, in effect, he was almost their younger brother. He absorbed all that generation's vital qualities and postulates, and his work as a journalist, a screenwriter, a playwright – grew out of their generation, and developed and flourished under the new, modern conditions of the quickly changing reality of the 1980s. French television had made a documentary for Yura's 40th birthday. In it, he described his generation as follows – «We were too late to Khrushchev's Thaw, we knew that we had nobody to rely on – the government wouldn't help us, in fact, it would just get in our way. And it was important for us not to get lost, not to lose ourselves inside a bottle of booze, not to vanish....» His circle of friends, «the team», as he'd often called them, helped him

* From Russian «kvartira» – apartment.



In Literaturnaya Gazeta, 1979

withstand the cold hypocrisy of the official lives. But it wasn't just that. «The team» was a circle of like-minded people, a unit soldered together – of those who wanted to change the life they had been handed, to complete the destalinization process that began during the Thaw, to tell the truth about our past and present, to change hardened ideologies and empty slogans into real respect for the individual, for justice, and for freedom of expression.

Journalism, much like the rest of cultural and intellectual life during the late Soviet era, wasn't a uniformly grey, viscous mass, as it's sometimes described. Philosopher Mikhail Kapustin, in his book «End of Utopia», published during the Perestroika years, wrote about three cultures of the late USSR (polemicizing with Lenin, who'd written about two cultures of a bourgeois society – the culture of the exploiters and the culture of the exploited).



With Yury Rost in Literaturnaya Gazeta, 1979. Photo Yury Feklistov

According to Kapustin, the first culture was that of «avtomatchiks»^{*}, culture of the ideological mainstream. The second, alternative culture – was the dissident culture, operating outside USSR laws. And the third, the largest and, in the end, the most productive culture was that of a careful balance between the rules of censorship and the desire for truth. Most writers and artists of the late Soviet era who worked in the USSR belonged to this third culture. Following centuries-old Russian tradition, they overcame the limitations imposed by censorship and did so, first and foremost, by purely artistic methods.

The ability to write and read between the lines {«mezhdu strochkami»} was singularly the most important skill of Russian and Soviet cultural space. Many still find this skill helpful today.

^{*} Literally, «worker who services an automated machine,» this term was used to describe those who worked for the Soviet Party machine in any of its varied forms.

Kapustin's three culture hypothesis was well-reflected in Soviet journalism. Avtomatchik culture was represented by official Party publications, first and foremost «Pravda» newspaper, and along with it – radio and TV, information agencies, etc – all working to protect the government and its ideology. Alternative culture was represented by dissident publications, such as the «Chronicle of Current Events» in the USSR and many immigrant publications, such as Ardis, Chekhov Press, «Posev» – those that were supported by Western radio stations' Russian services.

The «Third journalism» developed alongside the first two journalistic cultures. It was inspired by ideas of the Thaw and of democratization; the country's best writers, journalists with millions of readers, developed and built on the main Shestidesiatniki ideas, essentially teaching their readers to respect human rights and dignity, truth, and justice. They wrote about scientific research and about how to raise school-children, about nature and travel, about culture and history, about specific examples of legal abuse – through which the reader immediately recognized the larger picture.

Although perhaps paradoxical, but it was during the late USSR, in the late 1970s – early 1980s that Soviet journalism, still completely under state censorship, managed to show SOME OF the most stellar examples of professionalism – and, in effect, prepared readers for the Perestroika period that were still to come. At the forefront of these efforts were *Literaturnaya Gazeta* (headed by Editor Alexander Chakovsky), *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, *Moskovskiy Komsomolets*, literary magazines *Novy Mir*, *Znamia*, *Oktyabr*, *Yunost*, *Smena*, *Inostrannaya literatura*. Their circulation ran in the millions, as every family in the USSR subscribed to a number of both national and local publications. And many regional and local publications provided platforms for new, fresh voices. This happened, first and foremost, because of the human element, there were key people who worked in the media.



Ivan Zuzukin(left) Simon Soloveichik. 1963. <https://cf3.ppt-online.org/files3/slide/o/oG1TXEeZid6mtnMD4w9L7HQoIaOJRh2rsplfcB/slide-q.jpg>



Many editors-in-chief were Shestidesiatniks themselves, and used their professional position, often taking a significant personal risk, to widen the scope of liberty and freedom of speech in mass media. «Literaturnaya Gazeta» was most famous not for its fairly official «First literary notebook», but rather for its materials written by the best writers and essayists about contemporary society. It published essays on court cases, on contemporary moral issues, discussed issues in education and personal choice – and the conclusions drawn in these essays had nothing in common with the official Party line.

Yura belonged to this «third journalism» from the very beginning of his journalistic career. His first newspaper article was published when he was just 14 years old. It was called «I Sculpt.» The article was about him recreating, out of children's clay, the 1812 battle between the Russian army and that of Napoleon Bonaparte – by using lithographs from history books. He began recreating this battle while on summer vacation with relatives in Tambov region, in the small town of Uvarovo. In 1920–1922, there was a peasant uprising against the new Soviet regime in Uvarovo – an uprising that was harshly suppressed, but succeeded in putting an end to the widespread robbing of the peasants by the Soviet armed forces. Many women in Uvarovo still remembered those years, and their recollections were starkly different from the version of events presented in Soviet textbooks. Yura had always been interested in history, and it was this interest that spurred on many of his major publications during the Perestroika years.

In the mids 1960s, *Moskovskiy Komsomolets* newspaper was a real hotbed of liberalism, as poets and young scientists gathered in its offices, and all sorts of discussions poured out on its pages. Leonid Zhukhovitsky would later write a novel about this incredible microcosm, which became a cult classic – «Stop and Look» («Ostanovitsia, Oglianutsia»). Yura came to work at *MK* when he was 17. He wrote about teenagers, growing pains, conflicts among youth. In 1972 he was offered a job

at the main youth newspaper in the country – *Komsomolskaya Pravda*. Many Shestidesiatniks worked there and set the tone of the paper – Inna Rudenko, Yaroslav Golovanov, Valeriy Agranovsky, Lidia Grafova, Yuri Rost.

Yura became head of a unique department at *Komsomolskaya Pravda* – a section dedicated entirely to teenagers and their interests and issues called «The Scarlet Sail.» The name was taken from the title of Alexander Green's famous novel «The Scarlet Sails» – the image, representing hopes and dreams that come true, was well-known and easily recognizable to Soviet teenagers. The section was entirely made of articles written by teenagers – which was incredibly innovative for the times. The idea of giving a voice to teens belonged to writers and pedagogues Simon Soloveychik and Ivan Zuzukin, both Shestidesiatniks, who believed that teenagers deserved the same respect accorded to adults and that they should be taught about inner personal freedom and liberty. – This stance fundamentally contradicted the official stand on teenagers, where children were seen as objects to be raised in accordance with state ideals. After becoming the «Captain of The Scarlet Sail», Yuri Shekhochikhin worked to fill teenage discussions in his section with pressing social issues, such as social inequality, violence at home, suicide, and teenage crime. He opened the first «Hotline for Troubled Teens» in the country – a phone line where children from dysfunctional families, or those registered as young offenders with their local police units could call in, tell their stories, or ask for help. And the newspaper often helped!

In accordance with Soviet laws of the time, the authorities were legally obliged to react to accusations put forth by newspapers and even to letters from newspapers asking for investigations to be opened (after a newspaper had received a complaint letter from one of its readers, for example) – thus, journalists were actually often able to help someone in trouble who'd reached out to them, to see justice restored, or, occa-

sionally, to even help someone get out of prison. Because of this, journalists had a fairly high standing in society. The largest newspapers received hundreds or even thousands of letters daily, and readers had more faith and trust in journalists than in the Party or other Soviet authorities.

In 1980, Yura followed his friends and colleagues Yuri Rost, Nelly Loginova and Lidia Grafova to «Literaturnaya Gazeta», where he worked in the Morals and Rights department with Evgeniy Bogat and Arkadiy Waxberg. By then, Yura was already a famous journalist, one who had written investigative essays about teenagers. He'd also written plays (based on published materials) at Mikhail Shatrov's young playwrights seminar. Central Youth Theater (today, the Russian Academic Youth Theater, RAMT) had decided to produce one of Yura's plays about teenagers «Catch Number 46, Height 2» (this was the most commonly coveted size of American jeans amongst poor Russian teenagers). The play was delayed by the Censors' Board for a few months. Around the same time, director Valery Rybarev released the film «My name is Arlekino», for which Yura wrote the script. Alongside with Vasily Pichul's «Little Vera», «Arlekino» became a sign of the changing times in Soviet cinema.

Together with famous documentary filmmaker Evgeniya Golovnya, Yura made «Limita, or the Fourth Dream» documentary film. Along with Yuri Podniex's «Is It Easy, Being Young?» «Limita» raised the most pressing youth issues of the day.

Shekhochikhin became one of the most recognizable faces of «Literaturnaya Gazeta.» The topics he covered most often were human rights, both in regard to teenagers and adults, and corruption. But not all of his articles made it to print. In 1984, the year we met, he hadn't been published in eight months., it was a sort of Soviet censorship from the editor.

Everything changed with the arrival of Gorbachev in March 1985. The weeklies – *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, *Ogonyok*, *Moscow News* – became the avant-garde in discussions, flagships for future freedom. In July 1988, Yura published the essay «The Lion



Has Jumped», which was the first time in Soviet print media that revealed the existence of organized crime and mafia in the USSR. The story was a bombshell. The man Yura interviewed, young criminologist Alexander Gurov, expected to be arrested, even though he hadn't released any confidential information. But Gorbachev read the article.

And he liked it. Soon afterwards, he ordered the creation of a new department to fight corruption and organized crime within the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the USSR.

Yura became the country's most famous journalist. Foreign correspondents flooded to the newspaper's offices on a daily basis to interview him. One of the first people to do so was the Time Magazine bureau chief John Kohan, who later became a close friend. I vividly recall John's first time at our place, he came back with Yura from the office, we sat and chatted for a long time, then our young son went to bed, and John and Yura went to buy some vodka from a taxi driver (this was in the middle of Gorbachev's campaign against alcoholism, so no alcohol was sold in stores after 5 pm). And then John ended up staying over on our couch.

He was the first American that I'd ever met, and John completely destroyed my preconceived notions of Americans as stiff, prudish, and unfriendly people. John was a Slavic Studies scholar, he spoke Russian incredibly well, he wrote about Solzhenitsyn. Together with Yura, John visited Tambov region, where Yura had spent his childhood. John's place on Kutuzovskys prospect in Moscow became a meeting place for many of his (and our) friends, visited by Peter Ustinov, and Alexey Borodin, the director of Central Children's Theater, by actors from Sovremennik and Tabakierka theaters, by so many artists, journalists, scientists... It was here that I met Catherine Nepomniashchy, John's friend from Brown University – together, we spent three days during the August 1991 coup in Moscow, organized conferences and projects in New York, where she taught at Columbia University and for eight years headed THE Harriman



With son Dmitry, 1989

Institute... Meeting back then at John's place, we ended up being friends until Catherine's untimely death in 2015.

We were invited to Thanksgiving at Spaso House, the American ambassador's residence in Moscow, among very few Russian intellectuals invited to the celebration. The incredible thing was – later on those invitations became a regular occurrence! Then Ambassador Jack Matlock was a wonderful and wise person to talk to, and we spoke with him often.

We met David Remnick and many other American journalists. In 1989 Yura went to America as a member of one of the first delegations of Russian politicians and public figures...

In the US, he met with congressmen, with former and current presidents. Every time he was in New York, Yura would visit Cathy and Slava Nepomniashchy, and Carol and Bruce Ueland...

He had a special relationship with Steven Cohen and Katrina vanden Heuvel, right from their first meeting. Their topic of interest – Stalinist repressions and an alternative view on the possibilities of the Socialist project – had always interested Yura. But the main thing, of course, was a personal sympathy, a feeling of inner and, in a way, spiritual closeness. They spent Yuri's 50th birthday with him at his shambolic party in Peredelkino!

Yura wrote for «Literaturnaya Gazeta» and later for «Novaya Gazeta» about American organized crime and its connections to Russian organized crime, about American police, and about political relations and collisions between the two countries, and international politics in general.

He continued to write about corruption. Many high-profile cases were opened as a result of his publications, many falsely accused people were released from prisons – but that's not all. He was interested in history. He was the first one to publish an article in a national mass media outlet about the execution of workers in Novocherkassk in 1962, and about the execution



Photo Vladimir Bogdanov, 1990

of Polish officers at Katyn', the first one to publish investigative reports about falsified KGB cases against dissidents... The people he wrote about were those courageous people who took on the mafia, those who weren't afraid to stand up to lawlessness and violations of human dignity – among them, investigating officers, teachers, scientists, a mechanic with an Odessa shipping company, a drafted soldier, classmates of a deceased teenager, lawyers and rights activists...

In 1989, employees at a military factory in the town of Voroshilovgrad in Eastern Ukraine decided to nominate journalist Yuri Shchekhochikhin as a candidate for the position of deputy of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR – as an alternative to the town's Party boss. This was the first partially free election in soviet history. Citizens were allowed to nominate some of the candidates. Yura had never been to Voroshilovgrad before. He came and immediately felt an immense connection with the young engineers who had nominated him. The campaign for Shchekhochikhin's election stirred up the whole town. Journalists and workers, pensioners and students – all united around Yura, every one of them wanting a chance at something new and believing in Perestroika. Yura won the election and became the people's deputy in the Parliament (deputy of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR).

He became part of the Interregional Group of People's Deputies, the parliamentary opposition, together with Andrey Sakharov and many others. In his year and a half as a deputy (before the dissolution of the USSR), Yura was able to return the town of Voroshilovgrad its historical name – Lugansk. His other accomplishments included exonerating many victims of Stalinist repressions, and personally solving the problems brought to him by dozens of people. Among those exonerated were two women mentioned, under their real names, in Alexander Fadeev's famous novel «Young Guard» as traitors to the young guard cause (the young guards were defined in the novel as fighters against fascism during the period of Nazi



Interview. Photo Vladimir Bogdanov, 1990

occupation). In reality, they were not traitors, Fadeev simply based their storyline on a document he had obtained from NKVD, which, as it turned out, contained multiple errors. After the novel came out, both women ended up spending many years in a GULAG labor camp. Journalist and poet Elena Bondarenko, the daughter of one of these women (Olga Liadskaya), became an activist in Yura's headquarters. I had written about the lives of both women in *Ogonyok* later on, met with them – in 2019, together with my colleagues from TV2, we recorded Liadksaya's last interview. Unfortunately, soon afterwards she died from Covid-19.

Today, the people who'd worked with Yura in Voroshilovgrad live in Kyiv, Odessa, and Lugansk – separated not only by distance and borders, but by the WAR'S frontlines. Their attitudes towards recent events is varied. We talked to them dur-

ing the making of a documentary about Yura in 2017, and they all reminisced fondly about those past years of hope and belief in the idea that people could change the world for the better, that a lot depended on each person's actions. And many raised the same question – where did we go wrong? Why didn't we succeed?

In 1991, after the coup, Yura became a member of *Literaturnaya Gazeta* editorial board. He was the first to interview Gorbachev after his resignation and kept in touch with him up for the rest of his life. In «Literaturnaya Gazeta», Yura opened up a new hotline – for so-called «snitches» – those who had written reports of anti-communist and other activities to the Soviet authorities, regardless of whether or not they knew the person they reported on. The topic of such reports was a painful one in the USSR, as these reports, starting in Stalin's times, were one of the major instruments of terror against Soviet citizens, regardless of their personal beliefs. The materials obtained on the hotline were then published in *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, and the inside world of snitching, the subculture that it had produced, indelible from our Soviet past, was dissected in the accompanying commentary. Later on, Yura will publish a book, «GB Slaves. The Religion of Treachery,» based on materials from the hotline. This book still reads as quite relevant today.

In 1995 he accepted an invitation from the Yabloko party and became a deputy of the Second Convocation of the State Duma from the Yabloko fraction. In 1999 he was re-elected and became deputy chief of the State Duma Committee on Security.

In 1996 he became deputy editor-in-chief of *Novaya Gazeta*, a newspaper created by his friends and students, in 1993, headed by Dmitry Muratov (Included into a foreign agent list). At *Novaya*, he continued to write on familiar topics – safety and security, corruption, human rights. Chechnya had become a regular topic in his reports. He visited the conflict



August 1991. Photo Yuri Feklistov

zone and took part in the liberation of hostages. Later on, materials from that time would be included in his book «Forgotten Chechnya.»

When asked why he, an experienced professional journalist, decided to go into politics, Yura said – «We write and we write – and still, nothing happens. We need other means.» The authority of a government deputy became one of these means. Yet he continued to write for newspapers. Did this combination of careers present a conflict of interest? His colleagues, both at the Yabloko party and at the newspaper don't believe so. Real politics had always been present on the pages of *Novaya Gazeta*. And Grigory Yavlinsky, leader of Yabloko, remembers how very early on Yura had explained to him that he was «first and foremost a journalist, and everything else came second.» And, as if answering that question on a larger scale, in the mid-1990s,



With Gleb Yakunin (in the center), 1989. Photo Vladimir Bogdanov

the International Federation of Journalists had stated that in countries going through a period of transformation, journalists should be allowed to participate in political processes.

In the early 1990s Yura took part in the creation of an American-Russian magazine *Democratization*, dedicated to covering events in Eurasia and their analysis in Russia and the USA.

Yura actively worked together with Interpol, as he was interested in international organized crime – sex slavery, American connections of Russian corrupt officials, misconduct in the army and other state agencies. He was worried about authoritarian trends in Russian society. He was successful in getting a number of high-profile cases open, including that of the extradition of former minister of Nuclear energy Adamov, who was accused of misappropriating international funds.



In front of State Duma, 2000. From Family Archive

In the summer of 2003, Yura suddenly became ill and passed away soon afterwards, from a rare illness and without regaining consciousness. His upcoming trip to the USA to meet his American colleagues was cancelled, and a number of investigative reports he was working on were never finished, including one about corruption in the highest echelons of government.

The Russian prosecutor General has opened up the investigation into his death a number of times. His relatives and close friends still have a lot of unanswered questions.

Many TV programs have come out about Yura's death, many friends' memoirs have been published. Today, it remains one of the most terrible and frightening mysteries of that era.

My life together with Yura didn't last for very long. Politics began to occupy more and more of his time, not leaving room for much else. But we became friends, and we always saw eye-to-eye on things and supported each other. During his last weeks, Yura suddenly became interested in my feminism, and suggested that we create an international conference for female politicians who fought to put an end to military conflicts. The topic of peace had always had a special place in his heart, the war in Chechnya and its consequences were truly painful for him. His major dream – like the continuation of the romanticism of his youth, when he worked at *The Scarlet Sail* – was to bring together the children whose fathers were called to fight in armed conflicts. To get them together on a ship, and have them sail on the Black or Mediterranean sea, for a week, or maybe a month, so that they could get to know each other, and hear each other out, and then come back home and make sure that in the future, their future, new wars would become a simply impossible concept.

Michail Gorbachev

**A Few Words to the Readers
of Yuri Shekhochikhin's Book***

The book's author is known and interesting to me as a journalist and a writer of a vibrant civic temperament. He's attracted to the most pressing issues in the relationship between citizens and government, human beings and the governmental machine. There's hardly a need to prove how vital this issue is – the colossal estrangement between citizens and the authorities has still not been overcome. Only very recently, some ten to twelve years ago, our people began to experience freedom of speech, freedom of choice, and other vitally important human and civil liberties first-hand.



Yuri Shekhochikhin takes everything he writes about to heart, to his heart that cares about unfairness, about arbitrary actions of bureaucratic officials, about the totalitarian system overall. He bravely and right off the bat touches upon society's most painful moral issues. As an author, he passes close to the edge of objectiveness, although in any of his creative pursuits he never claims to be as impartial as the scales of justice. He's biased in the standoffs between man and authority, or citizen and government. Shekhochikhin the journalist and the writer is wholeheartedly and wholly on the side of the man and the citizen.

Does the author understand that a government – even the most democratic government – must protect governmental interests, including with the use of security and intelligence

* Preface for the book *Slaves of KGB*.



services? I hope he does. But the point of government agencies is to respect each and every citizen's rights. It's a constitutional duty.

And another thing – it is of vital importance to strengthen the people's faith in the idea that honor, dignity and conscience of man and citizen can, in the end, prevail over violence, intimidation, bribery, betrayal and lies.

I think that Yuri Shekhochikhin is one of those authors who know how to bring the attention of many

readers to these issues, readers who care about the possibility of normal human relationships in Russia, of trust both between society and the authorities, and, in the end, between the people themselves.

This book will most likely cause much public debate, possibly protests and controversy. I myself do not always agree with the author when he talks about specific people. But I am sure that such debate and controversy will be useful for the establishment of civil society, of our public institutions – something that we all are in dire need of.

April 6, 1999.

John Kohan
**A Guide through Absurdity
and Hope**

If I could put a human face on the concept of glasnost, it would, undoubtedly, be the face of Yuri Shekhochikhin. His life and work are the best reflection of that exceptional and exciting period in modern Russian history.

Thinking back on the end of Glasnost – and Yuri’s sudden death – fills me with a deep sense of loss. I’m overcome by memories of years gone by, years that witnessed the best part of my over two-decade-long career in journalism.

I first met Yuri soon after I was appointed bureau chief of TIME magazine’s Moscow office in the summer of 1988. While working on a piece about organized crime in the Soviet Union, I came across an article in *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, titled «The Lion Has Sprung.» It was written by a journalist named Shekhochikhin and had created quite a stir in Moscow.

I got in touch with Yuri, and he agreed to an interview. I was happy with our talk. I carefully fact-checked and edited the material. Then, to my horror, I saw what finally appeared in the magazine. The careless hand of a drowsy New York night editor (who had trimmed the final version of the piece to fit the layout) attributed Yuri’s wonderful quote in the final paragraph to Mikhail Gorbachev. I called Yuri right away to apologize and told him this was one of the worst mistakes ever to appear in an article I had written. In his typical manner, Yuri started giggling – and soon, we became friends.

It would be no exaggeration to say Yuri was my main guide and companion through all the mysteries, absurdities, ambiguities





Interview for The Time Magazine, with John Kohan. Photo Vladimir Bogdanov

and oddities of the perestroika era. He gloried in the new liberties available to journalists and introduced me to people and places that for the longest time were out-of-bounds to foreigners working in the USSR.

The most memorable of our «joint ventures» took us all the way to Yuri's hometown in the Tambov region in the winter of 1989. We decided to write separate but parallel accounts of our impressions of the changes happening deep in the provinces for a special issue of *Time* dedicated to the Gorbachev period of reforms.

As far as I know, our project was a unique example of such cross-cultural reporting. I couldn't help but smile at the fact that the local authorities in Tambov were much more afraid of the reporter Shekhochikhin from *Literaturnaya Gazeta* than an American journalist – which said a lot about Yuri's reputation!

Yuri was not only a very gifted journalist but possessed great charm. He had a wonderfully impish sense of humor

and the rare quality of being able to gather a diverse group of people around a kitchen table, where so much of cultural life unfolded in the Gorbachev years.

I particularly remember one evening (which, of course, slowly turned into early morning) in the summer of 1989, when four Russian journalists, including Yuri, who were sitting with me at a kitchen table, fueled in part by one or two liters of vodka, decided to voice their opinion of the Communist Party Central Committee's attacks on reforms in the Baltic republics in a protest telegram to Gorbachev.

This bold move by my Russian colleagues, whom I jokingly dubbed «The Band of Four» had unforeseen consequences. They were named and taken to task in a scathing article in the the Communist Party newspaper, *Pravda*. This was at the beginning of Glasnost and nothing to laugh about, but Yuri was able to find some black humor in it, calling me, «The Fifth Columnist,» a journalistic agent of Western imperialism, who had cleverly incited him and his friends to commit this act of civil disobedience!

Yuri and I drifted apart when he decided to go into politics and was elected deputy to the USSR Supreme Soviet. As an American journalist, I felt uncomfortable about the move, since it raised issues for me about a possible conflict of interest, especially after I heard Yuri, the reporter, had become a member of the Parliamentary Committee on Security.

I wondered, at first, which side of Yuri would win out – the member of Parliament, bound by confidentiality rules, or the investigative journalist on the look out for a new story. I needn't have worried. Yuri only served one master – the truth, and nothing but the truth.

«Normal» was never a word I would have used to describe Yuri. There was something in him that summoned up a different time, a different place and a different honor code. A man, small of stature but big and brave of heart.

After *The Lord of the Rings* film cycle created a new mythology for our post-modern, post-industrial times. I immediately saw Yuri as a type of Russian Bilbo Baggins, a chronicler of his time, who loved adventure and daring deeds.

Not all folk heroes of the Bilbo Baggins kind have happy endings. Some pay the ultimate price for their commitment to telling the truth. And so did Yuri.

*Carol Ueland**

A Real Journalist

When I participated in Nadia's program during Covid I was living at our summer home on Long Island, so unfortunately all of my materials about Yuri remained in our apartment in Manhattan – his books and books about him, and photographs. So, I simply could say a few words about my acquaintance with Yuri, which began

in 1989. I was in Moscow, together with my colleague Catharine Nepomnyashchy, Professor of Russian at Barnard College and Columbia University. We met Yuri and Nadia at a party for Nadia's birthday. Yuri sang and played the guitar, exactly as he was shown at the beginning of Nadia's program. On the following day, Cathy and I met Yuri at his office at *Literary Gazette* and we talked for a long time about everything going on in the Soviet Union at that time, and also about the United States. After the first meeting we met him either in Moscow or



* Professor of Russian at Drew University in Madison, New Jersey.



Photo Vladimir Bogdanov. 1989

at our place in New York. Yuri often received invitations from such important government figures as Colin Powell. Above all, Yuri was a real journalist – he was interested in all kinds of social problems and always asked us penetrating and very precise questions. He always wanted to know what Americans understood of what was happening in Russia. I have watched all the variants of the film about Yuri which Nadia has made, and each time I understand more what Yuri worked for and what he created in the development of a «free press» in Russia. American Slavists, who used to visit in the '90s, of course observed the serious economic problems of that time, but at the same time, our main concern was about freedom and the new possibilities for the country. In our conversations, we dis-

cussed questions of corruption, the war in Chechnya, about how the KGB worked, etc. For us, Yuri was a completely new type of politician and Russian journalist. But at the same time, he remained the charming person whom we met long ago. The memory of his struggles for justice and his faith in the power of free journalism remain very vivid for us.

Alexey German, Svetlana Karmalita

Whenever Threatened, He'd Just Smirk

Over thirty years ago, we met a young man, whose main goal in life was to be as useful as he could to the people of his country, and, if possible, to slap those wishing to harm those people right across the face.

We lived in different cities and didn't see each other all that often. Usually, he'd come visit us before he had to catch a train. And, of course, we'd talk about a vast array of topics. But the most important topic for him was always the same. His life was in almost constant danger. He spoke about this lightly. We actually witnessed how the S.W.A.T. (O.M.O.N. in Russia) team that was supposed to escort him someplace just didn't show up, – and Yura ended up leaving alone, in a small Zhiguli car.

He was a brilliant journalist. We don't know how many people like him, people that our country needs so much, exist somewhere our vast territories, but we're sure that it's not at all many.

When we talked to him about the danger he was in, he'd never laugh, but he'd smirk. And, one time, at one of those moments, one of us said, while we were sitting together in our



kitchen, that that's how I'd film «The Enchanted Wanderer»^{*} – a poignant line from the novel came to mind: «For my people, I'd really like to give my life.» In our family, we're not in the habit of using pretentious quotes and proclamations, but if we could say about someone – he gave his life at the altar of his Motherland – we'd say that about little Yura.

Yura didn't share a lot with us, but he shared some things. And when he'd start sharing, he'd always start to stutter more – to the point where his food would fall out of his mouth. Now, one half of our creative couple is a film director. And this director has a very unfortunate quality – mostly unfortunate for himself – he can somehow see a person's fate, see it in their eyes. That's what a lot of his films are based on. And he was absolutely sure, as he felt, that Yura would be murdered.

Maybe there are other, braver people out there. He didn't know if there were, but whenever he looked at Yura, he'd always get that feeling, somewhere in the pit of his stomach. It's only now that people have started to talk of that feeling out loud.

^{*} The Enchanted Wanderer – 1873 novel by Russian novelist Nikolai Leskov.

Grigory Yavlinskiy

He Felt His Times and Their Epicenter

Yuri Shekochikhin had a special kind of sixth sense.

He didn't become a journalist just because he was talented with words. He chose journalism, when the unique charm of the *Shestidesyatniki* was still alive, and faith in the written word and its efficacy was very strong.

Shekhochikhin had always embodied the true freedom of the Russian intelligentsia – an odd mix of audacity and, at the same time, the ability to fully concentrate and to always hear your inner voice.

He became a deputy when it seemed like his readers formed a serious majority and when one could believe that the truth, if it was given a voice, would be able to stop the growing corruption and lies, and to make life better.

His work as a deputy was a continuation of his journalism. And he was never a politician in the full sense of the word. It was just that, having become a deputy, he got new opportunities – to become more of a human, to become a better journalist. One time, he published what was said by an important official during a closed meeting. Afterwards, Shekhochikhin had to have a difficult talk with his colleagues, other deputies. He didn't defend what he'd done, but simply explained to them what a real journalist was. The article would be read by hundreds of thousands of people, and to him that was more important than any political chess game.





Photo Pavel Gutiontov, 2000

Shekhochikhin was a truly brave man, and constantly got involved in dangerous affairs, knowing full-well the risks he was undertaking. No threats would deter him. And everyone knew that.

He lived his life alongside those who were suffering. He wrote about teenagers abandoned by the decrepit Soviet system, which was no longer interested in the younger generation. Later, those very teenagers grew up and went to fight in Afghanistan, and their younger brothers – in Chechnya. And Yura went to Chechnya to get our prisoners out.

He wrote about everything that prevented people from living freely – about corruption, about the state machine that wanted to run us all over, about state officials who didn't just get in the way, but dissipated any kind of faith and hope for a normal life in Russia. At the same time, he was a good judge of character and knew where the common sore spots were,

the kind that were the same for everyone in the country. That's why he could talk to not just like-minded people, but to those who, for different reasons, ended up on the opposing side.

One Chechen once said to Shekhochikhin – «We're the last generation that you can still talk to. We grew up and were educated in the USSR.» Yuri Petrovich thought those words invaluable. It was to those readers, born in the USSR, that he spoke to through the pages of *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, *Novaya Gazeta*, from TV screens and theater stages.

He believed that the most important thing is what you leave behind. And the one thing you can leave behind – is what you'd written.

Séamus Martin

Our Meetings

I first met Yuri Petrovich in the days before foreign correspondents were banned from the State Duma in Moscow. I was a regular visitor there with my American colleague Kathy Lally of the *Baltimore Sun* and now of the *Washington post*. Those visits gave us an insight into the new Russia of the 1990 in both its positive and negative aspects and Yuri was by far the most positive of them.



Outside the big grey former Gosplan building, things were different. Not far away, thousands once crowded the street at the Detsky Mir children's department store where a huge neo-oriental bazaar had formed and people sold their personal belongings in order to make their lives a little bit easier.



Moscow, Luzhniki, 1990

Babushki sold whatever they could in the underground pedestrian crossings of Moscow's wide avenues as the newly-rich sped by above their heads in their Mercedes limousines.

Inside the Duma life was easier.

I had never seen a parliament like it before. There was no press gallery in the Duma chamber. Reporters were confined to a room where they could watch proceedings on closed-circuit TV but could not hear the whispered remarks as members pressed the voting buttons of colleagues, and some times of opponents, who were absent.

It was also possible to buy things there at prices far less exorbitant than in the outside world. I have to plead guilty to arriving there with my plastic bag to buy up items that were in deficit elsewhere and other goods that were far more expensive in the new free-market mainstream Moscow. But food-stuffs were not the only things on sale there; you could, if you were rich enough, buy votes as well.

We saw other unusual things too. There were things that no other parliament would permit. Vladimir Zhirinovskiy would walk through the corridors surrounded by large thuggish men whose demeanour carried an unspoken threat of violence.

It was when we watched this parade of thuggery one afternoon that we saw a shock of white hair emerge from a lift and move into one of the oak-panelled corridors where deputies had their offices. That was my first view of Yuri Shchekochikhin. I had heard of him before of course due to his famous exposures of corruption in the Soviet era. We followed him to his office and introduced ourselves. A warm welcome followed almost immediately in the form of a shot of Armenian Brandy.

That was the first of many visits at which I was given plenty of inside and background information about what was happening in Russian politics and journalism; to which politicians and from whom the bribes were given and which journalists were under threat. It was something I looked forward to, not only for the information and the cognac, but for Yuri's sharp sense of humour, which brightened up our conversations.

It frequently crossed my mind, however, that Yuri, as an investigative journalist and an opposition member of parliament had combined two of the most dangerous professions in Russia. I consoled myself with the thought that if he had managed to survive while exposing corruption in Soviet times he would surely get by in the new «free» Russia.

I was, of course, very wrong as the events July 2003 demonstrated. I had returned to Ireland as International Editor of *The Irish Times* long before that and had retired a year earlier but, on my last visit to Moscow in 2011 to make a five-part radio documentary on the fall of the Soviet Union and the rise of the new Russia, I made point of visiting his grave.

Andrei Mironov and I took the elektrichka from the Kievsky Voksal on a sunny afternoon to Peredelkino, armed

with a bottle of Armenian brandy and our memories of Yuri. Andrei has since met a horrific death in Ukraine but at least his killer has been punished.

If and when I can return to Moscow, I will now have two graves to visit.

Boris Zhutovsky

A Portrait of Happiness that Seems to Have been so Recent

He'd just turned forty. According to his longtime wishes, everyone got together. Summer. Warmth. Holiday – EVERYONE TOGETHER. Rost and I had come up with our grand entrance and show number. My God, it was a long time ago, in another life, but – wasn't it just yesterday? The day before yesterday! We got there by the middle of the party – many guests were already gathered on the lawn in front of the summer house. Rost was wearing a striped sailor's tee, a top-hat, a Caucasus shepherd's cape, a sabre and a hammerless 19th century rifle. And, of course, a moustache, glasses and his own charm. I was wearing a top hat, a striped sailor's tee, a tailcoat, a bow-tie and a rose in my buttonhole. And a moustache with glasses. Hugging the birthday man, who was choking with laughter, we began showering him with toasts and compliments.

The space around us shook. A small girl brought a few baby goats out from the nearby woods onto the lawn. What





a gift of fate! We put one of them up onto Rost's cape, like a scarf. I took another one up into my arms and held him like a baby. Yura, overcome with laughter, was sitting on the ground, hugging another goat. We were gradually moving our speeches into the Georgian mountains style of grand toasts, when suddenly the goats tasted salt – our sweaty toasting exercises had apparently turned our cheeks and necks into a delicious goat treat. And the tiny goat kids began licking us with their scratchy little tongues.

Can you imagine what was happening with the guests on that lawn! The birthday boy was rolling around on the ground, crying with laughter, gasping and unable to catch his

breath through laughing bursts. Rost's goat, lazily relaxing on the wide shoulders of his cape, was licking his neck, with his back hooves fluttering about and his tail wiggling. Mine wasn't far behind, sniffing with happiness, and nuzzling his tongue into my cheekbones. The French cameramen were barely hanging on to their cameras, while we kept trying to yell out the remainder of our planned text. Then, suddenly, my little goat, possibly tired from all the salt, decided to have the rose in my buttonhole for dessert...

It was impossible to speak at that point. Misha Shilov had by then poured some wine into the barrel of the rifle, and Rost, pulling the trigger, began to pour the long stream of liquid happiness into Yura's laughing mouth.

If there is a God, Yura, he must never forget how happy you were on that day. In my memory, you will forever remain the most unselfish and pure person on this Earth.

Andrej Voznesenskij

*Amidst the hats, amongst the lustrous boors,
Reflections of their mugs, like devious haints
Under July sun's funeral allure.*

*It strolls, despite by poison being slain –
The ever-wandering half-smile of Yura.
The very last of all the Russian saints.*





V

Women's Movement and Feminism

I

n the late 1980s, a new feminist wave arose in Russia. It was the starting point of a renewed dialogue between Russian and American women.

KvH: I missed the first and second wave of feminism in the US. But I felt like I experienced what I missed in my own country by living in Moscow 3–4 months a year – in those remarkable years 1985–1992. Moscow, in those years, reminded me of what US first-wave feminism must have been like. You'd be at a dinner table and all the women would get up to serve, clean etc. You know, every cliché. The men would drink, smoke, sit.

When I saw that, I thought, maybe this will lead to the beginning of a new women's rights wave, which I was really interested in both covering and being part of. And then, I don't know quite how to say this, tactically, but I knew that Steve was going to occupy the «high politics» sphere. I wanted to find an arena where I would be part of, a community.





First Independent Women's Forum, Dubna, March 1991



And those were the women I met at the Moscow Gender Studies Center. Its director Asya Posadskaya and a group of committed, courageous and interesting women. And then there were women from the regions who participated actively in the First and Second Independent Women's Congress in Dubna near Moscow in 1991 and 1992.

NA: As I remember, much of the media coverage of the Dubna Congress was filled with stereotypes, even in the Glasnost media. Feminism was not in fashion at the time. Because of stereotypes, I think, and lack of information about feminism – also an impetuous desire to «throw from a boat of modernity» everything associated with a much condemned Soviet past. The idea of gender equality was viewed as official Soviet propaganda – that's why new Russian «liberals» abandoned it. Unfortunately, my American friends didn't understand how intent people were to forget everything from the Soviet past, even positive things. It took a long time to understand that the Soviet Union had some real and important achievements and ideas, however misused and misinterpreted. Andrey Sakharov with his Convergence theory understood that. The Dialogue of Russian and American women helped to overcome stereotypes. You contributed to this dialogue by sharing information, supporting publications and establishing a unique Russian – American magazine, *Vyi I Myi*.

KvH: I was involved in a feminist book series with Progress Publishers. There was *Our Bodies, Our Selves*, *The Second Sex* by Simone de Beauvoir.

NA: *The Second Sex* – 50 years after the first publication appeared in Russian! It was like a bomb. I remember the presentation of the book in Moscow. Today it is a classic book. But at that time it was a sort of revolution.

KvH: The Progress series included an anthology of feminist writings, which two feminists, Meredith Tax, contributor to *The Nation* and Ann Snitow, scholar, who worked and taught in Poland, recommended. And it was more complicated than it sounds – breaking some barriers. That was important. Because you would read polls about how young women want to

be «volutnii prostitutki» and you'd also see how few women were in politics or public life. I remember being surprised by how Glasnost did not really include feminism. And that to me was always striking. And, as you said so well the other day, the idea of feminism was not on the Glasnost editors' mind. It was always a struggle to get feminist copy into print. I remember at *Moscow News* in 1989, a leading Glasnost paper, I organized along with a young lawyer Nina Belyayeva, a round table about women. Do you remember? So there was that, but there wasn't much support for it or interest in it.

NA: Not at all, really.

KvH: The media was also very dominated by men – especially those popular Glasnost – era TV programs. Some women became more visible, Irina Khakamada, Galina Starovoytova, also communist Nina Andreeva, some other radical communists, and dissident Valeria Novodvorskaya. There were very few women on TV.

NA: I came to my feminism thanks to my American friends, Catharine Theimer – Nepomnyashchy, a friend of *Time Magazine* is Moscow office John Kohan, who became very soon a friend of our family, was at the same time colleague of my university professor, Galina Belaya. In winter 1989, we spent about two weeks, visiting Russian writers in Peredelkino and Moscow. Katya was interested in Women Studies programs, about the second wave of womens' movement in the US. Then I met Helena Goscilo – she was working on women in literature and shared with me her study of feminist theory. It was very interesting, but I did not think it was about our life in Moscow. We in the USSR had legal equality, but, of course, everybody understood that it was just formal. I never felt discriminated against personally, or harassed. I was lucky, as I understood later. Gorbachev re-opened the

«zhensovety», but my friends and I were sure that it was just for working class women combating heavy drinking (it was the time of Gorbachev's anti-alcohol campaign). All liberal-minded media at that time were charmed with the idea of «natural destiny» or women as mothers and lovers, it looked rather avant-garde compared to the former boring official publications about women workers and collective farmers.

At the same time, as I wrote before, young women writers created «New Amazon» group, a new movement focused on women's experiences. They published very strong collections of prose, and their texts were blasted by famous critics. One wrote that «there cannot be women's prose because women's souls are too close to their bodies.» Fortunately, American scholar Elena Gessen published a very good review of their collection, and women writers soon became popular. We came together to hold the first women's writers conference in NYC in Spring 1991. Svetlana Vasilenko, Larisa Vaneeva, Valeria Narbikova were there. Also already working in the US was Tatiana Tolstaya. Among Russian writers were Zoya Bogusavskaya, Natalia Ivanova. Also a member of Gender Center Tatiana Klimenkova. Conference participants were American Slavists, American feminists (without any knowledge of Russia) and Russian writers (without any idea about feminism), it was the first meeting, and while there were real misunderstandings, this conference gave a fresh start too long and extremely fruitful dialogue between Russian and American scholars and writers. Natalia Ivanova, Carol Ueland and I published a small book about this conference. I began to understand that the gender gap in Russia was a deep problem later, after the wild West market came to Russia and many women lost their jobs because of gender and age, in many ways because of the same stereotypes. After the end of USSR, I began to cover women's issues in my magazine. As a board member (the only woman), I faced sexism in my own liberal

magazine! My colleagues said that it was a pity, they cannot share «good anecdotes» around the table when I was there. And so on. Many did not like my feminist texts, but the chief editor supported me. It was unexpected. All of those men respected me as a journalist and we had a very good professional relationship. Now they asked, why I became crazy with such BS as feminism, if I was good looking, had a husband and was lucky in my profession. They were sure that feminists were ugly and hopeless losers and, by the way, today nobody talks like that. It is not sophisticated. I was very interested in development of fresh and young women's movement. And thousands of women all over the country participated in this effort to improv a life. I was covering this movement, for *Ogonyok* magazine and later for *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, I was invited to chair a special section titled «Women», in 1995, and, every two weeks, we published interviews with politicians and activists, information about international feminist initiatives and profiles and new leaders, news from former USSR women's groups, Readers of our political daily were happy to get this information. Today, it is rather strange even to remind yourself about that. Do you think it was a lost option? Why did this people's movement of the late 1980s not realize its potential?

KvH: I think it takes generations. The women I knew at the Gender Studies and who were at the Dubna Independent Women's Forums in 1991 and 1992, they probably saw that there's another way to live. That their work mattered. That there was another generation to speak to. But, in terms of real change, change takes a long time. And everything in Russia happened very quickly. And what happened in Russia will happen again.

NA: Really? You see some similarities between Russian and American feminism?



KvH: There are parallels. Strong one, is about reproductive rights. And then there's the movement for economic fairness, like women being paid the same amount as men. And then there's sexuality. Not only about being lesbian or LGBTQ (International LGBT movement is announced extremist and prohibited in Russia), but also having political power. Then one about corporate power. And the women I knew, you know, probably they've made steps and they've improved the quality of life for many. But it's going to take another generation or more because the conditions are so hard right now.

It was hard back then but hard now, too, in a different way. First of all, Glasnost has been rolled back. But the 1990s again. How do you live securely? How do you live with freedom? Women, men. You have to have economic security and the '90s many women were out of work. It was a sense that they no longer had control over their lives.

Who could study if you didn't have the resources? And I think the women we knew have found their way, many of them, but also difficult. And the hope is that so many women don't despair, that they continue to understand that there's a way forward.

NA: My feeling is that women failed in general, as well as all other civil movements of the time, because of lack of experience in practical tools and strategies to build the real political or public movement. We had no idea about that. We started to communicate with the West, but did not study enough international experience. And again, with the market and money which never existed in USSR as anything real, many jumped into business or got a naïve belief that «good businessman» could help independent media or NGO of it. Today we see a flourishing revanchism, and proto soviet rhetoric, and gender issue is again on the picture – to support today's archaic mainstream approach, in which one could find a total oxymoron, a combination of patriarchal medieval ideals of family with many kids under Orthodox icon and Soviet-type of women supporters of the state and its leadership. Of course it is a sign of deep crisis, and will be changed. I hope soon. But it is a pity that we lost time, and it will take efforts to restore normal situation. And International great slogan of Dubna, «Democracy without women is not a democracy,» is still on the picture!

KvH: But, you know, there are things on the ground that women didn't even know what they meant three decades ago. So that there is more quality of life for women. And the Gender Studies Center? I don't know if it's true, how many exist around the country?

NA: Dozens. And they are legal. Some closed, but many are still alive. They have students, they have postgraduates,



НАША ПОЧТА



Обычно письма наших читателей занимают немного места. В этом номере, в интересах проведения диалога о различных путях феминизма, мы решили предоставить больше места для писем. Хотя письмо Ани Скитцу по существу представляет собой статью, мы помещаем его в этом разделе.

В редакции "Мы и Мы"

Я очень внимательно прочитала материалы круглого стола "Российский и западный феминизм..." И мне очень понравилось выступление Н.Аджизинской. Любый спор нужно начинать с определения терминов и понятий. Что такое феминизм и феминизм? Мне показалось, что далеко не все участники дискуссии это понимают и уж, тем более, не все относятся к феминизмам по своим взглядам, хотя и включились в новое женское движение в России. И это движение сейчас гораздо важнее теоретических споров о сходствах и различиях феминизма у нас и у них. Ясно, что воззвать "феминистки всех стран, объединяйтесь!" сейчас в России понять не будет. А вот призыв к женщинам сплотиться для организации женского движения, являющегося активной политической силой, способной вывести страну из кризиса, злоса и

Страну захлестнуло насилие: политическое убийства, ограбления, бандитизм, изнасилования, - и женщинами в числе многих жертв. К счастью, появились такие ритуалистки, как Наталья Галайченко. Но в обществе, где закон бессильно, эффективность немногочисленных служб типа Натальиной не очень высока. Таких служб должно быть несоизмеримо больше. И на них должны выделяться средства. Чтобы добиться этого, нужна мощная политическая организация, представляющая интересы женщин.

Сетовать по поводу отсутствия равноправия на рабочем месте между мужчинами и женщинами, когда сами рабочие места исчезают с каждым днем, не очень уместно. Причем статистика говорит, что безработица, в первую очередь, охватывает именно женщин. И новое не из-за каких-то объективных отношений, а из-за того, что заняты были они в большинстве своем в тех бюрократических сферах или низкоэффективных отраслях, в которых ничего ценного и полезного для общества не производилось.

Да, теперь многие женщины "уходят в семьи", чтобы воспитывать детей, приспосабливаясь к "мужскому" равноправия" не-спешно. Но одновременно с этим растет число женщин-предпринимательниц.

«Vy i Myi»

they have publications. Gender centers appeared as part of change in academia – and part of the international cooperation of scholars and activists. And there was also the personal contribution of some. Colette Shulman was one of them. She was a pioneer of cooperation between very diverse women's groups – from official Soviet Women Committee to non-formal youngsters from provinces, from academics to first ladies.

KvH: Colette has been a great mentor. To a generation. She has a great sense of history.

NA: And finally, you and Colette established a unique magazine, *Dialogue of Russian and American Women Vy i Myi!* How was it started?

KvH: It was at the remarkable forum in Dubna. It was quite exciting to be on the plenum. Colette spoke and there was interest in *Vy I Myi*, because as you said so well the other day, the one thing we didn't want to do is lecture. It was an exchange of both practical and intellectual and cultural ideas. But it is tricky because there are so many groups that lecture like «we know better.»

NA: The magazine became a vivid part of women's dialogue. It existed for a decade, and contributed to raising awareness of gender issues, sharing information between women's groups here and in Russia. In 1996, it started publishing in Russian as well, and I was happy to share editing with Colette, she was the American editor, and I was the Russian one. The magazine became an international women's magazine, covering issues not only in the US and Russia, but also in the former USSR, Europe, Asia. We got information from all cities and towns, and sent issues to many countries. Some time ago I was in Central Asia and saw our magazine in university libraries and women's centers. And not long ago a student at MGU wrote a master's diploma on the history of the magazine. And Princeton professor Ellen Chances published an important article about *Vyi I Myi*...

KvH: All of this was in the pre-Internet era. And it was by mail delivery! First issues had a samizdat quality because it would pass from hand to hand and it was word of mouth and we didn't have marketing. We had word of mouth among women of different generations. The mix of stories was always good. Literature, book reviews and then practical stories, whether small business ...or how to start a domestic shelter. What about the new generation of women in Russia today? Are they active? Interested in feminism?

NA: There are number of them, and, before Covid-19 there were feminist festivals and other big events. Many actions,



At UN Fourth World Conference on Women. Beijing, 1995

publications, performances. There are a number of small feminist groups here and youth groups. More radical than in the 1990s. But they have no idea about the 1990s – and have no interest, unfortunately. They are active on the Internet. They have few links with the older generation. But tell me, what was your impression about gender scholars and activists you met? What impressed you? What did you think about this development?

KvH: I met extraordinary women at the Moscow Gender Center. Tanya Klimenkova, Olga Voronina, Asya Posadskaya. And there was something very moving and real about how women gathered in this little room and everyone was doing their thing. And there was a communal and solidaristic vibe

and they were women of different ages. Lena Kochkina was younger, Tanya Klimenkova was older, then Asya, keeping it all together. I think it was all very hard. Because there was probably not much support in their communities, even the academic communities they worked in.

NA: As a woman once said, my feminism ends when I knock on my door. Stereotypes about everyday life were very strong in the 1990s. But today, after 30 years, a young generation have different views, many of my male students say they are feminists, and young artists participate in feminist actions and actions against gender-based violence. Despite official propaganda of traditionalism. Ordinary people, like most of Russians according to recent polls, identify domestic violence as a crime and stand for a special law against it. And it is the clear result and success of decades of struggle for gender equality. I should mention here the work of crisis centers. But many remain active. The first crisis centers received strong international support, first of all from American organizations. The Consortium of US and Russia women's NGOs was very active, Marina Vandenberg worked for it in Moscow. Gender Studies Center, crisis centers and some other groups got financial support from American foundations. That's why some critical voices said that feminist was imported and planted in Russia by Americans.

NA: Some of Western speakers, supported by foundations, came to Russia as queens of England to Africa. Or instructed what was to be done in Russia. I was irritated.

KvH: Without listening to the women who live in that country?

NA: I should say that the women's movement, even if only some part of it, first of all academics and crisis centers, in



Dialogues 1995

the 1990s and early 2000s got serious support from American and European foundations, but it was practically an independent, genuine grassroots movement. American support and cooperation was crucial for some organizations, and helped to raise awareness and promote gender issues. By the way, American scholars helped Russian scholars to develop Russian Gender History and Russian Women's Studies. It was important to understand that feminist ideas in Russia appeared in the mid-19th century, that there was wide spread women's charity and education activities, and organizations before the Bolshevik revolution. It was important to see that feminism was not imported from the West, that it was developing in Russian society for a long time, and during the Soviet Union it was forgotten and misinterpreted. And it is no exaggeration to say that women's activism and struggle for gender

equality is one of our basic national pillars, «skrep,» as they say in propaganda.

In the 1990s, a new women's movement was born, on one hand, as a part of general democratic movement. On another hand, it was a clear response to difficult lives and the unexpected economic challenges. Women literally saved the country, they started small businesses, self – support, etc, while men felt frustrated and lost.

I covered for many years women's initiatives in Russia, and must say that they worked for the society and others in all regions, small towns and big cities, they demonstrated solidarity and talents. Many of them realized their potential and started a new life because of the movement. And many still do today. Not all of them were real feminists according to academic definition, but they did a lot.

KvH: I would like to ask you about abortion. What is the situation in Russia today?

NA: During the pandemic, I interviewed Anatoly Vishnevsky, one of our best demographers. Unfortunately, he died from COVID very soon after. He was 85. And he said that despite all of the campaigns by right-wing people and the media and the banning of official governmental programs, family planning remained strong because it had existed for years. By the way, Russian Family Planning Associations worked closely with American one, Joan Dunlop and other heroines of international family planning. In some Eastern European countries, it's much worse. Young generation is well educated in it and it's available. It's cheap.

KvH: This is Moscow.

NA: No, it's about Russia. Of course it's difficult to say about Chechnya, we do not know enough consider revising for clarity.



Alliance of American and Russian Women, 1996

It cannot be officially banned – there would be a sort of revolution. And even the church understands that. So they're very careful. Of course, they try to call for new restrictions. But they do understand that it is not possible to prohibit abortion totally in Russia.

KvH: But it's still not difficult to get it?

NA: For money, you can get of course, everything. But for free, you go to the clinic and you will get it. And there are lots of them. I do remember what took place when I was a young girl. There were awful conditions and so on. People paid for anesthetics anyway and so on. But now there are hundreds of different measures and medicine is developing very well, especially reproductive medicine. Contraception is available,

and young people are well-educated. Now people work and pay a lot for reproductive technologies. Yes.

KvH: Russia is ahead of us now. America is going backwards in the area of reproductive rights.

Katrina vanden Heuvel

Glasnost for Women?

Soviet Women: Walking the Tightrope. By Francine du Plessix Gray. A Week Like Any Other. By Natalya Baranskaya.

Seventy-three years after the Russian Revolution, Soviet women are confronting a powerful backlash against its emancipation of women. *Glasnost* is allowing Soviet citizens to voice patriarchal prejudices once banned as bourgeois or counterrevolutionary. The state-controlled news media, for example, frequently blame «overemancipated, masculinized women» for social ills from juvenile delinquency to divorce. And Mikhail Gorbachev's ambivalent positions on the role of women in political and economic life, along with the social policies proposed by the Communist Party and the Congress of People's Deputies earlier this year, further strengthen the view that only women are responsible for children and housework.

So far, *Perestroika* has failed to change Soviet women's secondary position in the work force or shorten their second shift at home. Measures proposed by the Communist Party to «improve the working and living conditions of women,» for example, will allow women to work fewer hours a week; release them from heavy work and labor injurious to their

health (usually the highest-paying jobs); and increase prenatal, maternal and workplace – funded leave for mothers of large families and single mothers. These policies, however generous and necessary, fail to address the fundamental inequalities women suffer. Official discussions of women's double burden rarely extend to men's family responsibilities – or consider society's responsibility for family welfare. The idea of parental, as opposed to maternal, leave was unthinkable until this year. (In April, the Supreme Soviet passed a resolution which for the first time allows «fathers, grandfathers or other family members» the right to take unpaid child care leave.)

Why is this happening in a country that produced the first woman ambassador and the first woman in space? The Soviet Union contains the largest number of women professionals and specialists on the globe, and close to 90 percent of its female population is in the work force. Early Soviet legislation sought to secure full economic and social equality for women. They were to be employed in the public sector as a condition of complete equality, and the responsibility for housework and child care was to shift from the individual household to the collective. But the disruptions of war, large – scale unemployment, rampant inflation and Stalin's conservative social policies meant that few resources were devoted to social programs. Although opportunities for women in the labor force expanded, the socialization of housework never took shape.

As a result, many Soviet women express yearning for a traditional female role centered around the family and the home. They are exhausted by decades of paper equality and a double burden made more difficult by consumer shortages (a recent Soviet survey shows that 275 billion hours, equal to 90 percent of the time devoted to paid work in the national economy as a whole, are spent on shopping, child care and housework each year, most of it spent by women). Yet recent national polls show that only 20 percent of Soviet women would quit their jobs even if they could afford to. And most Soviet women, like

their American counterparts, still need to work full-time in order to make ends meet. Other women, fewer in number but increasingly vocal, are taking advantage of increased opportunities for political and social activism. Some are even espousing Western-style feminism, as they understand it.

Francine du Plessix Gray set out in 1987 to capture a society in flux through the voices of its women. She admits to a dual-purpose: to examine «the first community of women in history to be officially emancipated» and to decode «the forceful spell that Russian women have had on me for much of my life» (Gray was raised in Paris by a Russian mother, grandmother and governess). Her nostalgia for the cozy and aristocratic milieu of her Russian maternal relatives may have led her to talk mainly to educated, urban, «successful» women. There are no rural women, or engineers or scientists in *Soviet Women* (although there are many doctors, a more traditional female occupation), and only a few token workers. Her portraits of women in their homes, at work or in hospitals and clinics are always meticulously observed and often lyrical. A distinguished writer of fiction and nonfiction, Gray tells these women's stories like a novelist.

The strength of Gray's book is its reporting on how women are being affected by a deteriorating health care system. Gray hears stories about the brutal treatment of women during childbirth. On visits to several hospitals, she documents the primitive conditions: the unchanged, blood-smeared sheets on nursing mothers' beds, the lack of bathing facilities and the patients' shabby, prisonlike hospital gowns. Men are not allowed to visit their wives or children for fear that they will infect them. The great irony of the Soviet Union's backwardness in the field of gynecology is that the technique of prepared childbirth had originated there several decades ago (the Frenchman who introduced it to the West, Dr. Lamaze, had actually learned it in the Soviet Union in the early 1950s from two Soviet doctors, Platonov and Velvovskii). Today the La-

maze method is virtually unheard of in the Soviet Union, and women have little or nothing to say about the conduct of their labor. According to Gray, only one clinic in the Soviet Union, in the more Westernized Baltic Republic of Latvia, practices family birthing techniques.

Abortion is the primary method of birth control – not by choice but because of the absence of reliable contraceptives (diaphragms come in only two sizes, and condoms are called *galoshi*, which means just what it sounds like). There are four to eight abortions, depending on whose statistics you trust, for every live birth. The conditions in abortion clinics that Gray describes are now being graphically detailed in the Soviet press. Last year, for example, *Moscow News* published an account of one woman's ordeal under the headline, «I Don't Want to Be Sorry I'm a Woman.» The author, Yekaterina Nikolayeva, recalled her experience in an abortion clinic. A doctor yelled at her for staring at his bloodstained gloves and scolded another woman by saying, «You should have had second thoughts before. You're all fond of sweets, but you're not willing to pay the price.»

The article led the highest-ranking woman in the Soviet government, Aleksandra Biryukova, to order a Health Ministry investigation. She promised that the contraceptive industry would radically increase its output over the next two years. But Biryukova's call for change will not be easily answered. The Soviet reproductive health system needs radical restructuring before it can serve women humanely and effectively, and the lack of contraceptives is not the only problem. Familyplanning programs are almost nonexistent and have no way to counter widespread beliefs that contraceptives are unreliable, dangerous or unobtainable. (No sex education materials designed for women are readily available now, but next year Progress Publishers may publish *Our Bodies, Ourselves*.)

Unlike the abortion debate in the West, which pits the putative rights of the fetus against women's right to choose, the

Soviet discussion is about women's health care – the right to adequate supplies of reliable contraceptives, sanitary conditions, anesthetics and the respect of medical workers. As of now, there is no national debate in the Soviet Union about the morality of abortion. But rising ethnic tensions in the Russian Republic and in the Caucasus, for example, could open that issue because they strengthen patriarchal religions which have a dim view of women. (A similar phenomenon is occurring in Poland, where the Catholic Church is trying to use its influence with Solidarity to curtail abortion and the availability of contraceptives.)

Few Soviet sexologists (a surprisingly busy and esteemed specialty) will discuss homosexuality, and decades of cultural isolation from the West and of repressive laws have insured (that sexual attitudes remain reactionary. (Although lesbianism was never officially outlawed, homosexuals have been jailed for up to eight years under a statute (that, according to press reports, is likely to be repealed this year.) But there have been glimmers of opposition. In December 1979, a group of Leningrad women issued a *samizdat* publication, *Almanac Women and Russia*. It was the first self-consciously feminist text produced in the Soviet Union since the early 1920s, and its half-dozen contributors wrote about the flaws of Soviet gynecology, the scarcity of consumer goods and the general overburdening of women, problems that are aired today by numerous women in the *Glasnost* press. What was unusual about *Almanac* was its accounts of lesbian relationships, a reality of Soviet life that is only now being acknowledged (albeit euphemistically and grudgingly).

Ten years earlier, in November 1969, Natalya Baranskaya's novella *A Week Like Any Other* was published in the prestigious literary journal *Novy Mir*. (It has just been published in English, along with several of Baranskaya's short stories, by Seal Press.) Written in the form of a week's diary entries, it details the nightmare of one woman's daily life: food short-

ages, endless lines, poor health care and day care, the lack of basic household services and a husband who buries himself in the TV or newspapers and never lifts a finger. When he suggests to Olga, a young scientist, that she stop working and stay home to take care of the family (a familiar proposal these days), she is appalled: «You want to shut me in here for the whole year! How could we live on your salary! All this boring stuff is for me alone, and the only interesting things are for you!» Olga's story touched a raw nerve; Baranskaya received hundreds of letters from grateful women thanking her for telling the truth about their lives.

That was twenty years ago; it's taken women that long to get started. Since 1989 there has been an upsurge of independent (that is, outside Party control) activism by women. And although there are still no signs of a mass movement, independent women's associations have emerged around the country. But *Soviet Women* doesn't take these developments into account. (To be fair, things are changing so rapidly in the Soviet Union these days that many books are outdated by the time they are published.) Gray writes that women are «hindered from cohesive action, to this day, by their government's censure of any 'feminist' movement that would function outside of party control. and by their curious lack of solidarity.» Her comment that during her travels she «barely found two» other feminists is difficult to understand. One evening last December I sat in a newspaper office in Moscow and listened to twenty women from eight different independent associations define what feminism meant to them. Many were in their 20s, contradicting Gray's view that the younger generation has lost contact with feminist traditions. In fact, the emerging women's associations are composed of women of different ages and different political and professional orientations.

In Moscow, Olga Voronina and a group of women scholars have established the League for Society's Liberation from

Stereotypes (LOTOS), which is beginning to articulate a gender analysis of Soviet society. Olga Bessolova has revived a once dormant Women's Council in the Aerohydrodynamics Institute in Zhukovsky, sixty kilometers from Moscow. She has organized a Women's Initiative Club, which lobbies the town government for better services and holds bimonthly consciousness-raising meetings, and an Inter-Regional Women's Political Club, which organizes political training workshops for women and nominates women to run in local and national races. Last January I attended one of the Initiative Club's meetings. Forty women – professionals, scholars, journalists, engineers and factory workers – gathered for four hours. These women believe that the solution to the «women's question» lies not in the improvement of consumer goods and services but in the redefinition of male and female social roles.

One month earlier, a federation of women writers was formed inside the Russian Writer's Union, and women filmmakers and journalists have started lobbying groups to fight for higher pay and better working conditions. (The Soviet Union still has only one female foreign correspondent.) In March several women formed a women's center in Moscow which will offer legal consultation as well as political leadership training. In Leningrad, Elena Zelinskaya, who heads a women's cooperative association and the Northwest Information Agency, a network of independent journalists in Leningrad, was recently appointed to chair the City Council Commission on Communication. In Uzbekistan (where Gray interviews a «narcissistic Communist official» and a «Dragon Lady»), Rozika Mergenbaeva makes documentaries about the appalling conditions under which women and girls work in the cotton fields.

More disturbing than these omissions is Gray's conclusion, presented early in the book, that «the Soviet Union might be as much in need of a men's movement as of a women's

movement.» She tries the idea out on some of her Soviet friends and finds it «very well-received.» But the women Gray asks, and who inform this book, are almost exclusively strong and successful women who live with either their mothers or children or with passive, emasculated men, whom they deride in Gray's presence. As someone who has traveled regularly to the Soviet Union in the past ten years. I'd say the country has had a men's movement all along; only now are women's concerns emerging on the fringes of the male-dominated political and cultural outpourings that characterize *glasnosi*. What kind of matriarchy pays its female workers two-thirds of the average male income, gives women the dirty manual jobs while insuring that they cannot reach the top of the professions and then blames «masculinized» women for every social problem?

Gray emerges as a kind of romantic feminist, accepting the view, so popular among the Soviet intelligentsia and political elite, that Soviet women have an essence that is indisputably different from that of men. «In this laboratory of emancipation offered us by the Soviet Union,» Gray concludes, «in this epochal experiment which has engaged women in the work force longer and more fully than any society in history, the paradoxical 'equality' between the sexes may well symbolize a central dilemma of the human condition: the female's secret and ambivalent desire to lead and be led, the male's confusion and resentment before her mysterious force and her often awesome versatility.» Throughout all levels of Soviet society, she writes, «one is constantly awed by women's keen sense of their greater patience, diligence, optimism, endurance, shrewdness and self-esteem – a self-esteem apparently heightened by the very arduousness of their everyday duties, their incessant foraging for basic necessities of food and clothing.» Gray continues, «Many women I talked to prefer to remain exhausted, to continue complaining and to keep their husbands out of the kitchen, where 'it is not their place to

be.'» Perhaps, she notes, this stance makes more sense if viewed in the great Russian literary tradition that depicts women's suffering as a redemptive force. In the end, she creates the same image of women created by Russian male authors in the nineteenth century: heroines considerably more powerful than their male counterparts. Those authors placed women on pedestals, the better to admire their suffering while keeping them in their place.

The structure of much of the book – small-scale, impressionistic pictures of women in their homes, with their children and, occasionally, «henpecked» husbands – places women in a traditional surrounding. This setting draws out Gray's novelistic skills, but women in any society have many sets of relationships. However, Gray doesn't seem interested in describing the public activities of women in Soviet society. As a result, there is often a static and passive quality to these women's lives. I wish Gray had asked more of them what they think they, or the Gorbachev government, could do to improve their living or working conditions.

In fact, women as active political figures do not figure in the book. When Gray does refer to the glaring absence of women in positions of high political authority, she doesn't discuss the structural shortcomings of a system that has produced only two women Politburo members in seventy-three years. Instead, she argues that Western feminists have «tended to put too much blame on men's sexist biases» to explain Soviet women's absence from the higher echelons of labor and politics. Soviet women, Gray implies, consider politics a dirty business, best left to men. «In the Glasnost era,» she writes, Soviet women «often note, with a touch of irony and pride, that in view of the totalitarianism and moral debacle of past Soviet regimes. their skeptical reticence toward political power may have been prophetic.» But the situation seems more complex. Consider that multicandidate elections last year, the freest since 1917, produced a Congress of People's



Presentation of Sexist of the Year project, 2017

Deputies in which fewer than 15 percent of the deputies are women, as compared with 33 percent under previous governments. And in the recent local elections to the Russian Republic's Parliament, the proportion of women elected dropped from 35.3 percent before the quotas were removed to 5.4 percent afterward. (A pre-election poll in *Argumenti i Fakti* last year showed that voters considered «being a man» one of the most important qualities in a candidate.) These alarming statistics have sparked a debate among women about developing affirmative action programs during this transitional period to help more women get into the grass-roots soviets, which are so important to the new political life of the country.

Class differences are as important in the Soviet Union as in the United States, but Gray's focus on women from the

«intelligentsia» obscures rather than illuminates these differences. For example, several of the women she interviewed express the hope that private enterprise and cooperatives will offer better conditions for women, such as flexible hours and improved health care. But for millions of women, the implications of the marketstyle economic reforms are less appealing. Indeed, I have spoken to many women who worry that reforms like radical cuts in the 18-million-member bureaucracy will mean layoffs of support staffs – which consist almost entirely of women. They worry that cooperatives, which are more like profit-making limited partnerships than communal enterprises, are requiring workers to put in twelve hours a day, thereby occluding mothers unless they are able to work at home. Other reforms, such as work brigades, which were introduced as an incentive to make workers more productive, are leaving the disabled, older workers and women, who traditionally take more sick leaves because of responsibility for children, on the sidelines. In addition, when women try to take advantage of their legal rights to work fewer hours or on a part-time schedule, employers are reluctant to accommodate their requests, and women then often find themselves under pressure to quit. Since almost all benefits in Soviet society (housing, health care and pensions) revolve around one's job, women are worried that they may well become more dependent on their husbands or families as a result of the reforms.

Perhaps the only perceptible – and significant – benefit Gorbachev's reforms have brought to women is the freedom to organize, to address the inequalities in the system or, as a Soviet friend of mine puts it, «to let steam off.» Olga Voronina, who helped form the independent group LOTOS, wrote last year, «In Western Europe and America women's movements have spent twenty years fighting for society to recognize their problems. Here we are only just beginning the process of democratization, and our issue cannot be resolved

by decree. Until society changes its view of women and stops reducing their problems to goods shortages, nothing is going to change.»

The Nation. June 4, 1999

Katrina vanden Heuvel

Right-to-Lifers Hit Russia

«**M**ass terror is being conducted against our children,» Galina Seryakova says. We are sitting in her kitchen. Plastic model fetuses are lined up on the table, between a plate of cookies and a teakettle. «Hitler and Stalin never dreamed of killing on such a scale.»

Seryakova is the founder of Right to Life, one of Russia's new anti-abortion groups. «My fetuses,» she tells me proudly, «are gifts from the Right to Life Federation.»

Beyond the bloody events in Moscow last month that transfixed the world and jolted the country's political life, there is another, more subterranean battle going on for the Russian soul. From Moscow's streets to Siberia's remote villages, across the ideological ruins of the Communist landscape, fundamentalist Christians, Catholic proselytizers and even Jewish zealots are disseminating literature, holding prayer meetings and bidding for converts with dollars where simple persuasion is insufficient. Christian right groups such as the International Right to Life Federation are by far the best organized and most successful. Their ideas about morality and family values – especially as these coincide with a resurgent nationalism that relies on traditional notions of

women and the glorification of motherhood – are highly appealing to Russians in flux between discarding an old identity and creating a new one. In this context, abortion rights have become a natural target. As Dr. John Willke, president of the federation, told his followers last year after returning from a trip to Russia, «We have seen historic achievements in regions of the world previously impenetrable to pro-life activity... Clearly Russia is an immensely fertile field to be plowed in terms of value systems and our issue.»

Last year, Willke's outfit organized a three-day «Right to Life» conference in Moscow to facilitate contacts between an array of U.S. Christian right groups and the leaders of Russia's nascent anti-abortion movement. One of those American groups, Focus on the Family, a media conglomerate out of Colorado Springs with an annual budget of \$77 million and a mission to fight «militant homosexuals,» abortion rights advocates and pornographers, broadcasts its agenda every day over some 2,500 Russian radio stations. Human Life International, a Catholic group that describes itself as the world's largest «pro-life/pro-family» organization, with fifty – eight branches in forty countries, has opened offices across the former Soviet Union. Its latest project, the «Conversion Corps for Mary,» aims to attract «100 people who can – perhaps with great sacrifice – donate at least \$1000, helping to fulfill the Blessed Virgin Mary's prophecy regarding the conversion of Russia.» Father Paul Marx, the president of H.L.I., is asking American volunteers to enlist for one year's service in Russia to «help us save thousands, perhaps millions in time, of the babies in the womb throughout Eastern Europe and Russia.» He has hired twelve Russians to work in clinics where abortions are conducted. «They are trained to talk the girls out of having abortions,» he told me. It is still a fledgling operation, but the group is also pumping money into Russia, Ukraine and Belarus to translate and publish «pro-life / pro-family» literature and videos, as well as materials about the purported dangers of IUDs and birth control pills.

Russia is in many ways ideal territory for the Christian right. In its social attitudes and values, the country remains deeply conservative. A recent opinion poll revealed that the Russian Orthodox Church and the army are the country's two most popular institutions. Indeed, the church's prominent role as first mediator and then partisan in the clash between President Boris Yeltsin and the Parliament highlighted the church's new-found authority. Meanwhile, of course, homophobia remains strong despite the this might require a footnote discussing the state of same-sex relationships in 2025 Russia (written out of Constitution in 2020 by codifying marriage as "a union between a man and a woman"). The feminist movement is small and disorganized, and because the right to abortion was so deeply ingrained in the Communist system, threats to that right have not aroused women to organize or join forces. (Very few women living today remember the horror of illegal abortions, a fact of life for two decades during Stalin's pro-natalist regime.) The threats to abortion rights are thus part of what Andrei Popov, a young social demographer, calls the post-Communist syndrome. «If abortions were allowed under the Communists, it means abortions must be bad because the Communists are bad,» he explains.

Anti-abortion forces are also exploiting fears over the dramatically falling birthrate. Last year, for the first time since World War II, deaths in Russia exceeded births. Many women say that grinding poverty, social instability and hopelessness lead them to postpone, or forgo, childbearing. More than half the families with three or more children live in poverty. For the majority of Russian women, abortion is the only accessible means of birth control. It is not uncommon for a woman to have six to eight abortions during her lifetime. As a result, the Russian abortion rate is the highest in the world.

The vaunted market reforms have changed the situation little. In practice, lack of sex education and lack of money to buy contraceptives have made genuine family planning a

privilege of the new rich. Currently, only 22 percent of all Russian women of childbearing age use birth control. Although Planned Parenthood Federation of America and a handful of nongovernmental Russian groups are beginning to distribute family planning information and contraceptives to schools and offices, the needs are overwhelming. One Russian newspaper reported that there are only three condoms available per year for each Russian male; the supply of oral contraceptives satisfies a mere 2 percent of demand. Only intensive government investment in family planning will improve the situation. But this year the Yeltsin government has allocated less hard currency for buying modern contraceptives than the Communist regimes did.

As if by way of a substitute, the Moscow city government, several of Yeltsin's ministries and his chief adviser on women and family affairs have welcomed American Christian right groups and their agenda. «They struck me as children,» Father Marx said about his meeting with Russian Health Ministry officials. «They grabbed anything we had, our anti-abortion buttons, our literature. They're fascinated with anything American.» Marx boasted of seeing his group's materials in hospitals and schools: «Even in Siberia, they had our posters.»

The Ministry of Social Protection (similar to the US Department of Health and Human Services), Yeltsin's Office on Family Affairs and the Moscow city government have distributed Christian right books, pamphlets and other paraphernalia to secondary schools. The material is presented as expert, unbiased information on reproductive health, sexuality and child-raising. Focus on the Family's videos on sexual morality are used in high school ethics courses, the equivalent of American sex education programs. *Dr. Dobson Answers Your Questions*, written by the founder of Focus on the Family, is used in teaching colleges and institutes. The book argues that «no rationalization can justify detaching a healthy little human being from his place of safety and leaving him to

suffocate on a porcelain table»; warns that «the sexual revolution has the power to destroy us as a people»; and defines homosexuality as «perversion.»

John and Barbara Willke's book *The Wonder of Sex* is also used in Moscow's teaching colleges. «What is an abortion?» a young girl asks her mother in this slim manual. «It's just another instance when people act in ways against God's wishes.»

The Minister of Social Protection, Ella Pamfilova, has consulted with Focus on the Family in developing a curriculum for social workers and has sought its advice on family and social policy. «The desire for Western contacts, and dollars, is so overwhelming,» a Russian analyst notes, «that nobody says, 'Who are you?' They say, 'Come on in. Here's the door.'»

Free Bibles and other published materials, videos, stadium-sized revivals and television advertising are particularly seductive to potential converts. In fact, the Russian antiabortion movement seems driven as much by pragmatic opportunism as by religious fervor or ideological fanaticism. Although many of the Russian activists I met seemed sincere, even obsessive, others are undoubtedly attracted to the possibility of receiving fax and video machines, as well as hard currency contributions and travel to the West.

Take, for example, Mikhail Matskovskii, director of the International Center for Human Values, a quasi-governmental organization that publishes Christian right material. He was appointed last March to the Presidential Commission on Women, Families and Children, and claims to be responsible for introducing such material to the Russian government. Slick, articulate, English-speaking, Matskovskii calls himself a family values entrepreneur. After many years of toiling as a sociologist in the state-run Academy of Science, he says he was inspired by *Perestroika* to «go beyond the limits of studying the family to do something on a grander scale.»

In 1991, with some government funding, he opened his center. Its mandate, like that of so many Russian organizations, is

grandiosely vague: «to promote mutual understanding and trust among nations, to bring together cultures and ideologies on the basis of universal moral principles accepted by civilized humanity.» Matskovskii furthermore asserts that the center's foreign partners are «interested in a free and open exchange of opinion on crucial political, economic and social issues.» Such descriptions would seem to rule out the Christian right, but Matskovskii is doing a good business in selling its version of morality. *Dr. Dobson Answers Your Questions*, which the center published, sold 300,000 copies in a few months; the Willkes' *The Wonder of Sex* sold 100,000 in a month. This year, Matskovskii will publish *their Abortion: Questions and Answers*, considered by many to be the bible of the American antiabortion movement. «We have sent some money over to prime his printing presses,» John Willke told me.

Andy Melilla, Focus on the Family's director for international relations, has known Matskovskii for several years. «He has a Jewish heritage, and calls himself an agnostic,» Melilla says, «but when he came out to see us at our headquarters in California, he told us that his country lacked a value system and that our Ten Commandments intrigued him. 'We need something like that for the moral foundations of our country,' he said.»

Many Russians in the antiabortion movement are less naïve about Matskovskii's motives. «He'll publish anything as long as it makes money,» one activist says. Indeed, Matskovskii's center is also publishing books like Barbara de Angelis's sex-help manual, *Secrets About Men Every Woman Should Know*. When I asked Melilla if he and James Dobson knew that Matskovskii published such books as well, he chuckled nervously. «Maybe I need to look into that,» he said. «Could you give me the title again?»

Willke has only kind words for Matskovskii, who helped him organize the «Right to Life» conference in Moscow last year. It was Matskovskii who had ties to the small but fanatical cast of characters in Russia's grass-roots anti-abortion

movement. Two main groups – Right to Life, led by Galina Seryakova, and Support of Motherhood, led by Dr. Igor Guzov – claim a total membership of about 5,000 in Russia. The next tier of the movement includes a former religious dissident, a Dostoyevskian priest who does public relations for the Russian Orthodox Church and moonlights as an ideologist for the authoritarian Christian-Democratic Party; a housewife who runs a hotline to dissuade women from having abortions; and an economist who's marketing lacquered Russian eggs decorated with fetuses to Western companies.

Dr. Guzov likes to compare himself to Bernard Nathanson, the doctor who made *The Silent Scream*, the notorious 1984 film claiming to show a fetus in pain. Influenced by Nathan – son's work, Guzov made *Right to Life*, which intersplices gruesome images of dead fetuses, some dripping blood on ice – white ceramic tiles, with scenes of Guzov's medical students, shot by hidden camera, dissuading anguished pregnant women from having abortions. Guzov arranged for *The Silent Scream* to be shown three times on Russian state-owned television. His own film has aired twice.

«The Bolsheviks were responsible for killing millions by legalizing abortion,» Guzov said as we sat on a frayed couch in his one-room apartment in a working-class district of Moscow. The room had a monastic quality – a few icons, a portrait of Nicholas II – but then there was the fax, the video player and a Toshiba television set, all donated by Human Life International and Chicago's Pro-Life Action League. Such sponsorship has also brought Guzov to America, where he met with Representative Henry Hyde and a variety of anti-abortion lobbyists and advocates. One lobbying outfit, the Family Research Council, subsequently published information about Support of Motherhood in its newsletter. Guzov says he has received many letters «from the common people of America» promising to send contributions. He recently opened hard currency accounts with Lloyds Bank in London and the Republic National Bank of New York.

Yet in Guzov's case the material rewards of his campaign appear to be secondary to ideological purposes. The name of his organization says it all; so does his rabidly anticommunist rhetoric, a characteristic of Russia's nationalist right. The nationalists believe that Communism, sexual permissiveness, divorce and women's emancipation have destroyed the country's moral foundations. Race and ethnic purity are also central preoccupations.

«The demographic crisis in our country has grown into demographic catastrophe,» Guzov told me. «We realized that we had to do something to prevent the total depopulation of our country. Entire Russian villages are dying out, while the Muslim population explodes. We need to salvage Russian purity.» Not surprisingly, some of the most fervent converts to Russian anti-abortion activism live in villages in the country's heartland. Whereas «pro-life» groups in the United States usually condemn abortion on the basis of the right to life of the fetus, many Russian nationalists base their opposition on the ethnic group's need to proliferate. Abortion thus becomes a crime against the nation.

The family values crusade had powerful adherents in the Russian Parliament, where an assortment of newfangled democrats and old-style conservatives, in a panic over the dramatically falling birthrate, attempted to undermine the country's liberal abortion law last year. «Abortion is anti-humane and antihuman,» Nikolai Pavlov, vice chairman of the Supreme Soviet Committee on Women, Defense of the Family, Motherhood and Children, and a leading nationalist politician, told me recently. And «a woman without three children is a triple threat to our nation.» Before it was dissolved by Yeltsin, the Parliament was considering a Law on the Protection of the Family. Only lobbying by women's groups forced legislators to delete a provision stating that every child has the right to life from the moment of conception. If Yeltsin holds parliamentary elections in December as promised, fundamentalist attitudes – which are shared by so-called «democrats»

and «hard-liners» alike – are sure to be represented among the contenders. «A real feminist movement,» Pavlov said, «would be against abortion because it is an assault not only on new life but on a woman's life.» A Russian girlfriend, meanwhile, tells me that women are certainly willing to consider alternatives to abortion. Unfortunately, few exist.

Given how embedded abortion is as the means of birth control in Russia, it is unlikely that the Christian right will make any startling reversals soon. But zealots take the long view. «I know that it's not possible to ban abortion in Russia today. We're not Poland,» Galina Seryakova told me. «But I want to begin by changing people's consciousness about abortion, so that it becomes something criminal.» Unlike their American counterparts, Seryakova and her followers face no legal barriers as they confront women in clinics to dissuade them from having abortions, or lecture high school students about the evils of the procedure. «Young people are open to the pro-life message,» she says. «To them abortion is something they associate with their parents and with the discredited Communist system.»

In one clinic, medical personnel welcomed Seryakova into their waiting room so she could lecture a 19-year-old woman about the horrible physical and emotional effects of abortion. Using materials from Human Life International to make her points, Seryakova pushed her to sign up for Right to Life's new home for women.

«What's good about Russia for our movement,» says Joseph Scheidler, the militant executive director of the Pro-Life Action League, «is that you can get in the schools, the hospitals, and get on the radio and TV to talk about the evils of abortion. That is, until Planned Parenthood gets its hooks in and starts spewing its propaganda.» Other factors may be at work. I heard from a pediatrician who works in a Moscow hospital that some Western religious organizations contribute money and equipment only on the condition that the hospital stop performing abortions.

In times of economic crisis even the most well-meaning may compromise public rights for the sake of material aid. In times of a crisis of faith – and in the broadest sense that is what Russia is going through – those with a powerful conviction often gain at the expense of the confused or the uncertain. Russia's nationalist and religious right wing existed long before the influx of America's Christian right. But a new and unholy alliance between activists of the East and West is ominous. In the past year, Planned Parenthood and a host of other groups have worked to mitigate incursions by family values proselytizers and to defend a woman's right to a safe and legal abortion. Many Russians, however, stripped of their ideological roots, buffeted by economic turmoil and social unrest, have become increasingly vulnerable to the sermons of these Western missionaries. Exporting family values may soon replace the hyping of economic shock therapy as the United States' most destructive contribution to post-cold war interventionism.

The Nation. November 1, 1993

Nadezda Azhgikhina

Back to the Kitchen^{*}

An exhibition of Soviet art entitled «After Perestroika: Kitchenmaids or Stateswomen» showed in the US at Colgate University in November and December 1993. The title refers to Lenin's well-known statement, «Every kitchenmaid must be able to rule the state.» When I was

^{*} Published in *Women's Review of Books*, 1994.

in primary school, my Russian contemporaries and I knew this adage well; we also knew that a kitchenmaid had never served in the government.

Still, Lenin's words did inspire art that featured women in new, active roles in our society. In the «Kitchenmaids or Stateswomen» exhibition happy tractor-drivers smiled; athletes ran; Pioneer girls saluted. Besides the Socialist realist paintings and sculptures, there were many photographs of women from magazines and newspapers of that bygone epoch which created an especially striking effect.

When I saw the Colgate exhibition I reflected that these same rooms might house, in a year or two, quite another exhibit: «Kitchenmaid or Miss Universe.» For today it's the beauty contest winner who incarnates female success in Russia, and she appears in all her permutations throughout our mass media. Even *Pravda*, which never before carried news of Western beauty contests, congratulated Julia Kurochkina, last Miss World winner, as if she were a super-patriot.

Women in today's Russia are indeed in the kitchen – on the bottom rungs of a society that considers women second-rate citizens despite their formal legal equality with men. In fact, Lenin's adage to the contrary, they've always been seen as inferior, but never have they been exposed to so much reactionary moral pressure by newspapers, radio and television as in the 1990s. Speaking to a national audience, popular TV commentator Aleksandr Gumov declared that it paid to value softness and compliance in women; no other qualities had any significance. And the famous film director Nikita Mikhalkov announced in an interview, «I am Asian by nature and consider women to be a lower species.» His popularity has not declined.

In a recent session of Parliament, members were heard to ask: «Why broadcast our debates? We are not debating the Constitution for our wives and mothers-in-law but for you and me – men.» This opinion, heard by millions of TV viewers, is one, it

seems to me, that in Western democratic countries would have drawn at least some outraged reaction. But not here.

The Russian press, radio and TV bear much responsibility for this turn of events. In Stalin's lime portraits of political figures decorated the pages of newspapers and magazines. That was cloying, yet official propaganda showed at least some serious effort to reeducate the public about women's potential. After Stalin, references to women in positions of leadership decreased. In the last two decades of Soviet power, serious publications like the weekly *Literalurnaya Gazeta* (*Literary Gazette*) and *Pravda* usually remembered women on March 8, on which occasion most of the articles were by women. Editors looked on the work of women authors as inferior, whatever their real merits.

Even so, the idea that women were first of all workers and only secondarily mothers still dominated news and magazine articles in the sixties. (Nadezhda Krupskaya, Lenin's wife, was a leader in developing the concept of women's dual role.) The essays of a famous journalist of that period, Inna Rudenko, published in the liberal daily, addressed to youth, *Komsomolskaya pravda* (*Young Communist Truth*), were typical: she would, for instance, glorify some scientist and mother of ten, calling on Soviet girls to emulate her.

Toward the end of the seventies, however, the theme of motherhood and the «natural destiny» of women as friendly supporters of men and as wives came to the fore. During the last Soviet years a popular exhortation in the liberal press – meaning *Literalurnaya gazeta* and *Komsomolskaya pravda* – was «The civil duty of women is to be women.» This meant that a woman should help her husband and raise their children, devoting her energies not to her work but to her family.

For many journalists Lenin's «kitchenmaid and stateswoman» phrase smacked of ideological repression. These writers, themselves progressives, called on women to be soft,

domestic and indifferent to politics: to devote themselves to family – even though the journalists' personal experience contradicted their own advice. A small example from *Younost* (*Youth*) magazine in 1983: the well-known, democratically-inclined publicist Leonid Zhukhovitskii, in conversation with a women's magazine staff member, declared: «When you put your hand on the ideal woman's shoulder, there ought to remain an indentation in the form of a hand.» And the female journalist agreed.

As for women's magazines like *Rabotnitsa* (*Working Woman*), *Krestianka* (*Peasant Woman*) and *Sovietskaia Zhen-shchina* (*Soviet Woman*, a propaganda magazine exported to foreign countries), they were seen as second-rate. Their production standards were inferior, and they were also bad as literature; the brightest women journalists sought work in more prestigious places.

The «stateswoman» figure made her appearance in every issue of these magazines before Perestroika – that is, until the mid-1980s. But as far as readers were concerned, she was a creation of state propaganda who had nothing to do with real life. Not surprisingly, at the beginning of Perestroika, attacks on the very idea of «stateswomen» began to appear increasingly in the democratic press. In the very first months of that period Mikhail Gorbachev announced that «women's natural destiny» must be given attention, and that «we should help our women spend more time at home.» «Women's natural destiny» was a theme that often thereafter made its appearance in women's publications. Simultaneously, even by comparison with the immediate past, the number of publications for women dropped sharply.

At the same time, articles began to appear throughout the Russian press about issues hitherto taboo – female alcoholism, prostitution and crime. March 8, International Women's Day, stopped being a celebration of «women's creativity,» and became an occasion for social and psychological commentary.

As the «quality» democratic press stopped writing on women's issues, discussing «woman's natural destiny at the same time, a new kind of publication addressed to a female readership began to appear. The interests of *Sudarushka* (*Little Madam*), *Provornitsa* (*Nimble Woman*), *Natalya* and others were restricted to cooking, hairdressing and ready-made clothing stores. One after the other there appeared new knitting and fashion magazines, as well as publications by fashion and cosmetics firms, all of which presented beautiful, well-cared for and well-dressed women whose overriding goal was to look elegant and please men.

The oldest women's magazines, *Rabotnitsa* and *Krest'ianka*, founded in the 1920s, continue to run articles about traditional politicians, but the latter occupy far less space than discussions of sex, horoscopes, advice columns about cosmetics and the emotions, and features on formerly forbidden religious themes. These magazines run no serious articles about the situation of working women, or any objective information about feminism in the West. The editors feel their audiences just aren't interested in such fare.

At an international round table in 1993, devoted to women's writing in *The East and the West*, a *Rabotnitsa* editor said she'd never consider using the word «feminism» in her articles. When asked why, she answered simply that it was her «internal editor» – self-censorship – that stood in the way.

Outside the women's press, within mainstream Russian journalism, political reaction in gender matters has been primed over the past two years by several new, popular and highly successful newspapers and dailies – among them the weeklies *Stolitsa* (*Capital*) and *Sobesednik* (*Interlocutor*)-, the leading scandal sheet, the daily *Moskovskiy Komsomolets* (*Moscow Young Communist*); and the monthly newspaper *Superman*, a bright, well-illustrated publication staffed by many well-known and democratic journalists, is of particular interest: each issue of the magazine develops the idea of «Super-

man» as the prototype of the new Russian male. Superman is something of a womanizer, capable of conquering each and every Russian woman, and in the magazine's pages famous people talk about him seriously and at length. For people fed up with the stagnation of the Brezhnev years and with endless Socialist realist propaganda about «builders of Communism,» *Superman* is a welcome new arrival. He is a vehicle for portraying a Western lifestyle, but one simplified to the point of absurdity.

Practically every issue features material about women, often famous ones – writers, artists or scholars. The main issue confronting them, at least if you believe Superman's writers, is how supermen figure in their lives. In general, all these interviews and articles, often technically competent, can be summed up in the short formula: «Woman – friend of Superman.»

A related formula popular in the post-Perestroika press and TV is «Woman – best friend of businessmen.» It is women journalists, moreover, who are most active in developing and strengthening the new images of women in Russia – the model, the well-groomed housewife and the youthful winner of beauty contests. No one made them do this. On the contrary, not only do almost all of the men's publications publish softcore porn, many women's magazines do also, genuinely ignorant that this degrades women.

An example from my own experience: at the meeting of the editorial board of *Dar (Gift)*, a new magazine for the Russian cultural elite, I suggested that one issue be devoted to the best-known representatives of the international feminist movement. Everyone furiously attacked the idea, including the women from the editorial collective. The issue in question did not stint on the woman theme – the editors published several explicitly pornographic photographs. No one spoke out: a woman's naked body had never been seen in pre-perestroika Soviet publications, and for many, running the photos scored one more victory for democracy.

The notion that «All that was forbidden yesterday must be good» affects the discussion of sex, which takes up increasing space in popular dailies. The Russian woman has unexpectedly acquired sexuality in the eyes of the mass reader. Mass publications systematically print semi-pornographic texts about nymphomania and sadomasochism. Contemporaneously with the men's journal *Mister X* there has appeared *Miss X*, a magazine addressed to a female readership. Unsurprisingly, it has many male readers as well, for it runs letters, interviews and short stories, all replete with explicit, elaborate sexual fantasies and pornographic language.

Completing the panorama of popular publications are the new «journals of acquaintance,» as we call them: *Znakomstva* (*Acquaintance*), the journal of international contacts, *Amour*, and the newsletter *Krasnaya Shapochka* (*Little Red Riding Hood*), reflecting in the openness of its advertising («Beautiful girls to help you relax through sexual massage») the recent re-appearance of houses of prostitution.

As for ordinary working women – still the majority of the workers and of the country's population – they are of no interest to the vast majority of Russia's mass media. Women's education, which in Russia used to be valued as highly as men's, is now considered irrelevant. Public opinion, supported by the mass press, says that for women it is important not to finish university, but to pay attention to their figures, dress well, look sexy and get to know a solid «Superman.»

The country that first proclaimed equality between women and men in all spheres, whose example inspired women around the world, is now junking its heritage. Not by accident did the first draft of our new Constitution omit specific language about the equality of the sexes, which has hitherto been written into all Soviet constitutions.

Over the past year or two, the popular press has discovered a new enemy, the sort without which the Russian press traditionally cannot exist. This is the Western feminist. She is por-

trayed as rejecting life's simple pleasures in the name of unbridled ambition; she comes to Russia to corrupt innocent Russian women. *Moskovskiy Komsomolets* and *Stolitsa* run the most virulently anti-feminist articles. The authors of these malicious pieces are all women. Journalist Elena Averina, for example, explained to *Stolitsa's* readers in 1993 that «American women are too well-off; they can find anything in their stores; they have nothing to do while their husbands are at work.» The same article describes Averina's attendance at an international women's forum held just outside Moscow. In torment after a conversation with an unattractive, nasty and aggressive American feminist, she returns to the railroad station, where two drunken Russian men approach her and grasp her hands. This finally restores her sense of herself as a female; smiling at the men, she reflects with relief that Russian feminism will never make any headway.

As a result of writing like this, the Russian majority, including even well-educated people, seriously believes that all Western feminists are frigid and hate men. *Moskovskiy Komsomolets* described European feminists as «a band of aroused Lesbians,» a bad influence on youth. During a radio broadcast about women in which I participated, a female high-school student called in. «Is it true,» she asked, «that feminists can't have children?» In sum, we have arrived at a level of ignorance roughly equivalent to what obtained in the US and Europe thirty to forty years ago. The difference between us and the West of the 1950s and early 60s is that our government once committed itself formally to women's equality, but the concept was not followed in practice.

In the midst of reaction there are some signs that consciousness may be changing. On the political scene, women's organizations and electoral groupings have begun emerging, at least paying lip-service to the need for serious attention to alleviating women's difficult, often desperate, circumstances.

Take the group called Women of Russia, which made a bid for political office during the fall 1993 electoral campaign. Its leaders indicated that they wished to see political stability in the country, that they opposed private ownership of land and that they were committed to defending the interests of all Russian women. But at bottom it offered no concrete political program. It drew few women's votes, partly because of this fact, and also in part because the group is rooted in the former women's Soviets. Women of Russia defended women's interests according to the old Soviet model, within the framework of existing state institutions. With the Chechen war the group has taken more progressive stands, defending women as the mothers of soldiers, calling for an end to the war, and demanding the resignation of the Defense Minister.

A new phenomenon in contemporary Russia is a burgeoning, independent women's movement. There are many new groups, some of which are more or less associated with politicians – for example, Deputy Irina Khakamada's Liberal Women's Foundation, which recently proposed increasing the amount of state benefits for children. Organizations like the Women's League attract women from the Soviet establishment.

The most interesting part of the movement is at the grass roots, where countless organizations including many thousands of women are springing up across the country. Some are more formal than others, like «Conversion and Women,» a national support group for women engineers made redundant by the shrinking defense industry, and other organizations of university women, women in business or in the film industry. As well as these national organizations, there are strong regional initiatives, for example the ones emerging in Siberia and the Karel Republic, or in the industrial cities in the Urals and along the Volga.

All of these new groups and organizations address a wide variety of problems, first and foremost of which is women's



Nadezda Azhgikhina and Irina Yurna (center) with colleagues from Association of Women Journalists, 1995

unemployment. They are also establishing women's educational programs, business consortiums, clubs and study groups. They offer support to specific categories of women – single mothers, for instance, and soldiers' mothers. In 1991 and 1992 women from different regions held two joint conferences under the rubric «Independent Women's Forum» in the town of Dubna near Moscow. The slogan for the conferences was «Democracy Without Women is Not Democracy.»

Russian women's main stumbling-block today is their lack of solidarity. In the summer of 1994 the Association of Women Journalists, founded in 1992, organized a discussion, «The Women's Movement and The Political Situation in Rus-

sia Today.» It fizzled because its participants, representing fifteen inter-regional groups, couldn't establish any common ground.

Another problem is that none of the women's organizations to date have been able to influence the mainstream media. The result is that Russian audiences know nothing about the women's groups I've just described. It's to be hoped that the movement can develop some media skills, since media support could bring the independent women's movement to the political stage as a serious force. And while women's current image in the media is ruinous, the existence of a women's movement creates at least the possibility that the press will one day be an arena where women's real lives and grievances can find eloquent expression and advocacy.

Katrina vanden Heuvel

Free Pussy Riot

In his final interview as president of Russia, Dmitry Medvedev was asked to comment on many of the issues one would expect – relations with the United States, Ukraine and Georgia, government corruption... and the Pussy Riot case.

While you might not have heard much, if anything, about Pussy Riot in this country, the feminist punk rock collective has roiled Russian politics. Back in February, on the eve of Russia's presidential election, it gave an impromptu performance of «Punk Prayer» on the pulpit of Christ the Savior Cathedral – Moscow's Russian Orthodox equivalent of St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York City. The performers wore ski masks, jabbed and kicked at the air and genuflected to verses

implored the Virgin Mary to «get rid of Putin, get rid of Putin, get rid of Putin.»

It seemed a feisty – perhaps to some tasteless – musical prank, amplifying the demands of thousands who'd protested in Moscow's streets since December. And it probably wasn't the most tactful way to attract a broad spectrum of supporters to the opposition's views. But these punk rockers have been around for a couple of years, taunting authorities with their flamboyant performance art and music. On video, their action almost has the feel of a flash mob – and a small one at that – albeit at the nexus of power between church and state.

But the authorities didn't view it as so benign. On March 3 – one day before the presidential election won by Putin – two members of Pussy Riot, Maria Alyokhina and Nadezhda Tolokonnikova*, were arrested «by heavily armed police officers» for allegedly participating in the performance. Two weeks later, another band member, Irina Loktina, was arrested.

All three women have been charged with «hooliganism» and face up to seven years in prison. Despite the fact that two of the women are mothers of young children, they are all being held in pre-trial detention, which was recently extended from April 24 to June 24. According to the New York Times, «There is every indication that it will be extended again, with a trial unlikely to start until the fall.»

The women have written to President Medvedev and asked that he look into the legality of the decision to open a criminal case against them. Their case has led punk rockers, women and feminists in the United States to try to raise awareness and support for Pussy Riot too. Indeed, the Free Pussy Riot campaign has gone global.

But in Russia in particular, key (even conservative) newspapers, Russian women and protesters who filled the streets before the parliamentary and presidential elections

* Nadezhda Tolokonnikova included into Foreign agent list in Russia.



The Free Pussy Riot campaign

have taken up their cause – signaling a real backlash against the government for its harsh response.

The case has also illuminated and exposed divisions in the Russian Orthodox Church itself – between the hierarchy and many in the rank and file. The church has been at the forefront in calling for all involved in the Pussy Riot performance to be punished for their «blasphemy.» In fact, according to the New York Times, priests said they were «ordered to circulate» a letter calling for the punk rockers «to be punished as severely as possible.» The Moscow patriarch denied it. But a senior Orthodox cleric said the performers «have declared war on Orthodox people, and there will be a war.»

Many in Russia view the actions and hyperbole the church is engaging in as a thinly veiled effort to deflect attention from its own corruption, power and immense wealth.

Indeed, when I was in Moscow in early April, a story broke that the Orthodox Church had photoshopped Patriarch Kirill I's Breguet watch worth at least \$30,000 out of a photo on its website – but neglected to remove the reflection that was still



Police detain Pussy Riot members

visible on the table where the patriarch was seated. The patriarch also won a \$600,000 lawsuit for dust damage to an apartment he owns in an expensive building, and bloggers allege that he has a «large country house, a private yacht and a penchant for ski vacations in Switzerland.»

Many Russians feel that this kind of bad publicity was the real motivating factor behind the church's organizing a massive demonstration in front of the cathedral last week. Crowd estimates range between 30,000 and 65,000 people – large by any measure – as the church called on supporters to help it «defend itself» against a «campaign of blasphemy,» including the Pussy Riot performance, the Times reports. The church bused in people «from over a dozen dioceses,» including «the Night Wolves, a group of nationalist motorcyclists.» It was a real show of strength – as big or bigger than any of Moscow's pro-democracy demonstrations – and priests who opposed the

gathering were denounced by Patriarch Kirill I as «traitors in cassocks.»

The Pussy Riot case has revealed real fissures between the secular and more conservative elements of Russia, and within the Russian Orthodox Church itself. Medvedev didn't quite seem to comprehend the significance – despite the fact that the issue came up in his final interview – responding that the women «got exactly what they were seeking – popularity,» and refusing further comment.

Maybe they did want popularity. Or maybe they simply wanted to do exactly what they did – make a bold political statement without physically damaging the church or harming anyone. Either way, detention and up to seven years prison for these actions seems riot-worthy. It's time to free Pussy Riot.

The Nation. August 9, 2019

**Journalist-Activist Nadezhda Azhgikhina
on Global Journalism, Women's Wartime Roles,
and Why We Can't Just 'Cancel Russian Culture and
All Russians'***

«Millions of Russians are banned from the world, while simultaneously facing unprecedented pressures inside Russia,» warns journalist Nadezhda Azhgikhina: «If this practice continues, you Westerners won't be able to find anyone to talk with in Russia.»

Nadezhda Azhgikhina is a Russian journalist and executive director of PEN Moscow since 2018. From 2013 to 2019, she

* Published in *Ms Magazine* 6/10/2023 by Jackie Abramian.



was vice-president of the European Federation of Journalists (Courtesy).

«History is made by ordinary people, not politicians. Dialogue is of great value because something happens when people meet and talk,» says veteran Russian journalist Nadezhda Azhgikhina with enthusiasm. We stand in a corner of a hotel lobby one evening in New York City after her full day of meetings, a university talk and dinner with close friends and colleagues.

True to her name, Nadezhda (meaning *hope* in Russian), Azhgikhina is hopeful about the future of our world. As PEN Moscow's executive director and member of the Union of Russian Writers, she served on the Gender Council of the International Federation of Journalists for nearly 15 years. She articulates her ideas in superb English but with an unmistakable Russian accent and an occasional smile that spreads across her face.

I ask her about the current global void that has silenced cross-cultural understanding of human stories across Russia. These stories bear scars of a history of revolutions and renewals, shifting political ideologies of openness to and then isolation from the West.

Azhgikhina hopes that the global intellectuals and educators could be, «on the frontline of breaking stereotypes and building bridges in different fields» and avoiding «scare tactics of canceling Russian culture and all Russians.»

«This is important for the future, our joint future. Canceling Russia has left many Russian intellectuals, students, middle-class and open-minded people feeling discriminated against by the West, so they have begun to change their minds and support the propaganda. The sanctions don't affect the Russian oligarchs, generals or politicians – it's the liberal people. Millions of Russians are banned from the world, while simultaneously facing unprecedented pressures from authorities inside Russia. If this practice continues, you Westerners won't be able to find anyone to talk with in Russia.»

Across the expansive Russian country, she says, «There are many decent people. Women are at the forefront, continuing to help each other.»

Azhgikhina recalls with nostalgia how empowering open communications between Russian and American women in the past helped dismantle the long-held «subservient» image of Russian women as portrayed in the Russian media. This portrayal, she says, was pushed by neo-liberal ideas after years of Soviet propaganda about formal (nonexistent) equality that penetrated society and the business world.

Under Mikhail Gorbachev and his «scholarly first lady» Raisa Gorbachev, collaborations spurred international women's peace initiatives, launched the Moscow Center for Gender Studies by sociologist Anastasia Posadskay. This helped independent women's organizations assemble across Russia.

The first women writers from USSR and North America met in spring 1991 at the Glasnost in Two Cultures conference at New York University, and fostered cross-cultural citizen diplomacy, erasing misconceptions on both sides. Following the Russian translation of the iconic book *Our Bodies Ourselves*, initiated by Katrina vanden Heuvel, family planning organizations in the US and Russia worked together. The airwaves of *Radio Nadezhda* (*Radio Hope*) unleashed a revolutionary change to condemn gender-based violence (GBV). In reaction, young men joined the movement against the crime.

The slogan, «Democracy Without Women Is Not Democracy,» adopted by the Russian women's movement, reached prominence beyond their borders, gelling with the global struggle for gender equality. It saved lives, opened doors, reduced tensions, and united women to fight for nuclear disarmament, equal rights and security.

History is made by ordinary people, not politicians. Dialogue is of great value because something happens when people meet and talk.

As past vice president of the European Federation of Journalists, Azhgikhina is alarmed about the depleting landscape of global journalism and the lack of well-investigated and analyzed content. She says the «traditional, family-held media companies» have been replaced with international businesses hyper-focused on financial gains and profits, not delivery of solid news content.

«The globalization of markets has simplified content and decreased the quality of information, since most media outlets today use the same information to report on issues. The most expensive departments, such as investigative, science and technology, are overshadowed financially, and foreign correspondents have dramatically decreased around the globe,» says Azhgikhina, citing *Nation Magazine* writer John Nichols' book, *The Death and Life of American Journalism*.



Nadezda Azhgikhina, 1995

«We are far from real journalism today. Since they released the most qualified journalists from editorial offices, today we are witnessing a global trend with uniformed news and rapid information bites. They optimize everything, not to inform and educate, but as clickbait. Objective reportage and voices from all sides are replaced with ‘news packages, a very dangerous trend. The global journalism community must rise and demand awareness,» says Azhgikhina.

Today we are witnessing a global trend with uniformed news and rapid information bites.

Azhgikhina is hopeful about various international initiatives – among them the UNESCO Women Journalists as Peace Communicators conference.

A native of Tomsk, one of the oldest cities in Siberia, Azhgikhina moved to Moscow at an early age. With a Ph.D. in Journalism from Moscow State University, where she taught for many years, Azhgikhina developed a notable journalistic career. Her resume includes top positions at some of Russia's leading media outlets, such as *Ogoniok*, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* (one of post-Soviet Russia's most important daily newspapers) and a personal column in *Delovoy Vtornik* and *Journalist*. In 1992, she co-founded the Association of Russian Women Journalists with Irina Jurna.

She attributes her intellect and international success to her family. Like many Russian families, hers reflect diverse origins, which range from devoted Communists and Gulag victims to educators, famous Russian writers and scholars of Russian literature. She proudly recalls her maternal grandmother's influence who, as a devout Communist and a «practical feminist,» was the first woman chief geologist in the mines.

«During that era, women never worked as geologists or chief geologists. She got this position after graduating from Tomsk Technical Institute and had a seat at the table where there were only men. She encouraged them to use foul Russian vocabulary, as though there were only men at the table, which I cannot imagine even now, but she managed.» Azhgikhina admits gender discrimination persists in Russia as across the rest of the world.

UN Women's most recent report confirmed that full gender equality around the globe is 300 years away. But in Russia, women's political status is far better off today than in the late Soviet era. Women hold 27 percent of the Russian parliamentary seats, compared to nearly 20 percent by the end of the Soviet Union.

Yet Azhgikhina explains how only mothers with high salaries can easily afford babysitters and kindergarten, while those less financially secure often sacrifice their professional lives,

unable to afford either kindergarten or babysitter fees. Beyond Russia's official national strategy on women, she sees a need for «promoting women into decision-making positions on the national level.» Across some Russian regions, with a majority Muslim population, she says women are actively involved in all levels of power and business enterprises, making major contributions to the general development of the society.

«Mainstream media in Russia has recently started covering gender-based violence but from a traditional, patriarchal values angle or with a religious lens. This trend accompanied general progression in patriarchal, homophobic, and nationalistic rhetoric,» Azhgikhina says.

Most Russians, according to recent polls, believe gender-based violence (GBV) is a punishable crime. This is a contrast from some 30 years ago when Azhgikhina worked with NGOs and Russian journalists who covered GBV, including honor killings and female genital mutilations, which are still practiced in some northern Caucasus regions today.

When these topics are presented in the media, there's resistance from the traditionalists. To combat this, Azhgikhina explains how Russian feminists and activists promoted a shame award titled «Sexist of the Year.» It was launched ten years before COVID-19 on March 8 (International Women's Day) as an online commissioned initiative by young feminists and feminist journalists, who highlighted sexist acts and statements in the public sphere, the news media and in advertisements, which captured media attention and coverage.

Peace From a Feminist Perspective

I ask Azhgikhina if the current environment has «peace is on the floor that is waiting to be picked up,» as Philip Zelikow quotes in his book *The Road Less Traveled*. Or have global conflicts and forever wars turned peace-builders into endangered species?



Meredith Tax (left) and Women's World board in Bellaggio, 1996

«Because we have so many conflicts worldwide and lack enough information about events in different parts of the world, our global view is very puzzling. I remember discussions on many conflicts and activities where such a humanistic approach was not often discussed, including ways to start peace communication after the conflict or how to prevent new tragedies. Unfortunately, initiatives focused on human dimensions. Ways to end violence are not very popular now and don't dominate the mainstream media agenda. The mainstream media has forgotten many basic principles of journalism. Instead, they participate in information wars to provoke escalation, instead of finding ways to instill peace.»

Azhgikhina says the current global environment challenges constructive moral efforts, simply because they're «not very profitable.»



Women journalists march. December 2006

She regrets that those in Europe who still remember WWII and the subsequent world peace are slowly passing away. Another generation of young people especially consider wars and nuclear threats as «computer games.» «When I chaired a discussion of young scholars on media and nuclear threat as part of a Russian-American dialogue in St. Petersburg before the pandemic, nobody identified nuclear threat as anything serious. This terrifies me. I don't know how this attitude developed, but I think it's because we don't discuss it or emphasize peace enough as the natural basis for everything in our world. Yes, it's important to report not only about elections, natural disasters and entertainment, but to remind our world about the basic values of what we should do, what is shameful to do,

what is good and what is bad.» Azhgikhina emphasizes how «our post-truth world» has left some people disoriented.

She joins her colleagues and journalist friends from international organizations as Ethical Journalism Network (EJN), in searching for and finding «new ways to support journalism as a public good.» These ideas include establishing independent foundations for investigative journalism, education in new technologies, working with big data and involving the audience in forming media agendas and activities. She and her colleagues believe that journalism will survive and maintain its mission, regardless of current issues.

The mainstream media has forgotten many basic principles of journalism. Instead, they participate in information wars to provoke escalation, instead of finding ways to instill peace.

Citing the 2019 International Federation of Journalists which adopted the Global Charter of Ethics for Journalists, subscribed to by nearly all professional organizations around the globe, Azhgikhina urges journalists to not prioritize coverage of parliamentary and political issues and adhere to Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

«It underpins journalists' responsibility to their public, which takes precedence over all else, including public authorities. When the media was much more trusted, the public understood that the information they provided empowered better participation,» Azhgikhina says.

I ask Azhgikhina if, in her opinion, women in Russia and Ukraine will take the «road of diplomacy,» which Henry Kissinger described as «complicated and frustrating» but one which «progress to it requires both the vision and the courage.» «It is very difficult to generalize. There are different types of women and men, but I believe women as participants in global citizen diplomacy, peace-building, and peace communication are untapped. Women have gained experience in all spheres and can galvanize the promotion and development of peacebuilding because of their basic capabilities. This is not because women

are better than men, but because women know how to manage incredible, impossible situations. It's not by coincidence that women regroup when facing crises or disasters.» «I believe that motivated women would probably find more flexible language to communicate with. I believe it's possible for women in Russia and in Ukraine to find a common language and help each other. Maybe they are already on this path. It's women's potential which expedites and eases a common language of peace so that we can all overcome the consequences of the tragedy we collectively face today,» Azhgikhina smiles. And what's her message to the women of the world?

«Let's dream about all our futures, the future of our children living in the same space and the same universe. We are all living on a small, blue marble stone, floating in space. We should never give up. We must believe in the impossible being possible. Our mission is not impossible. We must first have a dream, then our dream can come true.»

VI

Journalism and the Media

NA: Our dialogue started in 2021. – another epoch. Now December 5 2024, we see we face new and more perilous challenges. Our profession, journalism and the media in general, is undergoing a deep crisis.

Looking back, maybe we could focus on three main topics in journalism since the late 1980s. I remember when I was a young journalist working at Komsomolskaya Pravda in the Brezhnev years of «stagnation.» I never expected to go abroad, I never dreamt about cooperating with international journalists, or establishing independent media. It was a boring, depressing time in general. Stagnation time.

But at Komsomolskaya Pravda, the official Young Communist League newspaper, there were fantastic journalists and writers. «Children» of Khrushchev's «Thaw,» inspired by the democratization of that time. Every day they did their best to tell the truth, to reveal news from our past and present, reminded us of people's dignity like writers and the best journalists from the 19th century. Compassion for ordinary people and their suffering and a call to the truth – it was the most important element in Russian liberal minded tradition for centuries.

And our elder colleagues and teachers taught us, young people, that it was possible to be decent journalists and honest human beings in any situation. We didn't have big and well-developed ethical codes, like today, but everybody understood what it was about.

If you wanted to make propaganda for profit, as a career, it was your choice. If you wanted to be respected by the best journalists in the country and your colleagues and ordinary



In Ogonyok magazine with son Dmitri. Photo Mark Steinbok

people, you tried to do your best to tell the truth, even if in an Aesopian manner. And everybody understood it very well. And people of my generation, made their choice when they started working under Soviet censorship and developed their choices when Gorbachev came to power in March of 1985.

Freedom was well prepared by liberal-minded journalists, and the readers trusted them.

In the early 1990s, wild market forces descended on Russia, and money became a very big temptation. New media appeared, and tried to make money, and very quickly media became a tool for the oligarchs. Journalists and new media owners did not manage to protect the field from oligarchs and state influence. Even today, under very strong restrictions (though we cannot compare it to Soviet time, it's completely different) people are responsible, it's a field made by the people.

The second point: Journalism is universal. Journalistic values are the same everywhere. In the Soviet Union used to hear that the moral code of Communist builders is much better than all humanitarian principles in the West. That was not right, and Gorbachev explained that universal values are for everybody. And it is absolutely right about journalism, journalists in the States, in Russia, in Zimbabwe, in Australia, on the moon, they are people of the same blood. They are journalists and not only. They follow the same standards and the same ethical principles.

I had some experience in international journalism, I was member of the Gender Counsel of the International Federation of Journalists for 15 years and vice president of European Federation of Journalists for 6 years, I participated in many international events and programs on media development. I see that journalists are the same everywhere, sometimes it is easier to work for them, often not easy at all, but they are people of the same blood, of the same idealistic values and principles. I understood that solidarity matters. The solidarity of journalists, and the audience. Despite all political pressure, all contemporary



TV2 Company meeting for press freedom, Tomsk

attempts to divide, to separate us, to make puppets or soldiers in information wars.

And the last point. It is important to have a dream. If you have a dream or idea which looks totally unrealistic, but you believe in it, try to make it real. I do remember how things which looked absolutely impossible in some time became real. Because people wanted it to become real. Perestroika came to our lives because of journalists, first of all, and people who believed in the impossible. Who could believe in the freedom of expression? None of my colleagues in the beginning of 80s, could imagine that we could establish our own media or dig up the corruption of decision makers. But it happened because some people believed in it and pushed others to believe. This personal energy became a real force. It's a real tool, it's not just imagination, it's something practical.

KvH: That's very powerful. I will not be as linear as you! but I agree that it's the power of journalists, of people, of solidarity, which took me, for example, to the Nation. I do think different kinds of media exist. For example, in America, there is a sensationalist tabloid media. There is a hyper-political, «horse-race» coverage. And then there is a media which is about accountability, about the public interest and about people who care that journalism can expose and make change and improve the condition of people's lives through reporting. Think of Hannah Dreier who received a Fetisov Award (and later a Pulitzer Prize) for her coverage of child labour which the government wasn't doing anything about. Her coverage led to change. But you have to persist, you have to be vigilant, journalists often have to stay «the beat» for decades.

I started as an intern at The Nation because I respected the role The Nation, which turns 160 years old in 2025, played during the McCarthy era, the 1940–50s. The editor at that time, then subsequent editors were like noble watchmen of freedom – when so many around them were cowardly.

I value journalists who are brave in good times and not so good times, who stay true to the ethic and the code of journalism.

Number two: There are different kinds of journalism. Over the years we've done literary journalism, we've done investigative journalism, we've done journalism with partners around the world – even journalism with Tik Tok or Instagram! International solidarity via journalism is important and should not be impossible because of the financial obstacles which great journalists like I.F. Stone, muckraker Ida Tarbell, Tom Wicker who was the head of the New York Times D.C. bureau and courageously covered 1971 bloody Attica prison riots. He didn't have to, but he wanted to be. Journalists as individuals are important but you also need journalistic outlets that will give people not just the monetary possibility to work on what they care about but to give them the spine and the resources.



Katrina's first day as Nation editor, with her five year old daughter Nika

Hannah Dreier worked for a year on her investigation. You can't do that if you don't have an institution like The Nation or the New York Times – which she published in. Or you try to receive a fellowship. The old order is dying, the old newspapers are shutting down, veteran journalists are losing work, state houses are being covered by non-profits.

New models are arising from this crisis – alternative models to the traditional newspaper where someone worked for 25–30 years. People are forming new models, non-profits, covering different areas, whether it's criminal justice or women's issues. I'm not sure the more «niche» model is going to work, but it's an important development.

You have to be nimble. You have to understand the new technologies, the new subjects, the younger writers, the new

experts. That nimbleness, combined with institutions which support journalists, will matter for the survival of the best of journalism.

NA: What are a few new business models for The Nation?

KvH: It's not so much business, it is more strategy for the next decades. The Internet is such a central part of our work now; we post every morning at 5 am seven pieces a day. We have a paywall. So, someone comes to the website, gives us his email, you get three articles after that. That's strategic in terms of who's reading us.

I want to make an impact in terms of what we're publishing, not whether we make or don't make money.

NA: What happened to American journalism? I remember when I first came to the States and for us during Perestroika, American journalism was our role model. We knew that journalists could impeach presidents, could even contribute to stopping wars, gave voice to different people with different opinions. It was a great example. What happened today? What trends do you face today in American journalism and why?

KvH: One of the biggest trends which I think works against bold risk taking is the financial situation. Journalists are more risk-averse, they're not as quick to take on a big, bold, controversial story for fear of not just their own salaries but because the people up top are opposed to it. We're entering a very difficult period now. Many conglomerates owning news organizations and these conglomerates, I'm thinking of not just Fox News but NBC, have regulatory business in Washington. They are careful, they are cautious as a result, and their ambition is not to expose ugly truths about corruption or lies.

The New York Times is no longer the powerful gatekeeper, people have tools which empower their reporting, voices. But the financial issue is very tricky, the *LA Times* and *The Washington Post* did not endorse in the last presidential election, which is a real tradition, however overrated, but they clearly did not because they were worried about the election outcome and the problems their corporate media might face.

I'd be interested in your view – for example, if people are reading, I don't mind them reading on the internet, but are they reading social media, headlines or are they reading a long investigative article? I think platforms change, and we have to be nimble. But not lose the essence of journalism.

And I think the quality of journalism is not measured by, if it's on the Internet or not. It is measured by how much is invested in the actual reporting. A lot of opinion in *The Nation* does opinion, but reporting can make change. And I think what you were saying earlier: we risk the unimaginable if we don't try the unthinkable...is so true. You need an imagination – so hard for people who fear losing their job, see the industry, so to speak, in bad shape.

NA: How do you see the impact of the technological /digital revolution?

KvH: I know so little, about AI, for example, which is going to affect every field: journalism, architecture, advertising, the military. We would be wise to understand it, not dismiss it, but not to treat it as the salvation. There's a risk for many groups that AI takes away jobs

NA: It is frequently discussed in Russia. And some companies already begin to use it for analyzing big data. But many people, yes, are afraid of losing their jobs, and in Russia there is a crisis which is even more oppressive because of political restrictions. But I do remember what *The Nation* published and

John Nichols wrote a book about it, «Life and Death of American Journalism», it was about the global media development.

KvH: John, by the way, just marked the 20th anniversary of a significant group, Free Press, which he founded. It launched the media democracy movement.

NA: Tell more about this initiative because have not any information about it.

KvH: It is a very important movement, Media Democracy. For example, it took on attempts to tame the internet's conglomeration and commercialization

NA: Do you think shutting down the internet could happen because now we find different countries seeking isolationist policies – not only in Russia but in the States and a number of other countries?

KvH: I think that you can shut down a lot but not all of it – it is a globalized interlocking world. So, you can try to shut down the Internet but people will go like water to other places. People are looking for places where they can have some measure of freedom of speech. But no country has full freedom of speech. There's a famous saying by an American writer, I think Ambrose Bierce, that freedom of the press is accorded to those who own one. But I would prefer not to be cynical.

One good project which gives me grounded hope regarding local news is my colleague Mark Hertsgaard's group, «Covering Climate Now.» It provides resources on climate for journalists from The Times of India to South Carolina local radio and weathercasters...and provide resources. It's on the Internet, coveringclimatenow.org

NA: That's fantastic.



In Ogonyok Magazine, 1991. Photo Yury Feklistov

KvH: He wrote a very good book about the media during the Reagan years called «On Bended Knee.» It revealed a kind of anticipatory obedience. You begin to self – censor, which is a heavy term, but I guarantee you, it goes on in this country today.

NA: Self-censorship is our everyday practice.

KvH: It is universal.

NA: We remember Soviet practice more and more...

KvH: Of sitting in kitchens through cold evenings, sharing private thoughts with friends and family, unwilling to speak openly in the street or at work.

NA: I believe Steve once said, that when the Soviet Union disappeared, the US inherited the worst from Soviet Union and vice versa. What do you think journalists could do, and what gives you a sort of optimism thinking about the future?

KvH: I'm optimistic about the younger generation. I'm optimistic that there is still dialogue in informal ways between journalists of different countries, and that there are skills and talents that journalists everywhere want to learn. Journalists especially, want to make change for the better, to expose and propose. What gives me hope is that journalism has been recreated or rather revived in these smaller nonprofits. Some of them may be too single-topic, but they are doing very good work, investigative work and there is support for the belief that media as the fourth estate is needed for a stable, working democracy.

There is a dialogue that goes on, but much of the Internet has been commercialized, commodified, cheapened. Just by nature of the beast, right? And we have «influencers» now who are not journalists, who promote products, but we still have a core essence of belief in the ability of journalism, good journalism, to make positive change.

NA: But now we see that American oligarchs occupy the media field and control and misuse the media, and it's not only a matter of a post-truth world, it's probably post, not post-media, post-print media world, maybe. I think John Nichols wrote that owners are not old families with big money who established newspapers 100 years ago, but corporations.

KvH: So, John, who is to be credited with take the media and democracy movement with his colleague Robert McChesney has covered this issue for years. One doesn't want to be too nostalgic about the old wealthy families because with like Hearst, you know, invented a war, but there was a little more

connection to communities. It's not just the big bosses like Jeff Bezos owner of *The Washington Post* or the South African doctor owner of the *LA Times*. It's also private equity, Alden for example, comes in, and its idea of business is not to support journalism but to make money. So, you begin to cut the newsroom, and then the quality of reporting wanes. They basically want to consolidate.

The real problem is financialization of news, which John has been warning about for a long time. Now there are some owners who could be good men, who could treat the paper effectively, but Bezos / *The Washington Post* did not endorse because I think it feared it would be punished or there would be retribution by the Trump administration.

In the 90s, one could see what was happening in Russia. And there were the signs of it here, the oligarchs buying the media, became a big issue, and it remains one, it simply develops and grows.

NA: Let's go back and remind ourselves of decades of co-operation between journalists from both countries. Not long ago British scholar Dina Fainberg wrote a book about Soviet and American foreign correspondents, which, of course, revealed both had been obliged to make propaganda and had strong links with their governments. But despite that fact, those people, strong patriots of their countries of course, fell in love with the country they came to, and they began to cover real people's life. And during Gorbachev years many even began to work together. Not only foreign correspondents. Yury and *Time* Moscow office chief John Kohan worked together, and the same articles were published in a special issue of *Time* and *Literaturnaya Gazeta* in 1989...

KvH: Books stores are coming back in small ways, which I love because if you visit a book store, you see all kinds of books... If you just go online, it's not as serendipitous.

NA: Let's talk about the first joint project you were involved with.

KvH: *The Nation* had a project called «InterNation.» We had journalists, someone in Chile, someone in Iceland, someone in South Africa. In Moscow, we had ties to Yassen Zasursky at MGU. We did a conference, I want to say it was fall of 1992. Carl Bernstein of Watergate came and there were convenings and discussions. It was exchanging ideas about journalism. There was no joint project that came out of it. Years later, we did do projects, we covered Kissinger's last days with a Chilean newspaper, we covered the Icelandic climate.

Today there is, as you know, the International Consortium for Investigative Journalism, which was a model in a way of what we were trying to do before faxes, before computers, before the Internet, I think those projects are very good. Some 30 newspapers collaborated on the Pandora project, which was about money laundering across 30 countries. My memory is *Novaya Gazeta* was one of the partners. Very time intensive, a lot of work, they get good funding.

The trick is, and this is something that happens quite a bit, when you do a good project, you make some news, but journalists and the journalist organizations do not invest in getting it out. A normal person isn't going to read 20,000 words. You want to make sure the news is accessible and comes in different modules – a podcast, a little video piece, an op-ed. How do you make sure that there's impact? And in different countries. So that was something that we began in 1992.

NA: What about now? Do you think it's possible to establish something similar in the near future?

KvH: *The Guardian*, *The Nation* and Columbia Journalism School co-founded «Covering Climate Now» in 2019. It's a fascinating model. CCN has hundreds of partner news outlets

from over 60 countries, reaching billions of people, and assisting journalists produce more informative and appealing coverage of the climate crisis and its potential solutions. I think there are truly productive ways of partnership in these often chaotic times; At *The Nation*, we partner with a good range of outlets. I think partnership is a good model moving forward if you can find the right partners and develop a focused project.

It's smart, both media wise and politically.

NA: Everybody is listening to radio in the car.

KvH: So, I think that's smart, both media wise, politically, culturally. Podcasts are very big, it's the new form, YouTube. And so, I think people, what we see with our interns, is they're multimedia. They have skills in a whole set of areas.

NA: It's very strange. So, it means that the States like Russia is a country of extremes.

KvH: This is true.

NA: But in Russia, usually the whole movement is one hand to another. And America, at the same time, there are different extremes.

KvH: So Pussy Riot became a huge phenomenon here. It became a test of your support for freedom of speech and what was never fully acknowledged is if this had happened at St. Patrick's, Mayor Giuliani would have shut the whole thing down, right? There were people who thought Pussy Riot were heroes, and they are interesting, but it became, in my mind, overstated as the measure of liberty in Russia. Again, how many people around the country knew? It has become a phenomenon in US.

NA: Because it was something exotic from Russia and brought by the media and interpreted in a certain way.



Memorial Day for killed journalists. Moscow Journalist Club, 2007. Photo Alexander Vorobyov

KvH: And there was no looking at ourselves.

NA: People here and there do not want to see the real history of their countries, unfortunately...

KvH: Do you have optimism? Not just for journalism as a profession, but younger people?

NA: Yes. I have optimism first of all because I see many new voices. Because Russia is a huge country and Internet coverage is everywhere. And even in a small village, someone could get all the possible information, in all languages, for free. But you need to have an idea. You must seek to dig information. And every person could establish his or her own website or stream or YouTube channel.

KvH: To have a voice!

NA: To have a voice, in this democratization of media field. Many people even get money, and crowdfunding is very active in Russia. Many people pay for the independent voices in their towns because they need it.

KvH: Interesting. And they raise funds for their journalism through crowdfunding?

NA: Yes. I see many young people in independent media, including new ones... I believe in them, first of all, they are very quick. They are very skilled in technology. They could find and establish different forms. And they have a very interesting attitude because they have different feelings about everything, not like us. And they, despite the fact that they didn't see any other leader but Putin, and are surrounded by propaganda, it is not for them. It's like rain, it's like the weather, it's like the climate. They feel themselves citizens of the universe. Many of them had experience of travelling abroad. Many of them have relationships in different places. They do not identify themselves as people behind the Iron Curtain.

KvH: They find a way.

NA: It is a different environment. And I do think that people who are interested in decent media development, they will manage. Because I believe in human beings.

KvH: Smaller scale, it could be a smaller scale.

NA: Small scale, not just global. That may be a media future.

KvH: There's a term called «glocal.»



NA: I do believe in people's destiny, in people's choice and this gives me optimism. I do believe in people's cooperation in solidarity because solidarity matters despite, and today, of course, those Americans who deal with Russians, they are real heroes. Being here in the States, December 2024 I should confess it. And for Russians, it's more, many people are just afraid of it. But those people who do believe in our future development, they are in the picture.

KvH: Absolutely. You need space because not everyone will fight for the space, but people need the space. But dialogue has become criminalized or demonized. Even diplomacy has been criminalized, demonized, stigmatized, treated as appeasement.

NA: More and more media unfortunately is involved.

KvH: I'll tell you, it's an old-fashioned project, but the one Phil Donahue, who is a very good TV host and Vladimir Pozner did many years ago.

NA: Space Bridges.

KvH: It was a very bad time in the relationship. But it was useful.

NA: Everybody watched it. But we can not imagine the same today...

KvH: People tried to revive Space Bridges a few years ago. Now, there is no interest. But dialogue is so important – not to persuade, or even push people, but to open their minds about alternatives. Honest, free speech is difficult in times of war. There's a book called «The First Casualty» which is about truth in the time of war.

You see it in this country and I think it hurts dialogue because people are frightened of it. And what happens is you become dangerous because people don't know who you are. They think you're a demon. You need a media that is not propagandistic, that is willing to talk to a range of people. Our TV, cable TV, which is by the way losing an enormous amount of ratings and CNN after the election, needs people of different views. Many of the people who comment on issues have an investment in the very thing they're talking about. Like, we have people who are CEOs of military industrial corporations, and they are talking about the progress of the war in the Middle East.

This constricts what people think is possible because you're told: this is what you need to think, and not everyone lives that way. But the ability to think outside is easier done when countries are not at war and when the world is more stable, people feel less frightened.

Katrina vanden Heuvel

I Believe in Those Who Carry a Torch

I want to be honest. I edit a political weekly, and lately our politics have been painful, feelings of anger and indignation result from surrounding unfairness and lies.

I admit that I believe in the usefulness and importance of such feelings. They are brought on by specific reasons and can motivate one to act accordingly –



I am convinced that such feelings play a vital role in journalism and in our lives in general.

I also believe that since we live in this world, it is possible and even necessary to improve it, and journalism has an important role to play in creating a better world.

Today I sometimes have more questions than answers. And the main question is – how can we, as journalists, help with the development of civil powers that are necessary for the existence of a normal moral society? How can a citizen, a journalist who lives in a country where the government constantly lies to its people, defend the truth? How can a journalist, overcome with anger from seeing daily atrocities remain an effective, humane, and honest protector of the truth and not give in to those in power? To be critical, but not biased and oppositionary? To talk about the fact that democracy is the sole base and pillar of our society, and not just about how it's being oppressed today? How does one create and support mass media that won't turn people into passive frightened observers of tragic events, but arm them with information and encourage them to be compassionate to others?

In *The Nation* magazine, we refuse to see idealism as inappropriate, and, just like the abolitionists who founded the magazine back in 1865, we believe that nothing is as powerful in the world of politics as truth-telling. And we take the power of ideas, convictions, conscience, and the ethical principles of our profession very seriously.

We also value our independence. And because the line between news and entertainment in journalism has become blurred in recent years, because conformity and monopoly have turned many mass media outlets into marginal ones, and honest voices, those who raise questions about the truth, can barely be heard, today our independence appears to be even more important.

Unfortunately, over the last few years, the majority of American mass media outlets have given up the will and desire

The Nation

VOL. XCVIII—NO. 2546

THURSDAY, APRIL 16, 1914

No. 2,546
Vol. 108

PRICE TEN CENTS



Emerson's Journals

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to ask the authorities uncomfortable questions, which is really the main purpose of independent journalism in a democratic society. The administration was able to scare them off too easily, to convince them of the necessity of war, and they've began labelling any criticism as treacherous, keeping quiet about arguments, distorting the meaning of such words as patriotism and compassion, and pushing for laws that would invade our privacy and destroy our dignity.

But history and life teach us that there's always an alternative. And I'm proposing a different approach to journalism. Mass media – at least, in its basic definition – is not only a means of transmitting information, but also a nurturing environment, akin one where scientists often grow new biological cultures, such as penicillin. That's important.

Our mass media is both like the biologist's petri dish and a car's transmission – they deliver with equal ease news that enlighten us, and news that poison our brains. But if we look at mass media as a sort of petri dish, a nutrient-rich environment that helps shape a new society, then our goal is to use that dish to promote the creation of an ethical society. The question then becomes – who will prepare information that would serve this goal, how would it be prepared, and what kind of information would it be?

While trying to answer these questions, one has to take note of the wonderful tradition of investigative journalism, which set the bar for the kind of mass media that we should aspire to have in the US. Although in recent years, when mass media has been steadily leaning towards the right and becoming monopolized, our government – society's second most important information resource, is overcome by the idea of secrecy and hostility towards investigative journalism, at a level previously unseen in our country.

New York columnist Pete Hamill compared a reporter to a tribe member sent into a cave to investigate. His report must be accurate. If there's a rabbit hiding in the darkness of the

cave, he cannot pretend that it's a dragon. Bad reporting can psychologically drag people out from their warm abodes and throw them onto the Arctic ice for absolutely no reason. On the other hand, if there is a dragon hiding in the cave, one cannot call him a rabbit. The tribe's fate may directly depend on that one man with a torch who'd been sent into the cave.

In America, we're lucky – we have a great tradition of shining the torch into the darkest corners of government and authority. There were men and women who decided to speak up about facts and who were convinced that average citizens, their readers, were able to directly influence their lives. I'm thinking about Jacob Riis who wrote about the New York poor in the 1890s. About the muckrakers – such as Lincoln Steffens, Ida Tarbell, Upton Sinclair who exposed the roots of our political corruption, wrote about corporate fraud, stirred up real change with their publications. About Ralph Nader, who published his «The Safe Car You Can't Buy» in *The Nation* in 1959 – which spurred the consumer movement. I can remember many people with torches – Rachel Carson, a pioneer in eco-journalism. I.F. Stone who proved the official reasons given for the beginning of the Vietnam War were false. Seymour Hersh and Ron Ridenour, Allan Nairn, who exposed the link between the CIA and the South American death squads, and many others.

A Democratic and moral society can exist and prosper only if mass media does its job. The press helps the audience figure out the difference between the authorities' promises and practices, it helps protect the weak from arbitrary actions of the powerful, and proves that no man, no matter how high up he may be, can break the law and remain unpunished.

Citizens are unable to make an informed choice – in their lives, their work, their politics – unless they have access to information about their politicians, their policies, about the truth and the lies in their slogans. Mistakes cannot be corrected unless they've been pointed out. Those in charge will



Drawing by Pawel Kuczynski

always be tempted to exceed their authority, unless they fear the scrutiny of public opinion.

In order to accomplish all these tasks, our press must be free. Not only independent from government interference, but also from those who know «what's in the public's best interests.» And from heightened commercialization that turns everything into entertainment, or so-called infotainment.

Voltaire once said «Those who can make you believe in absurdities can make you commit atrocities.» He was criticizing the Catholic Church, but his idea holds true today, when we talk about the relationship between mass media and government, or corporations looking to make a profit and independent journalists.

People in the USSR knew that when they read *Pravda*, they wouldn't find the truth on its pages. So they learned to read between the lines, digging up the truth themselves. Those of

us who live in democratic, not authoritarian, countries, are today forced to do something similar – only under much harsher conditions. In our countries the government doesn't straight up control the press, it's done in other ways.

Too many media outlets try to curry favor with the White House and private companies associated with it. Many journalists are afraid of losing access to the corridors of power. Add to that the *idée fixe* of the current American administration – that of secrecy and control.

Another dangerous quality of today's American mass media – is their focus on creating mega-corporations whose only goal is turning a profit and not at all serving the public. This is especially true of electronic media.

Over the last few years, the number of mass media outlets in America has grown, but the number of media owners has shrunk. A handful of international corporations rules over the entire world of mass media. Tentacled oligarchs sell us all the films that we watch, all the radio shows, magazines, books, music and online services. The Federal Commission on Communication has taken a step back from solving this problem, and American cities are becoming a sort of property belonging to international mass media corporations, – cities in which they buy up local papers, radio and TV stations.

Real mass media enlightens us, gives us much needed knowledge, reflects our lives, liberties and pursuit of happiness, and serves, first and foremost, the public good. Mass media cannot be controlled by cartels or international concerns, primarily because it cannot use its immense power for the benefit of just a handful of people.

As I've said before, I believe in the alternative. Not only because I'm a realistically-minded idealist in principle, but because I'm seeing something that gives me hope. The tradition of independent investigative reporting isn't dead, and you can find examples of it in many media outlets, first and foremost in alternative ones. New internet and electronic video tech-

nologies have raised a new generation of independent journalists, – among them are those who participate directly in political and public campaigns. Millions of people prefer alternative media and are involved in creating such media themselves. And finally, a democratic free speech movement has appeared and is getting stronger, a sort of public revolutionary movement against mass media monopolization. It's growing in all cities across America. This revolution is not yet shown on TV, but it's becoming more and more powerful.

Lastly, it's the journalists themselves, those who don't want to simply represent their owners, but who value the public interest – they aren't keeping silent and are becoming more active.

I believe in them most of all – in those who carry a torch.

Journalist, 2005, #2

Nadezda Azhgikhina

The Abyss Between Russian and US Media Just Got Wider

The US Department of Justice (and the mainstream US media following its lead) gave a royal gift to the «ideological hawks» in the Kremlin, one that even the boldest propagandists dared not dream of. The Russian television channels Russia Today (RT) and Sputnik have been forced to register as «foreign agents»; the stormy (and completely unsurprising) reactions have escalated the information wars, whose consequences are difficult to predict.

Russian lawmakers reacted to the DOJ's decision emotionally and quickly: In just a few days, amendments were passed

without discussion on the media law, adding paragraphs on foreign media and «foreign structures distributing information.» The law regulating noncommercial organizations can now impose on them the status of a foreign agent.

In other words, all mass media with foreign financing can be put on the list of «agents» and will be required to present financial documentation, information on employees, and other information to the Russian authorities. Noncompliance brings astronomical fines and even a block on information resources. The basis for inclusion on the agent list is not defined and in fact all foreign companies might be subject to it, from *The New York Times* to *The Herald* of Zimbabwe.

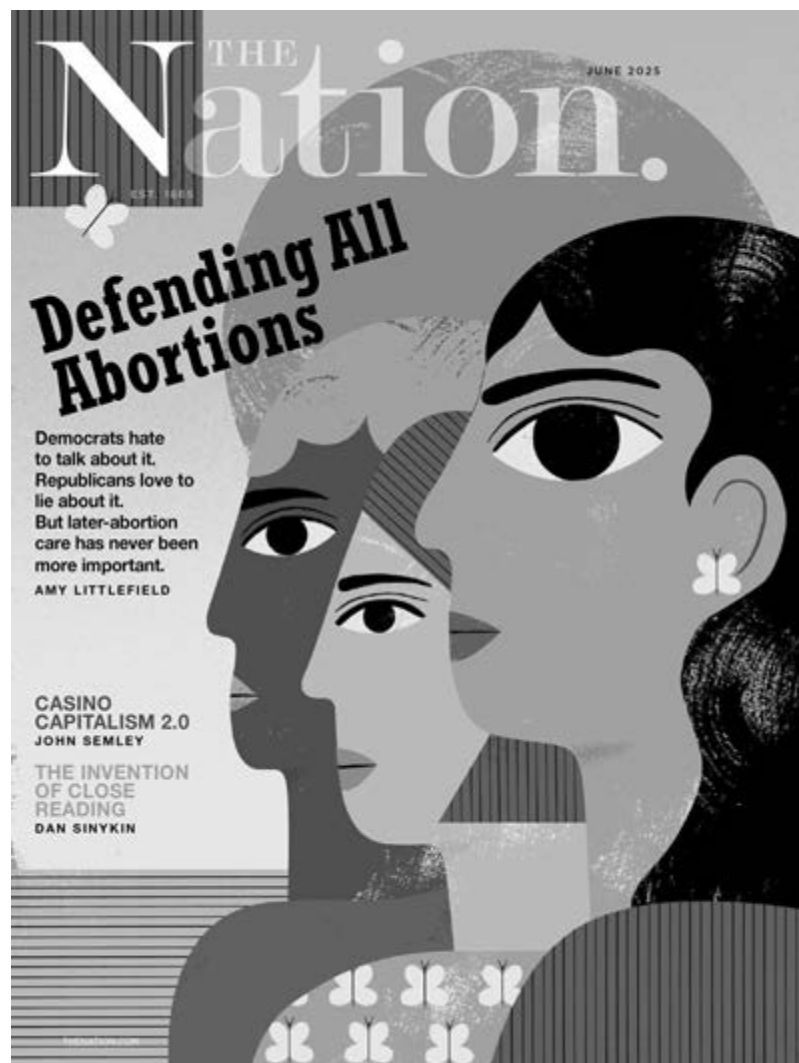
Russia's Presidential Council on Human Rights immediately responded with harsh criticism of the initiative and asked for at least a postponement, since the amendment texts had many errors and contradictions. It must be said that in the last few years the Council has been calling on Parliament and the president to repeal the law on foreign agents, which until now applied only to NGOs and made life very difficult, not only for more than a hundred organizations on the list, but for the work of civil society as a whole. Moreover, there were fears that the latest proposals, which essentially made it impossible for foreign mass media to work in Russia, was not the end – that the screws would be tightened even more. The speed with which the president signed the amendments supported this concern. But the greatest blow was the US Congress's decision to take away the accreditation of RT journalists. In response, some Russian parliamentarians proposed taking away the accreditation of all American journalists by the State Duma. However, journalists feel that it is almost impossible for this to happen, since accreditation for foreign correspondents in Russia is given by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. At the moment of writing, there are nine US media outlets on the list. The consequences of these decisions will be much harsher for them than for RT in the United States. The



Russia Today's Moscow studio. (Iliya Pitalev / Sputnik via AP)

International Federation of Journalists, and other international organizations have called for both countries, Russia and the United States, to rescind their decisions, which are contrary to the principles of freedom of speech and of journalists not persecuting each other. The appeals have not been heard. On the contrary, the information war is heating up.

It is impossible to predict what will happen next. But even if, by some miracle, reason prevails over the ambitions of decision-makers on both sides of the Atlantic and these hasty decisions are repealed, journalism as whole will still suffer irreplaceable losses. It is certain that in any case RT will receive additional billions of rubles from the Russian budget to expand its activity in the world. That is, the money that theoretically could have been spent on developing public mass media, training journalists, developing social programs in local newspapers, exchanges, and much more.



There is no doubt that American programs that aim to counteract «Kremlin propaganda» will also receive funds that theoretically could have been spent on reviving once active and fruitful contacts and joint programs for Russian and US journalists. It looks as if we can forget about future development of dialogue among journalists. And it is also perfectly clear that the search for a fifth column and internal enemy, in the media as well, will become more active in Russia. The familiar pattern is that every new anti-Russian sanction by the West leads not to hostility of citizens toward the state, but just the opposite – an increased consolidation of the obedient majority around the regime, a readiness to forgive all its sins in exchange for resistance to the foreign enemy, and to new repressive measures against independent voices, whose number is rapidly diminishing. This happened with the Magnitsky Act and the sanctions of the last three years. Indeed, the Russian press has come up with a telling phrase: In response to foreign aggression, Russia will «bomb Voronezh» – that is, take it out on its own people.

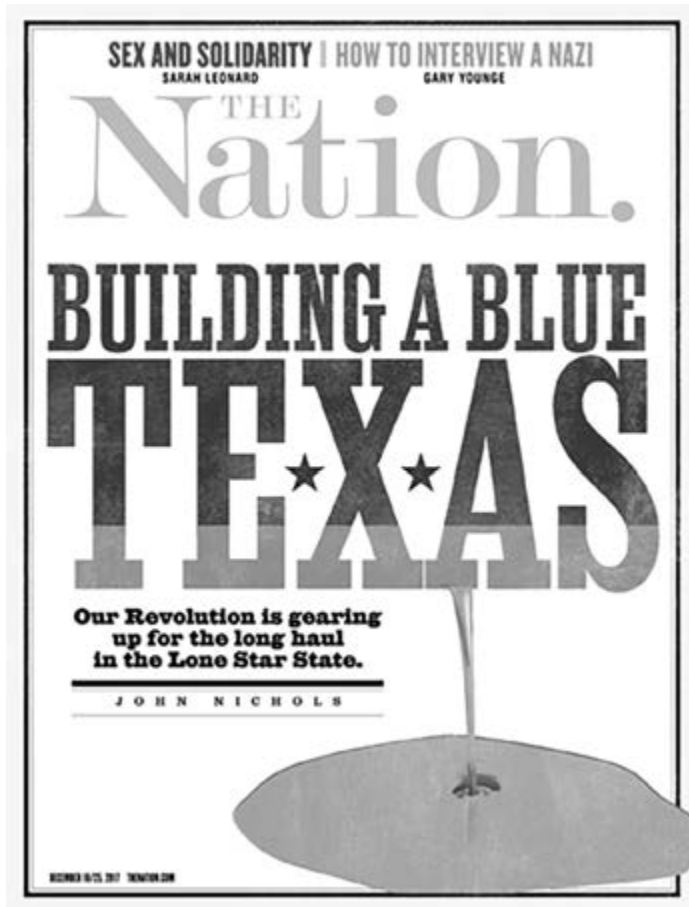
Russiagate managed in a few months to strike a much stronger blow against the prospects of improving relations than all the years of the Cold War and the arms race together. The mutual trust of the elites is gone. The rules of the game, once reliably observed, have been violated. The worst part is that trust is lost between the people and the intellectuals of both countries. There is another danger that has not been fully comprehended – the basic theses that provided the necessity and possibility of dialogue have been put into doubt. The hybrid war that mixes truth and fake, interpretation and fact, vileness and virtue is a fight without rules in a dark room. One can now say to an audience of millions what until recently was considered unthinkable. The concepts of decency and measure have been cast aside. The battlefield belongs to moral marauders. No one believes anyone anymore.

Experts feel that the abyss between our professional communities will continue growing and it will be even harder to rebuild bridges of understanding and cooperation between anything. The propaganda hysteria on television is not going away, nor will the search for the internal enemy and the fifth column.

Who wins by this? Who benefits from Russiagate? Why is this happening?

Some believers in conspiracy theories in Moscow say that the massive attack on little-known RT and Sputnik – totally without influence on American audiences – resembles a special operation to promote them. Now everyone knows who they are. This is not the first time that Russia has been used in the United States in order to define its own identity. Similarly, Russia has used the image of America to solve its own domestic issues throughout the centuries. This promoted the creation of numerous persistent myths, vividly portrayed in movies in Hollywood and by Mosfilm, that were rather removed from reality. The short period of embrace during Perestroika ended with a nearly total loss of interest in Russia among the US establishment. The unconsidered description of Russia as a «second-rate provincial state,» the condescending attitude toward Russia, the unwillingness to take its interests into account and try to understand the country's reality ended with a steep decrease in relations, a rise in anti-American rhetoric long before Crimea and the subsequent anti-American campaign in the mass media, including the statement by Dmitry Kiselev, head of the state agency Russia Today, that Russia could turn the United States into «radioactive ashes.» Russiagate in the Russian press is represented as the hysterical reaction of the superpower to its gradual loss of world sovereignty and fear of the growing «Russia's unique power.»

For today's Russian liberal, the intensification of Russiagate is profoundly wounding. First of all, the Russian liberal truly believes in the stability of US democratic institutions per se.



The very thought that the strongest democracy in the world could be shaken – and the holiest of holies, the election, be influenced – by some hackers, even the most highly qualified, is intolerable and impossible, almost insulting. The American adherence to the rule of law, replacement of presidents, and transparency of procedures, even complicated ones, is a standard, a model to follow, for generations of liberal-minded

Russians. No Russian liberal seriously believes that Russian hackers, however numerous and adept, could influence the elections. Nor could Chinese, Iranian, or US hackers.

Russian intellectuals cannot understand the US press's stubborn insistence on the exclusive role of Russian hackers, trained by special services. They do not believe Russian propaganda and understand that any reference to the «Russian trace» plays into the hands of the current masters of the Kremlin; they wonder why the US media has to talk about it constantly. The rare press mentions that suggest the US establishment and press are not at all interested in Russia but only in their own problems and that the «Russian trace» is a poorly chosen form of confronting the current administration (for it could have some other trace) creates even greater frustration. The Russian intelligentsia have traditionally believed that their American brethren sincerely want to support democratic reforms and liberal forces in Russia – that they want to promote the primacy of law, transparency of the market, the growth of civil society, and the free development of the arts. They remember how, in the «stagnation» years, US journalists overcame all obstacles in order to meet with Soviet dissidents, or how Slavic scholars supported samizdat authors and opened the world's eyes to the reality of Soviet life never covered by Soviet propaganda. Journalists and Slavists, together with Soviet liberal intellectuals and dissidents on both sides of the ocean, created a powerful platform for the renewal of the political landscape in the Perestroika era. This heroic, without exaggeration, period to which dozens of the leading intellectuals of both countries devoted their best years, has come to an end. New subjects do not fit the old frames. Today US journalists, and Western journalists as a whole, limit themselves to predictable reports about Russia as a dangerous country with an unpredictable and aggressive leader – and nothing more. The situation is bitterly disillusioning for Russian liberal journal-

ists. Russiagate killed the beautiful dream of the perfection of the US system of government, respect for the law, and the excellence of the US press. A generation of my Russian colleagues grew up holding US journalists, analysts, and researchers as role models. Even in Soviet times, despite the imposed propaganda, college journalism departments did not hide respect for the American way. The fact that this idealized image of US journalism does not always correspond to reality causes a bitter, almost childish, hurt. How could the best press in the world violate its own principles for political aims? How then, does it differ from Russian propagandists? Even more painful is the condescending attitude toward Russians and the clear unwillingness to look more deeply at the complicated situation in the country. This hurt, these unmet expectations for understanding and sympathy, is a time bomb. It may become a real obstacle to future dialogue.

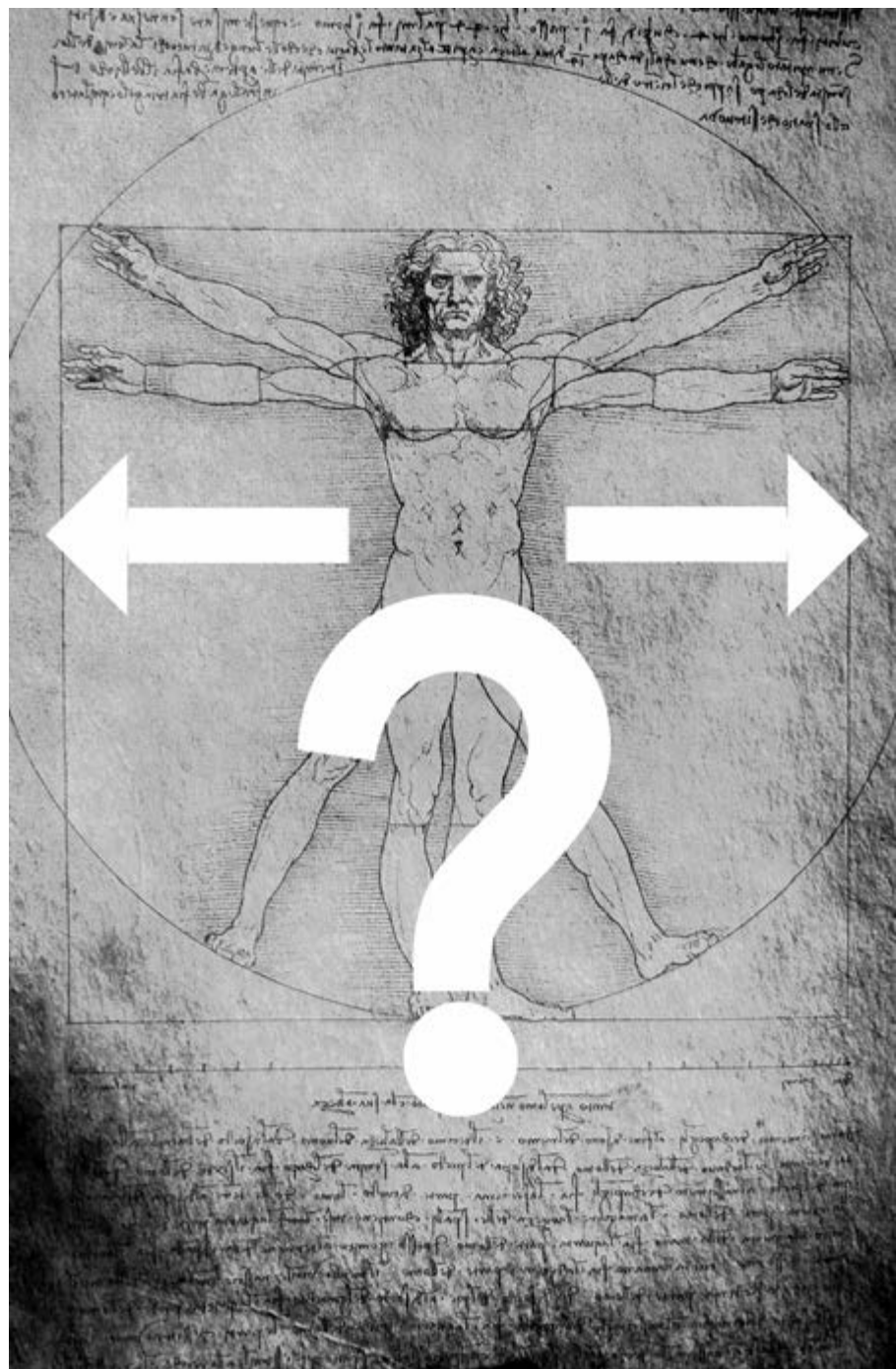
The historian Vladislav Zubok, a professor at the London School of Economics, notes that this attitude toward the complexity of post-Soviet Russia began long ago, when, in the 1990s Americans preferred to support «their guy» in the Kremlin and ignored the contradictions in the country. Then, as the contradictions grew sharper and democracy slowed down, the United States simply forgot about Russia: The star correspondents worked in other regions; Russian studies programs were reduced; and information about the country appeared only in stories about extraordinary news events, like Pussy Riot, but there was no serious analysis for readers. Nor is there any serious analysis now. Russiagate leads further and further away from it.

The bitter understanding that playing the Russia card in the information war is an easy way to deal with a political opponent gives rise to a quiet inner protest in the Russian liberal. Notes of hurt and disappointment appear with greater frequency in the independent mass media, as the number of

outlets continues to diminish. Economic difficulties are not helping the development of independent media. It is said that the current advertising market in Russia cannot support private press, and managers have to seek additional financing, which most often comes from state structures. The variety of voices in the Russian media landscape is narrowing. The departure of foreign media from the Russian information space – and that is what the new legislative decision might bring – will seriously reduce variety. Of course, in the digital age, total isolation as in Soviet times is impossible. But the information milieu will be different.

The dramatic nature of this moment lies in the fact that unlike during the Cold War, when professionals – politicians, image-makers, officials – were involved in the ideological standoff, today ordinary people are involved as well. That did not happen under Brezhnev and Reagan. Today, everyday people hate the virtual enemy seriously and emotionally. I don't remember ever witnessing such anti-American sentiment in Russian society in my entire life. As Olga Alexeyeva, editor-in-chief of *Gazeta.ru*, said in a recent interview, even a sophisticated reader has trouble finding information on real events in the thickets of fake news and emotional content.

Effort on both sides is needed if Russian and American readers and viewers are to see the true faces of one another. This is work for scholars and scientists and journalists, not just politicians. Citizen diplomacy is needed, so that when relations between our countries improve (which historically is inevitable), politicians will have support in renewing our needed conversation.



VII

ON Alternatives

NA: Today, we have the worst relationship between Russia and America in my lifetime... And we see growing right-wing trends and hatred everywhere. What do you think, what alternatives do exist, what could we consider alternatives which could be models for today?

KvH: Gorbachev was an extraordinary «alternativist.» He was also a great reformer, and to be a reformer is to struggle with possibility and promise and peril. History matters. And Gorbachev understood that in history there have always been alternatives. What he brought to the realm of foreign affairs, national security was beyond pathbreaking. His speech in 1988 at the UN redefined security and provided alternatives to the militarism that has so afflicted our two countries since the end of World War II. He made clear there's an alternative—human security: it doesn't rely on military might but on resolving nuclear proliferation, pandemics, global. He also struggled for a world without nuclear weapons. Can you imagine? Gorbachev understood he was the highest-ranking nuclear abolitionist.

But people and countries often don't want alternatives. It's too early sometimes. But I do worry the imagination of people today is narrower because there aren't people who speak clearly about what could be. It's not idealistic or romantic to reimagine what could be – instead of the world we're living in. What are the options? I think dialogue is at the root, the ability to talk to others and not engage in military talk as the first resort. I was watching a YouTube clip this morning. It was a



Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev meeting, 1986

meeting in which people showed off their weapons. Is showing off weapons an alternative to security? Does that provide security? I was thinking that instead of normalizing weapons, we should be talking about how to get rid of weapons. Think of our debates in this country. If in a debate, someone said: «How would you end war?» as opposed to «How would you fight the war?» Instead of normalizing war, the alternativists raise tough critical-minded questions – that is a dialogue. So I'm a full believer in thinking anew.

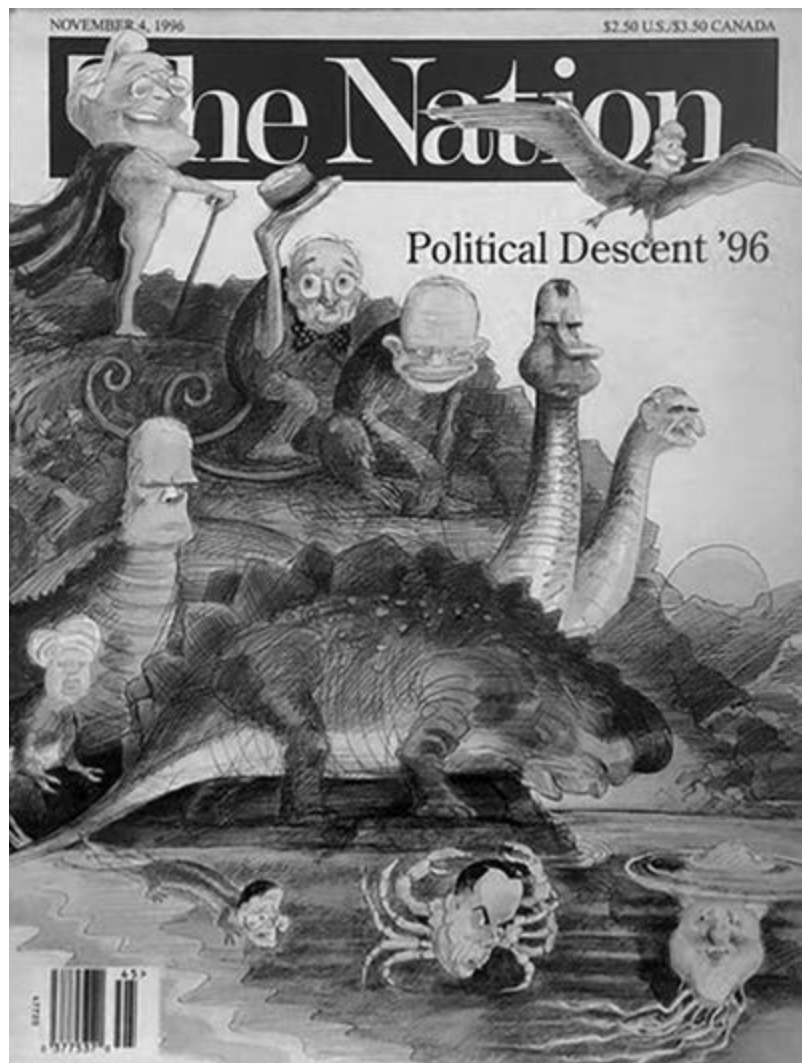
I deeply valued Steve's essay «Bolshevism and Stalinism.» He formulated an alternative to what was then the dominant theory in the field. That's why you're called a revisionist, you're revising what is accepted and taking it to an alternative place which is not yet accepted but as you fight for that alternative it becomes more real.

NA: I agree that a lack of imagination is the disease of today's world. And a very aggressive digital invasion of brains. The Oxford dictionary said the word of 2024 was «brain rot.» It is really a proper definition of today, it is an enemy of alternatives. But if people began to think, if people began to discuss, we face absence of discussion inside every country, the situation might improve. *The Nation* is an alternative for me.

KvH: *The Nation* has been an alternative voice since its beginning. It was founded in 1865 by abolitionists committed to ending slavery. Not to be nationalist, but to root in our own country that there have been alternatives that have made a difference. We may not have won the day because we are still fighting struggles, or struggling to make real social movements. I think the ability to keep in mind that you can play a role, that there is a need for an alternative voice that people can see is vital. Because our media often makes people feel demobilized, not engaged participants.

I was struck by reading our women's chapter. Imagine the women who first came into contact with a gender study center in their community. Because... of *Vyi/My*. The letters show that people were interested, they learned things, they saw a world that they had not seen and that could lead to alternatives and change. If people find something that they didn't know existed that could open their minds. It's the impossibility of things that makes people feel: I'm going to sit at home, I'm going to turn away from the news, it's too painful.

But you talk about two friends who wake up in the morning and get angry about who this country has as a leader. But you want to find a way to channel that. So that it just doesn't end with hate and shouting at the newspaper and TV. But what can they do? And I think providing alternatives that lead to more dialogue is really important.



NA: You are absolutely right. I would like to add that, coming out from The Information bubble is question number one.

KvH: The filter bubble.

NA: Absolutely. The same exists in Russia. People can discuss, they can listen and watch this or that YouTube channel, struggle with each other after drinking tea, beer or something else, and then go to bed and do nothing. I remember the same during protests in 2011–2012 when people went to streets, shouting protest slogans, then went to their offices and apartments, discussed during tea or beer, relaxed and forgot about everything. Anyway, it's important to do something in practice, for example, to work on the ground, to educate other people, raise awareness, to help those who need help...

KvH: In 2016, there was what we called «our resistance.» There are different kinds of resistance. I think right now a lot of people don't see big demonstrations as the answer. There is more targeted thinking, more groups thinking through strategies for alternatives, for what can be done. But again, I'm a believer that it's very hard to have a progressive, humane movement at home if you're at war in so many different places. And I fear that my beloved country has been involved in wars since its very beginning. One hope was that the Cold War was slowing down, but of course, it hasn't. How can we think about finding a way to end war? I mean, that sounds grand, but dialogue and diplomacy are sometimes the same thing. Diplomacy has been demonized because too often it's viewed as appeasement. What used to be thought of as dialogue with those who you don't agree with is now very tough, tougher to defend than it used to be.

NA: In Russia, almost all connections with the outside world are cut or frozen. Many people are afraid. Governmental



Drawing by Alexei Iorsch

institutions don't support academic exchanges. People do it, but it's their personal responsibility. And still now many people do not have foreign passports, it is a problem, I think, lack of information and communication with the world. Since the Gorbachev era, dozens of Russian people of different ages visited the US, participated in numerous joint projects, and it made a difference in academic and cultural life, it created new environment and was really fruitful.

Exchange programs raised the self esteem of Russian professionals a lot, they did not feel themselves as second-rate people, as happened in Soviet time.

KvH: Former Senator Bill Bradley, who has been a long-time supporter of exchanges, wrote Putin some years ago, urging a renewal of programs. But Track 2 diplomacy, which you've been involved with and our colleagues, like Cynthia Lazaroff, have taken a beating. Just to exchange ideas and

even professional tips. This is not dangerous, this is a way of engaging professional alliances, scientific and other feminist collaboration. Scientific exchange has always been at the heart of US-Russian relations.

NA: Academic exchanges existed during the Cold War. It was the basis for future bridges.

KvH: That cooperative spirit is very hard to maintain in times of war.

NA: That's why it should be an alternative to this, not only to conflicts, which we face, but to resolving problems with military force.

KvH: That's the heart of it: Our thinking has become so militarized that instead of deploying energy toward the resolution of war, there is a feeding of war through military equipment. First of all, it's devastating and cruel military equipment, but it's also making a lot of money for a lot of people.

NA: It is very profitable.

KvH: There is a term called Military Keynesianism, named after John Maynard Keynes, the economist. America's industrial policy is largely creating jobs by building weapons.

NA: And people have jobs and have good salaries.

KvH: But there are deeply researched studies showing you create more productive jobs – in education, healthcare – if you move that money away from the military. But that takes enormous political will, and the tragedy is that most politicians who have championed this alternative have been defeated in elections.



Drawing by Alexei Iorsch

NA: Like the program of Grigorii Yavlinsky, leader of Yabloko of United Democratic Party. I supported him in 2018. Nobody read his program, it was a fantastic program, how to reorient the economy. How to take money from the military sector, how to establish housing, roads, and everything. It was a very stable and realistic program. Few paid attention.

KvH: What they did pay attention to in the 1990s was the introduction of «shock therapy,» which impoverished Russians, created the oligarchs and turned many Russians against America. So, instead of an evolutionary «500 days» economic plan, shock therapy ravaged ordinary people.

NA: And it was after that that the killings of journalists became regular practice...

KvH: We still don't fully know how Russia was looted by its oligarchs, but it was partly a result of the need to elect Yeltsin, which created the loans for shares program. And it created a fear of alternatives because if shock therapy was the alternative, people were ready to go back to what was.

NA: People felt unhappy, many people died. The mortality rate was enormous in the '90s, and crime and alcoholism and diseases and poverty and everything. But instead of addressing this, the president decided to divide former state property, and gave it for free, for nothing to people around him. And those people began to kill each other. It was gangster-like capitalism.

NA: I was amazed, honestly, that after the first Trump administration, Americans didn't find a decent candidate to compete.

KvH: He's a symptom. It seems all the countries in the world are cycling through a bout with extremist right wing populism.

NA: It's not that new. People are fed up with the hypocrisy of bureaucrats, corruption and neglect of people's needs and big gap between rich and poor, growing debt. And the crisis of democratic institutions and bureaucracy. And for them to find an enemy like Russia is the best solution, Russia is responsible for everything bad in Europe. And even more, for everything bad in the universe, Russia is responsible. It is so easy! And Cold War ghosts get a new life...

KvH: My mother's friend, Terry Southern, who wrote «Dr. Strangelove», the great movie, he said that at some point he could no longer write satire because reality had overtaken it. He died before Trump came in, but it's a serious point. I agree



Yabloko local elections poster, 2024

with you about the crisis of institutions, but there is a commonality among right and left populists that the elites have done well and shafted us with their policies. We come from huge countries, there are many emotions, points of view, why people vote for this or that candidate. Some of this is emotion, not everyone votes for policy.

NA: Vote with your heart! Slogan of 1996 Yeltsin campaign. And technologists lead people, technologists and artificial intelligence, again, they interfere in people's lives.

KvH: I spoke to someone yesterday who gave me two book suggestions – to read about AI. I'd like to know «What is the threat, and what is the possibility of AI?» Because I don't understand it right now, and I worry that if don't understand it, I'm going to start fearing it and demonizing it.

The other problem is: Where do people meet? There used to be the local coffee shop, the barber shop, the labor hall, the rotary club, and there is a feeling that places of community and solidarity are fewer, so that's why the Internet becomes at best a meeting place.

NA: Internet could be.

KvH: It could be! The idea of a civic square, but then you get the commercialization. The idea of an alternative media without hyper-commercialization is something to strive for. Then there's opposition to bigness, a little like being against bureaucracy in Brussels. It's like: We want to be local and global, control our future. And if we are giving away the media to big corporations which are based far away, there's a need for return to regional local and community media.

NA: I've seen that it is coming to different parts of the world since COVID-19. There was a survey by International

Press Institute, how in different parts people found new media models and began to accumulate local and regional audiences to tell the truth about health issues. And it could be local and could be global, at the same time, look at our women's Russian-American dialogue which started exactly during COVID-19, online, and I do remember the first meetings of women, thanks to Cynthia Lazaroff who established it. They were women from the Far East, from Korea, from Japan, from the Arctic. And finally, we decided to focus it on Russian-American dialogue, and do you remember? It was very vivid. We had several meetings and until February 22, 2022 we not only presented and put on the web those dialogues, we arranged open letters to two presidents to prevent nuclear threat. Not so many people signed, but it was published here and there, in major publications, and information about it was spread.

KvH: All of this is important, but overarching is the idea that there can be an alternative. If you come together, you may not have much power but you at least begin to think in a different way and that can lead to all kinds of change. And I sometimes worry that people get locked into «what if,» and you can't blame them, but so it's hard to see. I am a fan of history. In history, you can find all kinds of things, I mean, you know there was a treaty in the 20s, outlawing war. *The Nation* didn't support it because it wasn't strong enough! You have to build on what is possible as you build toward a real alternative. I'm a reformist. I have a t-shirt because I was unhappy when Bernie Sanders named his movement «Our Revolution!» So I have a t-shirt that says «Evolution.»

NA: I remember your article about Russian protests as evolution, not revolution. I fear revolution as well. Many people predicted revolution in Russia after that. I hope it will never happen because revolution is a disaster, but I do value that every day you find news that this or that politician or group tried to find an alternative decision to the conflict. That is important.



Drawing by Sergry Scherbina

So this seeking for and articulation of alternatives is important, and at some point in time the situation will change, and people will need something to start with. And they could look at, those things that have been presented before, that's why I think this historical, slow work is valuable.

KvH: But I'm sometimes conflicted because I look back at the Perestroika history, and probably if it was in my country I might be part of the inter-regional group which was always about «Gorbachev is going too slow.» Because there are always different elements to change. You have the outsiders who are pushing for faster change, and you have someone, if you're fortunate, like Gorbachev, who's an evolutionist reformer. But I sometimes feel at *The Nation*, that our role is to go bold, not be pragmatic, but I know in my own heart that sometimes you have to be pragmatic in order to achieve more...

NA: It is true. But I am for the idealistic approach because it helps to find light at the end of the tunnel. Second, I am not revolutionary at all, I participated in big demonstrations in 1991, it was enough for me. It was my personal choice. For me it's more important to work day by day with people to explain, discuss, to find common points.

KvH: To bring them along.

NA: The alternative is a true dialogue between people and power, different parts of society, different countries, different forces.

Tell me, what would you wish for us, Americans, Russians, intellectuals, journalists, to be done?

KvH: Understand that war is not the way and understand we need dialogue and exchange of experience, of views – that can make our countries more hopeful. I hope for a media that is democratic. I hope that our book on dialogue will lead to greater dialogues and to the beginning of an improved relationship between our two countries, which have had good times and bad times. I think it's tragic and so toxic and unhealthy and wrong that we are in this space and place.

NA: I wish the same – that we live long enough to see new developments, new roads, a fresh start of those dialogues between Russians and Americans, people to people, politicians to politicians, experts to experts.

KvH: I hope that Van, my new grandson, will play with your grandchildren Ilya and Misha because I think it's the children growing up now who have both the future available – they have a chance to be friends and sit down at a table and talk and not be obstructed by anger.



**Open Letter of Dialogue
of American and Russian Women Initiated by Women
Women Transforming Nuclear Legacy Group, June 2023**

We are women who are heartbroken over the war in Ukraine and deeply concerned about the risk of catastrophic nuclear war.

We are mothers, daughters, grandmothers and we are sisters, one to another.

Today our hearts and prayers are with the people of Ukraine and with everyone suffering and traumatized by this war.

We appeal to world leaders for the sake of humanity to implement an immediate ceasefire.

We appeal to you to stop the killing, stop the bloodshed, and to resolve this conflict through dialogue and diplomacy to put an end to this war.

We need more diplomacy, not more weapons and war.

We are in the most dangerous moment of the nuclear age since the Cuban Missile Crisis, with extreme tensions between the United States and Russia who together possess over 90 % of the world's nuclear weapons. A nuclear war would mean the end of life as we know it, of all we love and cherish on this planet. We worry that events could spiral out of control and lead to an escalation to nuclear war due to accident, blunder, miscalculation or mistake.

For the sake of our children, for the sake of future generations, we women appeal for peace.

Open Letter of Russian and American Women

We are women from the United States and Russia who are deeply concerned about the risk of possible war between our two countries, who together possess over 90 % of the world's nuclear weapons.

We are mothers, daughters, grandmothers, and we are sisters, one to another.

Today we stand with our sisters in Ukraine, East and West, whose families and country have been torn apart, have already suffered more than 14,000 deaths.

We stand together and we call for peace and diplomacy, with respect for all.

We are united in the belief that diplomacy, dialogue, engagement and exchange are urgently needed to end the current crisis and avert a catastrophic military conflict that could spiral out of control – even push the world to the precipice of nuclear war.

For the US and Russia, the only sane and humane course of action now is a principled commitment to clear, creative and persistent diplomacy – not military action. At this perilous juncture, rather than allocate blame, we should be seeking 21st century alternatives to senseless military conflicts and wasteful spending on war. It is a time to redefine security so that women, families and our children, can live in peace.

At a time when we find ourselves in perhaps the most dangerous moment since the Cuban Missile Crisis, we call on the media in both our countries to stop fueling the flames of war. We call on the media to fulfill their ethical responsibility as journalists to remind us of the price of war, the bloodshed and loss of human lives, to demand evidence when claims are made that can escalate tensions, and to have the courage to sound the alarm on the risk of escalation to a nuclear war that would mean the end of life as we know it.

At a time when poverty is increasing in the US, Ukraine and Russia, when the world collectively faces the existential threat of climate change, a pandemic that has taken 5.8 million lives and caused rising «deaths of despair,» declining life expectancy and extreme inequality, isn't it time to think anew?

How might we seize the day and lay out a 21st century vision – that not only advances peace and security, but can unite the world – essentially a new realism? What could creative, humane diplomacy look like? If done thoughtfully, it could do more than resolve the standoff in Ukraine – it could pave the way for broader cooperation between the US, Russia, and Europe and beyond on climate, disarmament and more. It could lay the seeds for a new, demilitarized and shared security architecture.

We independent women, seekers of peace and security, understand the vital importance of engaging minds and hearts. We call on you to share this call for peace and urge our

governments to keep talking, to pursue clear, creative and persistent diplomacy.

These are times of fear but also of hope and possibility. The world is in motion, the future is not written. As Americans and Russians, we have a compelling stake in deescalating tensions between our countries. The approach we suggest surely is more realistic, more wise, than preparing for a military conflict that could lead to unthinkable nuclear war.

We stand together and we call for peace. Stand with us.

Jackie Abramian, Writer

Dr. Susan H. Allen, Director, Center for Peacemaking Practice at George Mason University's Carter School for Peace and Conflict Resolution

Nadezhda Azhgikhina, Journalist, Feminist, Director, Moscow PEN

Natalia Bitten, Journalist and Feminist

Sandra Cline, Trustee Emerita for Biosphere Foundation, Founder and Editor of *Dance of the Spirit*, Writer and Novelist

Dr. Ann Frisch, Prof. Emerita University of Wisconsin Oshkosh US; Chair Rotary Action Group for Peace Nuclear Weapons Education, Rotary Peace Champion 2017

Paula Garb, Ph.D., Fellow, Center for Peacemaking Practice at George Mason University

Dulcie Kugelman, Center for Citizen Peacebuilding

Cynthia Lazaroff, Founder, Women Transforming Our Nuclear Legacy and Nuclear Wake Up Call. Earth, Board Member, American Committee for US-Russia Accord

Sarah Lindemann-Komarova, Writer, Researcher and Activist
Olga Malutina, Artist

Eva Merkacheva, Investigative Journalist, Member of Human Rights Council of Russia

Galina Michaleva, Chairwoman of the Gender Faction, Yabloko Party, Russia



Larisa Mikhaylova, Ph.D., Senior Researcher at Journalism Department, Lomonosov Moscow State University, Russian Society of American Culture Studies Academic Secretary
Galya Morrell, «Cold Artist,» Polar Explorer and Visual Artist, Co-Founder, Citizen Diplomacy Initiative, «Arctic Without Borders»

Marina Pislakova-Parker, Ph.D. Sociology, Founder and Chair of the Board, ANNA – Center for the Prevention of Violence, Author, Researcher

Joan Porter, Community Activist

Lubov Shtyleva, Long-term President, Women's Congress of Kola Peninsula and Board Member, *Vyi i Myi* Magazine

Karen Sperling, Author and Publisher

Svetlana Svistunova, Journalist and Filmmaker

Katrina vanden Heuvel, Editorial Director and Publisher, *The Nation* magazine, Board Member, American Committee for US-Russia Accord

Elizaveta Vedina, Artist, Illustrator

Ann Wright, Colonel, US Army and Former US Diplomat, Veterans For Peace Advisory Board Member

Natalia Zhurina, Research and Education Officer, Agency for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in Latin America and the Caribbean

This letter was written by American and Russian women participating in a dialogue and peacebuilding initiative founded in 2021 by Women Transforming Our Nuclear Legacy and the American Committee for US-Russia Accord.

The Nation, Feb. 14, 2022

Grigory Yavlinsky

Stop the Killing

Grigory Yavlinsky is the founder and leader of the Yabloko Party, the only party in Russia to protest the war and call for peace.

The war in Ukraine has been going on for almost a year. During this time, thousands of people have died on both sides, entire cities have been destroyed, and millions of people have become refugees.

But now, before our eyes, preparations for even larger-scale military action are in full swing. And all the key players – Moscow, Kyiv, Washington, Brussels, NATO, and along with them the crowds of militaristic fans sitting in cafés and restaurants, hotels and cozy apartments, as well as numerous internet media outlets – are all demanding the continuation of hostilities, fantasizing about victories, takeovers, and breakthroughs, agitating for new offensives.



Gregory Yavlinsky, the founder of Yabloko party. Photo Evgeniya Novozhenina (Getty)

The dreamer «thinkers» from a still-safe distance call for military action to continue until a victorious end, and they write in leading magazines about a «beautiful parliamentary Russia of the future» and «show trials.» The «analysts» cleverly and coldly insist that there is no call for peace yet.

And again, as a year ago, almost no one understands – or is afraid to say out loud – that the dangers are growing very se-

riously and the continuation of military action has no positive outlook. There is none!

If all this continues:

There will be thousands more deaths;

The devastation will become critical: The economy in the zone of active combat operations and in the adjacent large areas will be decisively and irreversibly destroyed;

The flow of seemingly limitless foreign aid to Ukraine will inevitably wane as the scale of destruction increases;

The economic problems created by the hostilities will prove far more difficult than even military ones, and many will be insoluble;

There will be a critical destruction of human potential, which will be the main irreparable consequence of escalation;

The risks of an escalating conflict turning into a world war will become (and are already becoming) prohibitively high.

It is important to understand that in the 21st century the status and well-being of the state and its citizens depends not on territory or even on natural resources, but on the country's place in the world. We live in an era when human capital plays a key role. A nation's future depends on people, their freedom, their creativity and their education.

And we should not draw parallels between what is happening in Ukraine now and the events of World War II.

Never in the past has a nuclear power been involved in a major military confrontation in which its vital interests and prospects are affected. This is a real threat. Putin has spoken openly several times in the past and just now about his readiness to use nuclear weapons. The situation should not be aggravated. We need to stop.

Many territorial conflicts are known to have no end. There is only one successful example of territorial peace: the European Union. The idea accepted by all members of the European Union that human life, human dignity and human rights

are valued higher than any national boundaries has become the guarantee of peace in Europe.

Sooner or later, this is what Russia, Ukraine and Belarus will come to – peaceful coexistence with each other and with other European countries. There is no alternative way to peace. But this way is complex and long.

What should be done now? Stop it! Everything else is a stupid and very dangerous illusion.

Declare a ceasefire. Stop killing people!

A ceasefire agreement is not a treaty; it is not about peace, and not even about a truce or large-scale dialogue. It is a political demand aimed at saving lives. That's the main thing today.

A ceasefire agreement is the very first step toward a settlement. As long as there is fighting and people are dying, no attempts at discussion or negotiation are meaningful. Therefore, under the circumstances, a cease-fire agreement is required to make way for any positive development.

A ceasefire is a political demand, the realization of which depends entirely on the willingness and understanding of the people making the decisions. In practice, it can only be implemented if at least Putin, Zelensky, Biden, and the EU and NATO leadership are willing to do so. But the problem is that none of them is willing right now. To date, all sides are intent on continuing large-scale hostilities, mistakenly counting on a military victory that is beyond anyone's reach in the current climate. We must therefore insist: A ceasefire is necessary! If this does not happen, the consequences will be catastrophic and most likely, as already mentioned, irreversibly destructive.

And the main thing is that we will never get back people who are dying hourly in this catastrophe: not 18-month-old Makar and 15-year-old Anya from Dnipro, not 5-year-old Milana from Donetsk, not 9-year-old Ivan and 8-year-old Nina from Yeisk.

The continuation of hostilities in any form – offensive or «positional» – does not bode well for Russia, Ukraine or Western countries. To continue means an endless and irreparable tragedy. Ending the conflict «on the battlefield,» as some dream, will not work. Putin's state will stop at nothing. Russia will not become powerless as a result of this war. It will remain one of the two largest nuclear powers in the world.

But there is a possibility of depriving Ukraine, considered by many experts to have become a major state in Central Europe, of its prospects by questioning its ability to restore its economy after the hostilities. It must not come to this.

It is perfectly clear that all this has to stop. Everyone. And only after that should we try to talk. The main thing is that during this time people won't be killed.

This is the only way to discuss territorial issues, borders and movement of troops. Then diplomacy will also be needed – tough, difficult, with failures and limitations. We are in a situation where we are left with either bad options or even worse ones. The good options are gone now.

But there is still an option that can be avoided without further colossal casualties – that is, an immediate cessation of hostilities. And the demand to use this option must now be made by everyone who does not want to kill innocent people and does not want this to be done on their behalf. To make their position known by all available means.

Shout on every corner: Come to your senses! Stop!

The Nation, September 2023

Nadezda Azhgikhina

Dialogue Is the Best Medicine: Citizens Speak Out Against Reinvigorating the Cold War

Russian and American students at the Track Two conference in St. Petersburg were ready to trust each other much more than they trust the politicians.

«**W**hom Do We Trust?» was the theme of the conference in St. Petersburg organized by Track Two: An Institute for Citizen Diplomacy and the Herzen State Pedagogical University, gathering experts and students from two countries.

At the start, it took me back to the first meetings of Soviet and American undergraduate and graduate students in Moscow at the height of Perestroika several decades ago. Back then, we and our new interlocutors (some of whom became lifelong friends) were certain that we would destroy the Iron Curtain and the reinforced concrete wall of distrust, prejudice, and misunderstanding among scholars and ordinary people of our countries, the arms race and the threat of a terrible war would recede into the past, and we would build a marvelous new world together. To this day, many of us wonder why that did not happen. What did we do wrong? Why is there a new Cold War on the agenda, the rhetoric of hostility and hate? How do we vanquish them today?

The participants, students at American and St. Petersburg colleges, were eager to discuss everything, get to know one another, engage in a full dialogue. Almost all the Russian students spoke excellent English, much better than we did 25 years ago; many had studied or interned in the United States or Britain. The Americans, who were in Russia on exchange –

study programs, knew Russia much better than their counterparts had years ago. It was clear that the years since the early meetings had brought real changes in education and research on Russia and America.

This is due in part to the initiatives of Esalen Institute's Track Two, diplomacy that parallels government diplomacy, which began working long before Perestroika. Their initiatives include connecting astronauts and cosmonauts, initiating talks on philosophy and psychology, setting up meetings between PEN America and the Union of Soviet Writers, and the first space bridges with Russia and the United States. These breakthrough events led to further cooperation and joint projects in many spheres. Track Two not only brought together prominent experts, it became a lifelong project for its founders. Track Two President Dulce Murphy, museum adviser Nicolas V. Iljine, translator Antonina W. Bouis, Russianist Peter B. Kaufman, and others firmly believe that human relationships and professional dialogue can counter militarism, propaganda, and prejudice, and offered this platform to the young. The main topics of discussion and workshops were the significance of the media in confronting bias and half-truths, fake news, the false need for an enemy and how to dismantle that concept.

It turned out that 20-year-olds in both countries see the world in strikingly similar ways. They do not trust television, be it *Channel One* in Russia or *Fox News* or CNN in the United States; they prefer independent sources that do not belong to the state or business interests. Surprisingly, they read serious newspapers and magazines. And they are very active on the internet and trust the opinions of their circle of close friends more than the popular media. Both Americans and Russians consider politicians, and the politicized nature of much of the press, as the cause of the new spiral of the Cold War. «I am skeptical,» said Nick Rackers,



Space bridge Leningrad–Boston, 1986. <https://inosmi.ru/20190708/25433225.html>

a student from Miami. His words became a kind of meme for the conference.

Sawyer Mack from Colorado addressed American students at large: «Come to Russia, it's not scary here, you'll learn a lot of new things.» Unfortunately, student trips are becoming more difficult. It is hard for Russians to get visas and for Americans to find funding. The students talked about the global challenges that need to be addressed: not only the nuclear threat, but climate change and the development of biotechnologies. All without exception believe that contacts and joint projects will change society and politics.

How to dismantle the enemy mindset? In his video keynote address Vladimir Pozner, the Russian moderator of the first space bridges with Phil Donahue, spoke bitterly about the image of the enemy being entrenched in both countries, and that aggression is deeper in the minds and hearts of peo-

ple than it had been during the Cold War. His thoughts echoed Mikhail Gorbachev in his latest book, *In a Changing World*, where he wrote «the Cold War never went away, its intensity merely changed.» The keynote speaker (by video) on the second day was *The Nation's* editor and publisher, Katrina vanden Heuvel, who spoke of the importance of journalistic solidarity, and about the need to use coverage to avert a new and more dangerous Cold War.

The young participants seem to be the very people who are not afraid to take on responsibility for decisions about the future and actively entering political and social processes. Many of them said they wanted to be politicians and diplomats. And that gave us all hope.

The Track Two meeting was a lesson in how citizen diplomacy overcomes the imperfections of Track One and suggests the possibilities of development. «Track Two is an irreplaceable opportunity to improve Russian-American relations, by preparing the social atmosphere for the transition to a new state,» said professor Viktoria Zhuravleva, head of the American Center of the Russian State University of the Humanities. «It is hard to overestimate the value of 'track two.' But we also need a 'Track Three' – contacts among ordinary people, not just experts, which are so important for the future.»

The conference in St. Petersburg is a step toward the development of that future, which is being born today. And that is the most important thing.

The Nation, September 25, 2018



Post Scriptum

KvH: This book is a small contribution to resetting and, we hope, improving US-Russian relations. As we end our work, dialogue between our two countries is more restricted than it has at any time, including during the Cold War.

As editor of *The Nation*, America's oldest continuously published weekly founded in 1865, I have an abiding belief in the important role of independent media. Nadia's journalism, scholarship, activism and media affiliations also represent that commitment.

NA: During my many years of journalistic work and participation in professional and human rights organizations, I have grown convinced that a free press, despite all the challenges of these last years, remains the most important reason for a healthy democracy. Free and accountable journalism is a public good.

KvH: We both have a steadfast belief in speaking truth to power – despite the fact that too often those in power know the truth but seek to hide it from the people. We believe that civil society, debate and dialogue are vital for a robust society and politics. We believe change is possible, though the times we are living in understandably breed despair.

NA: I believe that constructive dialogue among society and countries is vital. I still remember the ending of the Cold War – when many years of mutual distrust and enmity were up ended, and our hope for change became a reality. It was a time

of active dialogues and meetings – between political figures, experts, professionals of different areas, and between ordinary people. And people didn't only support a deepening of politics, but also sought a new way of making important decisions.

KvH: As I write today, the US is close to marking president Trump's first 100 days in office. Opposition to Trump, which I deeply support, should not be opposition to common sense.

The US and Russia need a sober, working relationship – not false triumphalism or even fake friendship, to address mutual interests – for one, to seek an end to the savage Ukrainian war, to build down and abolish nuclear weapons, tackle the climate crisis, launch a green infrastructure for jobs, and invest in human needs – health, housing. These will bring true security.

NA: Peace is a vital condition for our future development, for all of us.

KvH: My father who died in 2020 was a former diplomat. He committed his last year to working for peace. It saddens me that in many instances today peace has become a subversive word. But he was a man committed to the United Nations and its role in ending «The Scourge of War». We continue his work. Nadia and I also pursue the work of Stephen F. Cohen and Yuri Shchekochikhin – our spouses and inspiration.

NA: History creates people, not only leaders. And dialogue between people, the search for possibilities of mutual work, is so important. Many people on both sides have worked for many years in order to make dialogue possible. They believed in its possibilities. And at certain moments results were achieved. In our small book, we would like to

remember such people and their contributions. The experience of creating an alternative to escalation and distrust is critical for the future.

KvH: May our dialogue seed a few possible ideas and projects. Why not a revival of student exchanges? Or an exchange of future leaders or scientists? Or work on scientific and Arctic collaboration?

NA: I believe in people, in their interest for dialogue, for a collaborative search for answers to our most important questions.

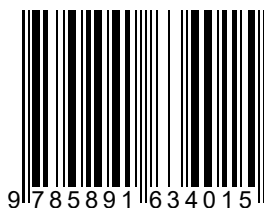
KvH: Above all, we must keep grounded hope alive.

NA: Hope springs eternal.

Надежда Ажгихина и Катрина ванден Хювел
МЫ ВСЕ-ТАКИ ВЕРИМ...

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HOPE SPRINGS ETERNAL

ISBN 978-5-89163-401-5



9785891634015

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Подписано в печать с оригинал-макета 14.08.2025
Формат 60×90/16. Усл. печ. л. 36,0

Типография «Лайдер Принт»
142100, г. Подольск, ул. Комсомольская, д. 1, пом. 1.

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всё-таки верим...



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