

The elite and the power in Russia¹

Historical dynamics of relations

The intelligentsia has played a particular role within the context of Russian history. The *ambivalence* (Firsov 1995) of its role can be illustrated by examples relating to all three periods of its existence in Russian, Soviet and post-Soviet societies.

The so-called *canonical* period in the history of Russian intelligentsia - the second half of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century - was marked by a heightened sense of responsibility and guilt for everything that had been happening to the people oppressed by state power. But the struggle for people's liberation did not mean freedom from state power. Striving for power appears to be a particular characteristic of Russian intelligentsia to this very day, although coming to power was not devoid of altruism. Moreover, it was based on the objective fear that „fleeing from state power“ would open the door to unworthy people. A powerful influence was exerted here by the subjective conviction that a member of the intelligentsia who was appointed a civil servant or a henchman by the revolutionary authorities would not actually become a civil servant or a henchman, but would remain first and foremost a member of the intelligentsia (Galkovskij 1995). However, immediately after the establishment of the Soviet power, representatives of the intelligentsia became directly involved in activities of all institutions of power, the repressive apparatus included.

The canonical period gave way to the *phantom period* (Levada 1993), when the very spirit of the intelligentsia was persecuted by the regime. The actual choice offered by the Soviet authorities to the intelligentsia and the elite proved to be very limited indeed. A tragic fate awaited the majority, while the survived minority had to assume the status of government officials and thus to become part of the law-abiding Soviet middle class. The relations between the institutions of power and the social elite after the introduction of radical reforms in the former Soviet society can be summed up as follows. Repressive by nature, the state fostered these relations with a certain

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circumspection, trying by „soft methods“ to win the allegiance of the intelligentsia and its elite strata, supporting the illusion of a quasi stable existence and quasi social harmony. The country remained poor, and yet the state would not dare to give up the promise of privileges as a means of ensuring compliance. Consequently, the relative material prosperity of the social elite was maintained at the expense of illegitimate redistribution (by depriving the actual productive forces). The converse side of this relationship was that representatives of the social elite (political, economic and cultural elites) formed the core of the main institutions of the Soviet State.

The most precise description of the ambivalent social roles played by the intelligentsia (the social elite) was given by the Russian historian M. Gefter, who died not long ago. He observed perspicaciously that the intelligentsia has been and remains *a pool of the persecuted and a reserve of the persecutors* (Gefter 1995). Gefter's thesis seemed to me the most appropriate for my analysis of relations between the intelligentsia (the elite) and institutionalised power, although in everyday consciousness the same relations are correctly expressed by the term *protection from state power and protection of state power*. The analysis makes it possible to identify several behavioural models which were characteristic of the Soviet intelligentsia in the period immediately before Perestrojka and the reforms, and to observe the inversion of these models in the post-Soviet period as well.

Model 1: Living in the niche of professional activity

A measure of life's optimism provided a basis for not suffering under the conditions of the old system while remaining outside the ranks of the Party and the sphere of its immediate influence. In most cases it was connected with a „pure“ sphere of work (such as the theory of architecture). Teaching was another form of sanctioned freedom (it did not mean political freedom, but one could control one's time). Thus, the strategy of coexistence with the regime consisted in the choice of a niche. A wisely chosen niche made it possible to avoid conflicts with the authorities (being persecuted is not very pleasant), and at the same time to evade excessively close collaboration with them (not everybody was willing to become a persecutor).

Apolitical existence and an affinity to this form of existence developed over the years were very useful in forming defensive mechanisms designed to escape the burdens of reality. In their own opinion, people with attitudes of this kind would never become dissidents. They were 100 per cent pure products of the Soviet system. But their life went on without traumatic expe-

riences or ideological ruptures. The escape from reality helped to survive: it was a basis for the „non-tragic variant of fatalism“.

Inversion of Model 1 in the post-Soviet period: A positive attitude towards social change and radical reforms seems to be natural here. This accounts for a particularly concerned reaction to the events of August 1991. The new equilibrium was disturbed. There was a feeling that „the rug had been pulled out from under one's feet“ and that an opportunity for affirming new values in life was on the verge of being irreversibly lost. Those who take this stance set great store by the abolition of egalitarian principles and the rejection of the ideology of equality which has never existed in the rigid communist hierarchy. The right to inequality has made it possible to recognise that the opponents of inequality are prone to be envious, not to have very high standards of professionalism, to have mediocre expectations, to be gullible and dependent on leaders and commissars. It explains the conviction that Russia will not achieve success before the generation that has forgotten how to work dies. Another characteristic is a certain perceptible insight regarding the perception of the social behaviour of the intelligentsia. One's own moral positions permitted to realise that one part of the intelligentsia aspiring to power (including those from own ranks with former connections to the „protectionist“ faction) had soon turned into „class demagogues“.

Model 2: Dissociation from the state

Relations with state power in the past can be reduced to one formula: keeping maximum distance. Deification of Stalin in childhood was replaced by an understanding of the nature of the regime. But one lacked the strength to offer active resistance or to go to jail (even though there was complete sympathy with the dissidents). Dissidents were given support whenever a convenient opportunity presented itself (people attended court sessions, signed petitions, wrote letters to the „Zone“). This form of solidarity could be called spiritual hygiene. But there was no question of any friendship with power.

It should be mentioned that there was a period when hopeful young intellectuals joyfully seized power. This was during the thaw period under Khrushchev. There was a feeling that the awaited end of longing for changes had come: this might be „our“ power, in that case we'll lend it a hand and vice versa. But it didn't work out that way. The power took a look around, took a sniff here and there, banged its heel on the conference table and definitively and irreversibly rejected those who put their trust in it. This

gave rise to internal opposition with the polarised options of being a dissident or being coerced into compliance with power.

Inversion of Model 2 in the post-Soviet period: The advent of Perestrojka indicated possibilities for self-realisation which had been restrained by the previous social order. It is only natural that this gave rise to competitive conditions (e.g. many people wanted to get published). Selection criteria became higher. Chances of being published today are directly related to the quality of belletristic literature in question. The important thing is that there is an awareness now that something depends on the intelligentsia:

„I have been drawn into the struggle to affirm the ideas of democracy. The coup has created a situation in which the illusions of liberation are threatening to disappear again for a long time to come, if not for ever. Therefore an active stance (public appearances, writing articles, giving support to movements) is my norm. This cannot be regarded as making common cause with the state. This stance is associated with the legitimation of a democratic form of government (restoration of the old order would mean a turn for the worse). Having met the country's President I had a chance to tell him what I considered most important - my concern about fascism rooting in this country and that St. Petersburg had become its cradle. But later on, when I was offered to manage the regional censorship office, I refused. I don't see myself as a civil servant, despite the fact that I have spent several years of my life fighting a court case against the author of a pro-fascist book. The court case against the fascist took tremendous efforts: studying masses of books, meticulously analysing the opponent's statements, and determination in warding off incessant attacks from the fascist mob“ (from an interview given by the writer K. Katerli).

And once again people have approached the power, wishing not only to collaborate in forms sanctioned by the state (the way to think and act under Khrushchev). There emerged the „preposterous“ idea of taking the reins of power into their hands by directly participating in the country's reconstruction. Gorbachev proved to be the harbinger of a fresh wave of hopes, but he was afraid to go too far. Moderation and order were the passwords of his gradual rejection of communist dogmas. The latest a flicker of hope was observed in 1991. We all know what came after that. There are those who are collaborating, not without repulsion, with the defective power. Others, feeling hurt, have turned their backs in disgust („A plague o' both your houses!“). Many are serving the state, but they are moving away from classic moral imperatives of the Russian intelligentsia (we shall return to this point later).

Model 3: Distrust of the state

As regards the diversity of personal attitudes towards and relations with the old system, there is another position that can be identified – namely the position of early recognition (which is possible in those cases where the biography is devoid of deification of the state and its leaders). This is a type of socialisation that began to take shape when the Stalin personality cult had been overcome (life without illusions or disillusionments, but based on disbelief and mistrust of the regime).

Inversion of Model 3 in the post-Soviet period: In the recent past, the supporters of this position tried to convince themselves of their right to a personal point of view, whereas under new conditions their right has become a public expression of a personal point of view, whilst self-realisation has become a basic value. According to their own assertions, people holding this position, are particularly sensitive to any kind of dependence. They find it particularly difficult to tolerate any attempt on the part of local authorities and business, which have replaced the Party and censorship authorities on infringing their freedom.

This stance appears to be particularly close to the traditional canon of the intelligentsia. It is the thin stratum of those creatively engaged in the cultural sphere (a fine film of thinking people, which today actually represents the whole complex in its canonical sense (as a stratum which enlightens the people and tries to invent new models for Russia's development). This stratum is small and its influence on the country's life and society is insignificant.

Model 4: The 60s generation

And finally we should mention a model of behaviour associated with a high level of creativity. During the communist pre-Gorbachev period, criticism and disapproval of the social order dominated here within the constraints of censorship and ideology (notes, suggestions, information), although excessively vigorous activity and criticism frequently put an end to the authors' careers and resulted in their being barred from travelling abroad.

Inversion of Model 4 in the post-Soviet period: For the 60s generation, there were two bright periods in life: the Khrushchev and Gorbachev periods. The latter was a desperate attempt to get off the ground, which ended in a crash landing. There were hopes for reforms, a market, a vigorous social policy and for more or less civilised democracy (selective, elitist, representative, market-oriented democracy, etc.). These hopes were not fulfilled: The

market turned out to be barbarian, while privatisation was used as a means of redistributing wealth among a narrow group of individuals; democracy did not crystallise; a vigorous social policy failed to materialise. Things wheeled on an axis, political activity changed into disillusionment. The power lost the opportunity to place the potential of this social stratum at the service of the state and society and to realise the complex of ideas proposed by the 60s generation. Even the Union could have been preserved within the framework of a federation or confederation of a new type (a variant of this kind was proposed during Perestrojka-enthusiasm, when the centrifugal forces were substantially weaker than the centripetal ones in terms of significance and magnitude). Weakness of leaders prevented the systemic change on a wave of common popular consensus. Consequently, a market-oriented democratic socialism failed to emerge (social state, Swedish socialism, commonwealth state), and the society fell into capitalism without having an appropriate cultural basis in Russia.

The present situation offers no basis for applying the potential of the intelligentsia: there is no alternative to restricting one's activities to one's professional sphere. It has become difficult to exert influence on others. This is a time when wise words can not be converted into social action. The latter has become the exclusive domain of civil servants.

„The messianic period has given way to a period in which former messiahs are able to assert only their own „egos“, possessing neither intellectual faculties nor a calling to fascinate others by their ideas and visions. There are no messiahs (teachers) and no common ideas“ (excerpt from an interview given by Prof. V. A. Jadov).

Model 5: Collective immune defence against the power based on „playing according to the rules“

In this case there is no overt protest (demonstrations with anti-government overtones) or struggle, but there is covert opposition to political ideologues. The behaviour within a closed circle of professionals does not correspond to official outward behaviour. This is not easily done, it calls for a certain amount of mimicry (swinging into the Party lines), but the advantage is obvious: preservation of the professional environment. In other words, the „rules of the game“ include a certain measure of integration into the system and a compelled attitude towards some illegitimate prohibitions (one part of the intelligentsia of Jewish nationality did not join the rush to travel abroad, because they feared not being allowed to go and partly out of fear of being allowed to travel and then having to submit official accounts of their trips). Professional activity in similar circumstances was also based on rules of se-

curity. One of them consisted in trying to select neutral or socially accepted themes (the historian sought research subjects attracting no official attention, whilst the sociologist criticised „bourgeois science“, since it was not possible to provide the reader with a certain measure of positive knowledge without including some critical comments). Another rule was the necessity to have a cynical mutual understanding of what „may“ and what „may not“ be said for ideological and censorship reasons. On the whole, the leaders or the leadership of the Party and state apparatus were regarded with irony. In fact, the whole system was regarded as historical nonsense. However, people adhering to such positions kept to a strict diet within their own environment. They recommended to consider the reality like some given quantity and not like a subject to be changed. One of the teachers of current Russian historians belonging to the oldest generation was Professor Romanov. In the early thirties he had taken part, not on his own initiative, in building the channel from the White Sea to the Baltic. After his discharge he returned to Leningrad but he was not given an opportunity for scientific work. He had no income at all about ten years till the beginning of the Second World War. Prof. Romanov's wife had a private practice as a gynaecologist. During all those years he opened the doors for patients coming to the gynaecological surgery, helped them take off their fur coats and controlled the queue of patients waiting to see the doctor. He wrote bibliographical index cards at the former archaeological institute (being paid a pittance as a laboratory assistant), and he still continued writing books, which up till now are regarded as historiographic classics: „People and Customs in Ancient Russia“ and „Essays on the Diplomatic History of the Russo-Japanese War“ (excerpt from an interview given by R. S. Ganelin, corresponding member of the Russian Academy of Sciences).

Such vicissitudes of life must be taken into consideration, but they did not result in stopping reflection. An intellectual, being quite by himself, clearly understood the repressive nature of Stalinist rule, and knew that Khrushchev and Brezhnev benefited from Stalin's „capital“, making use of the inertia of fear and obedience instilled by Stalin in several generations of the country's inhabitants.

Inversion of Model 5 in the post-Soviet period: During and after Perestrojka, this stance turns into a willingness to assume the role of an independent intellectual whose relationship with the government is regulated by contract (the government pays for the agreed volume of scientific work carried out by the intellectual, although this type of relationship cannot be fully implemented because of the government's inability to pay for intellectual work).

The common political position of this part of the intelligentsia can be (for good reasons) defined as latent liberalism, which has been prohibited up till now. I venture to equate open liberalism with the formula of optimum