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The Russian wannabe-bourgeoisie as the fundament of Putin's regime

Dmitry Mrachnik

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I am neither a supporter of the term “national mentality”, nor an ethnicist, for whom a nation would be anything more than a collective civil identity. Tales of blood and soil, of some spiritual unity of every representative and generation of a nation, of some unique quality of their morals, character and mentality—are nothing but tales. National character building has its real basis in the on-the-ground, everyday plane. Therefore, I wouldn't say that the Russians are cowardly, unscrupulous consumers because their ancestors were a pig and a dog. That would be an excessively gross vulgarization which could only work for tabloid propaganda targeting the uneducated and dimwitted masses.

I can attribute to entirely material circumstances why an entire crowd of Russians are afraid of a single policeman or simply don't want to change anything in their state because of their mortgage, vacation and career. The Russians have been bought with an enormous amount of fossil-fuel dough, the

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redistribution of which has been stabilizing during Vladimir Putin's reign. The population of the biggest cities of the Russian Federation has been receiving an opportunity to play the role of cogs in the system they have no right to influence—and the better the cogs are holding the system together, the more oil the governing vertical is pumping to them.

This is a mix between the relatively wealthy Soviet “middle class”, whose material welfare and career depended on their loyalty to the party, and the modern neoliberal capitalism, which encourages buying and selling everything one can't just steal. You can hardly find a more appalling monster among all the classes controlled by the state.

The Russian protesters hesitate to fight back at the police capturing their comrades –not only because they fear the consequences (those do affect their social mobility) but because they don't believe they have to. They still believe their justice system to be impartial. The Russians don't believe their propaganda because they are outrageously stupid. No, the propaganda simply allows them to let off steam in a legal way and snatch their piece of the pie—even if that pie is made of shit.

Some Russians strictly follow their state ideology, primarily for their own benefit. It's profitable to consider independent experts to be traitors and foreign agents; this way, they rationalize their own position and choose to improve it further. Losing contact with their relatives burning to death somewhere in the suburbs of Kyiv in the name of whatever, Russians still decide to believe in a “special operation” of “liberating Ukraine from fascism”—for their own material good. Not necessarily out of habit; it's simply clear to them where the wind is blowing, and they are diversifying their assets. They entrust the regime with their biggest asset pile, because all the way until February 2022 such as an investment had brought them the biggest dividends.

Russian patriotism isn't brainwashing, it's a mutually profitable contract between the state and the citizen. Until recently, it had been backed by lush bank reserves, lavish

payoffs to the leading world elites, its addictive oil-and-gas needle cheaply powering the European economy, its powerful army terrorizing struggling and vulnerable countries, and its relentless special services able to identify any terrorist. However, it turned out the emperor had no clothes. Putin's system is rather a frightful shadow on the wall, cast by a small, vicious vermin. The reserves are empty, the payoffs have failed, alternative fuel providers have appeared, and the army losing a thousand of their people every day in Ukraine has become a tin can of minced human meat.

Russia has only one remaining pillar after the gruesome events of late February and early March: the special services and learned helplessness of their “middle class” who already know which position to take, only waiting for permission from above and widening their pockets for the devalued ruble. These people don't want to believe in the failure of their mighty system, as they have no other master ready to throw them a clinking coin. The Russian wannabe-bourgeoisie can only live this way, and they don't consider it a heavy cross to carry along; no, they believe it to be their highest reward, and they will proceed to do the same until some other master appears, promising even more profitable conditions.

If you want to influence the Russians, you can only buy them off. Before you do that, hold them outside naked in the freezing cold a bit. Then they might be willing to turn their heads in the opposite direction and obediently fulfill any demand of yours. And nobody will pity them, as every person is free to choose, and therefore to bear the responsibility for their choice.