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The Russian philistine and the great upheaval

Vladimir Platonenko

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Many Russians, of what are commonly called philistines, do want Russia to win, or rather not to lose, not out of love for Putin but out of fear of great upheavals. Here they are of course right: a serious military setback always, or at least very often, has led a Muscovite state either to a revolution, as in 1905 and 1917, or to reforms that would break its ways, as after losing the Crimean War and the Cold War (and the Afghan War along with it), or simply to civil unrest, as in the early 17th century. Of course, all this did not arise from nothing, there were enough problems without the war, a military defeat was just the last straw, but even now there are so many problems that the loss of the war will make the turmoil inevitable. And it would make them inevitable now. If they do not happen today, they will happen tomorrow and will be even worse, but the modern Russian average man lives for today, it is not as important to him what will happen in ten or fifteen years, as what will happen in a year.

The philistine makes a big mistake, however, not realising that he is objectively interested in great upheavals. Not because he will

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be better off with them, but because he will be worse off without them.

War has already produced a mass of rapists and robbers. Whatever the end of the war, the “heroes of Bucha” will not be exterminated; they will return to their homeland and go about their usual business – robbing. And they will not be robbing Gazprom and Sber, but ordinary Russians. Yes, they are much poorer, but much more defenseless and numerous. So, foxes and wolves prefer to hunt not moose and deer (they only attack them if they are sick, old or very young), but... Mice, voles or rats (yes, wolves in summer eat mostly rodents). For the same reason.

Looters in the Russian Federation will be as greedy and ruthless as in Ukraine. There will be no way to buy them off, they can only be destroyed. Which is extremely difficult for a man in the street, but it is possible, if only in one case out of three or five or even ten. Especially if this average man is able to unite with two or three others like him.

But after that the law enforcers will come to him. Who don't care who they get asterisks for: a burglar who slaughtered his victims' family or a philistine who “exceeded self-defence”. Either way, the law enforcers won't risk getting into a fight (so you can't count on them to help you before you're killed), but they're more than happy to come in and take on the victor, who's already exhausted and doesn't have the energy for a second fight. In the end, even after fending off the robbers, the average man will become a victim of the law enforcers. If the government retains its strength.

But if a revolution breaks out, the authorities will have no time for it and the victors will not be judged. This does not give the average man a guarantee, because he may not be the winner, but it gives him a chance. The same is true of common distemper. Revolution is different from sedition in that its aim is to demolish the old system and build a new one. That is why distemper can lead to revolution or not, depending on whether people have the aforemen-

tioned goal or not. In any case, power fears the people and does not disturb them in times of both turmoil and revolution. Even when there are major reforms, if they are accompanied by an upsurge in public activity, the regime slows down its fervour. That is exactly what happened in 1989–1991.

It turns out, however we look at it, that great upheavals are not a threat but, on the contrary, a salvation for the man in the street. True, not for anyone, but for an active one, capable of playing at least Sancho Panza, but not Don Quixote. Who was also an ordinary man in the street, just determined enough. The only trouble is that the rare Russian Sancho Panza understands this. But maybe he is not so rare? I do not know, I will not judge. I will note, however, that the more ordinary people understand this the better. Revolutions need not only Don Quixotes, but also Sancho Panza. Reforms, and even sedition, by the way, too.