

Contending Conceptions of Nation And State in Russian Politics

Defining Party Ideologies in Post-Soviet Russia

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The collapse of the Soviet Union has focused attention on the problem of Russian national-political identity in a particularly acute way. In the wake of the August 1991 coup, the contagion of separatist demands within the Russian Republic (RSFSR)—appearing in certain “national autonomies” such as Tatarstan and Chechenia, later in efforts to create a Siberian Republic, a Far Eastern Republic and so forth—threatens to sunder the newly formed Russian state in much the same way that it shattered the USSR. At the same time, a host of new voices in the form of parties, movements, and blocs has emerged to address the question of national identity. They act within a framework developed by intellectuals in their respective books, journals and pamphlets. Moreover, the advent of organized political forces with the potential to reach the mass public has elevated the issue of Russian national-political identity to a new stage. It is these forces and their rival conceptions of the Russian state that constitute the object of this article.

Scope and Method

Previous research has identified four political groupings or “centers” within Russian political society that coalesced in the aftermath of Russia’s sixth Congress of People’s Deputies in April 1992.¹ Here, we describe briefly these groupings according to their positions regarding the fundamental issues dominating Russian politics at this juncture: state structure and property relations.² Their issue orientations are discussed more thoroughly in the succeeding section.

1. *The Right-Center.* This grouping is anchored in the Russian Popular Assembly, a bloc principally comprised of the “patriotic” association, the Russian Social Union, which is an extra-parliamentary organization spawned by the parliamentary faction. The Right-center consists of “Russia” and two parties—the Russian Christian Democratic Movement and the Constitutional Democratic Party—that had been part of the “democratic movement” until November 1991, at which time they left the Democratic Russia coalition, charging it with “national-state nihilism.”

2. *The Left-Center.* This “center” is based on New Russia, a coalition that

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includes the Social Democratic Party of Russia, the People's Party of Russia, the Social-Liberal Party and the Peasant Party of Russia. While retaining their membership in the ranks of "the democratic forces," these parties have distanced themselves considerably from Democratic Russia due to a combination of programmatic and organizational differences.

3. *The Liberal-Center.* Democratic Russia—before losing those parties, groups and personages that have terminated or suspended their membership since its second congress in November 1991—occupies the "liberal-center" position on the political spectrum. Once the umbrella for effectively all political parties in the "democratic" front, by summer of 1992 the Republican Party of Russia had become the last party of any size to maintain an active membership in the organization.

4. *The Opposition-Center.* Formally constituting itself as Civic Union in June 1992, this grouping welcomes political reform but is opposed to the monetarist cast of the economic reform pursued by the former government team headed by Yegor Gaidar. The bloc is comprised of Renewal, a party created on the basis of the Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs (headed by Arkady Volsky), the Democratic Party of Russia (which had left Democratic Russia along with its then coalition partners—the Russian Christian Democratic Movement and the Constitutional Democratic Party—but subsequently refused to follow these parties as they moved rightward to ally with certain "patriotic" forces), and the People's Party of Free Russia (led by Russian Vice-President Alexander Rutskoi).

The method adopted to analyze the conception of national-political identity pertinent to each of these four "centers" in contemporary Russian political society involves both a theoretic orientation and a specific research strategy. With respect to the former, the writer proceeds from the insight of structural and post-structural analysis that language constitutes the world and that subjectively is itself constituted by language use. Following in this vein, the approach articulated by Murray Edelman, we can regard politics as manifestly linguistic phenomenon that is defined by conflicts over meaning.³ As far as the object of our investigation is concerned, then, we understand the conceptions of state and nation proffered by each of the four political "centers" in question to be texts that generate a particular set of meanings relevant to the issue of national-political identity. Moreover, the generation of such texts is regarded as a social, rather than as an individual, enterprise in which meanings are (re)constituted out of available cultural materials (other "texts"), negotiated in conjunction with others (real or imagined) and put forward in opposition to other competing texts.

The second point about method, a specific research strategy, involves three issues related to the various political conceptions of nation and state and how they might be studied. First, since each of the four "centers" that have been

identified represents a coalition of forces rather than a single or uniform organization, to which member of the respective coalition should one turn in order to acquire the most articulate version of each of their respective conceptions? Here, the judgement is that in each case that coalition partner (political party) which is most developed in terms of its age, organizational structure, membership and activity would represent the most fully articulated position for the respective “center” itself. Accordingly, the Russian Christian Democratic Movement (RKhDD) has been selected as representative of the Right-center; the Social Democratic Party of Russia (SDPR) serves to illustrate the conception of the Left-center; the Republican Party of Russia (RPR) articulates the position of the liberal-center; and the Democratic Party of Russia (DPR) represents the opposition-center.

Second, which specific texts should be included in the analysis of the conceptions of state and nation pertinent to each of these “centers”? The strategy taken here has been to let the representatives of the respective parties themselves make this decision. Accordingly, the programs, speeches and articles that serve as our texts of analysis were selected by top officials in these parties as those tracts which best articulate the position of each of their parties on the question of state and nation in contemporary Russia.

Finally, additional information on our topic was gathered in the course of interviews conducted in July and August 1992 with leaders of the parties in question. These interviews revolved around a thematic question: “What is your party’s conception of *gosudarstvennost* [“statehood” in a strong sense that encompasses national-political identity as well] and how is it distinguished from the conceptions of other parties?” Follow-up questions were then employed to probe the initial responses of party leaders. In all cases, these interviews contributed significantly to reaching a fuller understanding of their respective positions on this issue.

Democratic Myths of State and Nation

The images of state and nation projected by the four parties in our sample can be identified as contemporary variants of two distinct patterns of national myth-making. The first, associated with the American and French revolutions of the eighteenth century, might be called the “national-democratic” orientation. Here, members of a nation are regarded as those persons sharing a particular commitment to certain universal human values—liberty, equality and fraternity—in a struggle against an oppressive other such as monarchy or empire that actively suppresses these values and, hence, denies the nation itself. Such palpable markers as language or skin color play no role in defining the national community. Rather, the existence of, and value attributed to, the nation is derived from its putative relation to these abstract ideas. As a consequence, this conception can be regarded as “outward looking.” Its core values potentially belong to all people; other nations and

states acquire either positive or negative significance insofar as they display these same values. In principle, these values do not point inwardly toward a group revered for its intrinsic worth but outwardly, toward a universal human community based on common ideals.

The second orientation, which appeared after and in reaction to the first, might be called “national-autocratic.” Here, national identity appeared as the counterpoint to a universal human community. Associated with the use of nationalism to generate allegiances to dynastic systems which are threatened internally and externally by national-democratic ideas, this version of the nation consists of visible or audible markers, such as physical features and language. Its proponents impress cultural memory and popular legends into the service of myth-making for the state. Under this conception, it is not the national community’s participation in some universal scheme of values but some inherent quality of the national group that establishes its worth and sets it apart from, if not above, other nations.

Three of the parties in our sample—the RPR, the SDPR and the DPR—share a discourse on the theme of nation and state that would place them squarely within the national-democratic category. Their act of “forgetting” the Soviet period has taken the form of “envisaging” a new Russia based on ideas borrowed from the West—the primacy of the individual over class or ethnic group, popular sovereignty, rule of law, and so forth. The fourth party in our sample, however, falls within the national-autocratic tradition. The RkhDD’s act of “forgetting” involves a “remembering” national-cultural specificities and past greatness of the Russian people which must be revived within a uniquely Russian state. Given this division between the parties in question, we now outline in this section the perspectives on state and nation particular to the parties of national-democratic orientation, reserving an analysis of those of the RkhDD for the section that follows.

The Liberal Orientation of the RPR

The constituency of the Republican Party of Russia’s liberal orientation is noteworthy. Its discourse on the question of state and nation is anchored in the principle of maximum “personal freedom for each member of society” within a minimalist state based on “social partnership and pragmatism.”⁴ Accordingly, it regards “the rights of the individual—conferred by birth—[as] above the rights of nations, classes and other group interests,”⁵ and portrays the state, along with all other public structures, as created freely by individuals in order to protect and secure the free exercise of their rights. These may include the protection of “national rights” should the individuals, *qua* individuals, be so disposed.⁶

Having defined the political universe as the product of voluntary association among free individuals, the RPR eschews all ready-made solutions

to the problems of Russian statehood. Indeed, it regards the problems as unsolvable. In keeping with its liberal orientation, then, it looks to individuals for solutions, and regards negotiated agreements based upon the mutual recognition of self interest as a motor for a long-term process of conflict resolution. Accordingly, the RPR insists on the right to self-determination for all within the Russian Federation who choose to exercise it. Consonant with its principle of pragmatism, however, the RPR does not foresee that the social partnership required for proper state formation will soon spring to life whole and fully intact. Rather, it depicts the old Soviet order as “totalitarianism and a unitarist-conservative center” against which the peoples of the former USSR have struggled to assert their freedom. During the struggle against this center, the forces of narrow nationalism have been unleashed. These have dismembered the USSR and now threaten to repeat the same result in Russia. In order to reduce the risk of violence and dislocation inherent in Russia’s division, the RPR appeals to international law and, paradoxically, to the contradiction inherent within it. To be more specific, it endorses the provisions of the Helsinki Accords that proclaim the inviolability of borders in Europe and implicitly oppose either Russian territorial claims on the former union republics or restrictions on the right of self-determination. This position is justified along pragmatic lines:

It is better to have friendly neighbors outside the borders of the state than enemy nations inside a unified and indivisible state. . . We hope in future that a reborn Russia will become that legal, democratic and enlightened state to which all the peoples of the former USSR will be drawn toward union.⁷

The RPR’s second appeal observes that the principles of state sovereignty and the people’s right to self-determination represent an insoluble contradiction for which any imposed solution will produce another Ulster. Hence, the RPR accepts the idea of national-territorial regions for those wishing to remain in the Federation, and promotes self-determination for those who do not, applying to these collectivities the same logic of negotiated agreement and social partnership that it ascribes to the individuals celebrated in its discourse.

The Left Orientation of SDPR

Like the RPR, the SDPR’s orientation toward the present crisis surrounding the form and nature of the Russian state tends to regard the problem as resistant to any *a priori* solutions. Similarly, it shares the RPR’s overriding objective of returning Russia to the world community, a return predicated on the quest for “a community based on the humanist ideals. . . of freedom, justice and solidarity.”⁸ Because it believes that “our Russian-style cart” will not achieve this return, the SDPR advocates “learning from others while preserving our human dignity.”⁹ In this regard, the value of “Russianness”

for the SDPR seems to count for even less than the rather negligible semiotic value attributed to it by the RPR.

The crux of the difference between the RPR and the SDPR on the problem of Russian statehood results from their divergent emphasis on the role of the individual. Whereas the liberal orientation awards primacy to individuals, that of the SDPR allows for other factors that may completely overshadow the individual's role within a particular historical context. Such a context, in this view, was obtained both in the USSR and in postcommunist Russia, and revolves around the particular power configuration associated with the term "*nomenklatura*."

The idea of the *nomenklatura*, as a self-appointed group carrying out repressive and parasitic activities in those places where it has monopolized economic and political power, has dominated SDPR thinking since the very inception of the party. Consequently, the SDPR frames the issue of the state by grounding it in a prior question: "Whose state?" That is, it begins its analysis of the crisis of Russian statehood by interpreting the issue as the problem of national separatism within Russia. Like the RPR, it endorses the principle of national self-determination and it sees negotiated agreements as the only alternative to the "path leading directly to calamity."¹⁰ Unlike the RPR, it draws a qualitative distinction between contracting individuals, on the one hand, and contracting collectivities, on the other. For in the latter instance it sees an opportunity for the forces of the *nomenklatura*—or, in its updated terminology, "*postnomenklatura monopolism*"¹¹—to stimulate and harness nationalist emotions for the purpose of maintaining a variant of the old order and privileged position within it. Therefore, the SDPR's endorsement of the abstract right of self-determination is qualified by the application of a concrete standard: Who is organizing and who stands to benefit from this self-determination, and what is its relation to the universal values of freedom, justice and solidarity? In sum, the SDPR and RPR share a common discourse on the matter of Russian statehood, one marked by both pragmatism and a search for the socio-economic roots of the national question dividing Russia today. Their differences regarding the problem of the state, however, seem to stem from their respective ideological orientations, whether social democratic or liberal.

The Statist Orientation of the DPR

According to its program, the Civic Union formed as a political center opposed to Russia's government because the government's economic policies damage the country's "national-state structures" and incite separatist tendencies. The DPR has long distinguished itself within Russia's democratic movement by its emphasis on the desideratum of maintaining a unified state. While making common cause with the RPR and SDPR during the struggle against the Communist regime, the DPR nonetheless dissented from the view

that the overthrow of communism would invariably entail the breakup of the USSR. Largely out of concern for this very prospect, in December 1990 it formed with the RKhDD and the Constitutional Democratic Party a separate bloc within Democratic Russia, called Popular Consensus, aimed at preserving the Union while disposing of the Communist authorities. In certain respects, its thinking on the question of the state contrasts with that shared by the RPR and the SDPR. Whereas the latter portray the authentic state as emerging out of a rightly ordered society, the DPR regards all social values as conditioned in the first instance by the existence of “a strong democratic state.” Rather than defocusing the issue of the state and searching for solutions in the socio-economic sphere to the problem it presents, the DPR foregrounds the state, arguing that “the question of statehood [*gosudarstvennost*] has become a major [factor] defining the direction of the movement of political forces. It is senseless to discuss the remaining [problems] without having solved this one.”¹²

The DPR regards the dissolution of the USSR and the “harsher form” of disintegration which currently threatens Russia as the result of a continuation by the democratic forces of the same “destructive policies”—those of national-territorial autonomies with the right to self-determination—inaugurated by the Communists. Consequently, it considers the indivisibility of Russia to be “axiomatic” and views as the optimal structure a unitary state with administrative divisions established by the center that exist independently of national composition.

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Aside from major differences on the surface level of the narrative that would separate the views of the DPR from those of the other two parties discussed, a closer examination of the “logic” of the DPR’s position indicates that, by and large, all three parties share a common discourse. Indeed, it is this commonality that enables them to argue with one another. For instance, although the RPR and SDPR stand for a federal solution and the DPR for a unitary one, the DPR accepts federalism as the only viable alternative for the immediate future. Moreover, it expects a unitary state, encompassing all of the old USSR, to grow out of negotiations based on enlightened self-interest. It shares in this respect the views of the SDPR, interpreting the appearance of separatist movements as resulting from the machinations of the old *nomenklatura* inciting the forces of mindless nationalism. Although the DPR is far more solicitous toward allegedly Russian national traits—“kindness, well-wishing [toward others], good spiritedness, a broad nature”—that would serve as factors promoting inter-ethnic harmony in a

future union, these features are cited more as incidental pluses than as claims to some national greatness or civilizing mission.¹³ Finally, even its stand against the right of self-determination is based on its own application of the principle of “the rights of the individual over [those of] the group or nation.”¹⁴ While the RPR and SDPR might reject the conclusion drawn here by the DPR, they would fully endorse the premise from which it has been derived.

To conclude this section, three general observations should help to elucidate the contrast between the national-democratic discourse shared by these three parties and that of the RKhDD. First, Russia’s democratic forces have demonstrated a marked reluctance to thematize the ideas of state and nation, because of these ideas’ long association with the despised Communist regime’s conception of state and nation against which they fought. Not until the very end of the 1980s did Russian national interests begin to gain currency among Russia’s “democrats.” Second, when the “democrats” did address the national idea, it appeared as a vague indictment of the Communist regime for destroying Russian culture and traditions, and impeding a renaissance of Russian national life. In short, the Communists were responsible for the absence of the national idea, and it only required communism’s overthrow to bring that national idea back to life. The national democrats’ emphasis on the individual and their relative failure to either produce or employ national symbols of group identity, testify to this particular political history. Moreover, this history underscores the national-democrats’ vulnerability to their opponents on the Right. Having developed their idea of “Russia” within the framework of their struggle against the

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Communist regime, the force of *that* idea appears to have spent itself along with communism’s collapse. The national-democrats now lack an opponent against whom this idea might again be deployed. Finally, the ideology of the national-democrats is open to assessment on the basis of visible results. Their political project heralds material progress through the creation of a market economy, which in turn will create

that society of free individuals that functions as a primary term in their discourse. As we see in the following section, the discourse of the RKhDD neither shares this liability nor lacks for opponents allegedly threatening that Russia which they would protect and enhance.

The RKhDD's Myth of National Salvation and Rebirth

Although a number of themes long associated with Russian right-wing ideology reverberate through the rhetoric of the Russian Christian Democrats and their affiliates in the Russian Popular Assembly, we begin our discussion of the RKhDD's ideas on state and nation by distinguishing them from those of other groups on the extreme Right. First, unlike the extreme Right's demonization of Jews, RKhDD ideology is not overtly racist. It locates the struggle for an authentic Russian nation and state on the level of culture and politics rather than on that of biology. Second, the RKhDD has entered a coalition with others on the Right somewhat reluctantly. Its leadership would have preferred to maintain the party's alliance with Russia's "democratic" forces, but found this impossible after the latter's alleged betrayal of Russia's state interests. Finally, the RKhDD and its new partners have attempted to disassociate themselves from Russia's extreme right wing, anticipating a date in the near future when they themselves will take power. This prospect, and the related need to draw allies from other segments of the political spectrum, especially from those identified as "statists" in the previous section, may constitute a moderating influence in RKhDD rhetoric.

These qualifications notwithstanding, an unbridgeable gulf separates the RKhDD's conception of nation and state from that of Russia's national-democrats. At the level of language, the sharpest way to categorize these differences is to note that whereas the discourse of the national-democrats is skewed toward the practical dimension, that of the RKhDD leans heavily, if not entirely, on the noological. Apparently, practical concerns—whether economic problems, hardships endured by refugees, or the preservation of historic sites—surface in RKhDD rhetoric only to portray the damage inflicted by nefarious others on a particular community that has repeatedly demonstrated its worthiness in the eyes of God.

The rhetorical strategy displayed by the RKhDD involves loading onto the positive axis of narrative all things associated with the Russian (*russkii*, rather than *rossiiskii*) nation, piling onto the negative axis all things connected with foreign or "other," and then associating their political opponents with this second set of terms. As there is no apparent limit to the RKhDD's litany of problems for which they blame foreign and domestic others, this strategy results in manifest absurdities once the problems have been itemized and the time has arrived for proposing their solutions. The noological's eclipse of the practical, however, conceals this fact. For within the structure of its language, that which might otherwise be taken as muddled, contradictory or absurd, functions instead to generate yet more alarm over the fate of "our Russia . . . which has summoned us to unify" in her defense.¹⁵

A particularly rich and concentrated example of this discourse can be found in an unpublished article by Party leader Viktor Aksyuchits, entitled "The Test of the Russian Idea."¹⁶ The implied thesis of this tract is that an

ordinary consciousness is incapable of apprehending "Russia's great, historic mission" in the world. This mission "concerns an apostolic consciousness," and the essay obviously aims at engendering such in the reader by referring to things seen and unseen, as well as to those that must be regarded in a radically new way in order to be rightly known. It begins in the genre of the Russian folktale with a statement of the tragic misfortune that has befallen the Russian people. Aksyuchits then proceeds to heighten narrative tension by claiming that at this historical juncture when national salvation depends on the Russian people recovering "their historical memory and national self-consciousness," all of Russia's "enemies have unfurled an unprecedented

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campaign of lies and slander against Russian history, culture and the dignity of the Russian people." In calling the attention of the Russian people to this mortal threat, the author thereby establishes a rhetorical position from which to generate a national myth as generous in the positive qualities awarded to all things Russian as it is fulsome in the heinous traits assigned to Russia's enemies.

Aksyuchits unfolds this plot in his narrative by locating the Russian idea in community based on *sobornost*, a Russian version of *Gemeinschaft*, connoting a freely established unity marked by harmonious variety. This community is said to be unique both because it has been constantly under threat (folkloric equivalent: worthiness proven by subjection to repeated test) and because it has been summoned to fulfill a great historical mission (folkloric equivalent: marked as "hero"). In order to accomplish each of these purposes, the community requires *gosudarstvennost* (statehood), just as *gosudarstvennost* is an inherently positive construct formed by the community's virtues of endurance and harmony. The conception of state and nation developed out of these primary terms is then built up by oscillations in the narrative between "constant threat," which constructs the positive qualities of *gosudarstvennost* by counterposing itself to this negative, and "historical mission" which articulates the manifestation of the positive qualities themselves.

Examining, first, the negative dimension of the narrative which, by reversal, constitutes the positive features of *gosudarstvennost*, we note how the text establishes a boundary known as "the organic mode of life" and then ascribes evil and destructive qualities to everything outside of this boundary. By means of various tropes, such malevolence is thereby associated with universal human values—for these are outside "the organic mode of

life”—and with those who espouse them. The category “international lumpens” plays an especially important role in this respect. “Lumpens”—from Marx’s sub-proletarian *declassé* social elements—are said to exist outside “the organic mode of life” and to gravitate toward utopian ideologies that lead society to perdition. The “international lumpen regime” which the author claims had seized power in Russia in 1917, has extirpated national life and its very memory to an unprecedented extent. Following the failed coup of August 1991 it was not removed from power. Rather, its first echelon has merely been replaced by its second. Russia’s enslavement by the “international lumpens” has not, therefore, ended; it has simply changed forms. Its perpetrators now call themselves “democrats” and “nationalists” but they are actually Russia’s old enemies employing new tactics to bring on further destruction. They have conspired to deprive Russia of her historic territories by sundering the USSR into separate states. In Russia’s regions, they repeat this process with declarations of sovereignty and independence, “transforming Russia into the black hole of humanity, on the edges of which neither the little Baltic states, nor Europe, nor far off America can sit [without being pulled in].” Finally, they collude with foreign powers eager to pounce on an exsanguinated Russia, dismantling all the means of national life—such as education, culture, industry and so forth—and converting her into a mere supplier of raw materials for the West. Aksyuchits highlights the catastrophic aspect of this scenario by contrasting the palpable image of “the face of Russian cities”—with the vistas of today’s alien and uncontrolled Moscow, whose streets “look either like an Eastern bazaar or like Broadway.” Not unexpectedly, only the rebirth of a strong Russian state can arrest and reverse this national calamity.

The purely positive moment in the narrative is largely established by denial. In the same way that Russia is exculpated for her Communist past—by blaming it on the “international lumpens”—so all potentially negative features of Russian history is said to be just the opposite of what Russia’s enemies would have them to be. Russian chauvinism has never existed. Unlike the imperialism of Western states which exploited, murdered and oppressed, the Russian Empire was a benevolent structure that protected and nurtured the many nations within it. Moreover, the Russian state appears for those within it explicitly as the functional equivalent of God, externally fettering their destructive impulses as God in man’s heart might do internally. Finally, the implications of Russia’s crisis of statehood are believed to extend to all humanity. Only the resurrection of a Russian state based on the Russian idea can extricate mankind from its global crisis, for this idea is “communitarian and universally human.”

Conclusions and Prospects

Hitherto, the ideas comprising the national-democratic variant seem to have

enjoyed the advantage of their association with the prominent role played by the democratic movement in establishing a Russian state and in defending it against the coup of August 1991. But we would do well to recall the fact that “democracy” as a defining element of nation and state in the discourse of this group has derived its particular force largely by virtue of its counter-position to the odious category “communism.” With this victory won, the national-democratic conception of state and nation has suffered the loss of its significant other and, by extension, much of its own significance. It is uncertain whether efforts to revive and sustain it—through, for example, the national commemorations of the anniversary of the victory over communism staged in August 1992 and 1993—will yield fruit. In the aftermath of communism, the national-democratic conception faces its greatest challenge. Having established a political credibility on the basis of a discourse heralding the advent of material progress once the principal obstacle to it—the wasteful and irrational Communist system—had been removed, those of national-democratic persuasion now find themselves at a distinct disadvantage before their opponents on the Right. Not only are they easily saddled with responsibility for the social and economic crisis now unfolding in Russia, but their basic values of individualism and democracy can be portrayed as destructive foreign notions that have led to national debacle.

Herein lies the force of the right wing’s discourse as exemplified in our discussion of the RKhDD’s conception of *gosudarstvennost*. Paradoxically, its practical political significance consists merely in identifying problems to use as material for elaborating its Manichaeian claims concerning the nefarious work of Russia’s enemies, of the nation’s consequent suffering, and of Russia’s unfulfilled mission in the world. In this respect, the absence of a practical program may count as the discourse’s foremost political strength. Whereas by its own pragmatic standard of demonstrable results, the national-democratic conception can be judged and found wanting, the same is not true of the national-autocratic one. For the latter derives its normative core from mystical principles such as the Russian idea which serve to (re)interpret whatever demonstrable results are under consideration. Thus, any failures, problems, or calamities can never, within the structure of the discourse, trace themselves back to a flawed conception. Rather, these failures and problems can only appear as the work of those dark forces seeking Russia’s ruin. When transposed onto the symbolic realm, difficulties experienced in the practical order serve to bolster, rather than to discredit, the claims of national-autocratic ideology.

To conclude, in the present contest over Russian national-political identity a certain advantage seems to have passed to the right wing. In the same way in which Russian nationalism has historically found an antidote to backwardness and poverty in the celebration of something greater than a nation-state—an empire, a mission—to which Russia’s name has been affixed, so the

presentation of its symbols—the Russian state, the Russian idea—functions to shift consciousness from the mundane onto an eschatological plane. On this level, the “real” Russia assumes larger-than-life proportions, offering ample sanctuary to those who have wearied of the struggle to cope, to fathom, and to endure. During a time of profound transition, when problems seem to dwarf all practical remedies and when the prospects appear hopeless, the purveyors of this conception of national-political identity can portray their construct as the single alternative to catastrophe. Should the pragmatic orientation of Russia’s national-democrats falter and ultimately fail, then the initiative would appear to belong to this alternative, regardless of which political leaders or groups at the time may seize it.

Notes

¹ See Michael E. Urban, “State, Property and Political Society in Post-Communist Russia: In Search of the Political Center,” A. Jones and C. Saivetz, eds., *In Search of Pluralism in Soviet and Post-Soviet Politics* (Boulder, CO: Westview, forthcoming).

² I have excluded from the political spectrum of Russia its fundamentally anti-political forces—Communists and fascists. For an analysis of the orientation evinced by these parties and groups, see Joel C. Moses, “The Challenge to Soviet Democracy from the Political Right,” R. Huber and D. Kelley, eds., *Perestroika-Era Politics* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1991), pp. 105-127.

³ Murray Edelman, *Constructing the Political Spectacle* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

⁴ *Budushchee dlya vsekh* (Program of the RPR adopted at its Third Congress, Moscow 27-28, June 1992), p.1.

⁵ *Programma deistvii Respublikanskoi partii Rossyskoi Federatsii: «Budushchee Rossii»* (RPR “Action Program” drafted for Third Party Congress, Moscow 27-28 June 1992), pp. 2,15.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 13,15.

⁷ *Budushchee dlya vsekh*, p.8.

⁸ *The Way of Progress and Social Democracy: The Program of the SDPR* (Moscow: Socium, 1991), pp.10, 37, 38.

⁹ *What the Social Democrats Really Want* (Moscow: Socium, 1992), pp. 7, 8.

¹⁰ *What the Social Democrats...*, p. 9.

¹¹ *The Way of Progress...*, pp. 7-10.

¹² «Doklad na III Sezda DPR predsedatelya partii Travkina N.I.», *Materialy III Sezda DPR (7-8 dekabrya 1991 g.* (Moscow, 1992), p.11.

¹³ Travkin, *Programme of the Democratic Party of Russia*, p.1.

¹⁴ *Programme* (of the DPR), p.7.

¹⁵ *Obozrevatel*, Nos. 2-3 (February, 1992), pp.12-17.

¹⁶ Viktor Aksyuchits, «Ispytanie russkoi idei» (unpublished manuscript, Moscow, June 1992).