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Russia

The Anticapitalist Left and Social Struggles

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The language of the contemporary radical left in Russia seems surprisingly antiquated. That concerns not only the habit, bad but forgivable, of using phraseology. Such linguistic stagnation also testifies to the ossification of thought.

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We have to ask ourselves, for example, what this association of words means; "work in the left milieu"? Does that indicate the technological process of association or the redistribution of resources? And "work with the workers" or "with youth", what is that? Is it the development of the movement or its instrumentalisation and adaptation to the tasks of its own reproduction? Accusing those closest to you of "reformism" deserves a particular mention; it goes hand in hand with the demonstration of one's own "revolutionarism". Those who strut around with such phraseology are in no way trying to understand why and how in this concrete society the revolution can and must take place. Because the revolution is not the result of the circumstances of people's lives, however unbearable they may be, but the outcome of people's activity in these circumstances.

In our opinion it is time to put an end to the existence of a left which conceives of itself as an industry producing ready-made answers, with no sell-by date indicated and which, moreover, are neither taken back nor exchanged. Admittedly, if you conceive of socialist organization as a leadership that is irreplaceable and by definition "effective", it would be difficult to find a better model. The problem it is that in objective reality there is no place for such a mechanism of production of duly authenticated valid answers.

If we want to find our place in events, we have to be able to seize the present moment and to analyze the current situation in all its ambiguity and all its contradictions.

The trade unions

The trade-union organizations have constituted the biggest and most advanced part of the social movement in Russia during the last years of the USSR and the post-Soviet era. At present, they appear to be social forces that are organized and consistent in their struggles, and their importance is constantly growing. However, an attempt at an objective appreciation (even quantitative) of the scale and level of activity of the trade unions in Russia inevitably encounters considerable difficulties, which concern in the first place methodology.

At the present time, the Russian economy employs approximately 69 million people, to whom it is no doubt necessary to add approximately 5 million unemployed (the employment agencies record approximately 1.5 million). The total number of members of the various trade unions comes to 31,5 million citizens of the Federation of Russia, if we take the figures of the unions themselves. Among them, the FNPR (1) organises 29 million members (91.2 per cent of all trade unionists), the Pan- Russian Confederation of Labour up to 1.5 million members (4.7 per cent), Sotsprof (2) up to 500,000 (1.6 per cent), the other federations and the independent organizations approximately another half-million (1.6 per cent).

Thus, trade-union activity concerns 42.5 per cent of Russian workers. In comparison, in France, the Netherlands and Spain, this figure does not exceed 15 per cent; in Germany, Switzerland, Italy, Portugal, Austria and Britain, it is between 20 per cent and 40 per cent; in Norway, Belgium, Denmark and Sweden, between 50 per cent and 90 per

cent. At first sight, the table seems fully reassuring. But, paradoxically, the level of participation of Russian workers in trade unions can only be regarded as extremely low.

Across the world trade-union activity is by no means homogeneous. There exist not only serious differences but also divergences concerning forms of organization, the level of work and of trade-union activity. The small trade unions of France and Spain seem to be in the vanguard of working-class struggles. To be active in them, according to their conception, resembles what here would correspond to membership of political organizations. Moreover, the influence of these unions, their capacity to mobilize and to organize strikes extends considerably beyond their militant base in the strict sense of the term. Collective struggles and collective agreements involve in these countries 70 to 90 per cent of workers. There is also a "Scandinavian" trade union model: that of an organization whose role of mechanism of redistribution of the benefits of the Welfare State is inscribed in law. These unions have a very large membership (since obtaining social protection depends on membership of a trade union) They are strongly centralized, with a heavy apparatus, whose decisions are seldom taken as a result of open debate, but which has a direct influence on the organization of production, outside processes of collective discussion.

It is obvious that the situation of the Russian trade unions corresponds to neither one nor the other model. Consequently, as a general rule, it more or less resembles the two models at the same time. It is certainly possible, although not always pertinent, to draw a parallel between the combative unions of France and the "alternative" unions of Russia (although they do not stand comparison either as concerns the level of membership or, even more so, their influence, they do use similar methods of struggle and organization). But to define the FNPR, strictly following the same parallel, as a "yellow" trade union or, better, as a trade union "with a yellow leadership", would raise serious and well-founded doubts.

The "alternative" unions in Russia come from the wave of perestroika and the rise of the social movement, in which they played a central role. However, the rapid decline of social activism, engendered by the cruel disillusion with the ideals of "democratic capitalism", had as a consequence that these trade unions were not formed as mass organizations of the working class. They manage to maintain themselves as mass organizations only in some sectors, where the working class is solidly united and where there is a high concentration of workers within the framework of the enterprise: in the coal branch the NPGR (3), in transport the RPD (4), the RPLBJ (5), the pilots' unions, the air controllers. In all the other sectors, the "alternative" trade unions are only small groups of the conscious minority of workers.

Today, all the independent trade unions represent in Russia only 7-8 per cent of organized workers (i.e. 3 to 3.5 per cent of all workers). However it is within this small segment of the social movement that there are currently taking place extraordinarily important processes for the whole of society, above all linked to the appearance and the development of independent organized labour in the multinationals and the large Russian corporations. It is the syndrome of the ever greater demand for collective self-organisation of the class. Such trade unions are coming into existence in new contexts, in the milieu of young workers, in companies which are experiencing the new generation of management (often foreign), in other words outside the old work relationships founded in the "Soviet" enterprises on the inter-class interests "of the whole of the personnel", from the manager to the cleaning lady.

This representation was preserved for a long time because of the partial and paradoxical coincidence of the interests of the workers and the old body of management on the question of safeguarding the company, the workplaces, the vertical relationships between work teams and the administration of the company. Furthermore, this arrangement reached the apogee of its development a few years after the end of the Soviet Union, in the middle of the 1990s, in the middle of the movement of privatizations. "We do not give to foreigners! ": this slogan united the workers and the managers "of the old generation", linked to the work teams, in tens and hundreds of companies, as with the example of the TsBK in Vyborg (6).

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The FNPR, in its current conception of itself, that is, basically, as a whole system of corporatist relations inside the enterprise, is the product of this contradiction and this paradoxical situation. Consequently, at the moment when the process of redistribution of property was finished, when the conflict between the leaders and owners of "the old generation" and "the new generation" became secondary, overshadowed by the opposition between the classes, the terrain on which this organization had grown and maintained itself disappeared. This is reflected in the change of the political loyalties of the federation, which changed from the KPRF (7) to United Russia (8). Now that the time of paternalism and inter-class unity has gone, there comes the moment to prostrate themselves at the feet of the victor.

For the victorious bourgeoisie the FNPR thus appeared not to be necessary. It does not defend the workers (and even often betrays their interests directly), and at the same time it is absolutely ineffective as an instrument of the employers. In fact, the only social groups which are still directly interested in the work of this organization are the "intermediary layers": foremen, workshop and department chiefs, assistant managers... The particularity of the situation of this intermediary layer is that it appears as the "advanced detachment" of the management of the company. Its task - to motivate and supervise - is extraordinarily complex. Its psychological situation is more than uncomfortable because, whereas it is permanently rubbing shoulders with ordinary workers, it must follow the line of the management, although its wage situation is closer to that of its subordinates than to management. "At home among foreigners, foreigners among their own". In this situation, the FNPR as a corporatist, workshop structure, while at the same time the possessor of means of encouragement - poutiovki (9) etc. - and accelerator of promotion, remains irreplaceable.

Neither in its social composition, nor by its role in the relations of production and in social existence, nor by its policies, can the FNPR lay claim to the name of "trade union". Nevertheless it plays a very important part in the labour and social movement in Russia. But this is not thanks to its "combative" rank and file militants, but to its role as an enormous and almost bottomless reservoir for the canalisation of social protest and also as the most effective instrument for discrediting trade-union work as such.

Consequently, in our opinion, it could be said rightly that the real membership of trade-union organizations in Russia, according to the most optimistic calculations, does not exceed 3 million people, that is, 4 per cent of all workers. That represents the "alternative" trade unions and certain of the healthier sectors of the FNPR.

The "free" trade unions, in the majority of cases, organize an active minority of workers in the enterprise, which lays them open to attacks by management, and thus does not allow them to take part in the conclusion of collective agreements. Often, the independent trade unions do not have a "second level" of organizers and the sacking of some leaders deprives the rank and file of the ability to fight and often leads to the destruction of the union organization, which disappears before being able to prove in court the illegality of the sackings. On the other hand, the members of the "alternative" trade unions, in general, are characterized by a high level of consciousness and by self-sacrifice in the struggle; they are more united and ready to resist the attacks against the organization. As for the mass membership of the FNPR, very often joining the union is not the result of a conscious decision to join a workers' organization, but of completely different motives: a suggestion by the personnel department, habit, perception of the union as source of benefits (poutiovki, places in the kindergartens...).

The serious difficulties for both the "alternative" trade unions and the combative unions of the FNPR lie in the relationship with their own leadership. They appear as fighting class organizations at the local level, but their national structures are often not built on transparent and democratic bases. You can observe a distance between the leadership and the rank and file. The national leadership plays a role of centre of co-ordination, of legal and material support, of providing information but not really of an active and representative institution under control of the rank-and-file activists. The independence of the leadership makes it possible for individuals to use this situation for personal ends. The combative unions of the FNPR, because of the characteristics already described above of the structure of this organization, in situations of radicalisation and of open opposition to the employer, often enter into direct conflict with the local or industrial leadership body, which involves either the defeat of the militant action or the

autonomisation of the trade union, which leaves the Federation.

The social movements

It is no accident that the stabilization of labour relations and the reawakening of the trade unions have coincided with the offensive against the social sphere. At the end of the 1990s, privatization of production was in its final phase. On the other hand transport, the various infrastructures, housing, the organizations of health, education, of science and culture, the pension system, all of which represent an enormous section of public property, had not yet been touched. At the same time, the guarantees that the state gave to the working class and to the social spheres remained an obstacle to Russia joining the WTO.

The first blow was dealt by the modification of labour legislation and simultaneously by restrictions on democratic freedoms. The mass actions of the beginning of the decade have not yet been forgotten by the Russian elite. The purpose of the restriction of the rights of organization and assembly as well as the control established over the media was to guarantee its rule and to legitimate repression in the event of "popular fury".

These counter-reforms were not carried out frontally, but were directed against a sector of the population, while preserving the indifference of the majority. The adoption of these laws dragged on for years. Thus, the modification of the labour code was presented by the Russian government in the mid-1990s, but the new version was only adopted in 2001; the reform of pensions took more than five years; begun in 1993, the reform of education is still not finished. Later, the forced adoption of antisocial laws, even less destructive ones, was faster, but Russian society, overcome by the blows of the beginning of the 1990s and plunged in frustration, was not able to build a strategy of resistance in the long term. Lastly, the real contents of the bills adopted were not understood by broad layers of the population, and the work of explanation of the opposition was not able to compete with the propaganda of the neo-liberal mass media.

In total, approximately 300,000 people took part in the very massive "days of united action" against the new labour code, organized at the call of the "alternative" trade unions, but only a minority of them took part in the meetings and the one-day strikes. In response to the reform of pensions, there was only a passive protest: citizens did not place their money in the non-state funds, which led to the failure of the plans of the government.

Growing confidence in its ability led the bourgeois elite to accelerate the rhythm of the preparation of the projects of reform and their examination by Parliament. The composition of the State Duma, transformed after the elections of spring 2003 into a body of pure form, contributed to this. Thus, the infamous federal law 122, presented to Parliament in autumn 2004, was signed by the president the same year (10). The housing code, adopted in 2005, went through in only one year all the stages, from its preparation to its entry into force (11); and the complex arsenal of projects concerning the privatization of education, science and culture was presented to and examined by Parliament during autumn 2006.

The consequences of these reforms have already affected very different layers of the population: workers, pensioners, students and unemployed young people. The revolt against federal law 122 at the beginning of 2005 was the first strong signal of resistance from below. The protest actions, a majority of which were of a radical nature, took place in almost 600 cities, in other words in almost all district capitals. The first demonstrations, which began after the Christmas and New Year holidays, were of a particularly spontaneous nature and were only slightly marked by the influence of the parties of the "official" opposition, which did not understand the importance of what was happening and only tried to take control of the movement when in local areas structures of self-organization were set up and began to take action. And although the movement quickly declined, its importance was decisive for the subsequent

development of the protest movement.

Co-ordinations of councils (KSs), formed on the wave of the "cotton revolution", attracted the most varied elements, from the militants of small left groups to people who were showing interest in the social process for the first time.

In this context, there took place in April 2005 the first Russian Social Forum, bringing together more than 1,000 participants, on the basis of representation of the regional KSs. It was an attempt to structure the movement at the national level and to politicise it, by working out a global alternative programme to the antisocial policies of the Kremlin.

The adoption of a new housing code and of a series of related laws gave fresh impulse to the development of social protest. The particular characteristic of this reform is that it directly runs up against the interests of all the citizens of Russia. Around the question of housing thousands of initiatives took place, concerning housing management as well as building programmes, the problems of households, the situation of housing funds, service charges paid by tenants (12), rent increases, the right to housing, the rights of investors who had been cheated, etc. In spite of the similarity of the problems related to housing (the contradiction between the interests of the inhabitants and those of the building companies), we did not manage to have unified demands. The repeated attempts to coordinate these initiatives ran up against reciprocal incomprehension and the focusing of struggles on local problems.

The existence of contradictions between particular social groups, which appeared during the movement of protest, is in general an obstacle to its development. The deepening of the process of privatization of education, science and culture led in the same way to unambiguous protests by the students and the workers of this sector. However, the working out of a position of coordinated protest poses a major problem. The implementation of this reform provokes fears of various kinds. The students are dissatisfied with the attack against exemption from payment for education, whereas many of the professors hope that it will improve their material situation. At the same time, the professors in higher education are acting against the introduction of selection in access to studies (13) while the parents of pupils calculate that it will save them from having to pay for private tutors. The scientists who deal with fundamental sciences are worried about the loss of independence of the Academy of Sciences and fear that their institutes will be closed; but their colleagues who specialise in applied science are getting a foretaste of the additional finance that they will receive. The self-financing of secondary education places in fact all those employed in schools in competition with each other.

When politics begins

Throughout post-Soviet history the new ruling class, intrinsically linked to the state apparatus, was the only subject which created its political institutions and its political representations in society as such. We can consider the 1990s and the beginning of the 2000 decade as a form of "loneliness of the bourgeoisie", building structures of decision-making that were coordinated with its interests, without involving the participation of society as such. The unilateral war against the majority in society, which manifested itself through privatizations, required the foundation of a political regime capable of speed in carrying out attacks against the social milieu, against workplaces and living standards. It is not by chance that the beginning of the radical social counter-reforms coincided with the political counter-reforms, which began with the fusillade at the Parliament and the introduction of the short-lived state of emergency state in 1993 (14). Such a system, by its very nature, did not leave (and still does not leave) any place for the opposition from below in its political dimension.

For the representatives of the workers' organizations and the social movement, any attempt to situate themselves within the existing public policies subjects them to the colossal pressure of corruption and the manipulation of the

existing institutions. Each new electoral cycle leads to the creation of a panel of quasi-political formations, which, like a tsunami, threatens to drown what remains of independent initiatives. The big question with which we are confronted is how the movement can, under these conditions, preserve its independence, remain outside of the dominant political culture and work out clear alternative programmes capable of ensuring that workers have an independent instrument which speaks with their own voice and which fights to change their condition.

However, at present, the Russian left does not have the forces to propose anything at all going in this direction. Though existing outside of the political field built for the bureaucracy and the corporations, the left is under its permanent influence, interacting unconsciously with it and imitating its strategy in its relations with the social movements. In aspiring to self-affirmation, the left groups try to use the trade unions and rank-and-file initiatives to affirm their common feature: the ratification of particular programmes. The strikes and the actions of protest in the field of housing, the actions of working-class solidarity and the demonstrations against the consequences of the reforms are attractive and accessible summits for those who want to be the first to plant their flag or their own partisan logo. In the eyes of relatively inexperienced social activists, such a relationship often practically wipes out the differences between the radical left and bourgeois politicians, who are interested in electoral successes or in the fact of being the representatives of their concrete commercial interests.

We have to try to overcome the reciprocal mistrust between the social movements and the left, as well as the fear of a mutual instrumentalisation. The situation that is considered as usual today, and which acts as a norm, leads the trade unions or the organizers of the social movements to see political militants as free auxiliaries, in the image of "give, bring and go away" (15), who are available when it is necessary to lead a picket or organize a lobby of an MP, but definitely useless, indeed harmful, for "real" work. "Leave politics outside!" and "We support those who help us!", those are two slogans with which the overwhelming majority of activists of the social movement identify. In its turn, the left has a similar attitude to them.

So the very first question for socialists, for those who want a real change of society, remains the search for freedom of action in the movement, for a truly decisive rupture with the technicized and consumerised approach of the militant social movement. Immersion in the movement, being present within it with independent positions based on a real political alternative, is the only real possibility for the adequate expression of a left perspective in the public space. Such an immersion, such a presence within the class, not only does not mean for the left the loss of its identity or the refusal of any form of offensive on the political level, but, on the contrary, creates the conditions that allow it to begin to exist.

The role of the left

We can distinguish four starting points which mark at the same time the weakness of the social movement and the left in Russia and the possibility for them to have a coordinated development and a common growth: the problems of the diffusion and the reception of information; the low level of coordination and interaction; the insufficient number of trained militants; the impossibility of having a mass mobilization.

Whether it is on the left, social and militant or trade-union, the movement in Russia finds itself today in a situation of isolation from the media. The absence of interest in its activity and even the frontal disinformation that the mass media engage in are only one part of the problem, although an important one from the point of view of propaganda and the organization of resistance on a massive scale. No less serious is the question of the exchange of information and experiences within the movement itself. The current level of communication scarcely makes it possible to make known concrete cases of repression. For broad long-term campaigns that is insufficient.

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Information on events functions (especially by Internet) like a kaleidoscope, whereas we need it to be generalized, to make it possible to look for tendencies, for points of contact, for common demands and approaches. Today this work is done by sociologists - in the first place we must salute the role played by the Institute of Collective Action (16) - more than by political activists, which unfortunately affects its character.

Without overcoming the extreme reserve of the social movement and without going beyond the subculture of the left, without the creation of a general space for communication, it is impossible to speak about perspectives for the politicisation of the social movements or of them becoming conscious of their general interests. In this context, solidarity campaigns play a particular role. They are important and will remain so - and they should be, for the social movements, not only a method of resolving their specific problems (not always effective enough), whereas the left should not only see in them a self-sufficient demonstration of its formal bond with the class. Such common actions must on the contrary become the field of active and successive convergence of the present consciousness of the protest movements and the unions, putting on the agenda the question of their political representation and, consequently, of the political alternative.

Compared to an isolated campaign of solidarity, the appearance of co-ordinations of councils and committees of trade-union solidarity has constituted a step forward. Conceived of as permanent spaces for the exchange of opinions and the working out of global action plans, putting out joint publications, they have made possible the appearance of broad structures on the national level: the social forums and the Union of Co-ordinations of Councils (SKS). The effectiveness of such structures depends on the precise circumstances, on the requirements of the moment, expressed at a certain level of consciousness for each concrete form as a practical necessity. Moreover, the political activists must still fight to be able to take part on an equal basis with others in these initiatives.

The shortage of trained cadres is a general problem for the left, the social movement and the trade unions. On the one hand, there is a crying lack of competent militants in the social movements and not enough education and self-education. In this sense, the question of the shortage of cadres intermingles with the insufficiency of information and analysis within the movement. On the other hand, the left in general lacks relations with the social actions that are taking place, even though what is involved is not a purely practical struggle, but a social or trade-union movement (that is, the political generalization of such a struggle, the consciousness that a unified movement often has of itself).

As we know, Marxist theory is not only a direct product of the struggle of the working class, but is at the same time the generalization of all its past experiences. This is why the safeguarding of Marxism as a practice of political analysis is possible only if each new individual experience is not dissected according to established rules but is treated as forming part of a coherent social experience which evolves in contact with it. Thus the training of cadres is inseparable from the insertion of the left in the mass movement and from obtaining the political support of the social activists and the leaders of the combative trade unions.

One of the major problems remains on the one hand the capacity of the social movements to organize mass mobilizations, and on the other hand the extremely reduced growth of the left groups, both quantitatively and qualitatively. Today the mobilization against the commercialisation of public services (17) is undoubtedly the only experience of a real mass movement capable of giving an adequate response to the situation and of formulating unifying demands in such a way as to bring hundreds of thousands of demonstrators into the streets. At the same time, both this movement and some other large-scale movements of a more local nature, were related to situations that were concrete and of short duration. The initiatives which emerged on the crest of the wave of these mobilizations turned out to be, in the majority of cases, incapable of qualitatively broadening their presence in public life or of constructing their activity on a regular and methodical basis. Leaving aside objective reasons linked to the characteristics of the present consciousness of the masses, these modest results are to be explained by an acute lack of a broad organized political movement.

The glaring inability of the left to be present and to take part in the movements, although it is doing so more and more, explains the insignificant number of its militants and why it finds it impossible to attract new forces towards it. We can say with certainty that today the left is only to a very limited extent taking advantage of the potential for increased interest in anti-capitalist ideas among young people and is not showing itself capable of reacting actively to current social problems, by putting forward open and convincing arguments, by giving clearly and without hesitation an alternative interpretation of the broad spectrum of current issues. This "splendid isolation" leads both to sectarian tendencies and to the "reduction" of participation by the activists, and to the complete dilution of their political positions into daily activity as "good social militants".

Independently of all the objective differences, mistrust towards political forms, towards the political dimension of issues, is not a distinctive feature of the situation in Russia. The fundamental rejection of European political organizations that the social movements demonstrated, typical of the beginning of the 2000 decade, diminished once the very logic of resistance pushed people to seek an active alternative. Thus, by the decisive "no" to the European constitution, the organized left became precisely the force which could express the growing consciousness by society of the organic link between privatization and the offensive against the social milieu, and its institutional manifestations on the level of national states and the European Union. This is what can be called the "return of the party", based on the link and the profound interaction between theory and practice, between the daily experience of struggle and the socialist tradition. Such a change of situation was linked not only to the awakening of society but also to a major revision by the left of its past experience and its relevance to the problems of the present situation.

Such a revision is possible only on the basis of daily work within the movement, by demonstrating decisive influence on the development of an understandable and mobilizing political alternative. It is precisely on this that the very principle of the Transitional Programme is based, the idea of putting forward clear and consistent demands, which are addressed to the broad masses, intrinsically linked, thanks to the opportunities of the moment, to the need to fight against the logic of the market, to the necessity of the conscious and definitive overthrow of capitalism.

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Endnotes

1. The Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia (FNPR), founded in March 1991, comes from the Central Council of Trade Unions of the Soviet Union, which under the name of "trade union" was an instrument of control over workers. The FNPR kept the majority of its members, its cadres and its property. It is dependent on the government for the maintenance of its institutional status and its property.

2. The Sotsprof confederation was founded in 1989, in opposition to the model of the single trade union and later of the FNPR. Its leadership supported capitalist restoration and the neo-liberal reforms but its base is often very combative and in opposition to its own leaders. However, it concentrates on the defence of its own members.

3. Independent Trade Union of the Miners of Russia. It was founded in 1990 on the wave of the great strikes of the years 1989-1990. The leadership of the union insists on the union maintaining an apolitical stance, but the base is often much more combative. For example, the militants of the NPGR took the initiative of the "war of the rails" of summer 1998 (strike pickets, blocking of railways) and demanded the resignation of Boris Yeltsin.

4. Russian Dockers' Union.

5. Russian Union of Brigades of Engine Drivers.

6. Vyborg is a town of 80 000 inhabitants on the Finnish border, on the Gulf of Finland. TsVK is the town's cellulose factory, which produces paper. A struggle between the workers and the employers led the workers to take over the factory, from March 1998 to January 2000. The production of the factory is of high quality and has important export outlets, but the speculation engaged in by the owners since its privatization in 1994 led to bankruptcy. The 2,200 workers of the factory elected a "popular manager" and took control of the factory. In the face of the opposition of the employers and the local authorities, and after two attempts at invasion of the factory by the police, the self-management experiment was short-lived.

7. The Communist Party of the Federation of Russia (KPRF) was founded in 1993 on the ruins of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union by the intermediary bureaucratic apparatus which had not managed to be recycled in the framework of capitalist restoration, around a conservative ideology identifying with Communism (the Stalinist version) and Great-Russian nationalism. It is led and ruled with an iron rod by Guenadi Zyuganov.

8. United Russia is a neo-conservative party set up in 2001 to support Vladimir Putin and to give him a parliamentary majority. Since 2003 this party has held 305 of the 450 seats of the Duma and 88 of the 178 seats of the Council of the Federation (the Upper House). That is enough for it to modify the Constitution at will. Its president, Boris Gryzlov, is the president of the Duma.

9. Coupons which enable workers to take advantage of the offers of the Works Council (holiday camps, collective holidays for children...).

10. Law on the "monetisation" (commercialisation) of social rights, which means in plain English that the poorest are deprived of state aid. The free nature of certain services (for example: health, medicine) is replaced by a financial "compensation". The entry into force of this law led to big demonstrations in January 2005.

11. The Housing Code came into effect on January 1, 2006. Its objective is the privatization of municipally-owned housing. It put a stop to the ease with which tenants could buy their houses, something which Yeltsin had encouraged in order to privatise housing as quickly as possible. It makes it possible for the management of housing estates to be given over to private companies, which are chosen by the municipality if the co-owners do not do it themselves.

12. Zhilitchno-kommounalnoe khozaĀstvo: all the domestic services that go with housing (electricity, heating, communal space...).

13 EGE, United State Examination. Introduced from 2001, the EGE is the final examination of secondary education and makes it possible to operate selection for entry into university. It will be generalized in 2009.

14. After its independence in June 1991, the Federation of Russia placed itself in the institutional continuity of the old Federative Soviet Socialist Republic of Russia (the RSFSR, Russia within the USSR), with the same Constitution. The last Supreme Soviet of the RSFSR played the role of Parliament. Composed mainly of Communists, it was opposed to the neo-liberal "shock therapy" of Boris Yeltsin. The situation seriously degenerated between the executive and the legislature and in 1993 Yeltsin sent tanks to bombard the Parliament and elite troops to take the building by storm. You can see today in the Museum of Modern History in Moscow one of the doors of the Parliament riddled with bullet holes. The present (presidential) Constitution of the Federation of Russia was promulgated following this coup d'etat.

15. The Russian expression "work in the style: give, bring and go away" indicates work of simple execution at the humblest level.

16. The Institute of Collective Action is directed by the sociologist Carine Clément. Its web site (in Russian: www.ikd.ru) publishes information and analyses of social movements and trade-union struggles, as well as weekly digests.

17. Against federal law 122 of January 2005, which we have already mentioned.