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Things Fall Apart

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# Things Fall Apart



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By **NIKOLAI ZLOBIN**

*Editor's Note: Despair is perhaps the most common sentiment in Russian public life, and has been so at least since the middle of the nineteenth century. This remarkable document indicates that, released from the heavy hand of totalitarian rule, that vast, restless country—really, a civilization unto itself—has yet to find peace with itself.*

*A half-century ago the German psychoanalyst Erich Fromm advanced the notion that in modern society many people are actually afraid of freedom. His model was, of course, Nazi Germany, but it might just as well have been Soviet Russia. The author of this document is obviously a Russian patriot, a serious and decent man, and the critiques he offers of his country today can in no way be confused with nostalgia for its Communist past. On the other hand, his description of life there since the fall of the Soviet state is, to put it mildly, disquieting. His warning that Russian youth is afflicted by "disdain for knowledge, honest work, civilized business dealing, integrity, democracy, and human rights" should be of deepest concern to Russia's neighbors, and indeed all who wish the Russian people well.*

**T**he second McDonald's restaurant in Moscow opened in 1993, located within two minutes' walking distance of the Kremlin. This event had a major political impact on President Yeltsin, the mayor of Moscow, and other high officials present at the opening. Addressing the audience, Boris Yeltsin noted that his grandson and his friends washed the windshields of cars stopped at the traffic light in order to earn money to buy food at McDonald's. I don't know whether McDonald's paid for such a high-level endorsement, but the

example of the president's grandson is one more reminder of the enormous changes that have taken place in Russia during the past few years. Only recently, Russian children were considered "the only privileged class." Of course, we can applaud the younger Yeltsin's desire to earn money on his own, but on the other hand, this exemplifies one aspect of the recent social changes.

The break-up of the USSR and the failures of economic reform have hurt primarily the elderly and the children. In addition, the systems of social services, education, and health care also fell apart. The fabric of society changed with the disappearance of values and morals. Secrecy and repression were quickly replaced by the power of money unconstrained by either legal or moral frameworks. In the past there was a common expression—"Without papers you are a bug, but with papers, you are a man"—which meant that you were constantly required to ask permission from a countless army of bureaucrats to make any move. Now you cannot expect to be treated with respect unless your pocket is full of a wad of "greens," a prestigious foreign car is parked by your home, and your family vacations in the Bahamas. It doesn't matter if you earned this money by racketeering, selling drugs, or pimping. Your social status will be much higher than that of an engineer, a professor, or a doctor.

The elderly, unable to adapt to these changes, prefer to stay home. Shocked by the newspapers and television news, they immerse themselves in soap operas. Occasionally, they venture out to nearby stores, praying that no one on the street steals their worthless rubles or rips off a hat that was purchased during communism. They also hope that the rude store clerks do not cause a heart attack, which would cause them to be faced with exorbitant prices at hospitals and pharmacies.

Children, on the other hand, immerse themselves completely in the attempt to master as quickly as possible the new rules of Russian life. And they are quite successful in achieving this. It is inevitable that the new generation of Russians will be completely different and the image it takes on will be the new image of Russia. In ten years, the entire world will be faced with the new Russia. The meeting will not be pleasant or easy, because the currently evolving moral standards, philosophy, and values will not be acceptable to other civilized nations.

Recently, I read a sampling of letters written by children in a youth newspaper. Nina, a fifteen-year-old girl, wrote that her father demanded that she focus less on her studies and much more on "the ability to look attractive next to beautiful objects in a fashionable store. Education and knowledge will bring neither money nor respect in society. But being beautiful and dressing well will bring success." The letter ends with Nina's conclusion that she is "happy to have such parents." Another writer, nine-year-old Rita, wrote that she hated her mother most of all, because she "earns little money and she [Rita] cannot afford to buy the foreign chocolate that all her friends are eating" ("Opasni Vozrast" ["The Dangerous Age"], *Chitatelski Convert* [The Reader's Envelope], 12, 1994).

This hatred for parents is common among Russian youth and in some cases is extreme. Some good friends of mine who teach at Moscow State University have told me with tears in their eyes that their son, a fifth-year student at a prestigious university, loathes his parents, "who have ruined his life by insisting that he attend the university rather than allow him to work as a lifeguard for a wealthy businessman." This job was offered to him by a school friend, who now owns a Mercedes, an apartment in downtown Moscow, and spends his time in expensive restaurants. The son feels that he is doomed to perpetual poverty with a diploma in his pocket. My friends do not have an apartment in a nice neighborhood or a car—they are poor university intelligentsia who count every ruble. Their only valuable possession—their library—they sold, hoping to placate their son's hatred, but the money only went far enough to buy a few fashionable rags. "He simply hates us," cried the mother, "he openly waits for the day that we will die and vacate the apartment. He has told us several times how impatient he is for us to die. I am afraid of him; we lock our bedroom door from fear of him at night."

These young people are neither from disadvantaged families nor monsters with a sick psyche. They represent the attitude of the future masters of Russia. Hatred, disappointment, and a mixture of pity and loathing are their primary feelings toward older people. In addition, they desire, by any means necessary, compensation for all their deprivations as a result of their parents' inability "to live right." The degeneration of Russia and its loss of civilization are surely moving forward in geometric progression. Although it may be possible not to notice this today, it will be impossible to hide from it in the future. One can only pity the future business people and politicians in the United States who will have to deal with people who are badly educated, uncivilized, socially segmented, reject moral or social standards, and live according to the laws of organized crime under the conditions of a permanent Cold War in their own country. Finding a common language with them will be much more difficult than discussing the situation in Chechnya or nuclear control with someone as unpredictable as President Yeltsin.

But I would not blame the five-, ten-, or even twenty-year-olds for the way they are turning out. It is not their fault; it is the fate and misfortune into which they are pushed by the realities of modern Russian life.

Judge for yourself. For many Russians, especially young people, children have become an unmanageable psychological and financial burden. It is too expensive to have and rear children and constantly worry about their safety on the streets, in schools, and in the military. And it is especially difficult to help them start a successful life and provide them with a satisfactory financial foundation—I would say that it is impossible for 99 percent of families. Thus, many people are not willing to have children. Statistics from 1992 revealed that for the first time in the past fifty years, the mortality rate in Russia exceeded the birth rate. The decrease in population was observed in forty-two regions; sixty-three regions in 1993, and nationwide in 1994. As a result, during the last five years in Russia, 25 million fewer people were born than during the previous five-year period (*Zavtra* [Tomorrow], 43, 1994).

The children who were born during this period do not have adequate social services. Official statistics demonstrate hundreds of thousands of tragedies: each day, ninety-four children under the age of one die in Russia (the highest rate among the developed nations); five

children commit suicide, five die from drugs and alcohol, 1,288 lose a parent through a divorce, 194 are taken away from their parents by the courts, and 237 run away from home (“Ezhednevnyaya tragediya” [“An everyday tragedy”], *Pravda*, 1 September 1994). I repeat that the above happens in just one day! Homelessness among children is also very prevalent. Only 14 percent of school-age children in Russia are considered relatively healthy according to Russia’s low standards of health care (*Zav-*

**The streets offer a wide variety of jobs for every taste—dealing in foreign currency, extortion, terrorism, pimping, selling drugs (1.5 million Russian youth regularly use drugs), pornography, etc.**

*tra*, 43, 1994). Juvenile delinquency, which includes the children of businessmen, is growing especially quickly. What is a five-year-old to think when in his presence there is constant talk of murders, robberies, tortures, car bombings, and so on and he is allowed to leave the house only when accompanied by armed bodyguards (“V novoe vremya poyavlyautsa novye deti” [“New children appear in new times”], *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 23 April 1994)?

For example, last year in the large industrial city Irkutsk, ten-year-old children underwent medical examinations. The results were staggering (except to the powerful authorities) even for the Russians, who have come to expect even the impossible—100 percent of the children had serious health problems (*Izvestia*, 31 November 1994). For any family, a sick child causes financial strain and internal tension.

I recently witnessed the tragedy of a fourteen-month-old girl from Moscow who last summer was involved in an automobile accident in which she lost her parents and received “life-threatening injuries.” The situation was politically inconvenient because it took place in the Ukraine, now a very independent nation, and naturally, local doctors did not attempt to save the life of this little foreign girl. With great difficulty and at enormous cost (the equivalent of fifty months of Russian wages for transportation, plus the same amount for bribes), the child’s grandmother brought the paralyzed child to Moscow, where she encountered a new

set of torturous challenges. This elderly woman has gone through endless humiliations, insults, and degradations in attempting to save the life of the only happiness left to her in this lifetime. The dying child, faced with endless pains, fevers, and brain hemorrhaging, was placed in a special children’s hospital. Incidentally, it was the same hospital that Mikhail Gorbachev triumphantly opened with personal money that he received from international prizes.

It would make a separate story to tell of the many bribes for the doctors and hospital administrators, who, by the way, receive substantial humanitarian aid from the United States; about how the chief doctor openly sells medicines needed for treatment for large sums of money to the families of sick children (medicines he receives free from the United States); about all the infections the little girl developed in the hospital; and how previously used “disposable” catheters were used on her. Fortunately, this story gets happier. A number of people in St. Louis heard about the girl and collected enough money for a ticket to bring her to St. Louis, where a hospital and a team of doctors agreed to treat her at no charge. In spite of the vehement opposition of Russian doctors—“It’s pointless to waste money on her, she’ll die anyway; the Americans won’t be able to help; the girl is hopeless, she’ll never survive the flight; we won’t permit her to travel to the United States; we will not release her x-rays and test results”—more bribes were given. After only four months, the doctors at Cardinal Glennon Hospital not only returned her to life, but even taught her to smile. They regretted not being able to treat her sooner. This story is not just rare; it’s unique. Everyone who hears it has the same question: who cares more about Russian children—the Russian government or strangers in the United States?

Let us assume that in spite of the doctor’s efforts a child survives and enters into a life where he unavoidably encounters a circle of problems with the streets, school, and his parents (provided he has both). I don’t know at what point the child realizes the financial helplessness of his parents, but in Russia, it happens very quickly through simple comparison. Russia has one of the world’s greatest disparities in the standard of living between rich and poor (*Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 5 May 1994). Under these conditions, a young person not only quickly loses respect for his parents, but begins to feel his own poverty. Most importantly, the observation of his parents working hard at a

factory, a university, or in the field to earn an honest living and still being unable to afford decent food or some "luxury" items (such as a washing machine or a leather jacket) causes loss of all respect for honest work. They understand that they will never have a dignified life by following their parents' example and choose a different path.

So what happens? According to one communist legend, more than a century ago when Vladimir Lenin heard about the execution of his older brother for revolutionary activities, he exclaimed, "We'll take another path!" Ironically, today this is the slogan of Russia's new generation. This attitude coincides with the hourly Pepsi commercials on Russian television—the choice of a new generation. The other option is found in the streets.

If during the past three years the crime rate in the country became five times greater, the juvenile crime rate alone became fifteen times worse. More than 203,000 Russian youths committed crimes last year, including 8,000 involving firearms. Each day, 2,500 children are arrested by the police for their crimes; approximately 300 of them are sentenced by the courts (*Pravda*, 1 September 1994). But one can get arrested only if one is too lazy to get away, lacks enough money to buy freedom, or does not have a reliable adult who would help out. It is a horrible thought to guess how many young criminals are not arrested because they possess the necessary connections. The streets offer a wide variety of jobs for every taste—dealing in foreign currency, extortion, terrorism, pimping, selling drugs (1.5 million Russian youth regularly use drugs), pornography, etc. Even juvenile killers have arrived on the scene. Yes, the Russian-style market has children who are willing to kill; they can be bought for less money and are willing to do much more. Any young boy knows that if he wants to be really "tough," it's too late to start when he is twenty years old. It must be done five to seven years earlier. By the time he is twenty, he needs to have experience and be part of the right "adult" crowd.

If the parents have changed for the worse, then there is a chance to organize an entire criminal family enterprise, a large number of which already exist in Russia. Entire dynasties of professional beggars, panhandlers, robbers, drug dealers, and pimps flourish. Naturally, this allows greater trust and experience to pass from generation to generation twenty-four hours a day.

It seems ridiculous to speak about education,

respect for honest work, people, morals, and laws. Why? The heroes of the modern Soviet youth, the so-called "new Russians," reached their success by discarding such outdated notions. For example, in Moscow every eighth wealthy man has come either from the Communist Party or the KGB. In other words, he has betrayed the values he professionally defended only a few years ago when he fought against the dissidents and human rights activists. Of the most successful Moscow businessmen, 62.5 percent have had problems with the law, and 25 percent of those do not hide the fact that even now they have constant dealings with organized crime, which helps them to be the "masters of their lives" (*Segodnya* [Today], 15 December 1994). It was not surprising for me to read in one of the popular newspapers a letter written by a mother of three children. "Hello, dear mafia! Please help me find money for my children" (*Literaturnaya Gazeta*, 41, 1994). She was not going to the government with her request. The government doesn't know what to do with Chechnya, let alone a bunch of children. It's about time the laws were written in slang and the children taught to translate them from Russian into the everyday foul language of the streets.

In the 1800s, an American educator and congressman, Horace Mann, said that "schools are the line of defense of a republic." I would add that at the end of the twentieth century, schools are the defense of the entire world civilization. But this line has broken on the Russian front. Thirty years ago, endless delegations of American congressmen, educators, and social activists visited the Soviet Union to study and understand the reasons for such high scientific and technological accomplishments. They wanted to be able to explain why the first satellite, the first cosmonaut, and the first flight to the moon were accomplished by the Soviets. They all came to the same conclusion: that the root of all success lay in the schools and the system of Soviet education. The United States wasted no time adapting all the best from the Soviet model of education and quickly entered the arena of world leaders in science and technology.

Now Russia has a new unique model—how in a short period of time to destroy the current system of education while at the same time establishing a long-term intellectual backwardness. Any takers for that? In all fairness, President Yeltsin inherited a considerably beat-up educational system, which has further deteriorated.

rated during the economic, political, and social battles.

The failure of economic reforms has endangered the system of public education. In Russia, 2.5 percent of the federal budget is spent on education, compared with 11.7 percent in Japan and 13.7 percent in the United States (*Pravda*, 1 September 1994). Furthermore, some nations have additional nongovernmental funding, which does not exist in Russia, thus making the gap even larger.

As a result, first of all, there is no place to teach the children. More than four hundred school buildings have been condemned and will be demolished. Almost every second school in the nation lacks electricity and plumbing. The enrollments are shrinking due to lack of space. For example, in the Far East, only 73 percent of the children will be able to attend school; however, 55 percent of the existing buildings are in such state of disrepair that it is life-threatening to be inside. In order to survive, many schools lease parts of the building to private enterprises, which increases class sizes. Therefore, more than a quarter of the nineteen million Russian school children have no opportunity to attend school during the first part of the day.

Second, there are no textbooks. New texts, purged of communist doctrine, do not yet exist, and the old ones are in short supply. Sometimes there is one textbook to serve an entire classroom. The situation is even worse in the former republics of the USSR. In Ukraine, only every other first grader received a textbook. There were no textbooks at all for 25 percent of the students in grades five through eleven. Overall, there is a shortage of more than ten million copies of more than thirty types of textbooks. Not only textbooks, but also various children's books, magazines, and notebooks have practically disappeared. I am not even speaking about the more expensive equipment for classes in chemistry, physics, industrial education, and physical education. And of course no one could even hope to have a computer when some schools have not yet installed a telephone!

Third, there are no teachers. As one of the authors of a new Russian textbook, I encountered thousands of teachers. Teachers represent one of the most conservative layers of society, which explains why so many of them belong to many communist and nationalist organizations. Very few young people go into teaching, for it would mean dedicating oneself to perpetual poverty and hard work with no respect. Tradi-

tionally, during the Soviet era, the teaching profession attracted those who could not get into a prestigious university or have a career in some industry. Today, the number of teachers is declining, especially in the provinces. Who would be enticed by a career in which you would appear each day in front of students in an old suit, an outdated dress, or a worn-out pair of shoes? As a result, in some schools core subjects have not been taught for years. To fill the holes, school principals attempt new combinations, such as asking the physics teacher to also teach chemistry and geography and the history teacher to handle biology and literature. It's not even worth commenting on the quality of such instruction. Unfortunately, even these teachers will disappear in a few years ("O bednom professore zamolvite slovo" ["Say a word for the poor professor"] *Pravda*, 26 November 1994).

Finally, there are fewer students. The number of school children is shrinking not only due to demographics (there is still a federal law mandating a universal system of public education), but many are leaving schools for personal reasons. In 1993, there were 60,000 dropouts, which was forty times greater than in 1985. In 1994, more than 80,000 left school, which means that one out of 200 children remains without an education. Naturally, they do not go to work at factories. In the past, both the parents and the schools were responsible (some were even criminally prosecuted) for faults in children's education. But now, the schools are happy to have fewer students to free up scarce resources. And the parents are happy because the children can help provide for the family. In addition, these inferior schools are expensive. Last September, when the average salary was 37,000 rubles, the minimal essentials for school (uniform, book bag, and supplies) cost 25,000 rubles ("O bednom," *Pravda*, 26 November 1994).

Do Russian schools have a chance to get out of this financial dead end? Only recently, the privatization of education became the answer. But big businesses are not in a hurry to invest. One leading politician/businessman in Russia, A. Borovoi, said, "Industry will invest in education only when the government will completely give up its control. As it stands, education is a black hole that devours everything" (*Komsomolskaya Pravda*, 27 November 1994). While the government is making a final attempt to save the schools, privatization has begun in higher education. If the government were to

lose control of primary education, who would employ the thousands of bureaucrats working in the educational system? It is also not clear who will teach in the schools and what will be taught. Most importantly, the government does not want to lose its large share of the educational tax that is automatically levied on each taxpayer. Under these conditions, private schools have trouble surviving as they constantly raise their tuition, thus becoming schools for the very rich. As a result, only .01 percent of Russian children attend private schools and no one can be sure of the validity of their diplomas (“Ne uspev vozrodit’sya, chastnye shkoly mogut pogibnut” [“Barely born, private schools may perish”], *Izvestia*, 2 December 1994).

Clearly, Russian schools are not a priority for the president and the government, and not only because of lack of money. More likely, the reason is political nearsightedness and the inability to think ahead. Today, after the fall of communism, an ideological vacuum society is deepening the crisis of social values. When the government lacks any direction, the connection between generations is broken and most people can not see the future. Schools could have been the link holding together the government and society and people of different nationalities, various political views and socioeconomic conditions. It could have been, but it wasn’t. Furthermore, schools lay the foundation for the future political and economic degradation of society by producing a generation without any moral limitations, concepts of honesty, legality, or respect for the self and others. Today’s schools encourage degradation, fascism, nationalism, cultural and religious separatism, and criminal attitudes.

Much is written today about the twenty-five million ethnic Russians (17 percent of all Russians) who after the fall of the Soviet Union live outside Russia. But who knows that 8.5 million of them are school children and that 35 percent of all school children in the near abroad are Russian? Who worries about the problems of Russian schools, Russian teachers, Russian textbooks, Russian identity, and the civil rights of these 8.5 million? The governments of newly independent states are concerned with pushing them out of the country, while the Russian government would like to push them back into the former republics. And no one has taken a moment to remember how much blood has been spilled during this century alone over “people without a land.”

Perhaps I am wrong—this is not nearsighted

politics? The early nineteenth century Italian philosopher Giacomo Leopardi wrote, “Immorality is detrimental to the republic and profitable for absolute monarchies and despotic regimes.” Whoever knows more, doubts more. Maybe this is the long-term goal of Russian politicians: to raise an electorate who will be able to vote, without thinking, for the establishment of an authoritarian dictatorship, thus becoming its reliable social base.

Maybe new Russian intellectuals, graduates

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of universities, will be able to save the situation. But here we have another problem. The loss of social values has brought about a sharp (almost double compared to 1987) decrease of school children planning to attend universities (“Vot tebe, student, i Tatyani den” [“Here you have, students, Tatyani’s day”], *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, 25 January 1995). Now only one out of five students consider furthering their education. As a result, there are half a million fewer university students. According to research conducted by a professional students’ union, nearly 60 percent of students consider their lives pointless and hopeless. This is twice as many as five years ago.

The financial condition of universities is catastrophic. Seventy-two percent of university employees live below the poverty line. Universities no longer have adequate technical equipment; they have half the necessary research buildings and laboratories and one-third the needed computers and other supplies. More than half the buildings were constructed fifty years ago, and today new construction for universities is less than a third of what it was in 1985. The reputation of most universities and the work done there has fallen sharply; no one is enticed to work as a professor or a researcher. It makes sense. Federal support of science decreased from 5.1 percent in 1990 to 2 percent in 1994. Scientific research and development, including the military-industrial complex, have been destroyed. During the last three years,

about half a million people (especially young people) have left the universities and scientific institutions. Thousands upon thousands of young intellectuals leave the country each year. According to calculations of the United Nations, the cumulative loss of this "brain drain" adds up to \$70 billion (*Zavtra*, 43, 1994).

Life is very difficult for today's students. A survey taken in 1993 showed that one out of ten students had experienced a constant feeling of hunger, as the stipend covered less than a third of the necessary food expenses. If high school graduates do decide to attend a university, they look for one near their home. Recently, the rector of Moscow State University (MGU) made a sad joke that it should be renamed the Moscow City University. Large numbers of students cannot afford to live far away from their parents. And since most cities do not have a large choice of universities, students enroll just to get a diploma without making too much effort or spending too much money. The financial well-being of university students is proportionally related to the time spent away from their studies, education being only an incidental activity to their commercial or illegal ventures. Crime among university students is fourteen times higher than it was ten years ago (*Komsomolskaya Pravda*, 25 January 1995). No more than 20 percent of the students truly want to study of their own free will; the rest spend their time on business ventures. Dormitories of many universities have long ago become underground currency and merchandise markets, warehouses, gambling rooms, and brothels.

Two years ago, I was shocked when I met one of my former students on the street in Moscow. He told me that he had not attended the graduation ceremony to receive his diploma because he was too busy. "Why do I need a diploma?" he asked, "I now make ten times more money than I would if I practiced my profession. When I have some time, I'll stop by to pick up this piece of paper." I later learned that he never found the time. Today no one would be shocked by such a situation. The quality of education and the profession no longer matter, because most people do not use them for their professional careers. According to research on social and national problems done by the Russian Independent Institute, 80 percent of new Russian businessmen have an education that has nothing to do with their current jobs (*Finansovye Izvestia*, 54, 1994).

Of course, if one has money, it is possible to

receive an education. For example, one can study abroad. It is also possible to become a "paying" student of a prestigious Russian state university, such as Moscow State University or the University of International Relations. The idea is simple: you pay money and easily pass entrance exams (or skip them altogether) and you become enrolled as an "additional" student. You are very different from your classmates because you bring the university money that is used as salaries for your professors. For this reason, you are treated differently and judged by another set of expectations. Everyone is interested in retaining you as a student. They "help" you and you continue to pay. Some universities have a direct link with entrepreneurs. For example, an Altai university has made an agreement with a local bank to accept "additional" students who have purchased a certain number of bonds. In order to remain in the university each year, it is necessary to buy more bonds. Some businesses provide scholarships for education—provided that students use real estate as their collateral ("Studenty Litvy uchitsa stachke," *Pravda*, 12 January 1995). How could an eighteen- or twenty-year-old legally earn enough money to own real estate?

Another option is to study at a private university, of which there are about two hundred in Russia today ("Studenty segonya predpochitayut uchitsa ryadom s domom" ["Today's students prefer to live near home"], *Izvestia*, 30 November 1994). But they are not very prestigious because education received there is of very low quality. They are businesses rather than educational institutions and specialize in fashionable programs—law, economics, and management—but without a strong core of "unnecessary" disciplines. Graduates of these institutions have trouble getting good jobs with decent firms. Another question: who can afford this education? Even if your father is an engineer who makes five times the average salary, he will never be able to afford this level of education. Judging by the social make-up of these students, these universities have become the training ground for government bureaucrats, entrepreneurs, and organized crime ("Studenty," *Izvestia*, 30 November 1994). In any case, the article in the Russian constitution that guarantees affordable education for all citizens is an empty promise.

If this situation does not improve, in a few years 90 percent of Russia's young people will be unable to enter the new century as civilized people. Russia will be a nation of unemployed.

Moreover, they will be perpetually unemployed, because all they will be able to do is hustle and racketeer. Success will come only through violence and money. The disdain for knowledge, honest work, civilized business dealings, integrity, democracy, and human rights will have been taught from early childhood.

If you and your friends skipped school to watch the tanks bombing the Parliament—bad, but still the Parliament, though it disagreed with the president—you will remember for the rest of your life that might is always right and the winners are never judged. If you played on the street while bombs were falling on your school building and you were happy that school would be canceled, it will be easier for you to imagine bombs falling on other children. If your father

tells you about education, “Don’t worry, I’ll buy your teacher tomorrow,” and about his competitor, “I will shut him up forever,” and you know what it means, you will go through life with another set of standards. It is not difficult to imagine how a nuclear superpower will behave itself with such a population.

In his time, Bismarck noted, “Mistakes in politics resemble tuberculosis. Symptoms are invisible when the cure is possible; when they become visible, the cure is too late.” Are we not making a fateful political mistake today by ignoring the problems of Russian education? I hope the next generation of politicians does not helplessly lower its hands while repeating a phrase from Boris Yeltsin’s *Notes of the President*—“We didn’t believe that anything was possible. But anything is possible.”



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