

THE FUTURE WITH NO FUTURE

The general subject of the section “The Crisis of Civilization: the Future of Man and Mankind” combines the ideas of the crisis of civilization and the future. The offered notes are dedicated exactly to this conjugation.

1. The combination of words “the crisis of civilization” has been firmly established in our common humanitarian vocabulary. In my opinion, it has no strict conceptual contents and more likely it is a concept defining a big aggregation of various phenomena, when success that people are striving for and achieve turns into threats and dangers for them as, for example, it happened in case of achievements in nuclear physics, which turned into nuclear weapons, or in case of the boost of industrial development that, as many experts are sure, became the reason of dangerous climate warming. We’re speaking not just about contradictoriness and difficulties of civilization development but about a special – apocalyptic – perception of them. There is a lot of evidence of such a perception. Here are just several of them at random. The cyclical theories opposing the ideas of linear progress became popular in the philosophy of history, e.g. N.Ya. Danilevsky’s and A. Toynbee’s teachings. There were three great moralists in the 20th century who were world famous and acknowledged – Leo Tolstoy, Mahatma Gandhi, Albert Schweitzer – and all three of them were against the modern civilization in its most important aspects. The catastrophe plots (war against aliens, robots rebelling against people, etc.) became nearly prevailing in science fiction. Pessimistic forecasts of sociologists arise a lot of interest and attract public attention, e.g. S. Huntington’s articles on the clash of civilizations, F. Fukuyama’s papers on the end of history. Another fact. The academic journal of the Chicago University, *The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, has been printing the Clock set at several minutes to midnight since 1947. Midnight in this case symbolizes a global nuclear war meaning death of the mankind, and the design got the name of the Doomsday Clock. The board of directors of the journal together with invited experts, with about two dozens Nobel Prize winners among them, decides how close we are to a

nuclear apocalypse. In 1947, the original setting was 7 minutes to midnight. In 1991, the Clock was set backwards to 17 minutes, it was the most optimistic forecast in those nearly 60 years, if it is possible to speak about optimism at all when the time is counted till doomsday. In the last two years the Clock was set at 3 minutes to midnight. As a result of the Presidential election in the USA, the hands were moved 30 seconds forward and there are two and a half minutes left to a nuclear midnight. Moods, evaluations, expectations and fears are certainly not academic statements and forecasts. But nevertheless they are an important symptom. And it is necessary to understand what stands behind it.

2. One can suppose that one of the reasons of the wide spreading of the doomsday moods is the mankind being left with no future. The future as a category of human existence has at least a double meaning. This follows from the difference between the physical time and the social time as, in particular, this difference is described by A.A. Zinoviev in his book “The Factor of Understanding”.

The physical time fixes the consequence of events in the world, with the events being just reference points for abstracting the time, and they in their own right are not taken into consideration in their empirical contents. The social time fixes on the events themselves, the meaning of objects, on real life in time. The future in the physical time aspect is what will be taking place after the time from which the counting is done and which is considered the present; consequently the past is what took place before that time. Here the future is separated from the past by the borderline of the present, which is nothing else but this borderline (As Ortega y Gasset said, “the present is only the presence of the past and the future, the only place where they really exist”¹). The future in the social time aspect is not just what happens after, like the past is not what happened before the time that separates “before” from “after” and is called the present. Here these categories are meaningful and vary depending on the real life of social subjects (individuals and their associations acting in unity). “The physical present for a social subject is not only a moment without any length. It is a prolonged interval of time for him, in

¹ Ortega y Gasset J. The Revolt of the Masses. Moscow: ASE. 2002. P. 207.

which he calculates his actions and performs in such a way as if the time does not go into the past and does not come from the future, – as if the time is something frozen”.² The decisive factor in the social future (and, by the way, in the social past) is its inclusion in the subject’s real life thanks to the subject’s consciousness, and it becomes his present. The future is open as a category of historical, social being of an individual, one can interfere in it. Here the matter of what the things happening after will be, what future we can count on and hope for and, most important, what future we should work for, comes to the foreground. The future understood like that appears as a desirable and more perfect condition of an individual and the state of his/her affairs in comparison with what there is – what an individual wants to be and what he/she is striving for.

3. The idea of time, its division into the past, the present and the future is connected with an individual’s understanding his/her life as the one unfolding in time, to say it more exactly, with understanding how he/she can influence his/her life, direct, design it. The very individual’s attitude to his/her existence as being in time is an important landmark in the human historical self-awareness, the moment of culture’s continuity as a specific for a human inheritance mechanism. At the same time orientation in the social time may have different (including very low, nearly lacking in primitive societies) level of manifestation and different direction. It is important for us to underline that it is not always and not necessarily looking into the future (it is enough to refer to ancient ideas of the golden age in the past, conservative vector of social processes, religious transfer of the future into the other world). The direction of public conscience and practice for life arrangement in the future is a special case, typical for the contemporary civilization and in particular and especially European civilization of the New Times, which originates and develops under the sign of progress. The future for this civilization and for us, belonging to it, is mainly the better future. In our case “after” and “better” merge. Our language does not exclude conjugation with the future defined pessimistically

² Alexander Zinoviev. *The Factor of Understanding*. Moscow: Algorithm, 2006. P. 464.

(e.g. sad future), but optimistic expressions are more habitual for it: happy future, bright future, glorious future, etc.

4. The idea of a better future is also two-fold. In one case the future is mainly understood as a more perfect present, it is connected with the growth of intellectual and technical possibilities of the society. In case of this approach the progress coincides with the control over the future as the physical time, the future is viewed as an advanced prolongation of what there is: we live better (richer, more comfortably, etc.) than our parents, our children will live better than us. This, if we can say it like that, is a purely technical view of the future, which cardinally does not touch upon the social forms of life, even if they are evaluated negatively. For example, an issue is raised about decrease of the gap between the rich and the poor, but not about its elimination, about improvement of living conditions in prisons but not about eradication of crimes, etc. It is supposed that an individual, because of the original human nature, is aimed at his/her own profits and domineering. Thanks to an intelligent life arrangement, it is possible to limit, put in order, soften destructive behavior of people and their interrelations like it is possible to oppose destructive manifestations of forces of nature but it is impossible to eliminate them. The classical example of such view is e.g. Hobbes' teaching proceeding from the basic precept that *homo homini lupus est* (man is man's wolf).

The second view of the future is strictly social and proceeds from the idea that it is not just an improved present but something qualitatively different from the present. If we quote Ortega y Gasset once again, "only God knows what will happen tomorrow, and this secretly delights us as only in the open far-off places, where everything is unexpected, everything is possible, there is real life, true fullness of life".³ Exactly the principal openness of the future allows to combine it with the ideal state and think of it as something perfect in its own right. Its image is formed not by analogy with the present but based on fantasy and as a rule in contrast with the outdated, unjust and hated present, as a negation of it, often turning it upside down. It should be noted that mental overcoming of the existing state of affairs is

³ Ortega y Gasset, *Op. cit.*, p. 35

the basic mechanism for origination of ideal concepts of a man and society. Thus, for example, the Golden Rule was worded in the middle of the first millennium of the new age (treat others as you wish to be treated), which specified the humanistic basis of moral efforts of all subsequent development until the present day. Its origination may be considered something absolutely unbelievable for that still semi-Barbarian era, nevertheless it can be comprehended as a lawful product of its times if one takes into account that it is a negation of the governing mechanism of social regulation of that time – the law of the talion (an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth). The idealistic and romantic view of the future comes from the concept of the self-sufficient power and inexhaustible possibilities of a man. Its foundation was laid by the Renaissance with its cult of a man, it was embodied in various communist utopias. Its basis is the idea of the original human striving for the good, human unlimited possibilities in striving for perfection. Such a view of the man was, for example, developed by Jean-Jacque Rousseau.

4. The two views of the future, one of which understands it as an improved prolongation of the present and the other as its cardinal transformation, were not just two philosophical platforms and not only them. They were also two dominants of historical development in the New Times, widely represented in practice of socio-political struggle and fixed in the forms of social conscience. They can be named evolutionary-protective and revolutionary-critical trends in the uprising, progressive social development: the first one saw space in the future for continuation of the present, not seeing in it an independent source for the world to become different, the second viewed the future in the ideal perspective as an opportunity for historical creativity, qualitative renewal of the forms of life. They were not only actually different, but also understood their differences and were inter-struggling, and either one trend or another trend prevailed, and depending on that epochs (periods) of the society's development were called revolutionary and stable (peaceful, evolutionary). Not only epochs but it seems various societies and nations also differ by the extent of inclination to this or that orientation to the future. Thus, for example, the English are devoted to social development within

the limits of traditions in contrast to potential readiness of the French for revolutionary solution of problems; it has also become usual to contrast the efficiency and pragmatism of the Americans relying on themselves, and dreaminess and disorderliness of the Russians in everyday life and their relying on a bit of luck.

5. The subject of the stability-protective and revolutionary-critical lines of social development in the New Times, decisively determining the composition and character of the forces, in the complex and versatile struggle of which the Big History was made at the time, was attitude to capitalism as a universal economic formation. It was exactly about that, about the attitude to capitalism as the highest form of development based on private property and proceeding from it form of domination and subjugation in the society, it was about it being the last word of history or not, inexhaustibly apt to evolution on its own basis, or if it was unacceptable exactly in its foundations, its bourgeois spirit and should be liquidated (in this or that form) as the real kingdom of liberty, equality and fraternity, worthy of man, is lying behind it. The future of capitalism as well as the issue if capitalism itself in its constantly perfecting form is that future was the subject of confrontation and struggle, to say it differently, is the future taken by capitalism forever and thus the issue of the future in the social historical sense is closed, or the future stays a vacant reservoir for historical creativity and capitalism is inevitably destined for death, and the future is bound to be anti-capitalism. Historical criticism of capitalism took the form of a thoroughly grounded project and acquired global scales when the Marxist ideology appeared as well as socio-political struggle of proletariat, as the main oppressed class under capitalism, organized under its banner.

When the anti-capitalist revolution won in Russia in 1917, and a socialist state was set up on the one sixth of the planet's area, these two trends in social development, which before that had contradictorily interlaced within the limits of the same social organisms, were shaped as two opposing camps: the Soviet Union on the one side, originally it was alone, later it headed the socialist camp which included 15 states

in the middle of the 1980s, and developed capitalist states consolidated after World War II with the USA at the head on the other side. This was not the usual struggle of competing powers to seize and take possession of something, which is equally precious for each of the fighting sides and to which each of them has claims: markets, territories, riches, etc. This was a global and historical ideological confrontation because of different understanding of social life arrangement, the purpose of which was that very ideological confrontation and not some certain goals achieved as a result of this confrontation. The socialist society in the shape it took in the Soviet Union and other socialist states was maximally (and as it turned out extremely) orientated to the future and presented itself as an alternative for capitalism, more happy and humane future for the human race than capitalism. Various roads of society's development were at stake. The question was: to be or not to be as to the history as the movement for the ideal future.

Socialism lost in this confrontation, let's put aside the question "why" (even if in conformity with certain laws), we'll not speak about how (even if without any show of talent), but it did lose. Socialism withstood military attacks, won the bloody battles when according to all calculations it seemed that it could not and should not win, but it lost the Cold War, it lost when again according to all calculations it should not have lost. By the way, the very character of the defeat certifies that it was not a usual struggle for power and territories; at the time when it was about power and territory, and that was the Great Patriotic War of 1941-1945, the USSR won unbelievably. It lost when the struggle was transferred to the ideological confrontation and moral stamina level. The defeat of the Soviet Union together with its allies had numerous consequences: disintegration of the Soviet state, expansion of the Western military alliance, impoverishment and spiritual degradation of the people, multiplication of seats of conflicts all over the world, etc. However, one of the main consequences was the break of the ideally oriented line of social development. Socialism together with Russia, which united its fate with it, was thrown out of history. (And for more than 25 years already Russia has been trying to separate itself from socialism in every possible way, to convince the

world that it has “normal” one-thousand-year-long past with tsars, priests, landlords, capitalists, that it’s not possible to judge it basing on a short period when it was seduced and usurped by Bolshevik “devils”, and during these 73 years it resisted, it had its martyrs, its white emigrants, it had General Vlasov and many others like him, that it broke all ties with the Communist past, annulled its holidays, cursed its leaders, had a gala burial of the tsar’s remains in a new place and announced him a saint, stole state property, created a constellation of oligarchs, etc. In short, it trimmed itself up, becoming decent and civilized, but it is not believed. And it seems that it does not believe itself either). The human race was deprived of an alternate social future together with socialism. It looks like capitalism is left without inner or external forces laden with its negation. After winning the Cold War, it seized the future, it is exactly the guaranteed future that is its main trophy.

6. The feeling of the present state of civilization being in crisis is connected with understanding the finality of its victory, with the thought that it is already forever. The civilization has reached a hermetic state, and nothing threatens its existence historically or socially. It owns not only the present but the future as well. The future for it carries no risk, but it is the prolongation of its present, constantly improved but unchangeable in its basic principles: private property, money power, the cult of force, market society, fetishism of consumption. This state can be named the future with no future: the physical future without historical (social) future. The future as “after” but not as “another”.

There is a question often asked in our country, in public discussions, in mass media, about what we are building, what kind of society, what goals we orient to. There is a feeling behind it of some vacuum formed in the sense of the social future. Constantly renewed attempts to formulate some nation-wide idea are manifestations of the same feeling. The question is as follows: we refused from socialism, but what is there instead of it? This is not a specifically Russian question though possibly it is more urgent and pressing in Russia; it also refers to more developed and prosperous Western countries that have no intentions to jump

anywhere. One should think about the extent to which this question is proper. Can it be that the future in the physical sense is fairly enough for the society and striving to fill it in with the ideal social structure is an illusion, historical anachronism? Is such a state of civilization that excludes qualitative renewal of social forms of life, and the future of which is quantitative changes of what there is, capable of living? There are a number of grounds to think that such a state is incapable of living for a number of reasons. First of all, this is contradictory to human nature, the essence of which is not given as a fact but is a preset of a duty and is realized through the second nature – the created by the man artificial social life's environment. Each generation of the society bases on the achieved, and at the same time it starts anew, it introduces something of its own, different from what there was before. Then the civilization's stagnation is contrary to all the pathos of culture, its humanistic ideals, which fed on the dreams of the ideal society. Finally if the future turns out to be closed for ideal strivings of people, they will find another solution, in the most evident case they will head into the past or to some imaginary world. And it happens like that as the last decades of the post-socialist development demonstrated. On the one hand, there are confessions that triumphantly returned to the public space, on the other hand, there is fundamentalist international terrorism trying to fill in the historical vacuum, which formed because of disintegration of the socialist world and refusal, if one can say that, from the ideal of the ideal society.

In short, one can say that the crisis of civilization has a lot of reasons and manifestations. One of the important, may be the most important of them is refusal from the social ideal, loss of the future itself.