

ACADEMICIAN LIKHACHOV AS A MIRROR OF RUSSIAN PATRIOTISM

Walter Laqueur is an eminent historian and journalist, the author of many books, director of this and that, professor here and there, and his book *Black Hundred: The Rise of the Extreme Right in Russia* (Moscow: Text, 1994) was in its time read greedily and excitedly as advent of Russian Fascism in the near future seemed fairly possible at that time.

It seems to me that the psychological basis of Fascism is yearning for simplicity, unwillingness to acknowledge the tragic nature of social being, in which not a lie but another truth opposes every truth. And as most people are always striving to have a simple and clear answer to questions, in principle not allowing such answers, the danger of Fascism also always stays irremovable. But if we are speaking about physical terror of common people, definitely knowing “how it should be”, we have escaped the material realization of Fascism for the time being, if we don’t listen to hysterical persons, ready to call any constraint of their wishes Fascism. Because of that *Origination of Russian Fascism* (the title of the book in Russian) can be reread fairly coolly as affairs of comparatively far gone days.

So, it was published with the support of the Open Society Foundations (Soros Foundations), New York, the translation of the book was kindly provided by the Problems of Eastern Europe Publishing House (Washington). It’s interesting that there is no word “Fascism” in the original title: *Black Hundred: The Rise of the Extreme Right in Russia*. Fascism and derivatives from it flash in the book all the time: “While working on the book, I didn’t think that Fascist movement would appear on the Russian political scene so soon and with such a support by electors. The Russian edition of the book should be accompanied by a short explanation. There is no need to say that this book is not about Zhirinovskiy. I’m speaking about the historical environment and movement of political constellations that made Zhirinovskiy possible”.

A quarter of a century later it was found out that even if Zhirinovskiy was not the father of Russian democracy, he was in any case one of the main “sinkers” of Russian Fascism: using extremist slogans for buffoonery and shocking behaviour, he made them funny, and caricature kills more reliably than pathos elevating your enemy. Zhirinovskiy was the first to discover that a democratic leader was not obliged to lead anywhere – it’s enough for him to shock and entertain. (An accompanying question: wasn’t the horrible Union of Russian People such a semi-decorative organization as the LDPR (Liberal Democratic Party of Russia)? In 1917 and later these savers of the Motherland didn’t show themselves in any way.) But at the moment Zhirinovskiy appeared on the scene, W. Laqueur seriously thought what exactly had elevated him. It turned out that it was “Russian inclination to radicalism and extremism, to boundless, far exceeding the limits of common sense following an idea and an ideal”. So to speak, socialism in other countries led to democracy and social security, and the Russians turned it into a horror. So, how monstrous Russian nationalism will be if it is “explosive power” in case of more moderate people?!

At the same time, Laqueur “understands well the indignation and humility, which many Russians feel at this critical period”: “Here there can’t be considerable disagreements between Russian right-wing and left-wing patriots. There is no moral or historical law prescribing nations or societies to commit suicide”. “Secessionists can be included in the list of democracy’s grave-diggers, those who use the newly acquired freedom not for reconciliation and compromises but for attacks at each other and Russia and who in the twinkling of an eye turned from the suppressed into suppressors”.

At the same time, “Russian nationalists are fairly eloquent when they express their dissatisfaction with capitalism or complain on it, however, they did not offer any alternative – only general trite reflections and discussions of national interests and national solidarity”. Vladimir Solovyev wrote about that: “Our nationalism wishes to destroy Turkey and Austria, divide Germany, annex Constantinople and, if there is an opportunity, even India. If we are asked what we

can offer the mankind as a compensation for the destroyed and the annexed, what contribution in the form of cultural or spiritual principles we made to the world history, we have to either keep silent or escape with phrases meaning nothing”.

And “there was a roundtable held in Moscow in 1991, where the reasons of limited attractiveness of patriotic movement were discussed. Yu.D. Rechkalov (I have no idea who he is, but he surely knows his business. – A.M.), who took part in the discussion, supposed that the reason for that is the Orthodoxy of patriots and their biased yearning to look at the Russian history through the spectacles of mythology: only the Russian Orthodox are the true Russians; market and democracy are a priori evil; the last tsar is obligatory mentioned only in sugar-coated tones; the adepts of the movement see Stolypin as a fundamentalist, protector of autocracy, who racked his brains every moment of his life as to how to strengthen his absolute power”.

I have nothing against inspiring daydreams – if they don’t close the ways to development and success. Laqueur names academician Likhachov as nearly the only outstanding figure, whose patriotism does not come down to settlement of accounts with enemies: “Likhachov, for example, said many times that there is a key difference between patriotism, love for one’s country, and nationalism, hatred to other countries”; “conscientious love for one’s nation cannot be combined with hatred to other nations”.

It would be wonderful but only love for one’s nation not only can but is without fail combined with hatred to everything that threatens the object of love. And as all competing nations are a threat to each other in some respect, the inevitable consequence of international competition is inter-national hostility or dislike – only its intensity may vary. As only the highest intensity turns patriotism into nationalism – into a secular religion, idolizing the nation. Because of that nationalists can’t come to an agreement – compromises are impossible when we are speaking about sacred things. Nationalism did not accidentally come to the historical scene together with religion’s weakening – it provided an alternative

form of existential protection for humans, protection from feeling ephemeral and defenseless, which anyone with enough imagination can't fail to feel.

However, Likhachov's views cannot be evaluated by a couple of may be accidental quotations. Happily, now we have his detailed spiritual biography at our disposal, written by Vladislav Zubok, Professor of the London School of Economics and Political Science, – *Dmitry Likhachov: Life and Century* (St. Petersburg: Vita Nova, 2016).

So, since early childhood Mitya reached out for “everything referring to ‘Holy Russia’. ...In 1992, Likhachov wrote: “The words ‘Holy Russia’ were often heard in pre-revolutionary Russia. They were pronounced when people went, drove or took a boat on a pilgrimage, and that was done often: they went to bow their heads to an icon, relics, just went to some holy place. They were remembered when people heard bad news from the frontline or news about a poor harvest, natural calamity, they prayed and believed: ‘God will not allow Holy Russia die’. The images of Holy Russia were a spiritual counterweight of the state, these holy symbols eloquently spoke about the other Russia, existing as if outside the troubles, cruelties and despotism that took place every day”.

His parents – his father was a successful engineer – “supported liberal initiatives but on the whole stayed rather conservative. The family roots nourished patriotism – the feeling of belonging to Russian history and love for Russian literature”. The idea of origin of “the all-Russian self-consciousness based on ‘national culture’” was spread at approximately the same time, and “formation of the big” was to start from love to “small motherland”, and St. Petersburg became such a small motherland for young Mitya. He admired magnificent St. Petersburg but at the same time “was choking from pity” to peasants, who came to the city “to do exhausting work”. Only Tolstoy among the Russian geniuses had courage to say aloud: “People are not moaning anywhere, that was thought up by liberals”.

“Mitya's naïve patriotic views were pitilessly corrected by the life when the Soviets were in power. And still the echoes of that ideology, saturated with sincere compassion and love for ‘common Russian people’, will not die even when

Likhachov becomes a part of the Soviet academic elite and a well-known public figure” (even in his declining years he dreamed about the union of some “peasant” and urban intelligentsia). The narodnik movement with its anti-statehood and actually anti-culture could not in any way form a common imperial self-consciousness, capable to provide a more powerful existential protection than nationalist fantasies; Russian nationalists’ striving to identify the imperial with the Russian gave an especially powerful trump card to all national secessionists. Notwithstanding the fact that “St. Petersburg elite of the Silver Age determined its identity in cultural and imperial and not ethnic and national categories”, the empire disintegrated, and only the Bolsheviks managed to restore it with iron and blood, and they at first saw “the Russian dream” as the main rival of their international fairytale. Likhachov’s trip to the Russian North in 1921 generated a dream “to combine St. Petersburg culture of the Silver Age with medieval culture, popular culture, passed over from one generation to the other. Likhachov’s academic work and his public activities will be tied in future with this idea”.

After the horrors on the Solovetsky Islands and frights of the Leningrad siege, Likhachov worked on his doctoral thesis without taking off his sheepskin jacket from the Solovki, in the non-heated library of the Kazan University, it was titled “National Self-consciousness of Old Russia”: “Likhachov writes about ‘the feeling of love for the Motherland as a live creature’”, – and it seems to me that no other love exists – we’re capable to love only some anthropomorphous image. “O, my Russia! My wife!”...

Though Messianic dreams were alien to him: “In Likhachov’s opinion, the idea of ‘the Third Rome’ was a spiritual dream of some ideologists of the Church, and the Moscow state wanted recognition and a worthy place ‘in a difficult environment of the European civilization’. Russia is a European country: that was Peter’s I and Catherine’s II cultural and political program – Likhachov was always sticking to this point of view”.

At first sight, this point of view is fairly sensible: where else to look for a place for oneself if not in the most powerful and developed not only materially but

also scientifically, culturally civilization? And if someone doubts a possibility to divide cultures into more or less developed, the word “developed” can be replaced by “influential”. So, a striving to join the civilization of the strongest and the most influential is more than natural. But is the so-called civilization choice possible unilaterally? One of the most important features of the club of cultures, claiming to be called a unified civilization, is an open or implied agreement on their joint feeling of being the chosen, and if one of the applicants to join them is not perceived by old members as a worthy partner, if that applicant in their opinion does not conform to their idealized image of themselves, they cannot perceive that party as a co-member enjoying equal rights, even if they wanted that for some reasons.

In 1946, when Stalin finally put an end to the international chimera and staked on an even more crazy national one, and started transforming the multinational empire into a mononational state, Likhachov had enough courage to present as an example to the contemporary time the best representatives of Russian nobility of the 19th century in the course of a radio talk, their patriotism “was inseparably connected with romantic individualism and Greek and Roman cultural heritage”.

And in 1962, Likhachov was invited to take part in the discussion on Russian culture, most likely he was recommended by the well-known Russian Orthodox theologian and Professor of the Harvard University Father Georges Florovsky. Florovsky was tormented by the issue of the reason of the so-called “intellectual silence” of Old Russia. “Why didn’t Old Russian culture generate anything outstanding and original in philosophical ideas, science and secular culture?” Florovsky supposed that the reason for that as well as the reason of state catastrophes was the Russian society’s being charmed by readymade solutions of all its problems, “first of all borrowed from Byzantium and then from the ‘Latin’ West”, i.e. the trouble was the same kowtowing to the West. Billington, a student of Florovsky, thought that the reasons of “intellectual silence” were the hard climate, despotic rule and long distance geographically from the European

civilization and later self-isolation from it. And Likhachov thought that there was no “silence”, just the philosophical and social thoughts in Old Russia were expressed in the form of arts and not academic treatises – however, this most likely looked traditional Russian myth-formation in the eyes of Western specialists in Slavic studies.

Well, and what if that was really so? Nations will be always governed not by the academic history but fictional, inspiring history, and if it motivates to creativity and cooperation and not hostility, praise to the crazy that will start evoking this elevating deceit. Likhachov wrote in May, 1992 that “Democracy built on the debris of culture will not do. It’s a pity that the current leaders of Russia do not understand the simple truth: the only chance for Russia to find a worthy place in the world... is our national culture”. “Likhachov said that only cultural heritage and world-level culture could give the Russian Federation a membership in the Western countries club. In the opinion of Dmitry Sergeevich, Russia without them would have stayed an alien country of occupants and barbarians in Western eyes”.

And it should be said that the only factor that does not allow to include us unconditionally in the club of barbarians managing to master modern weapons, is our geniuses. They are Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Chekhov, Musorgsky, Tchaikovsky, Shostakovich, Prokofyev, Stravinsky, Mendeleev, Lyapunov, Kolmogorov, Pontryagin, Landau, Kapitsa, and so on. And we should go on in the same way in future – stake on the most gifted and romantic. The “production of geniuses” national project – the widest network of schools for especially gifted young people – does not require special investments: nothing costs as cheap and is valued as high as national geniuses. However, this project can seriously interest not a liberal democratic party but only a liberal aristocratic party.