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Turning Drivers Into Slaves

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One of the strangest laws that President Dmitry Medvedev has passed since the start of the crisis was the one that dictates that a driver's blood should contain absolutely no trace of alcohol whatsoever — that is, zero percent.

The problem is that this law contradicts the laws of physiology. Human blood almost always contains minimal levels of alcohol that exist naturally within the body. In addition, any portable device that measures blood-alcohol levels always has a margin of error. Put these two factors together and you have a situation in which 35 million Russian motorists are at the complete mercy of the whims of "entrepreneurial" traffic police.

Prior to signing the law on blood alcohol, Medvedev signed a law regarding the Federal Security Service, giving them the ability to "warn" people they suspect are about to commit a crime. FSB agents were never particularly inhibited from doing whatever they wanted, but now things have become even easier for them.

Against this backdrop, we are seeing an alarming growth in the number of cops who go

unpunished for killing people and stealing from citizens as much as they can get away with. I would call this tendency "second enslavement," or perhaps more appropriate for Russia, "second serfdom."

This term commonly refers to the process in 17th- and 18th-century Eastern Europe that, according to French historian Fernand Braudel, was caused by the spread of capitalism in Western Europe.

Roughly speaking, a Russian landowner or Polish aristocrat watching the blossoming of Western capitalism would ask himself how he, lacking growth in local production, could increase his own wealth. The answer was simple: He must reverse the emancipation of his peasants, enslave them a second time and trade the products of their labor — which he could seize at will — for the goods of European merchants.

The laws regarding the Federal Security Service and the police support the idea of second enslavement. Russian drivers were already little more than slaves before the law on blood alcohol, but the new law makes it easier for their masters to extort money from them — and in greater quantities than ever. The new law makes enslavement legal.

Eastern Europe was not the only place suffering from such problems in the 17th and 18th centuries. Similar conditions existed in the southern United States. There, plantation owners also lived on a market economy, selling the products taken from their slaves on the market. The same thing occurred in Haiti.

In theory, modernization should lead to increased freedom and prosperity for all members of society in those places where modernization is concentrated. But in a country that only consumes the products of modernization, the greed of the ruling classes only increases the level of slavery of the people.

In these types of countries, modernization does not create a class of businessmen who want freedom. It only creates a class of slaves who hate their masters. As a result, revolutions in such countries result in more violence and continued enslavement. The revolutions in Haiti in 1804 or Russia in 1917 are cases in point.

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