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The Religion of Evil

By Boris Kagarlitsky

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While the left argues with the right and nationalists argue with pro-Westerners, a new ideology has arisen in society that has the potential to win supremacy over the minds of the masses.

People do not have faith in free-market forces, much less in the government. In place of all the failed ideologies of recent decades, people are believing more in conspiracy theories.

But this is not to say these people believe that conspiracies are behind specific events or phenomena. The conspiracy theories have more to do with a new global vision, a worldview contending that every social event of any significance is being guided by some external and inexorable evil force.

According to this theory, an anonymous elite uses the political process to manipulate and control people's behaviors: The financial and political elite stage revolutions, organize economic crises and finance social discontent. In short, they control the global chaos.

To Russian adherents of this type of conspiracy theory, the United States is the main conspirator, regardless of which president is in the White House. These adherents exploit the cultural baggage accumulated during the Soviet era for their own purposes.

The difference is that Soviet propaganda critical of the United States was focused on exposing the evils of capitalism, whereas the current criticisms serve as an excuse and a cover for Russia's own corrupt form of state capitalism.

There is no talk of the universal shortcomings of capitalism that affect Russia and the West equally, but only of the ill will of the Americans who, for some reason, have supposedly sent economic and political crises to Russia.

Believers in modern conspiracy theories assert that even floods, tsunamis and earthquakes are the handiwork of evil plotters.

We are thus confronted by the appearance of a new and pagan religion. The world is not guided by the will of a single, benevolent higher power, but by a vast number of conflicting dark forces.

What's more, adherents of this belief hold that the only way to counter this threat is not to oppose evil with good but to oppose it with even more powerful evil.

What is the secret behind the stunning success of this religion of evil? It frees the common man of any responsibility for his life and actions. It does not promise him the ability to influence the course of history or even to be the master of his own behavior. Rather than promote the idea that people are nothing but cattle, this belief system is the natural outcome of people who agree with this assessment.

This belief in an all-embracing conspiracy not only reinforces people's tendency to view themselves as little more than cattle, but also makes them smugly self-satisfied in rejecting enlightenment and reason. Even worse, they consider any grassroots attempt to change society from below, including social protest, as pointless.

The people's reflexive tendency to pacify themselves and to rationalize their own passivity is what finally transforms people completely into cattle.

As the joke about the psychologist says: "The treatment was a success: The patient continues to wet his bed, but now he is proud of it."

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