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Russians Want Daylight More Than Democracy

By Alexei Pankin

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Some members of the Moscow intelligentsia have been working overtime to come up with rather outlandish material for the media.

The radical "democratic" website Grani.ru ran a column by the legendary Joan of Arc of Russian liberalism, Valeria Novodvorskaya, titled "Have They All Gone Crazy?" The "they" refers to the liberal opposition, and in particular, opposition leaders Mikhail Kasyanov, Boris Nemtsov and Vladimir Ryzhkov. "Gone crazy" refers to their participation in the protest rallies.

Komsomolskaya Pravda — whose editor-in-chief never tires of saying he "liked, likes and hopes to go on liking Prime Minister Vladimir Putin for a long time" — reprinted Novodvorskaya's article for the newspaper's millions of readers.

In her article, Novodvorskaya argues that Russia's greatest asset is the Constitution it adopted

in 1993 under President Boris Yeltsin. But in her view, the Russian people do not deserve such a great Constitution because they make a point of voting for the radical left. And the fact that her beloved Nemtsov and Ryzhkov participate alongside extreme leftists and ultranationalists in rallies calling for fair elections means they are fighting to help those groups earn even more votes. And, she argues, because they no longer hold up the Yeltsin-era Constitution as a "sacred cow," they are effectively driving nails into the coffin of the "democratic" reforms of the 1990s with their own hands. Novodvorskaya goes on to say the only elections that can be considered fair are those from which Communists and nationalists are barred.

So why does the pro-Putin Komsomolskaya Pravda devote an entire page to a radical liberal like Novodvorskaya? And why did all three state-controlled television stations suddenly feature marginalized liberal politicians like Nemtsov and Ryzhkov who have been on the unofficial black list for five years?

And here's another amazing story. A young journalist among those who recently met with President Dmitry Medvedev at Moscow State University last week asked if Medvedev is concerned about a scenario in which the protests lead to a revolution, and the country's new leaders try him and possibly sentence him to death for his complicity in the widespread fraud in the December State Duma elections. The president, in turn, said these were the most honest elections held since 1991.

Nobody believed Medvedev, but he was actually telling the truth. If you judge the constitutional referendum of 1993 by current standards, the recent Duma elections were like pickpocketing compared to Yeltsin's "crime of the century."

If we leave Russia's fate in the hands of the radical opposition — whether it be from the left or the right — Russia could find itself without a legitimate state at a very vulnerable point — right in the middle of a global economic crisis.

Taking the cue from Novodvorskaya, I would love to ask those zealous advocates of justice: "Have you all gone crazy?"

Liberal Democratic Party leader Vladimir Zhirinovsky gave a direct answer to that rhetorical question in a televised debate with Just Russia leader Sergei Mironov on Rossia-1. Zhirinovsky explained that when the ruling tandem refused to change the clocks for daylight savings time last fall, it forced people to endure an extra hour of oppressive darkness every day. This, more than anything else, made angry Russians hit the street and fight for justice.

If that is true, then Putin should include one more item in his platform: "Give the people back their hour of daylight!" If he does that, he is sure to win in the first round of voting.

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