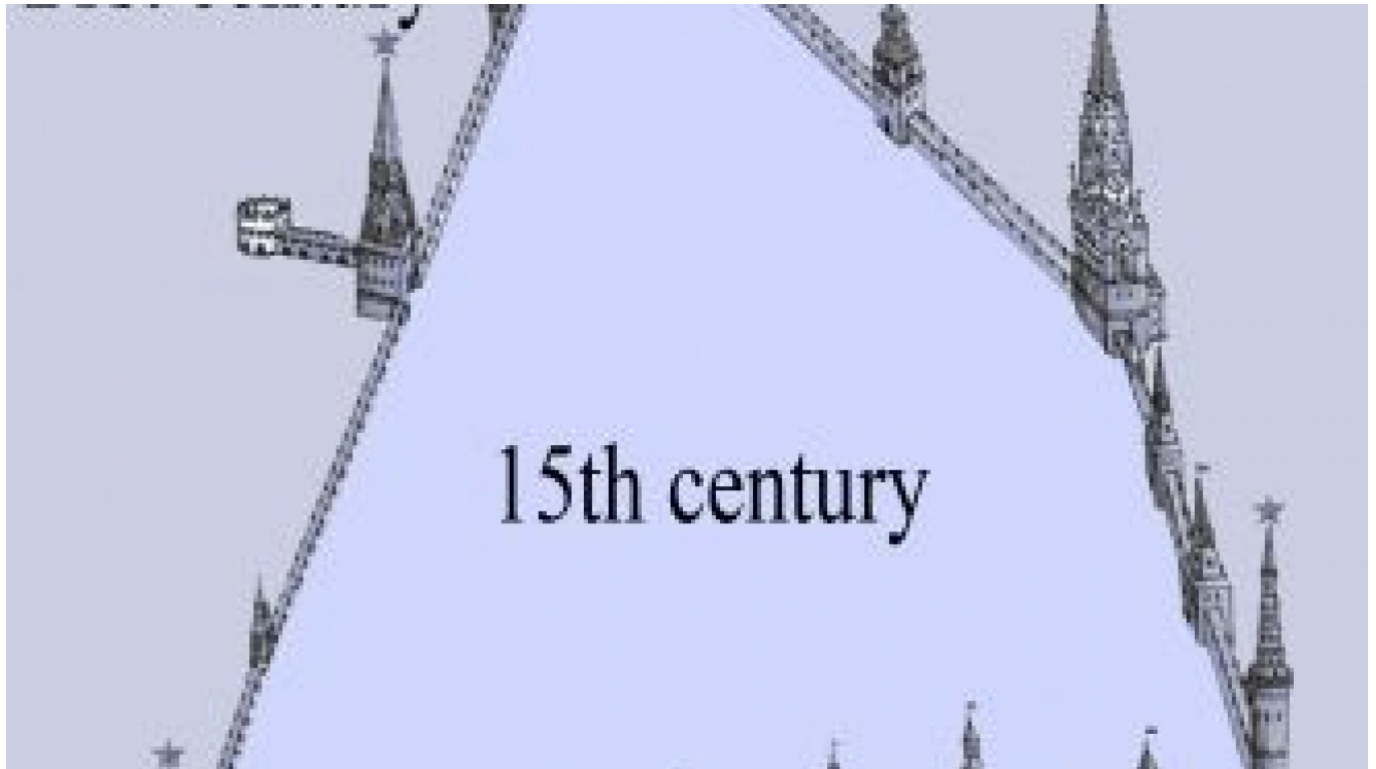


Illegitimate President

May 09, 2012



The brutality used by police to detain protesters at Sunday's rally — sealing off Bolotnaya Ploshchad where protesters had a right to gather before beating women with batons and using tear gas against the crowds — effectively denied President Vladimir Putin's inauguration any legitimacy.

Putin is an illegitimate president.

A legitimate president does not resort to such practices as carousel voting in which the authorities pay busloads of people to vote at multiple polling places.

A legitimately elected president does not order thousands of OMON riot police officers to cordon off access to Bolotnaya Ploshchad and close metro stations in the city center to prevent demonstrators from gathering.

A legitimate president does not stage a Byzantine inaugural ceremony for a roomful of handpicked guests. He receives congratulations from voters, not a blessing from Patriarch Kirill.

Putin's spokesman, Dmitry Peskov, said the police should have been even tougher with

protesters. But if they had been, it might have ended in another Bloody Sunday, the 1905 massacre in St. Petersburg that paved the way for the Bolshevik Revolution.

Some have suggested that demonstrators ought to adopt the nonviolent resistance championed by Mahatma Gandhi, who was able to peacefully force the British to leave India. But while the British might be persuaded by such measures, Gandhi would not have gotten very far if he tried those tactics against Putin's riot police.

The violent events on Sunday have set an irreversible process in motion. They mark the clash of two opposing historical trajectories. It comes in waves, with each wave stronger than the previous one. And this process has nothing to do with gubernatorial elections — which the authorities have rejected — or the liberalization of political parties — which has no meaning in the absence of real elections.

It is as if 21st-century Russia is still locked in the Middle Ages. The murder rate in today's Russia is the same as it was in 16th-century England. Moscow officials are just as servile and obsequious as they were in the Korean kingdom of Silla over 1,000 years ago. Russia's bigwigs wave their iPhones and iPads about while running over pedestrians with impunity, just as the French aristocracy did during the time of the Ancien Regime.

Moscow's streets are even governed by the same imperial rules: The two outside lanes are for opposing traffic, while the central lane is reserved for the national leader and members of his privileged inner circle.

Citizens of the 21st century cannot be made to live as people did in the 15th. It is impossible to persuade the progressive and informed members of society that violence, abuse of power and bribery are national customs. Whatever shortcomings modern Europe might have, British Prime Minister David Cameron cannot lop off his wife's head and say that he is acting in accordance with national customs from the time of Henry VIII.

As the authorities' crimes and abuses of power increase, so does the people's anger. What's worse, Putin has no control over either of them. When he should have allowed the people to let off steam on Sunday and Monday, Putin instead tightened the screws on the pressure cooker. Now it is only a matter of time before the steam blows the lid right off.

There will be no Orange Revolution in Russia. An Orange Revolution is when the opposition wins the elections and the incumbent authorities hesitate, and finally concede. In the case of Russia, there will be no elections, nor will the authorities vacillate. That is why Russia's next revolution will be the ordinary type — not pink or orange, but just the plain old bloody type that Russian history knows all too well.

As a piece of steel is formed by blows from the blacksmith's hammer, the oppression of the authorities at each successive rally will forge the leaders of this revolution. Whether we like them or not, opposition leaders Alexei Navalny, Sergei Udaltsov and Ilya Ponomarev are emerging as the men who will lead this charge.

Yulia Latynina hosts a political talk show on Ekho Moskvy radio.

Original url: <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2012/05/09/illegitimate-president-a14620>