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West Is on the Wrong Side of Pussy Riot

By Alexei Pankin

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After the failed putsch of August 1991, the democratic West had an opportunity to establish a protectorate over Russia and conduct radical political and economic reforms like those it implemented in West Germany and Japan following World War II. Now, 21 years later this August, the West is losing the last traces of whatever moral and political capital it held in Russia as it defends the rights of an offensively named punk group to shout obscenities in a church.

I traveled around the country during the fall of 1991 and saw how reactions to events differed in the capital and in the provinces. Muscovites were euphoric over their newly acquired freedom. State-controlled Channel One aired derogatory parodies of the Soviet national anthem sung by a dozen popular rock and pop musicians. People from the regions watched all of this with disgust and disbelief, dreaming of a strong and stable central government and rapidly losing faith that President Boris Yeltsin was capable of creating one.

It was amazing that people from all segments of society — liberal Muscovites, conservative farmers in the southern Kuban area, state employees of every rank, private businesspeople,

public sector workers and urbanites — sincerely hoped that Washington and Berlin would take responsibility for simple-minded Russians during the transition period. At that time, they viewed the West as a legitimate authority and saw Washington and Berlin as benevolent friends, not as foes.

Of course, that was an illusion, like many other illusions of the perestroika period. The West could have played one important role as an impartial arbiter in the conflicts that inevitably arose when Russia was trying to create a new society and economy.

But the West ruined its reputation in Russia by repeatedly putting itself on the wrong side. It praised young reformers who destroyed the economy and made millions of Russians penniless virtually overnight. The West also supported Yeltsin's bloody attack on the White House in 1993 and supported Yeltsin's openly fraudulent re-election campaign in 1996.

Throughout President Vladimir Putin's rule, the Western media, nongovernmental organizations and U.S. lawmakers waged a relentlessly negative propaganda campaign against Putin. Putin, we were told, was somehow personally responsible for the sinking of the Kursk submarine in August 2000. He was also behind the poisoning death in 2006 of former Federal Security Services agent Alexander Litvinenko in London, and Putin was the aggressor who started the Russia-Georgia war of August 2008.

And the whole story surrounding the Pussy Riot case is best summed up by the saying, "You don't know whether to laugh or cry."

As Soviet-era dissident Eduard Lozansky wrote to me: "This furor over 'female genitals run amok' could ordinarily only have been accomplished with a wildly expensive PR campaign. Now, even such pillars of the free press as The New York Times and The Los Angeles Times compare Pussy Riot to Soviet-era dissidents Andrei Sakharov and Alexander Solzhenitsyn, while Putin has been compared to Josef Stalin."

I would say that the democratic West is not selling out but suffering from a sort of collective dementia.

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