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Dozhd TV Fomenting a Hipster Revolution

By Sergei Markov

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I like the stylish manner of the Dozhd television channel. Their format is creative and original. The only problem is that Dozhd uses a "hipster" style that only works well in a specific social niche. If Dozhd had remained a hipster channel without any serious ambitions, the authorities would have let it get away with the controversial poll it conducted on whether the Soviet Union should have surrendered Leningrad to the Nazis in the early 1940s to save hundreds of thousands of lives. But the minute Dozhd positioned itself as a serious political voice, it got itself into trouble, getting more than it gambled for.

There are three theories behind the demise of Dozhd: business interests, political interests and social interests. I think all three factors played a role.

Dozhd TV's problem wasn't
that it had a pro-opposition
bent. The problem was it came

close to supporting revolution.

The first theory holds that Dozhd came into conflict with cable television operators. Dozhd managers behaved aggressively, leveraging its relatively high-income audience to wrangle unusually favorable business terms from cable operators. They even charged a fee for their online content in parallel with selling to operators. Now those cable operators have seized an opportunity to put Dozhd in its place by claiming that the channel has offended too many cable viewers.

Those who believe Dozhd was punished for political reasons point to the pro-opposition bent in its coverage. But I think it was more than just a pro-opposition bent. The channel virtually supported revolution. This can be seen by the way Dozhd gave sympathetic coverage to the Bolotnaya Ploshchad protests and glorified the Euromaidan demonstrators. With that, they went too far. Stridently anti-Russian and marked by revolutionary excesses, Euromaidan has alarmed the Russian authorities and frightened the general population, who remember the catastrophic results of the Russian revolutions of the 20th century: the October Revolution in 1917 and the fall of Communism in 1989.

In Russia, any group calling for revolution oversteps the boundaries. Dozhd began to follow the logic of Vladimir Lenin, who argued that the media can only serve the interests of the party and that "a newspaper is not only a collective propagandist and a collective agitator, it is also a collective organizer" of the revolution.

When Dozhd conducted its offensive survey, it demonstrated just how out of sync it is with larger, conservative-oriented Russian society. For Russia, the Soviet Union's victory in the Great Patriotic War has always been sacred, and it remains important today because it consolidates society and gives legitimacy to the authorities. It reminds Russians — particularly those who have experienced difficulties over the past 25 years — that Russia is a great nation and that it can always overcome its problems, no matter how difficult they are.

With its hipster ideology, Dozhd holds little sacred. After all, denying everything others consider holy is what it means to be hip. The limits of propriety do not exist for hipsters, and so they cross over that line of decency without even realizing it. But in doing so, they set themselves in opposition to most of society and made the channel's eventual closure a near certainty. When another oppositional hipster channel appears to fill that vacuum in viewer demand, it will have to pursue a lower-key, less revolutionary line and refrain from engaging in direct political conflict with the majority of Russia's citizens.

The conflict surrounding Dozhd has once again focused attention on the difficult dialogue between the minority and the moral majority in Russia. In this regard, Russia differs from the West, where the opinions of the minority often prevail over the majority. This conflict between Russia's minority and majority will be one of the most important political and social issues of the next few years. The laws concerning homosexuals and the Pussy Riot case represented convulsions along the path toward resolving that conflict. In any case, the Russian development model will likely always be independent and differ from that in the West.

The Dozhd scandal has sparked an interesting debate among Russia's liberals. The first group

of liberals is made up of patriots with ties to the Kremlin-approved liberal parties have criticized Dozhd. They do not want to oppose the majority. They want to lead government and businesses.

The second group of liberals is post-modernist. They stand for freedom, but only as an intellectual game. They believe that it is permissible to pose any question that will provoke a response from the public and that it is best to simply ignore the objections of traditionalists as the whining of the backward-thinking segment of society that cannot accept the inevitability of progress.

A third group of liberals is made up of Russophobes, such as journalists Yulia Latynina or Kseniya Larina. They work to destroy the patriotism that Russians have for their country, arguing that Russia has nothing to be proud about. They see Russia's whole history as evidence that this country is a black hole of civilization, whose past is not full of heroism but of stupid mistakes and crimes. For them, the Russian people and the ruling class are enemies and always have been.

This internal debate among Russia's liberals is the most interesting aspect of the entire Dozhd story because it will determine how liberalism in the country will develop. It will also determine whether this liberal movement will gain popularity at a time when an unstoppable wave of conservatism is on the rise.

More important, it looks like there will no longer be a television channel that promotes and foments revolution in Russia. That is obvious.

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The views expressed in opinion pieces do not necessarily reflect the position of The Moscow Times.

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