

Russians Will Go Down With the Sinking Ship

By [Lev Kadik](#)

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Now I understand exactly what the crew of the Pequod, the whaleship from Herman Melville's 'Moby Dick,' felt when sailing to their certain death. Hostile waters surround you, a dangerous and evil whale is waiting ahead and the captain of the ship refuses to turn back. You know exactly what will happen next.

The captain is mad, you are sure about that. You know you are doomed. But you don't do anything to stop it. On the contrary, you eagerly help the captain to run the ship into a catastrophe. This is completely mad, but it is exactly what is going on in Russia now.

When I meet my European friends, they all ask me one question: Why don't Russians go to the streets to protest Putin's politics and start a revolution? The ruble has lost half its value and food prices have skyrocketed.

Every day the State Duma passes laws restricting free speech, the work of foreign and local NGOs, and laws extracting more and more money from small businesses. Peaceful protests

are dispersed, protesters are beaten by newly established "Anti-Maidan" paramilitaries.

Provincial opposition activists are killed and the murderers are never found.

The list of stupid, awful and dangerous actions of President Vladimir Putin's government is so long that it could fill an encyclopedia.

But there is still no protest movement. Russians took to the streets to protest only twice last year. First in spring, to protest the invasion of Ukraine, and second — right before the New Year — to express their resentment with the sentences passed against Alexei and Oleg Navalny — an opposition leader and his brother, a businessman.

On both occasions there was no violence against the police. But at the second protest more than 100 men and women were apprehended, many of them innocent bystanders. Some were detained for several weeks, others were fined. A retired man, who came out with a "Je suis Charlie" sign, was fined on another occasion. Still, there are no massive protest movements around the country. Nothing

"Slaves," say some of my European friends. Others just shrug in complete incomprehension. I don't believe that my fellow countrymen are slaves. Some think that they are poisoned by television propaganda. I don't believe that either. I believe that they have become a Pequod crew.

Let's do some history. In the past, captains of ships were magicians. They knew how to read maps and use sextants and other navigation instruments to plot the ship's course and position the ship. No one else did.

Poorly paid sailors rarely had any access to nautical education and the instruments were unreliable. So mutinies were extremely rare and never ended well.

In most cases, after capturing the ship and killing the captain, mutineers died from scurvy or were lost to the waves. Luckier ones, like those from the notorious *Bounty*, were pursued to the ends of the world and hanged.

That's why the Pequod crew never mutinied, even knowing that the captain's actions and his obsession with *Moby Dick* can and will kill them all.

They didn't know how to run the ship without him and where to go. And neither do my fellow countrymen. They think that whatever Putin does, only he knows how to run the ship. They do not believe they can run the country themselves and they don't trust those who say that they can.

This phenomenon of social behavior was extensively studied by William Kornhauser, an American sociologist. In his work "Politics of Mass Society," first published in 1960, he observed that members of every type of society (e.g. pluralist, mass or totalitarian societies) possess different psychological characteristics.

In his view, members of mass and totalitarian societies were more self-alienated and more susceptible to the propaganda of the elites than members of pluralist societies.

Results of his studies also showed that members of mass societies felt themselves "impotent in political matters."

All of these characteristics can be seen in an average Russian today: He supports Putin against his own best interests, hates everyone who is "anti-Russian" and has not the slightest intent to change anything. He is ready to "tighten his belt" if you ask him.

And it is practical for him to do so. Because he is trapped, like a Pequod sailor. Metaphorically speaking, propaganda tells him that the seas overboard are infested with sharks, the captain is a genius and Moby Dick will be caught and killed in the nearest future.

When this does not correlate with the reality of rising prices and a falling currency, or predictions of liberal economists, the external enemies like Moby Dick and the sharks, or in Russia's case, the West, are to blame.

But the captain is dangerous too. His big guys in uniform can get you, if you say or do something wrong. You feel helpless and you cannot change the political reality. So it's better to stay on his side. He, probably, will not go against you.

This is where Putin's sky-high approval ratings come from — from the practical wishes of the trapped people to stay safe in turbulent times.

They just do not know that the sharks are not there. They are only in the captain's head.

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