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Weekly Wrap: Russians Rally for Mephistopheles

By Unfair Observer

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This week, President Vladimir Putin and Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev went to the gym and worked out. They also grilled Russian steaks on an imported barbecue and drank tea with jam, knocking cups back like it was vodka (it surely wasn't).

This breaking piece of news set the nation on fire. Pundits pondered whether Putin was endorsing Medvedev for the 2016 parliamentary elections, or grooming him for succession so that he could set things right with the West (fool me twice). Bloggers wrote about how the patriotic leaders — so keen on import substitution lately — dressed in Italy's finest sportswear and pumped American iron. At least Medvedev wore a $9 wristwatch — a signal that his finances are crystal-clear, unlike the rest of the Kremlin.

But to really understand this curious story you need to look to Sochi, where Putin met with a group of young people recently. A very serious 11-year-old asked him, in a trembling voice, why the ruble is falling against the dollar. Putin gave a suitably boring, financially literate reply, but also repeated three times, "Let's talk some other time."

It is clear that the president does not want to deal with such pesky matters as the economy. And Medvedev is his solace — because you can bet he never asks the president the difficult questions that even preteens in Russia have on the tip of their tongue.

Classroom Extremism

Extremists infiltrated rural Russia this week. An extremist group was exposed in northern Karelia, masquerading as local parents concerned about the welfare of their children. After budget cuts, kids of different ages now have to be taught simultaneously — i.e. a physics teacher has to tell a classroom about Newton and electrons at the same time.

The parents had the gall to boycott the first day of school in protest, and gathered in public to discuss their wicked plans. This gathering — according to district officials — violated the law on public rallies and qualified as extremism. Police have limited themselves to stern talkings-to so far, but a mass expulsion to Siberia should be on the cards.

Just last week — after bike rides qualified as public rallies — the Unfair Observer advocated a blanket ban on any gatherings of multiple Russians. And hey presto! the danger of this is exposed in Karelia.

Ban people gatherings in Russia before it's too late! Let everyone sit at home and read physics textbooks to their children.

Barefoot and Pregnant

Karelia may be a den of extremism, but Moscow, at least, cares about the hearts and minds of its residents. To that end, pregnant Muscovites were reportedly handed free booklets at state clinics with advice for young wives and mothers. These booklets, above all, highlighted that a woman must know her place, be obedient to her man and must not "wake the beast" in him.

"A man hates his wife controlling him — you can't control the head! Try controlling the president, would he be able to do much good for the country?" the brochure asked.

The good that an uncontrolled president can do for his country is best exemplified by the current ruble/dollar exchange rate.

But petty squabbles with the Constitution aside, the Unfair Observer wholeheartedly endorses the advice — in the cave I live in, we also bang the woman on the head if she speaks out of turn or if we need carnal pleasure.

Just one worrying thought: One day Russia will have a female president. We won't live to see it, but the country that gave the world Catherine the Great really has no shortage of tough women, from Central Bank head Elvira Nabiullina to opposition figures like Ksenia Sobchak. One day, it's bound to happen.

That will be a black day for us cavemen.

Sympathy for the Devil

And in St. Petersburg, devilment continued. Last week, someone destroyed a sculpture of

Mephistopheles that adorned a century-old modernist piece of cultural heritage across the road from a church. Everybody expected Christian fundamentalists to proudly take credit as usual, but this time, they were too shy — perhaps because even the prosecutors, despite their best efforts, could not close their eyes to this.

Anyway, an improvised rally took place near the defaced building last weekend. And though the protesters did not look like satanists, they demanded the demon be restored to its rightful place. They even tried to put up a photo of the sculpture, but officials stopped them.

After all the chest-thumping by religious nuts that embarrasses real Russian Christians, after all the showy piousness in the Kremlin, after the (grossly misinterpreted) conservative values have been touted in official rhetoric until television watchers bleed myrrh from the ears the people rally for a demon. Well, they really rally for cultural heritage, but that's not how the people destroying it would see it.

Dear fundamentalists, I rest my case. Back to the cave with you.

Unfair Observer is the pen name of a Russian journalist that The Moscow Times has invited to observe the most brain-dead weekly developments in Russia.

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