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The right to revolt: the European and Russian contexts

Abstract: Does a person have the right to revolt, or the right to public expression of disagreement? Such a right exists, and people use it periodically. In order to minimise the destructive effects of the implementation of this right, the ruling elite creates special institutions whose function could be to create a certain buffer between the individual and the government. The ruling elite is not interested in responding to the requests of the individual, as well as in private delegitimation, because the individual's satisfaction is associated with serious economic and reputational losses for the government. Historical experience shows that, regardless of the cultural tradition, a person can express their right to revolt, where concerned about the search for truth. From the author's point of view, this ambitious quest for a particular individual, as well as the request on his part to official institutions, is, to some extent, associated with the cultural context. The author confirms this with examples, by drawing parallels between the European and Russian experiences.

Key words: delegitimation, legitimation, revolt, right to revolt, power

In modern political practice, consensus among political actors seems to have been achieved. This is easy in situations where the state and the society come to a mutual agreement without any losses on either side and leads to an improvement of institutions. New institutions, intended to serve as buffers between the state and the society, have become so common that a careful researcher should still have some hesitancy about their effectiveness and the volumes of public discontent which these institutions are trying to neutralise in a certain way. The consensus obtained supports the legitimacy of the political regime, protecting it from delegitimation.

This could be fully applied to modern Russia. In each sub-sovereign entity of the Russian Federation there are public offices functioning on behalf of the President and United Russia party. This is also true of the Ombudsman institutions, Public Chambers and various counselling centres. In the regional centres of the Russian Federation's sub-sovereign entities there are regular monthly meetings with citizens held by officials responsible for their own area. In addition, mediators, trying to relieve the load of legal proceedings, appear in Russian courts. A lot more examples could be brought, but in general, the basic idea is just to demonstrate the government's continuing concern about the society and the individual. A person should be listened to, reassured, and receive a promise that their problems will be looked at. Thus, giving hope to individuals, government institutions are able to buy some time, because those waiting for help will not think about revolting. They want to believe in the favourable resolution of their own fate, but even a formal reply from a governmental agency or an official appears to be satisfying.

The official authorities do quite a lot within formal institutions to minimise public discontent on a variety of routine issues. The formulated 'rules for the game' suggest that any issues arising from 'below' must be necessarily addressed at the level of official dia-

logue and within existing formal institutions. Any attempt by a single person or a group of people to arrive at the truth in an alternative way, bypassing official institutions and making subjective attempts to “penetrate into the history and revive it with their breath” (Foucault, 2011, p. 19), meets the strongest disapproval of the authorities.

Power has an ontological character, as does resistance to it, which may periodically increase, acquiring various forms, such as insurrection, rebellion, and revolt. Insurrection and rebellion have an obvious militaristic and collective context, while a revolt is more individual and anti-authoritarian, because it contains protest against oppression. Revolt as a movement against oppression, as the rise of protest energy is defined in the Oxford lexicon as “rise in rebellion against oppression” (*Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary of Current English*, 1982, p. 223).

It suffices to recall the authorities’ discontent caused by the winter protests in 2011–2012 in Russia. The problem resides precisely in the fact that no attempt at dialogue was inspired from the top, by the authorities themselves. In addition, many researchers emphasise the fact that it was a protest in which the ‘creative class’ was involved. At the end of 2013, the creative class occupied Kiev’s Maidan, having created an astonishing reality of a revolt with new dimensions. Very often the authorities underestimate the fact that the participants of a revolt can be sufficiently educated, which increases the likely adequacy of their demand to the ruling elite and that of the instruments chosen to put pressure on the government.

According to T. Garr, literacy and Western education are assessed as the main sources of expectations (Garr, 2005, p. 145–146). Such a pursuit of justice definitely diminishes the ruling elite’s legitimacy, because it casts doubt on its credibility. The elite prove unable to respond to the inquiries coming from ‘below’ within official institutions. In other words, it leads to a situation that encourages the subject of the query to search for their own way of obtaining justice.

The authorities cannot be satisfied with such attempts at independently searching for answers to questions. This can be felt in the strongly negative assessments of those who are not impressed by the mechanisms of civil query designed by the government.

Is it possible to justify choosing the path of rebellion and resistance to the system? In our opinion, yes. Within the framework of this discussion, we shall try to justify those who do, despite the existing taboo from the government itself, for whom any manifestation of free-thinking destroys the monolith of subordination.

It should be emphasised first that formal institutions, whose function is precisely to deal with citizens’ inquiries and requests, can never be perfect, and, therefore, they cannot always meet their expectations. Even if half of the citizens’ requests and appeals were granted, the system itself would not survive, as it exists owing to repression and suppression, tight fiscal policies and limitations on people’s freedoms and choices. In fact, granting a sufficient number of requests and appeals ‘from below’ would cast doubt on its legitimacy, as well as that of the political elite contributing to its functioning. Thus, the system and its institutions cannot satisfy people in the first place, which may lead to institutions becoming akin to theatrical scenery, or a simulacrum of the true implementation of desire and satisfaction.

But what should a person do in such a situation? Some options are possible. For some people, this is a learning experience, and they endeavour to avoid further litigation at all

costs. For others, on the contrary, the desire to succeed in altering the system becomes their lifetime project. These people intrigue us and need to be shown in the noble-minded process of restoration of justice. One may recall the efforts of Sisyphus as portrayed by A. Camus (Camus, 1998, p. 203).

The need for resistance appears with coercion. The obsession of overcoming a predetermined fate (i.e. being predetermined to be manipulated) has been haunting people since authority appeared.

In general terms, complete coercion is impossible, because totality implies constancy, uniformity and orderliness of pressure. Any interruption in repression or in the flow of a repressive signal questions the purity of communication between authorities and subordinates. It should be noted that such repressive asynchrony can be even more dangerous, because after a respite individuals are attacked with multiplied coercion. It is impossible not to assume that individuals in return will address the authorities with a request to terminate the pressure, i.e. an abstract appeal towards humanitarian values. What if the answer to the query is not a concession, but silence, a cold smile, a grimace or demagoguery (within formal institutions without a specific solution to the problem and easing the repression)? Is it possible to imagine that in this situation all individuals will continue to follow the authorities' directives observantly and scrupulously? Apparently, not. These are precisely the situations of dissatisfying expectations that contribute to an accumulation of the potential for protest in some individuals and their negative assessments of the authorities which results in rebellion. At these precise moments people are beginning to understand that any request of such a kind, addressed to the government, will have the same consequences. Thus, people understand that they are forced to suffer humiliation, which is perhaps even greater than direct coercion. At this point a revolt breaks out. This leads to the "birth of anger in the name of truth, snarling rage, brutal and terrible... the more you live, the more you accumulate the sense of violence, and finally, any ordinary existence becomes impossible" (Prishvin, 1986, p. 65).

Rejecting any new requests from the authorities and accumulating the desire to protest inside, a person consciously goes beyond the authorities' ability to be benevolent, as there is no need for its sop. The volume of satisfaction on behalf of the authorities appears offensively incommensurable with the psychological and physical costs that have already been invested by an individual into an attempt to conduct a dialogue with the government on equal ground.

As noted by some authors, such a discrepancy is the cause of searching for new models to cope with the current situation. According to T. Garr, under these conditions it is possible to see an appearance of the basis for innovative behaviour, as opposed to the behaviour usually required in the process of socialisation. The "socialisation process teaches people to avoid unpleasant stimuli, and only tough new conflicts can overcome the adaptive abilities acquired in this process" (Garr, 2005, p. 60).

The objectivity of similar oppositions is obvious. Michel Foucault noted the incurability of movements in which "a person, group, minority or all the people said, 'I will not obey' – and throws in the face of power, which he considers unjust own life" (Foucault, 2011, p. 16). Similar practices exist in defiance of any political system, in various forms and variations.

As a rule, when an individual's revolt is being considered, the critical focus is placed on him. It is the rebel who is the cause for the revolt which ultimately results in the de-

struction or failure of the system. It is the rebellious man who takes the responsibility for this, which allows the worst charges to be brought against him. Of course, in such a situation it is not entirely favourable to consider this person as a consequence, rather than the cause of the indifference of particular institutions, provoking the person into revolting. The authorities endeavour to avoid such a blow, since they always have convincing arguments to persuade themselves that they are not to blame. In our view, however, it is unfair of authorities to avoid accusations and make no attempt to take responsibility itself. But this will never happen, as having done this, the system will demonstrate that it doubts itself.

Political practice shows that a rebellion can take various forms, ranging from 'soft' forms, which are practices of nonviolent resistance, forcing the authorities to concede to the protesters, to extreme, radical forms, such as acts of terrorism, where, often, along with the attempt to charge a person in authority, or any governmental institution, toll in blood is paid by ordinary people. We are not trying to justify those who go to extremes; we are just trying to examine the dire consequences of presenting the authorities with their shortcomings. We cannot ignore the responsibility of those institutions that only simulate interest in the fate of the individual, rather than initiating realistic measures to neutralise the potential for protest.

It should be noted that Russians are prone to rebellion, unlike people who are formed in a different cultural tradition, where rebellions may be briefer, with no catastrophic consequences. In Russia it takes time to accumulate discontent; this feature serves in the process of generating specific archetypes of Russian tolerance, caused by a variety of factors, ranging from the climatic and geographical conditions of life to the particular economic model organising human existence and daily life.

The long time-period that is needed for a person to awake and articulate hatred in Russia can be alluded to overcoming distances in the largest country in the world. A long road, a long farewell ceremony and a large amount of luggage – everything is more than enough. The travelling experience is always mystical and indefinite in time, which provokes the dream to become a substitute for the travelling torment.

A long trip cannot prevent people from reflecting on the place they take in the system of power. Being on the trip can only prepare a revolt, because people are held hard by the thought of their own humiliation, which leads to a feeling that even on the journey a person "comes into contact with the institutions of government, invisibly permeating the social fabric, and with it the election of the individual" (Skiperskikh, 2011, p. 68).

The constant struggle for identity in icy deserts becomes a condition, marginalising an individual, which puts him in a situation where he needs to be constantly resistant to different forces such as nature, the circumstances of fate, not to mention government institutions. The need to confront a huge number of constraints can only form the image of the Russian as potentially capable of taking part in a riot. In 1903 K. Pobedonostsev confessed to D. Merezhkovsky: "Do you know what Russia is? It is ice desert with a dashing man wandering around" (Hippiuz, 1991, p. 230–231).

Reflecting on the human right to revolt, one cannot ignore the cultural context in which the revolt matures. Ennobling the subject of revolt, it is the cultural context that is created by a revolt in the name of violated values, articulating the energy of a rebellious person to this or that purpose. In this sense it is possible to differentiate some features of the European and Russian cultural contexts. A lot of characters of ancient Greek myths

could be considered rebellious people, like Sisyphus, Icarus, or Tantalus who stole the ambrosia and nectar from the gods' table for his friends to try, or Prometheus who unveiled the secret of fire to people, or Odysseus, a vagabond wanderer. Awareness of their subordinate position periodically pushes rebellion out and provokes it, which we see in the examples mentioned above.

European history could also be considered in the context of revolt, which shakes it up periodically. A person needs to defend their values opposed to the ones of the state and religious institutions. As G. Orwell mentions in his essay *The Prevention of Literature*, "[i]n the past, at any rate throughout the Protestant centuries, the idea of rebellion and the idea of intellectual integrity were mixed up" (Orwell, 1989, p. 275).

Later in the European tradition, revolt becomes a reflection on the excessive attack of civilisation on an individual and nature (recalling the arguments of Herbert Marcuse in *Eros and Civilization*). Revolt is aimed at changing the values of civilisation itself as well as changing permanent values of the industry that prevails over individual values. A European, having found himself in a certain geographical and territorial vacuum, tends to take control of nature, since his rebellion is aimed against its laws. The European rebellious man sees a constant need in the leap of faith and overcoming a predetermined existence. Man seeks to overcome his own capabilities and nature in a manner reminiscent of Nietzsche. Man pretends to be its converter, and conqueror of the elements, like the Sisyphus of Albert Camus, or Captain Ahab by Herman Melville. Thus, in the European tradition, the cause of a riot is directly linked to the need for reform of the evolutionary development and improvement of the system. Anyway, such an attitude can assume that, in case of achieving the desired result, the rioter can stop. But do we ever try to imagine Sisyphus, having rolled his stone up to the mountain? What will be the next steps of the person, satisfied with his job?

The Russian riot, on the contrary, does not seem to give any chance to contemplate the result of one's own labour. In the Russian tradition a riot is an expression of hate for a particular institution of power or its personification. Hate is focused on settling accounts with the system and those personalities who communicate responsibility for the repression produced. A European person articulates their revolt on the need for reform or the need for the gradual improvement. A Russian person's rebellion, however, has a radical sharpness and bluntness. As V. Rozanov once wrote in *Fallen Leaves*: "revolutionists are notable for their being frank. 'I want to shoot in the belly', and shoots" (Rozanov, 2000, p. 745). The cruelty of a revolt is linked to cruelty itself and against one's own body, as exemplified in Dmitry Karakozov and Alexander Ulyanov, as well as Maxim Gorky's Danko, who pulled his heart out of his chest. The Russian revolt is always destructive, based on the long-lasting patience which precedes it.

Is it possible to justify the revolt if it is directed against the institutions trying to control a person, or deprive them of the right to doubt and form an alternative world view? In our view, it is possible, because, in case of a negative response, there is a danger of denying the spiritual quest of Leo Tolstoy, his civil and literary feat. Were his attempts to form a parallel social reality meaningless when the victims of famine were given food, new dining areas were opened, and peasant children could go to schools?

It is telling that the rebellion of a single person against the system, against an unbearable existence becomes a significant theme in the Russian art of the 19th and early 20th

century. In Russian literature one can mention the characters of N. Chernyshevsky, F. Dostoevsky, and I. Turgenev. It is worth discussing the separate topic of women's right to revolt. In Russian literature it is presented by Leskov's passionate Katerina Lvovna from *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* and Tolstoy's Katyusha Maslova. The straightness of a rebellion and its asceticism are projected onto women-revolutionists.

The destructive straightness of the Russian revolt does not deprive it of aesthetic qualities. For example, in Dostoevsky's *Demons* the nihilist Kirillov, living in a rented apartment, shows his revolvers, lying in a red velvet-trimmed drawer made out of a palm tree (Dostoevsky, 1994, p. 214). It seems that in the Russian culture, the proper existential attitude has been shaped almost on a subconscious level. But unlike the Western practice of refusal, proclaiming a desire for an environmentally-friendly existence, love and drugs, the Russian revolt is more brutal and uncompromising.

The dormant faculties of the Russian revolt can be seen in other forms of art. They are clearly visible on M. Vrubel's canvas *The Demon Seated*, or Boris Grigoriev's *Visages de Russie*. Cannot one feel the alarming anticipation of the revolt in *Boris Godunov* by Modest Mussorgsky, or *Petrushka* by Igor Stravinsky?

The distinction between European and Russian revolts, in our opinion, displays itself in attempts to determine the duration of the revolt itself, its quantitative evaluation, as well as in the chronotopes of revolt. The European revolt has quite a definite shape. Its source is a particular social group or a community, such as Lyon's weavers in 1831, the student community in the French May of 1968, the dockyard workers in Gdansk in August 1980, air traffic controllers, or railroad workers. The strong positions of the trade unions easily attribute revolt to a professional specification. Moreover, the European revolt is quite short-term. Thus, the authorities are given a signal that a revolt may arise again at any time should the ruling classes' legitimacy decrease and doubts about the social orientation of a policy appear. In this sense, we can speak about the existing tradition of demonstrations in the streets on holidays, and special carnivals which can quite easily acquire a political context. According to M. Bakhtin, "cultural and literary traditions (including the oldest) are saved and do not live in the individual subjective memory of the individual and not in some collective 'psyche', but in the objective forms of culture itself (including speech and language forms), and in this sense they are intersubjective and interindividual (and hence social)" (Bakhtin, 1975, p. 397). The chronotopes of revolt are urban public spaces, i.e. streets, squares and universities.

In the Russian tradition, on the contrary, revolt is individual and long-term, because patience is an integral feature of the Russian character. The excessive patience of the Russians, as well as their excessive development of revolt and the articulation of their own queries to political institutions and society itself, suggests to a large extent that the Russian person seems imperfect, with a lack of a sense of proportion, which, according to some authors, is the secret of the Russian revolt. The chronotopes in which a rebellious person finds himself, conversely exclude the European tendency towards expansion and demonstrative publicising, winding themselves into a room, an alley, a staircase, or the entrance lobby where Russian bombers wait for their victim. But the Russian revolt can attain menacing proportions very easily, which could lead to its extension. In his novel *1984*, G. Orwell describes the patience of the population: "[t]hey needed only to rise up and shake themselves like a horse shaking off flies. If they chose they could blow the Party to pieces..." (Orwell, 1989, p. 62).

It should be noted that the theme of revolt is timeless in nature. Resistance will always take place. It exists among us. Everyone is free to tell the authorities: "No" if his conscience or life situation demand so. There are a lot of examples proving this. Such a choice is made by people sooner or later, regardless of the cultural context, no matter whether European or Russian.

Regardless of the cultural context, individual revolt may cause collective rebellion, thus becoming a source of collective violence. History is a collection of collective experience of violence. Once Charles Tilly noted that "collective violence as voice is a metaphor which occurs in almost all histories of popular movements before our own time" (Tilly, 1978, p. 2).

The historical and political process shows that a compromise between public transmission, designed to ensure the rights and freedoms of man, and the bare nerve rebellious man can hardly be found. Conversely, the probability of the manifestation of conflict only increases as the pause itself lengthens, which cannot unambiguously indicate that consensus has been reached and the conflicting parties are satisfied.

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Prawo do buntu: konteksty europejskie i rosyjskie

Summary

Celem niniejszego tekstu jest odpowiedź na pytanie o to, czy człowiek ma prawo do buntu, lub prawo do publicznego wyrażania swojego sprzeciwu wobec jakiejś sprawy? Faktem jest, iż wspomnianie prawo istnieje, jednak ludzie nie korzystają z niego systematycznie. Zauważyć należy, iż by zminimalizować destrukcyjne skutki realizacji prawa do buntu (do sprzeciwu), rządząca elita tworzy specjalne or-

gany, których zadaniem byłoby stworzenie pewnego buforu między jednostką a władzą. Rządzący nie są zainteresowani odpowiadaniem na żądania indywidualnych obywateli, ponieważ wiązać by to się mogło z poważnymi stratami gospodarczymi i "reputacyjnymi" dla rządu. Doświadczenia historyczne pokazują, że niezależnie od tradycji kulturowej, człowiek może wyrażać swoje prawo do buntu w sytuacjach, w których chodzi o dążenie do prawdy. Z punktu widzenia autora rozważane zagadnienie wiąże się z kontekstem kulturowym. Autor potwierdza swoje poglądy przykładami, rysując paralele między doświadczeniami europejskimi i rosyjskimi.

Słowa kluczowe: delegitymizacja, legitymizacja, sprzeciw, prawo do buntu, władza