

Mother Russia by Rachel Douglas

Russian groups flaunt racism

Persons linked to the Pamyat Society supremacists sounded off at Soviet Congress of People's Deputies.

At the recent, inaugural session of the Soviet Congress of People's Deputies, Siberian writer Valentin Rasputin was not the only one to voice alarm about the crisis in the U.S.S.R., in words like these: "Not once since the war has its stability as a power been subjected to such ordeals and shocks as today."

But nobody outdid Rasputin in a display of the naked Russian racism, which is churning in the Soviet leadership and beneath the surface of popular discontent. He raised the notion that Russia might be better off without its captive nations.

This passage from his intervention at the Congress expresses not an operative political plan, but the kind of impatience and malice that already, in the case of Soviet Georgia, led to bloodshed.

"Perhaps Russia should leave the Union," said Rasputin, "Perhaps that would be better. Incidentally, this would help us to resolve many problems, both of the present and of the future. Oh, what resources, both natural and human, we still have! Our hands have not withered. Without fear of being nationalists, we could then pronounce the word Russian, speak about national self-awareness, and before you know it, the mass corruption of the souls of the young would be stopped, we could finally set up our own Academy of Sciences which would back Russian interests, and we could deal with morality and help the people to gather into a single spiritual body. Believe me, we are fed up with being the scapegoat and enduring mockery and insults. We are told that

this is our cross. [Applause.] However, this cross is becoming increasingly unliftable."

Rasputin regaled the Congress with the polemic always waged by the Russian supremacist Pamyat (Memory) Society, saying that "the chauvinism and blind arrogance of Russians is the fabrication of those who are playing on your national feelings. . . . Rusophobia has spread in the Baltic and Georgia. . . . Anti-Soviet slogans are being combined with anti-Russian ones."

Before and since the Congress session, Pamyat-linked "patriotic" groups have shown a flurry of activity. Writers associated with Pamyat founded a new front, called Otechestvo (Fatherland), which the Soviet trade union daily *Trud* welcomed April 8, as a new "Russian patriotic movement."

On June 16, Radio Moscow told domestic listeners of yet another such group, Narodny Dom Rossii (People's Home of Russia), which "is called upon to unite like-minded people who are striving to invigorate cultural, intellectual, spiritual, public, and socio-economic life of the R.S.F.S.R. [Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic]."

Something like the pure Russian Academy of Sciences that Rasputin was yearning for also emerged. TASS reported June 17, that scientists "dissatisfied with the activity of the U.S.S.R. Academy of Sciences" had set up a new Russian People's Academy of Sciences, with the aim "to reveal more fully the scientific potential of Russia in the interests of developing all of Soviet society."

Its founders, who met in Moscow, railed against "bureaucratic principles which hamper the free development of scientific thought." But the implicit message of their emphasis on the Russianness of the initiative, like Rasputin's, is that such problems are the result of pollution by other ethnic groups—Ukrainians, Jews, Georgians, and so on.

Also in June, the official line on Pamyat itself shifted away from the charade of criticism for "extremism," to which the society had been subjected since 1987. (All the while, Pamyat has continued to grow, facing no obstacles from the KGB.) A June 5 Radio Moscow broadcast in English, monitored by the Foreign Broadcast Information Service, presented a "balanced" debate about Pamyat, lifted from the pages of the youth magazine *Sobesednik*.

Having termed Pamyat a "national patriotic front" and "controversial unofficial organization," Radio Moscow quoted from Pamyat leader Aleksandr Shturmak's article in *Sobesednik* which contains Pamyat's classic defense of itself against the charge of racism: We're not anti-Semitic, we just hate Jews!

To wit: "Pamyat has never advocated chauvinism or nationalism, as its opponents claim. Pamyat, [the article] says, is highly molded toward unity. Shturmak says that Pamyat is often accused of propagating anti-Semitic feelings, and that these allegations obviously are aimed at discrediting the movement. . . . Zionism tried and is still trying to destroy the country's culture, slander its history, and deprive the peoples living here of their national roots." Shturmak then complained that Jews were represented in leading Soviet institutions in numbers disproportionate to their demographic weight in the whole population.