
Interview: Valeriya Novodvorskaya

In Russia, the specter of 'cruellest dictatorship' looms

Valeriya Novodvorskaya has been a human rights activist in Russia for nearly 25 years. In 1988, she founded the Democratic Union, the first political party to be formed in the Soviet Union apart from the Communist Party. Rachel Douglas interviewed her in Moscow on Aug. 24, 1992. The interview is translated from Russian.

EIR: Would you tell how you came to be active in the dissident movement?

Novodvorskaya: I could never have been called a classical dissident, because the dissidents were trying to reform the system, or they protested against specific violations of human rights—although there were no such rights, because in effect there were no “humans.” And that is now understood. I could more accurately be called part of a resistance movement, which existed parallel to the dissident movement, coinciding in some places and not in others. From the very beginning, that movement set itself the task of changing the state system.

True, at that time, we unfortunately did not know that there exists no ideal in the West either. We thought that it would suffice to create a structure like theirs, purely capitalist in its economics and purely parliamentary in its superstructure, and this would be something like a golden age.

Well, certainly the sieve in the West is of a coarser mesh and it is easier for a non-conformist to slip through it, whereas we had a very fine-meshed sieve, which nobody could slip through. But it turns out that there is a sieve there, too. Back then, we had a simple and integrated view of the world, because we did not know what in fact is going on in the West. We just took everything as the reverse of what was said: If they said there was imperialism, that must mean it was heaven on earth. Everything was simple.

It was easy and quite a pleasure to fight against that system. You did something, and they put you in jail. And if they didn't kill you in prison the first time around, then you had the chance to get out and continue. So, the dissident life was a certain kind of routine. I, for example, have three convictions under Article 70 [of the Criminal Code]. My life is not a long one; I am 42 now. My first conviction under Article 70, for anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda, came

in 1969 when I was 19 years old. Then I had a pile of petty arrests, for three months, or two months; I piled up six of these before perestroika. Then, in 1986, I got my second Article 70. And in 1988, they renewed the prosecution under Article 70, because [Mikhail] Gorbachov's perestroika let certain people loose. And the last time, that was already a record! Because to earn an Article 70 in 1991, under Gorbachov, and this time with a new formulation—calling for the violent overthrow of the state system—took quite some doing.

But I think that's not the end of it, and that I will earn something from the current authorities, too, because I have the same nasty relations with them as with the previous ones.

What did the resistance movement do, in general? Handled out leaflets, organized *samizdat* libraries, published and distributed Orwell and Zinovyev, Avtorkhanov, Solzhenitsyn. This was all useful, in its way. True, it wasn't anything like what would get the people to rise up, but nevertheless.

And then in 1988, the Democratic Union was organized, that is, the minute it became possible to get somebody to do something without the expectation of immediately being arrested and jailed for 10 years.

EIR: And you had the idea of organizing this?

Novodvorskaya: Yes, this had been my crystal dream—to create a political party. Not even an opposition party, but a revolutionary one, hostile to the system. Because an opposition exists in the same system of coordinates, whereas Democratic Union was conceived of as an absolutely revolutionary party, which would be engaged in overthrowing these authorities. I naively supposed that we could have a mass popular movement here of civil disobedience for a democratic reconstruction of society, and even a popular uprising for such noble goals. And it would all be exclusively motivated for reasons of conscience, pure freedom—and other such inedible matter.

So, for four years, we beat our heads against the wall, and didn't make it out of confinement. I do not remember being free in the Gorbachov epoch. We were constantly in jail. We would go to a meeting, and be dragged out in an absolutely horrible fashion, worse than in Brezhnev's time,

and we'd get 15 days. We'd declare a hunger strike.

Then they'd let you out barely alive. You'd go to the next demonstration, and they'd put you in again. And when I had contrived to get 15 days in jail 17 times—that's seven months and three weeks—and I had reached a state of complete physical collapse, they launched a criminal case against me for insulting the honor and virtue of Gorbachov. That didn't work. Nothing came of it in court. Then came another big arrest, the KGB again, Article 70 for the last time and Lefortovo Prison.

And ever since they let me out of there, we have continued to have very bad relations with the authorities and we are trying to push the population toward at least some democratic desires, at least some democratic actions. But part of the people are crying, "Long live Yeltsin!" part of the people are running after various fundamentalists, part of the people thirst for the Union to come back and are running with red flags, but the greatest part are lying like a stone. Right now, in Russia, that is, the population is like carrion and the politicians like vultures, which are circling over that carrion and dividing up that loot, without the loot having any say in the matter.

This, of course, is not a standard analysis for a revolutionary to make, but I would look at the 19th-century revolutionaries, supposing they were in our situation—the *narodniki* [populists], the People's Will movement, the Social Democrats, the Socialist Revolutionaries. What would they have done in this situation, when the people are incapable of any democratic efforts, any risk, any uprising, any motion?

Nevertheless, even if there is no way out in sight, a person is obliged to do his duty. And the Democratic Union is doing its duty. We go to meetings, write declarations, distribute leaflets. We are quite scrupulous as far as calls for armed uprising go because, unfortunately, the riff-raff do not know how to judge where to stop. We have too strong a tradition of *pugachovshchina*,¹ of wiping out everybody and then launching some new totalitarianism. But, without a doubt, armed self-defense of the people from total annihilation by the authorities is legitimate, although, in any case, this is not the best option.

EIR: Do you know the Rütli Oath, from Schiller's *Wilhelm Tell*? "When the oppressed can find no justice, when the burden grows unbearable—he reaches with hopeful courage up unto the heavens and seizes hither his eternal rights. . . . As a last resort, when not another means is of avail, the sword is given him."

Novodvorskaya: As a matter of fact, Mahatma Gandhi also allowed for such an option. At least he preferred it to total powerlessness. But this is not the point. If there is total civil disobedience by the people, one can get along without armed resistance, as Gandhi himself did. But our problem here is not that the people lack arms with which to struggle against the party regime of Yeltsin, rather that the people generally

do not even want to struggle against it and cannot—with or without arms. First the people voted in a party czar for themselves, and now they are the powerless object of every sort of manipulation—pitiless, inhuman manipulations—to which they are being subjected. The people are being destroyed, and they raise no objection.

EIR: What changes do you expect in the overall situation in the country in the near future?

Novodvorskaya: In time, one may expect either total disintegration, at the molecular level, when the country falls apart not into various autonomous units, but into districts, into streets and neighborhoods. And then would come what we call in Russia "fire, ice, and plague," basically the end of the world. And, naturally, war of all against all at the personal level, over scraps of bread. And the cruelest dictatorship. It would come full circle. For there is no rational, democratic force in the country now. There are only terrible forces, slow-witted, wicked forces. The forces of darkness. And if these forces, like Sauron in Tolkien,² undertake to stabilize things, then what darkness will it be? Tolkien had two darkensses, and this will be a third.

EIR: Our readers would like to hear your views and reactions about the LaRouche case, and related matters.

Novodvorskaya: I have known for a long time, that the American system is extremely egoistical and employs human rights questions on the spur of the moment, as it sees fit. That alone would have sufficed for me to have no use whatsoever for any of it—not the supermarkets, not Harvard, not Yale. For me, what happened in 1933 when the United States recognized Soviet Russia—and I am not even mentioning 1945, the warm relations with Stalin, or handing over eastern Europe, or 1968, or 1956—would have been enough reason to carry on an uncompromising struggle in the United States.³ That is, I would probably be burning the American flag before breakfast, before lunch, and before supper. I see no place for myself among the American establishment, and I would not be able to live like that. Perhaps this is our Russian maximalism, but ours is a country of extremes. Either man needs no freedom whatsoever, or he needs maximum freedom. I am from that smaller half, that needs the maximum freedom.

But I did not suppose that this state of affairs extended also to internal American problems. When I learned about [the imprisonment of] Lyndon LaRouche, I confess this was a revelation for me. No, of course, I knew about the investigations of anti-American activities and how Ronald Reagan was an enthusiastic participant in that, and therefore I didn't have illusions about his presidency. And I knew about how they hanged the anarchists in Chicago after May Day. But I simply hoped, that these were excesses, whose time had passed, and that American democracy had somehow been able to outgrow this and to return to the principles

established by Madison, Patrick Henry, and Jefferson. But this was not the case.

And it is absolutely incomprehensible to me, how people can be doing business, can enjoy their income, how they can even think about anything, if they have dissidents, and prisoners of conscience are sitting in prison, and, what's more, it's on falsified charges about non-payment of taxes. And, by the way, it's just simply not a good thing, to give people years-long prison sentences for non-payment of taxes. This is base. It means that for the sake of a dollar, the state is prepared to strangle somebody. This is incomprehensible to me.

And it is obvious that, apparently, in the United States, all is not well with civil society. A civil society would never allow such things. And I can't imagine Jefferson, who said that no government would ever be able to preserve freedom in the country unless it knows precisely that the citizens are prepared to give their lives for that freedom, and the Founding Fathers in general having in mind that such things could happen. As far as I know American history, and I know it not too badly, this is just a complete degradation of the idea. Why this has happened, I don't know, because the idea was a good one. Probably it has to do with the fact that at the point of the angle was that "commonwealth," the striving for happiness. Striving for freedom is more than striving for happiness, and happiness is not found in the increase of production and raising the level of one's income. Happiness is found in completely different things.

I think that material undercurrent, consumerism, in fact kills the idea of democracy in the entire world. Just as today it is killing everything in Russia and holding people back from rising any higher than questions of subsistence, when there is not anything to subsist on. Whereas in the United States, it seems, everything is all right as far as food goes, and people have cars. But, forgive me, if people are going to make it their ideal to buy four cars instead of three, or to change from one brand of car to another, or to buy a new cooking range, then God created man in vain, if man ends up as such an abomination.

And I think that the Schiller Institute and Lyndon LaRouche are trying to return man to his spiritual base, or at least to those ideals which Christ preached, and also Jefferson.

As for the death penalty, any country that employs the death penalty and does not abolish it unconditionally is not democratic.

Notes

1. Yemelian Pugachov led a violent uprising against Catherine the Great in the 18th century, claiming that he was her murdered husband, Peter III.

2. J.R.R. Tolkien, *Lord of the Rings*.

3. In 1945, the Yalta agreement among Stalin, Roosevelt, and Churchill was concluded. In 1956, the western powers stood by as Soviet tanks crushed the Hungarian revolution against communist rule. In 1968, Warsaw Pact forces invaded Czechoslovakia, undeterred by western countries.

Central Asian conflict gets bloodier

by Ramtanu Maitra

Recent reports indicate that the armed assault by the pro-Moscow faction on Dushanbe, the capital city of Tajikistan, to capture power and reinstate ousted President Rahman Nabiyev, has failed. The pro-Islam leadership of Akbarsho Iskandrov is in control of the capital, although reports of heavy fighting in and around Dushanbe are filtering in. Meanwhile, Washington has closed its embassy in Dushanbe and asked American travelers to stay away from Tajikistan until further notice.

The conflict in Tajikistan, one of the Community of Independent States (CIS), is now in a full-blown state, with Islamic militants poised to strike for power. The armed forces of the Hizb-i-Nuzhat-i-Islami, a secret organization for 15 years until it was officially recognized on Oct. 26, 1991, have gained strength significantly in the cities of Kurgan-Tyube, Karategin, and partly in Kulab and Dushanbe. The Hizb-i-Nuzhat, independent of the Qaziat in Tajikistan, is considered the most organized of all opposition groups. To the north, Khojend, whence President Nabiyev hails, is a hotbed of the communists, and the Communist Party, which was registered again in January 1992, is consolidating its position with the help of Uzbeks.

Impact of the Afghanistan crisis

In neighboring Uzbekistan, there is fear of ethnic conflict between Tajiks and Uzbeks. During a recent visit of the Indian foreign minister, R.L. Bhatia, his Uzbek colleague Abdul Razzakov expressed concern at attempts by external forces to destabilize the region through the flow of funds and arms in support of terrorism.

What Foreign Minister Razzakov was referring to is the adverse impact of the Afghan crisis. In Afghanistan, the pro-Islam Mujahideen leader Gulbuddin Hekmatyar is locked in a power struggle with the Afghan leaders Gen. Abdur Rashid Dostum and Ahmed Shah Massoud. Dostum is of Uzbek origin and Massoud is a Tajik, ethnically, and both are considered moderates on religious issues. Dostum had visited Uzbekistan recently, trying to forge an alliance with the Uzbek leaders in order to carve out an autonomous part within Afghanistan bordering Uzbekistan. Hekmatyar, in his effort