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In Moscow Bulgakov House

“I sit in my office at Bulgakov House on Bolshaya Sadovaya, Moscow. I look at our guest copy of Master and Margarita, I glance at it and suddenly I understood: PEN is MASSOLIT, MASSOLIT IS PEN. Bulgakov did not criticise as such the Soviet state, although he was opposed to it, but in his book he criticised people for their falsehood, for hypocrisy, for superficiality, for being evil to the point that it takes a Satan to uncover them. People that make themselves comfortable in any society; who serve any master as long as their housing question is taken care of. In the early days of the Soviet state we know what was the ideology and master they served, but whom does PEN serve?”

Anna Politkovskaya – Twilight of an Idol

The murder of the Russian journalist Anna Politkovskaya is again manipulated by the international press to raise anti-Russian sentiments. The international journalists associations have responded by forming “Hands On Russia” committees, which sponsor demonstrations, paid coverage and extra-parliamentary pressure in their campaign to show solidarity with the exiled oligarchs. The Finnish State television, Yleisradio, employing the tactics of Goebbels, have joined efforts with the virtual monopoly of Finnish media, the Sanoma empire of oligarch Aatos Erkko, to lead the movement of solidarity with the killers and have stepped up pressure on the Finnish democratic institutions to join in. Politicians, so-called scholars and the media declare in unison that Russian leaders masterminded the murder. Many people cautiously avoid the more direct expressions while there are those ready to take to lynching and direct accusations; Finnish Foreign Minister Tuomioja falls somewhere between the two groups, whereas Finnish MP Heidi Hautala and Markku Kivinen from the Aleksanteri Institute (the Russia research centre of University of Helsinki) clearly belong to the latter. It is obviously not in the interests of the Russian President that a journalist, well branded in the West, should be murdered; pointing this out would not be necessary but for this continuous smear campaign against Russia. It is disgusting to even have to participate in this discussion to refute the accusations. But the managed international media has created this situation, this discussion where the question is posed similarly to the old paradox “When do you stop beating your wife”, either way you reply you play their game. However, there is all the reason in the world to put forward the very plausible alternative, that the murder was orchestrated by quarters wishing in this way to create exactly the kind of opinion climate where all these experts keep repeating their anti-Russian rhetoric. I think that indeed it is time to be frank: the international media has created this situation where it is worthwhile for the enemies of the Russian president to kill a journalist. First she served their pr as a living writer, but then they thought she would serve their cause better as a dead writer. PEN made her a means. Then she became a means to the end.

Act in such a way that you always treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never simply as a means, but always at the same time as an end

In our cultures, we honour the memories of the deceased speaking only good about them in times of sorrow. One would like to grant this to Politkovskaya as well. But I cannot keep quiet when I see how she is being turned into a weapon to hit the Russian people by trying to sling mud at the country and thus to prevent the normal development. Not all are happy over the fact that equal opportunities to participate in democratic market economy are being created for Russian citizens under the leadership of Putin. Putin's political program, which I would characterize as self-defence of democracy has earned a lot of enemies among the people wishing Russia bad. Within Russia, criminal elements have availed themselves of the weaknesses of a young nascent democracy by grabbing and stealing enormous possessions. Putin, though, had the courage to rise against the mafia and the oligarchs (often separated through a fine line drawn on water). Outside the Russian borders the former Soviet states, thirsty for revenge, consider it the key role of their EU policies to fell Russia; they forget that Russia and the Russian people were the biggest victims of communism; that it was the Russian people who, led by Yeltsin, freed themselves from that burden and promoted the freedom of other former prisoner-countries. Because of its geopolitical position, Russia gets drawn into the biggest dirty games, as well.

Now that Politkovskaya's work is so much discussed there is reason to look at what she wrote. Best suited to this is her bestselling book *Putin's Russia*, translated into several languages. What did Politkovskaya actually write?

In her book she has followed the so called journalistic formula: there are a few key arguments, and then focus is turned on peoples' life situations as if to prove the arguments; but the interrelation stays on a purely emotional level (this style comes from Carl Marx's *Capital* where Marx tried to prove his childish theories of capital through stories of people's everyday lives). Marx argued that all economic profit is based on exploitation of the worker. He developed this idea and wrote a book with a thousand pages (*The Capital*, Volume 1). Correspondingly, Politkovskaya is driven by her personal disgust at President Putin. She begins and ends her book by saying this ("Introduction", pages 281 and 282; all references relate to the English translation *Putin's Russia*, The Harvill Press, 2004)). To start with, she states she does not like Putin "because he is the product of the Russian security service" (as if George Bush Sr.'s politics should be condemned on the grounds that he was the product of the CIA; this is the prevailing opinion in many Latin-American countries). According to Politkovskaya being "a product of the KGB" Putin "does nothing but destroy civil liberties as he has all through his career" (But she does not want to remember that Putin put his career and himself on stake in defending the former mayor of St. Petersburg, Mr. Sobchak, the icon for the democratic struggle of Russia) At the end Politkovskaya states she is disgusted with Putin "because there is a war in Chechnya" (She is not disgusted with the terrorists and their supporters, and all the people that started the war; she is disgusted with the ones having to put their lives to defend human freedom, and life itself), "because he is so coldly controlled"; "because he is cynical", "because he lies"; "because of the Nord-Ost siege" (In line with the international media, and the International Writers Association PEN, the modern day

MASSOLIT, she tried to manipulate the public opinion to consider that the terrorists were just peace-loving “separatists” that wanted to come and enjoy a night at the theatres, and then being rudely disturbed by the Russian police; or that in Beslan, the problem was not that the terrorists killed the kids, but rather how efficiently the media coverage was arranged). To complete her list Politkovskaya adds that “he spins webs consisting of pure deceit, lies in place of reality, words instead of deeds” (pages 281 and 282).

Politkovskaya does not like the fact that Putin goes to church Easter services (it is amazing that she can, supported by the whole of Europe, slander the confession of faith of someone, pages 279 and 280).

Politkovskaya attacks Putin for, as she wrongly claims, “being a racist” but herself as a racist claims that Silvio Berlusconi as a European has better powers of thinking than Putin, who only is a Russian (page 279).

Politkovskaya compares Putin with Stalin (page 272), “he behaved exactly like Stalin”. Such a comparison shows that neither the journalist nor the prize givers and back patters have any sense of proportion. But one should remember that the purpose of this investigative journalist was to tell us about her feelings; why she abhors another person.

Politkovskaya had absolutely no perception of the fact that all phenomena in society are based on social practices and that only a historical process advancing in the right direction can promote the wellbeing of society. She does not understand that the basis of a working society was destroyed in the Soviet Union and that it was not until 1990 that building democracy, market economy and a society of citizens was started from the ruins of the Soviet bankrupt's estate. - She forgets that society did not function, but that there was a lot of hope in the Russian people, they were not destroyed, they are the ones that are making this remarkable turn around of Russia, the side of Russia that did not make it to her writings. - Through glimpses of peoples' life experiences she brings up some of Russia's problems, such as the young democracy, criminality, corruption, the poor condition of the army, low pensions, the state of the judicial system. Politkovskaya (in her prevailing state of disgust) does not analyze what has been done about these things during Putin nor does she consider the impacts of decisions taken under him. Instead, she tells about human tragedies like the suicide of an alcoholic or about a former friend of hers, a busy businesswoman who went to politics to grab more riches, etc. What she tries to do is to convince the reader that, somehow Putin is to be blamed for this tragic suicide and the woman's ruthlessness (and as we know, she succeeded remarkably well). Politkovskaya's idea was that on day one of his presidency, Putin -- Putin alone -- had to make sure that all in Russia was right and people lived in a paradise, just as if Finland's president Halonen were responsible for the unemployment in Kainuu and drunks at Hakaniemi Market Square.

In one of her brief accounts Politkovskaya mentions an old man, aged 80, who had been found frozen up to the floor in Irkutsk, Siberia (page 194). The journalist tells the emergency services refused to come to the rescue claiming “the man was so old he could obviously not be all right”. Putin should have stopped this, according to Politkovskaya. And it was brave of her to have said as much!

The former navy captain Aleksey Dikin has a small pension and lives in poor conditions (page 198). This is Putin's fault. And Politkovskaya had the guts to say so! She does not even think of looking for reasons in the Soviet communism that destroyed the economy; and now reconstruction is going on, and the opportunity for it actually only presented itself in 2000, during Putin's first year in power. Since then, there has been an enormous increase in pensions. The writer of this article has personal experience from the Russian hinterland where economic development has also started, contrary to opposing claims. In January 2006 I visited Azikeevo, the native village of a friend of mine, situated in Bashkortostan in the Ural Mountains. A road connection to the village was opened about ten years ago, and approximately the same time, gas heating systems were installed; and a couple of years ago, phone connections to every cottage. My friend's mother's uncle, aged 70, said -- without my asking -- a number of times how good living conditions now were. In the meantime he took care of horses, cows and chickens. The retired teachers of the village, a married couple, answered my question that pensions now were so good they did not need all themselves but could support their children's families (see a photo report on this trip www.hellevig.ru).

But these, whether good or bad, are economic policy issues -- not matters that the president can have any say in as far as individual cases are concerned.

The condition of the army, the corruption and the state of the judicial system are not Politkovskaya's disclosures. President Putin often speaks about them. But they were supposed to be news uncovered through Politkovskaya's investigative journalism! What president of another country openly and publicly admits problems like these? Putin admits them and speaks about them because a president can have an impact through his opinions and legislative initiatives even though he cannot catch every thug. There are no such forces in Russia that could bring all misdemeanours under control all at one go; all that can be done is change direction, move on. And Russia is clearly, by any measure, moving in the right direction. These dramatic acts of terrorism aim at slowing this development ("wherever the tracks may lead" as Foreign Minister Tuomioja said; and one should indeed look at the *foreign*).

Politkovskaya's writing on terrorist dramas continues an odd type of news making that directly and as if on joint decision supports the actions of the terrorists. Through their deeds, terrorists try to hurt the society they hit. By killing innocent people they try to create public discussion criticizing the leaders of the target country. In this they had a formidable helper -- Politkovskaya (even though the results were not as good as earlier in Madrid where terrorists managed to change the entire government). This is incomprehensible logic, impossible for a sound person to comment on; but for some reason Politkovskaya was showered with prizes.

In her book Politkovskaya tells what a big problem, to her mind, the illegalities and the corruption in the governor-dominated Yekaterinburg are; but of course she draws the wrong conclusions again: Putin's fault! Nevertheless, as far as she and her supporters were concerned the way Putin dealt with this governor problem constituted evidence of his anti-democratic attitudes. These governors operated under the cloak of democracy; they were chosen through formally democratic elections, as in the Soviet Union (in another connection Politkovskaya remembered how people were elected in

the Soviet Union, page 271). A colourful bunch of criminals and adventurers had themselves appointed governors under the shelter of formal electing and voting procedures. It is as clear as day and even noted by the European Commissioner for Human Rights in his report (Alvaro Gil-Robles, Report on Visits to the Russian Federation, 2004) that there is no free press anywhere in the Russian regions (except Moscow and St. Petersburg). In these circumstances anyone who wanted to be governor had himself "elected by people" using threats, bribes, blackmail and killings and led the region, based on this "democratic mandate", illegally in an autocratic manner (and if somebody succeeded in being truly democratically elected governor, the end result was usually the same feudal behaviour). Putin dealt with the matter by stripping these governors of their mandates, and now democracy is practised in much more civilized circumstances based on a democratic competition between the regional parliament and the president. That Putin had courage to rise against this powerful elite and to succeed on it is a democratic achievement of historic proportions. Where does it come from that this is not really understood in the west? Politkovskaya's premise, her disgust with Putin? There seems to be a managed opinion, managed freedom of speech, strong in the world, dominant in some countries, like e.g. Finland, where leading newspaper, Helsingin Sanomat, called for a Noble price to be awarded to her (I presume in literature).

Big capital and oligarchs were bad and, according to Politkovskaya, Putin's friends (e.g. pages 111--113 and 197) but only until Putin does something about the matter. When Putin took the stand against Khodorkovsky, everything got reversed (pages 275, 276, 284, and 285). Now it is about "Putin's personal revenge". Politkovskaya ascribes it to Khodorkovsky that the company owned by him, Yukos, was "the most transparent company in Russia" and that it "operated in daylight" and even "gave five per cent of its profits to charity". None of these claims are true. Yukos flagrantly violated tax laws and other legislation through, among other things, criminal tax paradise companies. (Everything has been carefully documented later; in this connection I refer to the Sitra report, Suuri Maa Pitkä Kvartaali [Big Country Long Quartile], 2005).

Furthermore, Politkovskaya claims that Khodorkovski got into trouble with Putin because he supported "the liberal opposition". Why did she omit the fact we all know that Khodorkovsky also supported the communist party? A half-truth from a journalist's mouth has the hoped effect, in a way (the romantic side of the activity would be lost if communists were also mentioned). And why does she not tell the ulterior motive behind the support -- the fact that to get Khodorkovsky's support, these "democratic" parties sold him top positions in electoral candidate lists to enable him to place there his own trusted candidates; this was how he planned to make a corner on the Russian democracy culminating in a hostile takeover of the Russian parliament, the Duma. But is it this kind of democracy Politkovskaya, the EU ministers, Tuomioja and Hautala want? In Finland they would have to sit for it themselves, but not in their comfortable seats in the parliament, in jail they would go.

Many people rhetorically admit knowing that Khodorkovsky had committed crimes but "why Khodorkovsky, just Khodorkovsky"? The answer is clear: others were quicker to realize that their criminal activities were over! In Russia they are not occupied with a policy of revenge, on catching everybody just in case, they know their history, the challenges, they know there is only one way, forward.

Understanding the difficult history of his country Putin invites all, in the spirit of future, to participate in building a new society. There is no gain in punishing everybody, but this does not mean that democracy has no right to self-defence, even in Russia. This is Putin's Russia, and mine.

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