



Up for Grabs

by Cathy Young

In July, food prices rose by an average of 8 percent. The Constitutional Court held hearings in the case of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Crowds of inebriated young toughs in two Siberian cities rioted against fruit and wine traders from the Caucasus, destroying their wares, ransacking their hotel rooms, and setting fire to their cars. A plane en route from Yerevan to Moscow saw its forty-minute stop in Sochi (Georgia) turn into a six-hour ordeal for 350 passengers left frying in the cabin while the 300,000 rubles the pilot had been given to pay for fuel—in three- and five-ruble notes—were being counted. And the Russian media were understandably shaken by the attempt of parliament—elected in 1990 and still thick with Communists and assorted authoritarians—to reclaim *Izvestia*, which had declared independence of the Congress of People's Deputies after the August '91 coup.

At the parliament session, Russian minister of the press and information Mikhail Poltoranin implored the festive MPs "not to disgrace themselves" by such a vote. Speaker Ruslan Khasbulatov, one of the men behind the motion, retorted: "It's up to the deputies to decide whether they want to disgrace themselves or not."

First impressions notwithstanding, this was not a simple black-and-white case of heroic journalists versus villainous apparatchiks. Though now formally owned by its staff, *Izvestia* continues to use government-owned premises and equipment and, like most other newspapers, to rely on government subsidies. In a guest column

Cathy Young, our regular Russian Presswatch columnist, is the author of Growing Up in Moscow (Ticknor & Fields).

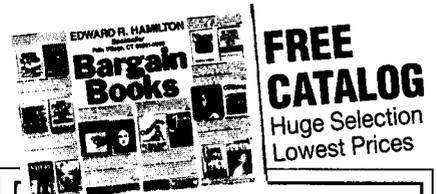
in *Moscow News* (July 26), *Kommersant's* new editor-in-chief, Ksenia Ponomareva, expressed dismay at the petty and tyrannical actions of the parliament—going after a newspaper that had criticized it—but also pointed out that the press itself gave ammunition to its persecutors by appealing for state funding. (*Kommersant* remains the only major Russian newspaper financially independent of the government.)

Ponomareva was favorably quoted in the *Literary Gazette* (July 22) by anti-Yeltsin MP Nikolai Pavlov, whose own politics are probably not of the free-market variety—though he does say the government shouldn't run newspapers. He concluded that subsidies will have to continue for the time being, but should be allocated on the basis of circulation. Meanwhile, sociologist Andrei Bystritsky pointed out on the same page that the bid to take over *Izvestia* is less an attack on free speech than an attempt to snatch a piece of the media and thereby of political power—"a desire not so much to limit the power of the press as to use it."

What is truly sad, Bystritsky noted, is that both the oafish deputies and the posturing journalists have utter disregard for the interests of the average news consumer. Readers at least have the choice of different newspapers, but all news broadcasting is government-owned: "No one is even thinking of switching to subscriber-based TV and radio, to give individuals the opportunity to choose what they like. Amazingly, the debate, once again, is over what is to be imposed on the audience: the politicians' buffoonery or the journalists' self-importance."

These debates are taking place amid mounting complaints that the Russian press, unable to wean itself from state subsidies, is becoming more docile and

less willing to give a forum to critics of the Yeltsin government. In the June 24 *Literary Gazette*, émigré journalist Vadim Belotserkovsky argued that "really hard-hitting articles have all but disappeared; moderately critical ones are 'balanced,' just like in the good old days, by positive responses or editors' notes. . . . The newspapers' deferential attitudes toward the government can also be seen in the treatment of my own articles which I tried to get published in Moscow." It should be noted that Belotserkovsky is a quasi-socialist who deplores the Russian intellectuals' inclination to "worship a new



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fashionable brand of extremism, this time capitalist ideology." Yet, last May, the noted Moscow free-market economist Boris Pinski told me that some of his articles criticizing the economic reform strategy of Yeltsin's finance minister Yegor Gaidar, scheduled for publication by major periodicals, were killed at the last minute.

The Reeducation of Lev Navrozov

To the impressive list of émigré writers making regular appearances in the Russian press, we can now make a startling addition: Lev Navrozov. For the benefit of those unfamiliar with this singular personage, Navrozov, now 64, moved to the U.S. in 1972 and published a well-received autobiographical look at Soviet society, *The Education of Lev Navrozov* (Harper & Row, 1975). He also undertook the mission of saving the West, lulled by Soviet propaganda and by its own gullible leaders' and complicit press, from the ever-more-imminent threat of Soviet domination—a danger he explained in his twice-weekly column in the Unification Church-owned *News World* (later reincarnated as the *New York City Tribune*).

Navrozov did some excellent work—his 1980 *Commentary* piece, "What Does the CIA Know About Russia?" gives him every right to say "I told you so"—but more often, alas, his arguments seemed rather eccentric. For him, a teatime chat in the late 1960s with the wife of a high-ranking Soviet official whose dacha was next to his became incontrovertible evidence that the Soviets had been on the verge of seizing Mexico. In the mid-eighties he took his one-man crusade against the *New York Times* to the *City Tribune*, calling his column "With David's Slingshot Against the N.Y. Times."

The past two years haven't been kind: the demise of Soviet Communism and of the *New York City Tribune* left Navrozov with no enemy and no forum—though he continued to argue, in such outlets as the Russian émigré magazine *Vremya i My* and the Jewish monthly *Midstream*, that the Soviet empire had merely faked its own death and the West had fallen for the trick.

It's mind-boggling how clever these Communists are, because it seems they've finally seduced the one man who was on to them. For who should appear in

the pages of *Izvestia* but Lev Navrozov, billed as "American political commentator"?

"A Phone Call From Prison" (June 18) introduces the Russian public to the case of his friend Alexei T., a former Soviet dissident now serving an 8 1/3-to-25-year sentence in a New York state prison for the fatal shooting of a fellow émigré. The case had many elements that suggest self-defense, and Navrozov says (perhaps plausibly, though he omits a number of relevant details) that "if Alyosha had been a billionaire, he would have hired one of the country's best lawyers for a million or two and would have been acquitted." However, "in the West, Alyosha conceived a hatred for commercialism." (True, he was trying to make it in business, but only so he could give Navrozov money for a newspaper to spread his message.) Having been away from his native country for twenty years, Navrozov may have forgotten how the Soviet or ex-Soviet reader reacts to negative stories about the West. You can't impress a Russian with news that someone may have been unfairly jailed; he will, however, be deeply impressed to learn that "Alyosha" can call his friend Lev collect from a pay phone inside the prison.

"Inside a New York Skyscraper" (July 16) profiles another victim of America: Navrozov's neighbor Margie, a rank-and-file corporate employee making \$2,000 a month, of which \$700 goes to taxes and various deductions and another \$700 to pay for a "so-so" one-bedroom Manhattan apartment. (At this point, the Russian reader's eyes grow big: a single woman living in two rooms!) While Navrozov tells his readers that \$2,000 a month is the average salary in America, he neglects to mention that taxes and rents in New York are far above the American average.

His point is that late twentieth-century capitalism has been bureaucratized by the transfer of power from owners to managers, whom he christens an American nomenklatura. The Margies of the world do all the work, and the managers sit in their corner offices and reap unearned rewards: "When a company fails thanks to his leadership, [the manager] moves on to another company, usually with even better pay and benefits." There is undoubtedly some truth to this, though Navrozov in his usual forgetfulness fails to add that most jobs in America are not

with large corporations or that rank-and-file employees can move up into management.

But leaving that aside, one has to wonder: Has Navrozov finally been convinced that the Soviet empire is defunct? Or has he despaired of making himself heard in commercialized America and decided to collaborate with the Communists in maintaining the illusion that Russia now has a free press? But maybe we're underestimating the cunning of our slingshot-wielding David. Maybe he's only pretending to fall for the Communists' tricks, so that they'll think no one in the West knows what they're up to and get careless—just in time for Navrozov to save the West after all.

Digging for Dollars

Soviet Communism may be dead, even to its most tenacious enemies; but its founder, for the time being, remains eternally alive in his Red Square mausoleum. In the *Independent Gazette* (June 11), correspondent Denis Gurinsky follows the latest debates surrounding the bothersome mummy. St. Petersburg mayor Anatoly Sobchak and some others are pushing for a plan to bury Lenin in the Volkov cemetery in St. Petersburg, next to his mother Maria Ulyanova and other family members, as the *vozhd* (leader) himself apparently desired. This plan, however, is meeting with opposition from the local radical democrats, who protest "the contamination of St. Petersburg's soil with the remains of a monster"; and from Communists, who regard the proposed burial as "an insult to the great man." To complicate things further, Sobchak wants a public funeral with a Russian Orthodox ceremony, which the great man would indeed have taken as an insult. The administration of the Volkov cemetery is not overeager to receive the controversial remains, fearing "grave desecrations by extremists."

On the other hand, Gurinsky found the grave-diggers at the Volkov cemetery to be nothing if not enthusiastic: the men said they were ready to dig Lenin a grave in three hours, in spite of threats from Leninists to "string them up." Mikhail A., a grave-digger with twenty-two years' experience, put it with brutal candor: "For dollars, I can put this *vozhd* not just six feet under but thirty feet under if they want me to." □



Unforgivable

by James Bowman

Somewhere in the devotional writings of Dorothy L. Sayers there is an essay in which she says that a Christian must forgive even those who do not seek his forgiveness. This has always seemed to me to be a suspiciously absolutist view of the subject. For our own sake it is important not to carry grudges, which are always self-destructive; but to forgive those who do not acknowledge fault is presumptuous. True forgiveness, like love, is a two-way process that requires humility on the one side as much as it does magnanimity on the other. Otherwise it is just moral posturing—trying on one's crown of thorns in the mirror and intoning: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

What that means in the Gospels, of course, is not that they didn't know what they were doing, but that they didn't know Whom they were doing it to. Some such thought is usually at the back of the minds of those who succumb to the allure of martyrdom. "If only they knew" quickly becomes "I'll show them" in the most common sort of self-dramatization—something we can recognize even in the pose (*especially* in the pose) of those who claim to be unforgiven themselves. The impulse they indulge is called despair, which, apart from being the sin against the Spirit, is not naturally a very attractive attitude, though Clint Eastwood's highly praised new film, *Unforgiven*, tries to make it one.

He is working some pretty familiar territory. *Unforgiven* purports to be a demythologizing of the old Western, but it is nothing of the kind. The Byronic hero whose unsheddable burden of guilt only makes him more attractive is, in fact,

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the original romantic myth—the ancestor of Hemingway's anti-hero, whose anti-heroism makes him paradoxically more heroic. The anti-hero, in turn, gave birth to the Man With No Name who, equally paradoxically, made Eastwood's own name. His character in *Unforgiven*, an aged gunfighter called William Munny, is effectively the Man With No Name reincarnated with postmodernist wrinkles—a hero for the nineties.

How can we tell? Partly by the irony. The man now not only has a name but it's an anti-heroic name—one that rhymes with funny. His hand has forgot its cunning and he can hit nothing with a six-gun anymore. He also seems to have forgotten how to get on a horse and is shown chasing, unsuccessfully, pigs through the mud. How delightful, the idea of making this schmuck the hero! And after he has played his part out, a closing note to the audience tells us that he later moved to San Francisco and prospered in dry goods. That is a nicely post-modern way to say, "That's all, folks," as if no emotion that the film produced was to be taken too seriously.

The problem is that too many of the wrong things *are* taken seriously—among them the hero's Byronic load of guilt from all the killing he has done, his earnest, AAer's determination, apparently instilled in him by his recently deceased wife, to go straight, and his politically correct sidekick, a wise and good black man (Morgan Freeman), married to a native American, who finds that he can kill no more, even when it is on behalf of a battered woman. Above all, it is very serious about teaching us that killing in general is dirty, furtive; unheroic stuff that hardly anybody can bring himself to do—something that the hero already knows. Naturally, he

doesn't want to do it anymore, does it anyway, and turns out to be very good at it still. Sound familiar?

There are some good things about the film: the acting, especially by Gene Hackman, Richard Harris, Saul Rubinek, and Jaimz Wolvett, the scenery (Alberta, Canada, as late-nineteenth century Wyoming) and quite a lot of the dialogue (by David Webb Peoples) make it very watchable, and I liked the fact that Eastwood's return to his murderous ways comes as he takes his first drink of whiskey in years. It acts upon him as the spinach does upon Popeye: suddenly his aim is true once again and his eye is dead—as are eight or ten from among the forces of law and order whom he mows down on his way to a career in dry goods. It's okay: somehow you know that when Clint Eastwood is shooting at the law it's different from when Ice-T does it. Or, if he's a bad guy, it's because everybody's a bad guy in the demythologized Western. Besides, the dead men were all gun-control fanatics.

Eastwood may not know how to give us anything but an updated version of the guilt-ridden Byronic hero, but at least he knows how to give us that. At some point he had to realize that the sensitive bumbler "in recovery" was a bore, gave him a slug of whiskey, and turned him back into the much more sympathetic machine-like killer. Would that the rest of Hollywood had his instinct. What might otherwise have been a fairly decent thriller like *Single White Female*, by Barbet Schroeder, is marred by the kind of psychologizing that is much more common in the movies these days. Give me the motiveless malignity of an Iago every time over therapeutic guff that purports to explain the behavior of Bridget Fonda's murderous roommate (Jennifer