

Garden of Thoughts

Letter to Soviet Leader

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Civilization in an Impasse

A second danger is the multiple impasse in which Western civilization (which Russia long ago chose the honor of joining) finds itself, but it is not so imminent; there are still two or three decades in reserve. We share this impasse with all the advanced countries, which are in an even worse and more perilous predicament than we are, although people keep hoping for new scientific loopholes and inventions to stave off the day of retribution. I would not mention this danger in this letter if the solutions to both problems were not identical in many respects, if one and the same turnabout, a *single* decision, would not deliver us from *both* dangers. Such a happy coincidence is rare. Let us value history's gift and not miss these opportunities.

And all this has so “suddenly” come tumbling out at mankind's feet, and at Russia's! How fond our progressive publicists were, both before and after the Revolution, of ridiculing those *retrogrades* (there were always so many of them in Russia): people who called upon us to cherish and have pity on our past, even on the most Godforsaken hamlet with a

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couple of hovels, even on the paths that run alongside the railway track; who called upon us to keep horses even after the advent of the motorcar, not to abandon small factories for enormous plants and combines, not to discard organic manure in favor of chemical fertilizers, not to mass by the million in cities, not to clamber on top of one another in multistory apartment blocks. How they laughed, how they tormented those reactionary “Slavophiles” (the jibe became the accepted term, the simpletons never managed to think up another name for themselves). They hounded the men who said that it was perfectly feasible for a colossus like Russia, with all its spiritual peculiarities and folk traditions, to find its own particular path; and that it could not be that the whole of mankind should follow a single, absolutely identical pattern of development.

No, we had to be dragged along the whole of the Western bourgeois-industrial and Marxist path in order to discover, toward the close of the twentieth century, and again from progressive Western Scholars, what any village graybeard in the Ukraine or Russia had understood from time immemorial and could have explained to the progressive commentators ages ago, had the commentators ever found the time in that dizzy fever of theirs to consult him: that a dozen worms can't go on and on gnawing the same apple *forever*; that if the earth is a *finite*

object, then its expanses and resources are finite also, and the *endless, infinite* progress dinned into our heads by the dreamers of the Enlightenment cannot be accomplished on it. No, we had to shuffle on and on behind other people, without knowing what lay ahead of us, until suddenly we now hear the scouts calling to one another: We've blundered into a blind alley, we'll have to turn back. All that "endless progress" turned out to be an insane, ill-considered, furious dash into a blind alley. A civilization greedy for "perpetual progress" has now choked and is on its last legs. And it is not "convergence" that faces us and the Western world now, but total renewal and reconstruction in both East and West, for both are in the same impasse. All this has been widely publicized and explained in the west thanks to the efforts of the Teilhard de Chardin Society and the Club of Rome. Here, in a very condensed form, are their conclusions.

Society must cease to look upon "progress" as something desirable. "Eternal progress" is a nonsensical myth. What must be implemented is not a "steadily expanding economy," but a *zero-growth economy*, a stable economy. *Economic growth is not only unnecessary but ruinous*. We must set ourselves the aim not of *increasing* national resources, but merely of *conserving* them. We must renounce, as a matter of urgency, the gigantic scale of modern technology in industry, agriculture and urban

development (the cities of today are cancerous tumors). The chief aim of technology will now be to eradicate the lamentable results of previous technologies. The “Third World,” which has not yet started on the fatal path of Western civilization, can only be saved by “small-scale technology,” which requires an increase, not a reduction, in manual labor, uses the simplest of machinery and is based purely on local materials.

All the unrestrained industrial growth has taken place not over thousands or hundreds of years (from Adam to 1945) but only over the last twenty-eight years (from 1945 onward). It is this rapidity of growth in recent years that is most dangerous for mankind. The groups of scientists I mentioned have done computer calculations based on various possible courses of economic development, and *all* these courses turned out to be *hopeless* and pointed ominously to the catastrophic destruction of mankind sometime between the years 2020 and 2070 if *it did not relinquish economic progress*. These calculations took into consideration five main factors: population, natural resources, agricultural production, industry and environmental pollution. If the available information is to be believed, some of the earth’s resources are rapidly running out: there will be no more oil in twenty years, no more copper in nineteen, no more mercury in twelve; many other resources are nearly exhausted; and energy and fresh water are very limited. But even if future prospecting

uncovers reserves twice or even three times as big as those we now know about, and even if agricultural output *doubles* and man succeeds in harnessing unlimited nuclear energy, *in all cases the population will be overtaken by mass* destruction in the first decades of the twenty-first century--if not because of production grinding to a halt (end of resources), then because of a production surplus(destruction of the environment)-and this whatever course we take.

When everything is staked on “progress,” as it is now, it is *impossible* to find a *joint* optimum solution to *all five* of the problems referred to above. Unless mankind renounces the notion of economic progress, the biosphere will become unfit for life even *during our lifetime*. And if mankind is to be *saved*, technology has to be adapted to a stable economy in the next twenty to thirty years, and to do that, the process must be started *now, immediately*.

Actually, though, it is more than likely that Western civilization will not perish. It is so dynamic and so inventive that it will ride out even this impending crisis, will dismantle all its age-old misconceptions and in a few years set about the necessary reconstruction. And the “Third World” will heed the warnings in good time and *not take the Western path* at all. This is still perfectly feasible for most of the African and many of the

Asian countries (and nobody will sneer at them and call them "Negrophiles").

But what about *us*? Us, with our unwieldiness and our inertia, with our flinching and inability to change even a single letter, a single syllable, of what Marx said in 1848 about industrial development? Economically and physically we are perfectly capable of saving ourselves. But there is a roadblock on the path to our salvation--the sole Progressive World View. If we renounce industrial development, what about the working class, socialism, Communism, unlimited increase in productivity and all the rest? Marx is not to be corrected, that's revisionism

But you are already being called "revisionists" anyway, whatever you may do in the future. So wouldn't it be better to do your duty soberly, responsibly and firmly, and give up the dead letter for the sake of a living people who are utterly dependent on your power and your decisions? And you must do it without delay. Why dawdle if we shall have to snap out of it sometime anyway? Why repeat what others have done and loop the agonizing loop right to the end, when we are not too far into it to turn back? If the man at the head of the column cries, "I have lost my way," do we absolutely have to plow right on to the spot where he realized his mistake and only there turn back? Why not turn and start on the right course from wherever we happen to be?

As it is, we have followed Western technology too long and too faithfully. We are supposed to be the “first socialist country in the world,” one which sets an example to other peoples, in both the East and the West, and we are supposed to have been so “original” in following various monstrous doctrines-on the peasantry, on small tradesmen-so why, then, have we been so dolefully unoriginal in technology, and why have we so unthinkingly, so blindly, copied Western civilization? (Why? From military haste, of course, and the haste stems from our immense “international responsibilities,” and all this because of Marxism again.

One might have thought that, with the central planning of which we are so proud, we of all people had the chance *not* to spoil Russia’s natural beauty, *not* to create antihuman, multi-million concentrations of people. But we’ve done everything the other way round: we have dirtied and defiled the wide Russian spaces and disfigured the heart of Russia, our beloved Moscow. (What crazed, unfilial hand bulldozed the boulevards so that you can’t go along them now without diving down into degrading tunnels of stone? What evil, alien ax broke up the tree-lined boulevards of the Sadovoye Koltso and replaced them with a poisoned zone of asphalt and gasoline?) The irreplaceable face of the city and all the ancient city plan have been obliterated, and imitations of the West are being flung up, like the New Arbat; the city has been so squeezed, stretched and pushed

upward that life has become intolerable-so what do we do now? Reconstruct the former Moscow in a new place? That is probably impossible. Accept, then, that we have lost it completely?

We have squandered our resources foolishly without so much as a backward glance, sapped our soil, mutilated our vast expanses with idiotic “inland seas” and contaminated belts of waste-land around our industrial centers-but for the moment, at least, far more still remains untainted by us, which we haven't had time to touch. So let us come to our senses in time, let us change our course!

On Ideology

This Ideology that fell to us by inheritance is not only decrepit and hopelessly antiquated now; even during its best decades it was totally mistaken in its predictions and was never a science.

A primitive, superficial economic theory, it declared that only the worker creates value and failed to take into account the contribution of either organizers, engineers, transportation or marketing systems. It was mistaken when it forecast that the proletariat would be endlessly oppressed and would never achieve anything in a bourgeois democracy-if only we could shower people with as much food, clothing and leisure as

they have gained under capitalism! It missed the point when it asserted that the prosperity of the European countries depended on their colonies-it was only after they had shaken the colonies off that they began to accomplish their “economic miracles.” It was mistaken through and through in its prediction that socialists could never come to power except through an armed uprising. It miscalculated in thinking that the first uprisings would take place in the advanced industrial countries, quite the reverse. And the picture of how the whole world would rapidly be overtaken by revolutions and how states would soon wither away was sheer delusion, sheer ignorance of human nature. And as for wars being characteristic of capitalism alone and coming to an end when capitalism did-we have already witnessed the longest war of the twentieth century so far, and it was not capitalism that rejected negotiations and a truce for fifteen to twenty years; and God forbid that we should witness the bloodiest and most brutal of all mankind’s wars--a war between two Communist superpowers. Then there was nationalism, which this theory also buried in 1848 as a “survival’--but find a stronger force in the world today! And it's the same with many other things too boring to list.

Marxism is not only not accurate, is not only not a science, has not only failed to predict *a single event* in terms of figures, quantities, time scales or locations (something that electronic computers today do

with laughable ease in the course of social forecasting, although never with the help of Marxism) --it absolutely astounds one by the economic and mechanistic crudity of its attempts to explain that most subtle of creatures, the human being, and that even more complex synthesis of millions of people, society. Only the cupidity of some, the blindness of others and a craving for *faith* on the part of still others can serve to explain this grim jest of the twentieth century: how can such a discredited and bankrupt doctrine still have so many followers in the West! In our country are left the fewest of all! We who have had a taste of it are only pretending willy-nilly....

We have seen above that it was not your common sense, but that same antiquated legacy of the Progressive Doctrine that endowed you with all the millstones that are dragging you down: first collectivization; then the nationalization of small trades and services (which has made the lives of ordinary citizens unbearable -but you don't feel that yourselves; which has caused thieving and lying to pile up and up even in the day-to-day running of the country-and you are powerless against it); then the need to inflate military development for the sake, of making grand-international gestures, so that the whole internal life of the country is going down the drain and in fifty-five years we haven't even found the time to open up Siberia; then the obstacles in the way of industrial development and

technological reconstruction; then religious persecution, which is very important for Marxism,* but senseless and self-defeating for pragmatic state leaders--to set useless good-for-nothings to hounding their most conscientious workers, innocent of all cheating and theft, and as a result making them suffer from universal cheating and theft. For the believer his faith is *supremely* precious, more precious than the food he puts in his stomach. Have you ever paused to reflect on why it is that you deprive these millions of your finest subjects of their homeland? All this can do you as the leaders of the state nothing but harm, but you do it mechanically, automatically, because Marxism insists that you do it. Just as it insists that you, the rulers of a superpower, deliver accounts of your activities to outlandish visitors from distant parts--leaders of uninfluential, insignificant Communist parties from the other end of the globe, preoccupied least of all with the fortunes of Russia.

To someone brought up on Marxism it seems a terrifying step suddenly to start living without the familiar Ideology. But in point of fact you have no choice, circumstances themselves will force you to do it, and it may already be too late. In anticipation of an impending war with China, Russia's national leaders will in any case have to rely on patriotism, and on patriotism alone. When Stalin initiated such a shift during the

* Sergei Bulgakov showed in *Karl Marx as a Religious Type* (1906) that atheism is the chief inspirational and emotional hub of Marxism and that all the rest of the doctrine has simply been tacked on. Ferocious hostility to religion is Marxism's most persistent feature.

war-remember!-nobody was in the least surprised and nobody shed a tear for Marxism; everyone took it as the most natural thing in the world, something they recognized as Russian. It is only prudent to redeploy one's forces when faced by a great danger-but sooner rather than later. In any event, this process of repudiation, though tentative, began long ago in our country, for what is the “combination” of Marxism and patriotism but a meaningless absurdity? These two points of view can be “merged” only in generalized incantations, for history has shown us that in practice they are always diametrically opposed. This is so obvious that Lenin in 1915 actually proclaimed:

“We are antipatriots.” And that was the honest truth. And throughout the 1920's in our country the word “patriot” meant exactly the same as “White Guard.” And the whole of this letter that I am now putting before you is patriotism, *which means* rejection of Marxism. For Marxism orders us to leave the Northeast unexploited and to leave our women with crowbars and shovels, and instead finance and expedite world revolution.

Beware when the first cannons fire on the Sino-Soviet border lest you find yourselves in a doubly precarious position because the national consciousness in our country has become stunted and blurred-witness how mighty America lost to tiny North Vietnam, how easily the nerves of American society and American youth gave way, precisely because the

United States has a weak and undeveloped consciousness. Don't miss the chance while you've got it!

The step seems a hard one at first, but in fact, once you have thrown off this rubbishy Ideology of ours, you will quickly sense a huge relief and become aware of a relaxation in the entire structure of the state and in all the processes of government. After all, this Ideology, which is driving us into a situation of acute conflict abroad, has long ceased to be helpful to us here at home, as it was in the twenties and thirties. In our country today *nothing constructive rests upon it*; it is a sham, cardboard, theatrical prop--take it away and nothing will collapse, nothing will even wobble. For a long time now, everything has rested solely on material calculation and the subjection of the people, and not on any upsurge of ideological enthusiasm, as you perfectly well know. This Ideology does nothing now but sap our strength and bind us. It clogs up the whole life of society--minds, tongues, radio and press--with lies, lies, lies. For how else can something dead pretend that it is living except by erecting a scaffolding of lies? Everything is steeped in lies and *everybody knows it*--and says so openly in private conversation, and jokes and moans about it, but in their official speeches they go on hypocritically parroting what they are "supposed to say," and with equal hypocrisy and boredom read and listen to the speeches of others: how much of society's energy is

squandered on this! And you, when you open your newspapers or switch on your television--do *you yourselves* really believe for one instant that these speeches are sincere? No, you stopped believing long ago, I am certain of it. And if you didn't, then you must have become totally insulated from the inner life of the country.

This universal, obligatory force-feeding with lies is now the most agonizing aspect of existence in our country--worse than all our material miseries, worse than any lack of civil liberties.

All these arsenals of lies, which are totally unnecessary for our stability *as a state*, are levied as a kind of tax for the benefit of Ideology-to nail down events as they happen and clamp them to a tenacious, sharp-clawed but dead Ideology: and it is precisely because our state, through sheer force of habit, tradition and inertia, continues to cling to this false doctrine with all its tortuous aberrations, that it needs to put the dissenter behind bars. For a false *ideology* can find no other answer to argument and protest than weapons and prison bars.

Cast off this cracked Ideology! Relinquish it to your rivals, let it go wherever it wants, let it pass from our country like a stormcloud, like an epidemic, let others concern themselves with it and study it, just as long as we don't! In ridding ourselves of it we shall also rid ourselves of the need to fill our lives with lies. Let us all pull off and shake off from all of

us this filthy sweaty shirt of Ideology which is now so stained with the blood of those 66 million that it prevents the living body of the nation from breathing. This Ideology bears the entire responsibility for all the blood that has been shed. Do you need me to persuade you to throw it off without more ado? Whoever wants can pick it up in our place.

I am certainly not proposing that you go to the opposite extreme and persecute or ban Marxism, or even argue against it (nobody will argue against it for very long, if only out of sheer apathy). All I am suggesting is that you rescue yourselves from it, and rescue your state system and your people as well. *All you have to do* is to deprive Marxism of its powerful state support and let it exist of itself and stand on its own feet. And let all who wish to do so make propaganda for it, defend it and din it into others without let or hindrance--but outside working hours and *not on state salaries*. In other words, the whole *agitprop* system of agitation and propaganda must cease to be paid for out of the nation's pocket. This should not anger or antagonize the numerous people who work in *agitprop*: this new statute would free them from all possible insulting accusations of self-interest and give them for the first time the opportunity to prove the true strength of their ideological convictions and sincerity. And they could only be overjoyed with their new twofold commitment: to undertake productive labor for their country, to produce

something of practical value on weekdays in the daytime (and whatever work they chose in place of their present occupation would be much more productive, for the work they do now is useless, if not positively detrimental) , and in the evenings, on free days and during their holidays, to devote their leisure to propagating their beloved doctrine, reveling selflessly in the truth! After all, that is exactly what our believers do (while being persecuted for it too), and they consider it spiritually satisfying. What a marvelous opportunity, I will not say to test but to prove the sincerity of all those people who have been haranguing the rest of us for decades.