

Russia's Putin campaigns for 'order' in a Time of Troubles

The long-awaited campaign statement of Acting President Vladimir Putin appeared on Feb. 25 as an "Open Letter to Russian Voters," just one month before the Russian Presidential elections. It is excerpted in the pages that follow.

As Putin himself wrote, the document is short on details of the economic strategy, being elaborated by his teams of advisers. Instead, discussing his themes of "the strong state" and "the dictatorship of law," Putin struck old, deep chords in Russia, and spoke in the language of a Tsar to the people, in a time of turmoil: "It used to be said in Russia, 'Rich is our land, only there is no order.' They will not talk about us like that any more."

Putin's words should be understood in the Russian cultural matrix. The population of that country, from intellectuals across to peasants and destitute pensioners, currently evinces rage, and outrage about Russia's political and economic decline during the past decade. It is still to be determined whether, under Putin, Russia therefore strikes an adversarial posture toward the West, or if, should recent years' anti-Russia policies in the West be replaced by Lyndon LaRouche's design for a New Bretton Woods system and economic recovery, Putin could use his commitment to a "strong state" in a positive manner. (All emphasis is in the original; subheads have been added.)

Putin's record

. . . In the past half-year, people have had an opportunity to see what I consider to be most important, and what I am already doing in national politics and economics. But, on the other hand, the question remains: "Who is Putin, and what are his political plans?" . . . Therefore, I thought it was most proper to address you directly. *I decided to do so without intermediaries, succinctly and clearly to tell what I think about our life today, and what should be done to improve it. . . .*

Many people seek the roots of our failures, in the incompetent decisions, taken within different sectors of the economy. But, that is only partly true. Specialists are still debating where, precisely, the decisive mistakes were made. . . . I am convinced that there will be no coherent, functional program, as long as the economic section is written in one office, the political in another, and the international in yet another. All

of this is then mechanically pasted together and passed off as a single state program. . . .

Principles and priorities

Any program begins by identifying the main goals. A state program begins with what can unite all of us, as citizens of the country. *For the citizen of Russia, the moral principles, which he first acquires in the family, are paramount; they form the rudder of patriotism.* This is the main thing. Without it, there can be no agreement on anything, and Russia would have to forget about national dignity and even national sovereignty.

That is our point of departure. And the task of the leader is to ensure orientation toward common goals, to assign everybody to their places, and to help people believe in their own strengths. Only thus, can a unified team spirit be formed, and only thus may victory be achieved. Therefore, today it is most important to recognize our fundamental problems and precisely define our priorities. I am prepared to say, how I see them.

Our first and main problem is *the weakening of the will.* Loss of the will of the state and of perseverance in carrying through things that have been started. Vacillation, dashing hither and yon, the habit of putting off the most difficult tasks until later. *It is time, finally, to confront the problems directly,* beginning with the most dangerous of them. With the ones that put the brakes on and suffocate the economy, preventing the state from developing. To put it bluntly, these problems threaten our very continued existence. . . .

People do not believe promises, and state power is losing face more and more. The state apparatus has become unhinged, while its motor, the executive branch, squeaks and sighs at the least attempt to get it moving. Bureaucrats "push papers," but not much else, and have almost forgotten what work discipline means. Under such conditions, people naturally cannot rely on the force of law, nor justice from the agencies of power, but only on themselves. What use, then, do they have for such powers?

Chechen war as combat against crime

A clear example of this chronic evil, is crime.

With many years of idle chatter about the war on crime,

we have only driven that evil deep into Russia. Banditry has grown strong, penetrating the cities and the countryside. . . . Things reached the point where an entire republic, a constituent territory of our Federation—Chechnya—was occupied by the criminal world and turned into its bastion. But then we entered into direct combat with these bandits and routed them, so that a real step has been taken toward the supremacy of justice, and toward a dictatorship of law, equal for all.

Now, no matter where a terrorist or a criminal might be lurking, whether in Novgorod, St. Petersburg, Kazan, or any Russian city, he can no longer count on finding help and refuge in Chechnya. A heavy blow has been dealt to the bandit world.

That was the first step, after which others are to follow.

But, this could not have been done by sitting in Moscow, composing “programs for fighting crime.” We had to carry the challenge to the enemy’s battleground and to destroy him there.

I think that I have explained, just how other grave problems can and must be solved. Life itself shows that only by openly taking up the challenge, is it possible to win.

Setting rules

Another big problem of ours is *the lack of firm and generally recognized rules*. Like any person, society cannot do without them. For the state, the rules are the law, constitutional discipline, and order. This means security for the family and for citizens’ property, personal security, and confidence in the invariability of the established rules of the game.

The state must begin with itself. It should not only establish equal rules, but observe them. . . . In a lawless state, which is a weak state, a person is defenseless and unfree. *The stronger the state, the freer the individual person*. Under democracy, your rights and mine are limited only by the corresponding rights of other people. The law is built on the recognition of that simple truth, and all must be guided by it, from a representative of official power, to an ordinary citizen.

But democracy is the dictatorship of law. . . . The police force and the prosecutors must serve the law, and not attempt to “privatize” their assigned functions for their own benefit. . . .

People ask, what our relations should be with the so-called oligarchs, in this case. They should have the same foundations as all other relations! Just like our relations with the proprietor of a little bakery or shoe repair shop.

Only a strong and effective state can live by rules, that is by the law. And only such a state can guarantee entrepreneurial, personal, and public freedom. . . .

I know that many people today are afraid of order. But order means rules. People who try to confuse concepts and pass off the lack of order as true democracy, should drop their dirty tricks and stop trying to frighten us with the past.



Russia’s Acting President Vladimir Putin. The policy content of his advocacy of a “strong state” has yet to be defined.

“Rich is our land, only there is no order,” it used to be said in Russia. They will not talk about us like that any more.

A national inventory

We have a very poor notion, of what resources we possess today. Everybody apparently understands, that property is inviolable—but how much property is there, where is it, and exactly whose is it? Today, we do not even know in actual figures, what belongs to the state. . . . It is shameful that no one in the country today can provide exact figures on the number of functioning enterprises, nor how much they earn, nor even reliable figures on the population of the country. . . . Today, taking a great inventory of the country is as necessary, as air to breathe. . . .

In recent years, we have adopted hundreds of programs of “to-priority” and “priority” measures. There being so many of them, nobody has identified the true priorities. . . . We have constantly heaped big and small matters into the same pile. . . .

Our priority is to conquer our own poverty. We are accustomed to be proud of our wealth—a great territory, natural resources, a multinational culture, and the level of education of the nation. This in fact does exist. But that is

not sufficient for Russia as a great power.

We have to tell ourselves for once: We are a rich country of poor people. In general, we are a nation of paradoxes—not so much political ones, as social, economic, and cultural paradoxes.

Our children collect gold medals at international competitions. There is high demand for our best minds, in the West. Russian musicians and directors perform in the best concert halls in the world. The theaters in our capital always have overflow audiences. All of this is our wealth.

But, there is another side of the truth. It is not only depressing, it demands action. There are still millions of people in the country, who barely make ends meet. They skimp on everything, even food. There are parents and children, who cannot afford to visit each other, for years at a time. There are old men, who achieved victory in the Great Patriotic War and earned Russia the fame of a great power, who get by somehow, or even worse—scavenging on the street. It is the fruits of their labor, their resources, which our generation is now eating up, while replenishing the national treasury with practically no achievements of our own. *We have to pay them their due, not only as a social debt, but as a political and moral task in the full sense of those words.*

Yes, we have finally begun to pay pensions on time. We have begun to help the needy, as possible. But endless hole-patching, without breakthrough ideas and approaches, is really no way to solve a national problem.

Of course, it is impossible to escape poverty without money. . . . Here, our main resource is the new generation of working-age people, . . . young, energetic people, all those who have recognized the value of work and who can work their way forward in life. . . .

State regulation

It is our priority, to defend the market from illegal interference, either by officials or by criminals.

Today, we are simply obligated to ensure property rights and to protect the entrepreneur from arbitrary, illegal interference in his business. . . .

We have talked for many years about state regulation of the economy. People understand different things by this. But the essence of it is not to strangle the market and expand bureaucracy into new domains, but rather to allow the market to get its feet on the ground. People have the right to demand protection against their business falling into the hands of bandit groups. They have a right to demand the observations of rules for honest competition. All economic subjects must be treated on an equal footing. It is impermissible, for state institutions to be used in the interests of clan or group warfare.

The picture is clear, in my view. We have high taxes, but we collect only a small portion of them. We need low taxes, but we must collect them. Enough so that the state can be *strong and effective*. . . . *The key decision for our entire eco-*

omic policy is, how to make honest work more advantageous, than stealing. . . . Enough of feeding other countries, as our people are forced to keep their earnings in foreign accounts.

Russia's foreign policy

Our priority is a rebirth of the citizens' personal dignity, in the name of the country's lofty national dignity. Russia has long since ceased to be a truncated map of the Soviet Union, but is a confident power, with a big future and a great people. . . .

Our press is now free, for good. Our Army, which has come through its debt crisis with honor, is becoming better and more professional. Yes, Russia has ceased to be an empire, but it has not lost its potential as a great power. We shall not dictate to anyone or constrain anyone, but we have time and strength for ourselves. *The new generation has a great historic chance, to build a Russia, which we shall not be ashamed to pass on to our children.*

Those who claim that we would use this opportunity for purposes of dictatorship, are afraid of their own shadow. A great nation treasures its freedom and respects the freedom of others. There is no reason to fear a strong Russia, but it cannot be left out of account. To offend us is costly.

It is our priority, to construct our foreign policy based on the national interests of our own country. In essence, we must recognize the priority of domestic over foreign goals. . . . If certain international projects are not beneficial for our citizens, no matter how loudly and prettily they are promoted, there is no need for us to go there. . . .

There is not and never will be a national power, where weakness and poverty rule. . . . But, I would like to note that our present economizing of efforts by no means implies, that we have no place for external expansion, in the positive sense of the word. What other countries call zones of vital interest, we can also see for ourselves. But let us see them as sources for further peaceful economic, international, and political development.

'Our common purpose'

I have laid out here, what I consider the most essential. Those who object, that this is not yet an entire program, will be correct. I do not pretend to have the absolute truth, but I thought it was my duty to tell my fellow citizens about my principles and views on the state.

I am convinced: The main characteristic of the new century will be not the struggle of ideologies, but the acute competition for the quality of life, for national wealth and progress. Either there is progress, or there is not. No party principles, whether left or right, may be invoked to justify the poverty of the peoples. If there were a slogan for my electoral campaign, it would be very simple: *Dignity in life*. Dignity in the sense that most of my fellow citizens believe in it and want to see it. That is how I myself see our life, being a Russian person.