
WILL RUSSIA'S FREE PRESS SURVIVE?

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Freedom of expression, and the associated freedoms of press, belief, religion, assembly, and grievance have never been greater in Russia than they are today. Conversely, never before have the authorities suffered a greater inability to suppress information and manipulate men's minds. This situation is the result of a long struggle, going back decades, between two powerful tendencies: the desire of individuals to express themselves freely, and the determination of leaders to use information selectively as a lever of power.

With the new freedoms have come what many Russians consider to be excesses: hate-mongering, rabid anti-semitism, disclosure of classified information, libel, lack of professional standards, pornography, corruption, and "unfair" criticism of the nation's top leaders. These developments have, in turn, elicited a political backlash. Leaders and ordinary people ask: Shouldn't criminal sanctions be imposed on the press for overstepping certain bounds? Shouldn't parliament pass an official secrets act? Shouldn't a law be adopted prohibiting criticism of officials? These challenges raise the question: Is media freedom in Russia here to stay or will it be restricted again in the not-too-distant future by the suppressionists?

Burden of Suppression

The legacy of suppression is one of Russia's heaviest burdens.¹ When England and other European nations were throwing off pre-publication censorship in the 17th century, Russia was tightening its control over publishing. Nicholas I imposed a particularly severe censorship as a result of the Decembrist mutiny of 1825 which sought to depose him and exterminate his family. Nicholas' son, Alexander II, and his great grandson, Nicholas II, loosened these strictures in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

But the free Russian press did not survive the 1917 Revolution. Despite claims of devotion to press liberty, Vladimir Lenin began a ruthless campaign to close

1. Yu. M. Baturin, "Tsenzura protiv glasnosti: Ot Ivana Groznogo do 1917 (Censorship Against Glasnost: From Ivan the Terrible to 1917)," *Sovietskoe Gosudarstvo i Pravo*, No.3 (March 1989), 134-142.

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down opposition newspapers once he came to power. His communist successors created one of the most rigid systems of press control the world has ever known. It was based on various mechanisms: raw terror; criminal sanctions for denigrating the state and the communist system; appointment of reliable party-line editors; and a formal censorship agency called Glavlit, created in 1922, which issued a classified Index nicknamed "the Talmud," secretly defining forbidden topics.

This artillery of suppression inspired most writers and editors to strive for self-preservation by committing self-censorship. The reflex of self-censorship, which produced intellectual dishonesty and corruption, became as powerful as the formal mechanisms of censorship.

Censorship under Pressure

Yet this impressive censorship machine began to fail in the years following Stalin's death in 1953. Pressures, both internal and external, combined to push the Soviet Union towards a more open society and towards press freedom. At least three major internal pressures were at play: (1) the undermining of the intelligentsia's faith in the political leadership due to a series of political/military crises between 1953 and 1983, (2) the economic stagnation of the Brezhnev era, and (3) repressed free-thinking.

First, Nikita S. Khrushchev's "Secret Speech" on Stalin's crimes to the 20th Communist Party Congress in 1956 sent shock waves throughout the communist world. Hungary, subsequently, tried to break away from the communist bloc and was brutally suppressed. Twelve years later, Czecho-Slovakia attempted an unorthodox renewal and was invaded. Eleven years after that, the Kremlin invaded a turbulent Afghanistan and Soviet troops bogged down in an unwinnable war. That probably spared an unruly Poland, where trade unionism and religion were on the rise, the same fate as Hungary and Czecho-Slovakia.

These events convinced many of the Soviet elite that the Kremlin leaders did not understand the internal needs of their own nation. Communist bosses were seen by many intellectuals as ambitious self-seekers, anxious to preserve their personal positions, and probably downright evil. As a Moscow-based correspondent, I had numerous conversations with members of the intelligentsia between 1981 and 1986. These talks convinced me that the Russian elite believed the Kremlin could be restrained by only one force: a strong United States.

Second, the Brezhnev era bought political stability at the price of stifling innovation. Little was done to cure the inefficiencies of collectivized agriculture. As much as 40 percent of agricultural output rotted on the fields or in storage. Industrial output leveled off, and extraction of oil and gas began to decline. The success of American-made "smart" weapons used by Israel in Middle East conflicts shocked the Soviet military by demonstrating the superiority of American electronics and computerization. The inefficiency of the Soviet economy forced the Kremlin to reach out to the Western world for trade and technology.

The failure of Soviet harvests obliged Moscow to import major amounts of grain. The technology gap prompted the Russians to pursue massive industrial and military espionage in the West. The inevitable conclusion was that something was wrong with the Communist engine.

Third, intellectual ferment at home began to boil. Alexander Solzhenitsyn called for an end to censorship in 1968. Historians urged greater openness in the national archives. Scientists travelling abroad discovered serious lags in Soviet science and pressed for more contacts. TV journalists, watching the U.S. space triumphs, pressed for launch-to- touchdown coverage of Soviet spectacles. Young writers formed a journal, *Metropol*, in the mid-1970's which operated outside the censorship system until it was closed down in 1979. Poetess Bella Akhmadullina denounced the arrest of academician Andrei Sakharov on television. A Moscow radio announcer stunned listeners when he twice criticized the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan on the air before he was relieved.

External Pressures

To these internal fissures should be added a host of unremitting Western pressures. The United States and its western partners agreed to recognize postwar European borders, specifically the borders between East and West Germany, East Germany and Poland, and Poland and the Soviet Union. (The West continued to dispute the incorporation of the Baltic states into the Soviet Union in 1939 but was unable to dislodge them from Moscow's grip.) For its part, the Soviet Union agreed to respect human rights and enlarge East-West communications. In 1975, the Helsinki Final Act was signed, an accord which dismayed many Russian bureaucrats who felt the agreements were far too intrusive in domestic affairs.

The United States, in fact, meant to intrude. In their biennial negotiations for a cultural exchange agreement, American negotiators unsuccessfully argued for the distribution of American newspapers in the Soviet Union. The Voice of America broadcasted western-style news reports and commentary into the Soviet Union in Russian and other languages. The BBC, Deutsche Welle, Kol Israel, Radio Vatican and other western broadcasters assaulted the Soviet airwaves and prompted a massive and expensive jamming counter-reaction. The Kremlin worried, too, that soon foreign TV broadcasting would be invading the Soviet Union. Foreign Minister Andrei A. Gromyko introduced a draft treaty at the United Nations to prohibit foreign TV broadcasting, but the issue was never addressed.

Another important external pressure to be considered was the rise in Western tourism to Russia beginning in 1954. Informal, people-to-people contacts only whetted the appetite of ordinary Russian people to travel abroad and to be in touch with the rest of the world. Jewish emigration to Israel, beginning in 1971, helped open up Russia. Jewish would-be emigrants contributed importantly to the growth of dissident literature — *samizdat* — from Moscow. Disgruntled Jewish citizens became a major source of inside information for foreign corre-

spondents. Finally, Soviet trade and culture officials, travelling abroad, brought back stories of Western affluence which convinced friends at home that capitalism was doing something right, and that socialism was doing something wrong.

The Economic Monster

Of all these pressures, internal and external, probably the most unremitting was the deteriorating Soviet economy. In the last months of the Brezhnev regime, the new generation of political and intellectual leaders were privately discussing the "era of stagnation" around the kitchen table and what to do about it. An example which was leaked to the *Washington Post* was the "Novosibirsk Report" authored by sociologist Tatyana Zaslavskaya.² In December 1984, before he came to power, Mikhail Gorbachev told a gathering of Russian ideological workers, that the Russian people were mature enough to know the truth about the nation.³ That was a hint of the Gorbachevian "glasnost" yet to come.

Glasnost was not, strictly speaking, freedom of speech or freedom of the press. The word is derived from the Russian word "golos" or "voice." Glasnost means "to give voice" to an idea or to a process like a trial. Gorbachev's selection of this word was imaginative: it allowed Russian and Western observers to read into it whatever positive connotations they hoped would accompany political change. In the West, many mistook this unfamiliar word for political liberalization. In Russia, many hoped that glasnost would prove to be a lightly disguised form of press freedom.

The first major test of glasnost came with the nuclear catastrophe at Chernobyl in April 1986. This tragedy seriously frightened responsible officials who sought to deflect blame and cover up the extent of the catastrophe. Once again, suppression was the first instinct. But the disaster could not be whitewashed: it was easily detectable from abroad by satellite and by measurement of radiation levels. Gorbachev eventually persuaded his Politburo colleagues to come clean, painful as that might be. After two weeks of unexplained silence, Gorbachev finally addressed the nation.

In the following months and years, glasnost would shake up the Soviet Union in ways that were inconceivable a few years before. For the first time, the extent of Stalin's lurid crimes were made public to the horror of the population. No longer could the Communist Party claim to be infallible. Indeed, one-party rule began to look in the popular mind as downright sinister.

And the press began reporting on the dark side of Soviet society in stunning detail: maltreatment of Afghan veterans, prostitution, teen pregnancies, rampaging gangs, organized crime, rationing in scores of cities, environmental crises, drugs, AIDS, and radiation dangers. Glasnost also allowed age-old ethnic conflicts to surface. The Baltic states took advantage of the moment to press for,

2. *Washington Post*, 2 August 1983, A1.

3. *Pravda*, 11 December 1984, 2-3.

and eventually to gain, independence. Meanwhile other ethnic and religious frictions broke out into open strife, as in Nagorno-Karabakh. The largely open coverage of the 18th Communist Party Conference in the summer of 1988 brought out complaints which astounded the nation. The taboos fell and the KGB police was blasted; individual leaders were denounced; even the untouchable Godhead, Lenin, was excoriated.

Express/Suppress Conflicts

Such spasms of criticism inevitably revived the express/suppress tensions. Suppressionists saw Lenin's authoritarian principles being betrayed and society disintegrating. On August 19, 1991, a group of hardliners nominally headed by Vice President Gennadi I. Yanaev tried to seize power and restore order while Gorbachev was on vacation in the Crimea. Their Decree No. 2 aimed to reimpose press control by suppressing the critical media.⁴ The conspirators miscalculated, however; Yanaev and his colleagues mistakenly believed that the media would rally around the Communist Party as it had done when Khrushchev was overthrown in a Kremlin coup in 1964. But just the opposite happened. Democratic leaders like Boris Yeltsin, Gavriil Popov, and Anatoly Sobchak recognized this was a make-or-break point in the nation's history and they risked their lives to defeat the coup. Several thousand Muscovites supported them and flocked to the Russian White House to defend "democracy."

Independent-minded journalists joined the movement, realizing that the liberties of glasnost might be taken away if they did not stand up. Though banned, eleven independent newspapers put together a crisis sheet called *Obshchaya Gazeta* (The Common Newspaper) which printed Yeltsin's denunciations of the coup plotters and their unconstitutional actions. Reporters and editors took hundreds of smaller actions to undermine the suppression order: they continued to gather the news and get the word out, using all available means: they distributed leaflets; they contacted friends abroad; they sent fax transmissions. Their efforts were assisted by foreign correspondents who energetically covered the attempted coup. CNN reports, receivable by parabolic antennas in the Moscow area, did a great deal to encourage the Democrats.⁵ In the end, expression prevailed over suppression.

The August crisis accelerated to breakneck speed a number of political crescendos, among them the final disgrace of the Communist Party, the fall of Gorbachev, the liberation of the Baltic states, the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the creation of the Commonwealth of Independent States. A new Russian Federation emerged from the ashes and adopted a new Russian Law on the Press on December 27, 1991.

Central to this new law was the prohibition of censorship. Article 3 reads:

4. *Pravda*, 20 August 1992, 2.

5. Stuart H. Loory and Ann Imse, *Seven Days that Shook the World*, (Atlanta: Turner Publishing, 1992), 233-235.

Censorship of mass media—that is, requiring from editorial boards of mass media preliminary agreement on announcements or on materials by responsible officials, government organs, organizations, agencies, or public groups (except in cases where a responsible official is the author or the interviewee), similarly a prohibition to distribute announcements or materials, or their separate parts—is not permitted.⁶

The New Russian Law on the Press

On examination, the Law on the Press reveals many compromises to accommodate the conservatives and their penchant for suppression. The thirty-page law has none of the simplicity and ambiguity of the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

True, the law does not allow prior restraint (Art. 3), but it does require each media organ to register with the authorities (Chapter II). Registration is not automatic and may be refused (Art. 13). Newspapers and broadcasting stations may be penalized or closed down for various abuses (Art. 4, Art. 59). Journalists have enumerated rights (Art. 47) but they also carry responsibilities (Art. 49). Erotic materials must be restrained by discreet packaging (Art. 37); calls for the forcible overthrow of the government, for racial violence, or for war, are banned (Art. 4).

Despite such restrictions, the Russian press today is pushing freedom of expression to the limits, occasionally overstepping the bounds with impunity:

- **Pornography**—The pornography explosion erupted in the late 1980s and continues today. Soft-core broadsheets, like *Venera*, *On i Ona*, flood hawkers' stands in the Moscow subway. A homosexual newspaper, *Tema*, has also made its appearance. Foreign hard-core pornography has been invading the Russian market as barriers have come down and has served as a model for domestic producers. Domestic hard-core pornography is also available with a little digging. The pornography issue pits conservatives against liberals, with the former wanting complete suppression; the latter urging "civilized ways to control."⁷
- **Unauthorized disclosure of secrets**—The opposition newspaper *Den'* prides itself on its ability to wheedle classified documents out of the bureaucracy. In its issue of July 26-August 1, 1992, No. 30, *Den'* published classified correspondence between U.S. Secretary of State James Baker and Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev. In these "Dear Andrei" letters, Baker urged the Russian minister to join the U.N. sanctions against Serbia. The letters made it appear that Kozyrev was willing to forsake a historic Russian ally to do Washington's bidding. The motive for publication was

6. From the text of the "Law on the Press" as supplied by the Ministry of Press and Information.

7. Interview with Zinovii Yuriev, journalist formerly with *Krokodil*, Andover, Vermont, 19 September 1992.

to put the skids under the liberal-minded Kozyrev.

- **Hate-mongering and anti-semitism**—Anti-semitism has always lain just below the surface in Russia. Now two small newspapers, *Russkoye Voskresenye* and *Puls' Tushina* have earned a disreputable reputation for constantly harping on the "Jewish-Masonic" conspiracy as the root of all Russia's troubles. The Ministry of Press and Information plans to take legal action against them.⁸
- **Libel**—Failure to check facts or quote correctly results in libel suits or the threat of libel suits. A year ago, *Den'* lost a libel suit to Edmond Iodkovskii whom it had accused of plagiarism and treason. A court ordered *Den'* to pay a penalty of 150,000 rubles.⁹
- **Lack of professional standards and sensationalism**—The Russian media are much more opinionated and less fact-based than their American counterparts. This is probably the result of a historic lack of access in a closed society, as well as a more general European tradition of partisan journalism. Under the "democrats" access to official sources has not notably improved. On the contrary, journalists frequently complain they have difficulty contacting and conversing with knowledgeable sources. Too, the falling readership of newspapers is pushing editors to become more and more sensationalistic, much in the style of America's *National Enquirer*. *Vechernaya Moskva*, for example, opened its pages to faith healer Alan Chumak who claimed that anyone reading the issue with his article would experience an improvement in well-being. Similarly, state television has given major air time to astrologers and quacks. The newspaper *Moskovskii Komsomolets* predicted that seven million invisible "astral soldiers" would gather on Red Square October 22, 1992 to fight the evil of centuries.¹⁰
- **Corruption**—Hard economic times make individual journalists vulnerable to being bought off by special interests. Several leading journalists are suspected of operating with KGB backing. One American journalist who worked for a short time on *Kommersant* reports that a number of reporters on that financial newspaper are "on the take." When confronted, they passed off their connection as "small business" which the government wishes to encourage. All of this recalls "the Reptile Fund" which the pre-revolutionary police used to buy off Russian journalists.
- **"Unfair" criticism of leaders**—President Boris Yeltsin has been described as "the American occupation government" since his return from the United States in June, 1992. The opposition newspaper *Chto Delat'* (circulation: 20,000) has been leading a crusade to oust Yeltsin. Gavriil Popov resigned as the democratic mayor of Moscow after a series of attacks on him in March and April, 1992, by *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, *Literaturnaya*

8. Interview with officials of the Ministry of Press and Information, Moscow, 5 August 1992.

9. Interview with Zinovii Yuriev, 19 September 1992.

10. *Ibid.*

Gazeta, and state television, for allegedly having leased illegally, at bargain basement prices, prime Moscow property to a French concern. Media critics say these attacks were not properly documented.¹¹

Curbing the Press

Against this chaotic background, it is not surprising that some political leaders wish to curb criticism by the press, or, at least impose stricter controls. Ruslan I. Khazbulatov, the speaker of the Supreme Soviet (parliament), is fond of quoting a distressed George Washington in 1793: "We have some infamous papers calculated for disturbing, if not absolutely intended, to disturb the peace of the community."¹²

In June and July 1992, Khazbulatov began a concerted attack on the independent press. His immediate target was *Izvestia*, but few doubted that he had much wider ambitions. His line of attack was that *Izvestia*, founded in March 1917, was always a Soviet government organ and that its claim to be totally independent today is illegal. During the August 1991 coup attempt, *Izvestia* was among the newspapers allowed to publish by the conspirators. But its editorial and composing room staff refused to comply with the conspirators' demands and belligerently refused to take directions.

Immediately after the coup, the newspaper reorganized itself, preserving its old name and electing Igor Golembiovskii, a twenty-five-year veteran, as its new editor. On August 23, 1991, the editorial staff re-registered the newspaper as an independent broadsheet under the 1990 All-Union Law on the Press. The staff dropped the front page picture of Lenin, as well as the tag line "Organ of the Soviet of People's Deputies."

Khazbulatov claimed that the newspaper's re-registration was illegal. Since the newspaper continued to use its old building at Pushkin Square, in addition to government-owned hot lead linotypes, printing presses, and other accessories, he claimed that it had essentially stolen the plant from the Soviet government. If *Izvestia* and other press organs were benefitting from the government, why shouldn't they subordinate themselves to the government's wishes? According to that logic, state television and any newspaper receiving any kind of help from the government owed loyalty to the authorities.

Khazbulatov's assertions sounded the alarm among members of the independent press in Moscow and even abroad. Harold Andersen, chairman of the World Press Freedom Committee, sent a message to President Boris Yeltsin warning that freedom of the press was at stake. In Moscow, twenty leading journalists, including *Izvestia*'s Golembiovskii, other independent editors, and three well-known television executives joined in an appeal to Yeltsin to stop the

11. Interview with Dmitrii Babich of *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, Boston, Massachusetts, 14 July 1992.

12. *Parlamentskaya Nedelya*, No. 17, 18-24 May 1992, exact citation from George Washington from James Pollard, *Presidents and the Press*, (New York: McMillan Co.), 16.

parliament's efforts to impose a new censorship.¹³ Yeltsin took their side, declaring:

The attempts to bridle the press could return us to the state of no free speech; could deliver a blow to our young democracy. The press is finding its complicated and contradictory way towards a new political culture; it commits mistakes; not infrequently shows a lack of balance in judgements; occasionally suffers from a lack of solid information. But all these 'ills' may be corrected with time, political awareness, and the strengthening of professionalism. We have a good Law on the Press, approved by all of society, and we need to cooperate with the press according to the standards of this law, which is a true achievement of Russian democracy.¹⁴

This was not enough to stop the parliament from adopting a resolution on July 17, 1992 asserting that *Izvestia's* re-registration in 1991 was defective and calling on the newspaper to become once again the organ of the Supreme Soviet. The battle lines were now clearly drawn. With Golembiovskii's cooperation, three parliamentary deputies appealed to Russia's Constitutional Court to examine the parliament's July 17, 1992 order. The deputies, led by Sergei M. Shakhrai, argued that the vote adopting the order had been incorrectly tallied and that the parliament, in attempting to judge *Izvestia's* re-registration and to order its restructuring, had unconstitutionally arrogated to itself both executive and judicial authority.

Meanwhile, *Izvestia* has continued to publish, disregarding Khazbulatov's maneuvers. Furthermore, no police have showed up on the newspaper's doorstep to close it down. "The strategy of the Supreme Soviet and of Khazbulatov is to gain control over all the media," Golembiovskii told the author of this article in an interview in his office August 5, 1992. The editor vowed unremitting opposition to press control.¹⁵

Golembiovskii also noted Khazbulatov's proposals for other levers of suppression: a media over-sight board to watch over press and television, and substantial changes in the criminal code to impose penalties for criticizing public officials. Golembiovskii asserted this latter stricture amounted to the revival of the much hated Art. 191.1 of the Soviet criminal code which made it illegal to denigrate the Soviet system or its officials.

President Yeltsin, Golembiovskii explained, is saddled with a conservative parliament which was elected before the August 1991 coup and which has been blocking reform. Yeltsin wants to disband the current parliament, adopt a new constitution, and hold new elections. Khazbulatov, the editor contends, thinks

13. *Izvestia*, 29 July 1992, 1.

14. *Izvestia*, 15 July 1992, 1.

15. Interview with Golembiovskii, Moscow, Russia, 5 August 1992.

he can strengthen his own political position if he can achieve control over a major portion of the press. Thus, freedom of the press is threatened again by the political ambition of suppressionists. If they win, they would limit reporting on government activities not just in Moscow but throughout the Russian Federation.

The Economic Threat

This renewed battle between expressionists and suppressionists is only the most obvious challenge the new Russian press faces today. No less serious is the economic threat caused by the transition from a subsidized, command economy to a free-market economy.

Two elements in this transition immediately affected the press. First, the Yeltsin government told newspaper editors that henceforth they alone would be responsible for meeting their bills. And second, their bills began to mushroom with hyperinflation. The most troublesome issues have been the price of newsprint and the costs of distribution. The cost of ink and labor have been lesser problems. Under the former Soviet system, newspapers benefitted from the extremely low cost of news-print. Traditionally, it had been pegged at 33 rubles a ton. But by January 1992, newsprint had risen to 240 rubles a ton, and by July 1992, it had reach 21,000 rubles a ton.¹⁶

The first reaction of editors was to raise newspaper prices. But even if the price went from a few kopeks an issue to 50 kopeks and then to one ruble, the income generated came nowhere near meeting costs. By March 1992, most of the large central newspapers were forced to conduct a re-subscription campaign. *Nevavisimaya Gazeta* went to 500 rubles for a six months subscription; *Izvestia* to 360; *Komsomolskaya Pravda* to 300; *Trud* to 300. *Literaturnaya Gazeta* and *Moscow News*, which come out once a week, went to 182 and 240 rubles, respectively, for six months.¹⁷

Furthermore, all newspapers were saddled with the difficult problem of distribution. Russian newspapers, and Soviet newspapers before them, have not operated their own delivery services. Rather they have relied on the Post Office or on Rospechat', a distribution agency, to deliver their subscription issues. Rising fuel costs have obliged both agencies to raise their delivery prices. Thus, it costs the individual 50 rubles a month to subscribe to *Izvestia*, editor Golembiovskii estimates, but it costs *Izvestia* 80 rubles a month to deliver the newspaper to the reader.

Some newspapers like *Komsomolskaya Pravda* and *Den'* encourage entrepreneurs to come to the editorial offices and buy copies for one ruble a piece, re-selling them for whatever they might get elsewhere. "But this amounts only to a drop in the bucket," Dmitrii Babich of *Komsomolskaya Pravda* says.

16. *Ibid.*

17. *Ibid.*

To make matters worse, the average monthly wage of the Russian worker is currently only 5000 rubles. The poverty line has been pegged at 2500 a month per person and a family of four needs about 10,000 rubles a month to subsist. In other words, newspapers are fast pricing themselves out of the mass market even as reader interest is dropping.

In desperation, editors cast around for other sources of income and cost-saving ideas. They have come up with the following: reduce circulation and limit frequency of publication; sell more advertising; restructure quarters, and rent out space to other enterprises; develop diverse money-making schemes within the editorial offices; eliminate costly foreign bureau; and seek foreign partners.

Government Subsidies

None of these palliatives, however, have been sufficient to sustain the print media. In response, editors appealed to the government for temporary help. And President Yeltsin, sensing the need for an independent press if democracy were to survive, instructed the Ministry of Press and Information to devise a system of subsidies. Would Yeltsin take advantage of the situation to help the press which was supportive of his administration, and destroy the press which was critical?

Officials at the Ministry of Press and Information assert that subsidies are not granted on an ideological basis. They say they wish only to destroy the rigid, dogmatic system of the past and ensure a plurality of views in modern Russia. In other words, they back expression over suppression.

Thus *Pravda*, the Communist daily, which is highly critical of Yeltsin but has a well-established niche receives a subsidy, as does *Izvestia*, which is emerging as the Russian equivalent of the *New York Times*.

According to Ministry officials the factors which are taken into account in granting a subsidy are first, priority will be given to cultural and educational publications for children as well as publications for children and young people. Second, no subsidies will be given to media organs which are already maintained by the national budget, like *Rossiskaya Gazeta* and state television. Third, there will be no subsidies for pornographic publications. In addition, size of circulation (does the newspaper circulate throughout the Commonwealth of Independent States), readership niche, and frequency of publication will also be taken into account.¹⁸

Assistance is intended to cover only the gap caused by soaring prices of paper, delivery services, ink and other supplies, Ministry officials say. Each newspaper files a financial statement with the Ministry and after careful consideration the amount of subsidy is tailored to the individual situation.

18. Interview with officials of the Ministry of Press and Information, Moscow, 5 August 1992.

Survival of the Messenger

Despite Russia's current turmoil, the Russian people on the whole feel that newspapers and broadcasting have improved as the communist system has collapsed. The new free press is viewed as more credible than the old Soviet press. Furthermore, according to polling data, Russians are not about to kill the messenger. Rather, they feel that uncovering inequities should be one of the responsibilities of the press.¹⁹ A July 1992 poll, for example, indicates the people feel that the press should be more, rather than less, critical of Russian leaders.²⁰ "The people feel that when something is written, something will be done," observes Dr. Yasen N. Zassourskii, Dean of the Journalism Department of Moscow State University.²¹

Says Zinovii Yuriev, a veteran Moscow observer of American and Russian society, "The majority of people are for a free press." And Editor Golembiovskii asserts that the Moscow public, in particular, support *Izvestia's* struggle to remain independent.²² Nevertheless, disputes do erupt which fire up emotions and cast doubt on these supportive reactions. In the quarrel with Khazbulatov, parliamentary supporters of *Izvestia* have referred the newspaper's case to the Constitutional Court. This accords with the philosophy of the Law on the Press which calls for the courts to adjudicate problems with the media (Art. 61, 62). Editor Golembiovskii sees the court system as a reliable method of conflict resolution.²³

This legalistic approach may, however, prove to be inadequate. Contemporary Russian courts are the direct descendants of Soviet courts where no independent jury existed. Judge and prosecutor were on the same side and superior to the defense. It is far too early to expect that Russian courts would enjoy a reputation for fairness and objectivity. Furthermore, the Russian constitutional court is generally regarded as "liberal" and likely to side with President Yeltsin. Thus, the decision it comes to in the *Izvestia* case may only strengthen the determination of conservatives to subjugate the press to the extent possible.

The Russian press must develop ethical norms of its own. This is recognized by editors and television executives. However, the development of a code of ethics, either for the press as a whole or for each individual newspaper or broadcasting station, is only just beginning. More urgent, everyday issues get in the way. Editor Vitaly Tretyakov says, "I wanted to create an ethical code for *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, but I keep getting distracted." In an interview, Tretyakov offered this initial approach:

19. Yu A. Levada, *Est' Mnenie: Itogi sotsiologicheskogo oprosa* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1990), 112-115.

20. Sluzhba "Mnenie," Vypusk No. 15/92: Russian Poll for May-June 1992 based on 1,500 respondents, 4.

21. Interviews with Dr. Yasen N. Zassourski, Moscow, 31 July and 10 August 1992.

22. Interview with Igor Golembiovskii, Moscow, 5 August 1992.

23. *Ibid.*

Journalists for *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* may criticize the Communist Party but they must not engage in rabid, anti-communism. They should stand apart from the political process and not make partisan appearances. Finally, they should not engage in polemics with other publications.²⁴

This is a start, but it obviously neglects many other important issues which the Society of Professional Journalists in America hold dear—truth-telling, objectivity, fair play, dialogue with readers, and unacceptability of gifts, favors, or plagiarism.

Since about fifty percent of Russian journalists enter the profession through schools of journalism, the role of Moscow State University and its associated schools in St. Petersburg, Yekaterinburg, Vladivostok, Irkutsk, Krasnoyarsk, Tomsk, Rostov, Kazan, Voronezh, Saransk, Ufa, Mahachkala, and Vladikavkaz will be significant. Moscow State University is only just beginning to turn to the issue of journalistic ethics. As of last year, the journalism department did not offer a single course in ethics for its undergraduates. Its professors, however, recognize ethics as an important subject which will have to be addressed. They are turning to the experience of the free press in the United States, Britain, France, Germany, and other foreign countries for inspiration and guidance.²⁵

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Russian press has never been freer and is likely to remain so. The suppressionists are fighting a rearguard battle to restrict the press, but they are unlikely to force a return to the Stalinist system of media control. They may win some minor battles, but history is against them.

For one thing, Russia's depressed economy will force any government in Moscow—even a very conservative or military government—to reach out to the West for help. The West will, in all probability, insist on verifying how that help is used. It will insist, too, on access to Russian resources and information. Western help will be an influence for openness.

Secondly, the pervasive presence of foreign media, as demonstrated during the abortive coup of 1991, will keep political and economic developments in Russia in the spotlight. Under such conditions, a return to the Stalin terror is impossible. Yet without widespread terror, a major element of the old censorship system is missing and cannot be renewed.

Finally, and perhaps most important of all, the Russian people themselves have learned, with horror, of Stalin's crimes. They have seen that one-party rule is likely to lead to catastrophic mistakes. They have come to recognize that an opposition is essential to testing and correcting policy errors.

24. Interview with Vladimir Tretyakov, Moscow, 4 August 1992.

25. Interview with Professors Svetlana G. Kolesnik and Zassurskii, Moscow, 10 August 1992.

Gorbachevian glasnost has opened for the Russians a perspective on their own history which had been missing during the last 70 years. What glasnost started is a fundamental break with the suppressionist tendencies of the past. A new perspective, which I call "the memory of evil" today pervades Russian society. This memory, contained in the minds of millions upon millions of citizens, will act as a countervailing force against any effort to re-create an obedient press and reinstitute a convenient form of thought control.²⁶

26. Nicholas Daniloff, "Pluralism in Russian Media—Now Irreversible?" forthcoming in Uri Ra'anani, *Russian Pluralism—Now Irreversible* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992).

