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Tough Russian Anti-Capitalist Literature

By Andre Vltchek
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Imagine Moscow being taken over by some international corporate cartel. By a monster which has its own factories and office buildings, security services, private prisons, re-education ('training') centers, and its obedient mass media outlets. Imagine that it also has detailed databases on almost everyone who really matters in the capital.

Imagine that human lives suddenly don't matter. People are only expected to produce and consume; they become fully disposable.

Imagine that the once greatly educated Russia with its legendary artists and philosophers is gradually getting reduced to an unimaginably primitive level. Suddenly, there is US pop trash flying about everywhere, and the greatest entertainment for the masses comes from watching countless television 'reality shows', including those that graphically depict, candidly, how both men and women are shitting and pissing in the capital's public toilets.

That's what you get when reading a witty, provocative and thoroughly outrageous novel by Sergei Minaev, called "R.A.B."; 521 pages of it!

In all his novels, including "Soulless", "The Telki", "Media Sapiens" and "R.A.B.", Minaev masterfully depicts the perpetual crimes committed by corporate culture and its mainstream media. Brutally and candidly he describes an apocalyptic society constructed on the soulless, merciless and murderous principles of the modern Western-style capitalist system.

In such a world, nothing is sacred anymore. The ‘elites’ are having great fun hunting on the outskirts of the city, not for some animals, but for homeless people living in abandoned pipelines (“R.A.B.”). A US mainstream television news channel, together with its local counterpart, manage to trigger a military conflict between Georgia and Russia, after hiring several combat helicopters and retired soldiers, killing real people, just in order to increase their ratings. And several terrorist attacks in Moscow are being paid for and staged by other big media conglomerates (“Media Sapiens”).

Minaev is not crying; he is definitely far from being a ‘bleeding heart’. He is tough and cynical. His characters are mostly ruthless super-yuppies from Moscow, go-getters, living a fast life, taking drugs, partying in luxury clubs, having sex literally with everything that moves (“Soulless”).

But they get burned, destroyed, brought to near suicide.

They have no ideology, no political views. They laugh at, they insult everything and everybody, but deep inside they are actually suffering from a horrible void, from emptiness. In those rare moments of honesty, they admit to each other and to themselves, that they are actually still longing for at least ‘something pure and decent’, uncorrupted by the global market-fundamentalist regime and its ‘values’ and ‘culture’.

In R.A.B. Minaev goes much further. His yuppies (paradoxically, the mid and upper-level managers) start a rebellion against the system. They go on strike, march through the streets, and build barricades. They begin demanding social justice. They burn down their own offices.

They do it after their Russian toy-producing company (and other companies all over the city) gets swallowed by a US-based multi-national corporation, which immediately begins dismantling all social benefits, while injecting uncertainty and fear into the workplace. A multi-national also opens a horrid toy factory on the outskirts of Moscow, which then employs desperate immigrants from the Central Asian republics.

The privately-owned mass media outlets first confront the protesters, and then follow up with pro-corporate propaganda and in the end the corporate security services and the army. Many people disappear. Others are locked up in the offices and secret prisons of the corporations, and tortured. Those who survive become ‘unemployable’, their names permanently on the blacklist.

But what does Minaev really call for? Is it a true revolution?

Yes and no. He does not believe that in the countries that have been conquered by market fundamentalism and by unbridled consumerism, a ‘real revolution’ is possible. He does not think that the people there have any ideals or any zeal left. At the same time, at least some of his characters are clearly unwilling to surrender.

It is chilling to read R.A.B. while at the same time those ‘rebellions’ in Greece, France, Spain and the U.K. are taking place.

One of the main characters of R.A.B. confronts the demonstrators: It is not a revolution! You are all parts of the system. You just want a better deal for yourself. Through this rebellion, you are actually negotiating with the cartel of the corporations. If you get what you are asking for, you’ll happily remain where you are and carry on as if nothing happened.

Then Minaev does exactly what no Western writer would dare to do. He begins to argue that to destroy the system, there has to be an armed struggle. Otherwise no real change could ever be achieved.

The suppressed rebellion of the yuppies eventually triggers much a wider movement, and soon there are real battles raging in several provincial capitals.

The end of the novel is open. The main character of R.A.B. is destroyed. He loses the love of his life (in desperation she commits suicide); he has no job, no money and no place to go. But he is still alive. Russia is still alive. It is obvious that no matter what, it will never accept this monstrous system that was forced on it by the West.

It all may sound like an insane fantasy, but in fact what Minaev writes about is not too far from the nightmares that Russia was descending into right after Gorbachev allowed the country (USSR) to fall apart, and then Yeltsin introduced unbridled privatization and gave unprecedented concessions to foreign corporations. During that period, Russia went through something that could be easily described as a social genocide. Life expectancy dropped to the levels of war-torn countries in Africa. Lawlessness ruled. All ideals were ridiculed and spat at. A big number of Russian intellectuals were bought and organized by the West into countless NGO’s. The lowest grade of Western pop and entertainment torpedoed Russian culture. During those dark days, the West finally succeeded in bringing Russia to its knees.

Not even two decades later, a new Russia is once again proud, strong and confident.

It rose to its feet, it began successfully producing again, and it underwent a tremendous and positive social transformation.

Just one week ago I returned from the Russian Far East, from the cities of Vladivostok, Khabarovsk and Petropavlovsk Kamchatski. Wherever I went, I witnessed new and impressive infrastructure. I encountered a confident, hard working nation, which was working hard to restore at least some of the socialist structures and benefits that it used to enjoy in the past.

The new, present-day Russia is much closer to China; much more impressed by the Chinese system, than by what it was forced to adopt in the past; during the “pro-Western era” which is now generally considered to be synonymous to a national disaster.

Russian writers played an important role in describing the horrors of the Gorbachev/Yeltsin years, and of the brutal global economic, political and ‘cultural’ regime injected by the West to all the corners of the Planet. From an outrageous Eduard Limonov’s novel “It’s Me, Eddie” to Minaev’s “R.A.B.”, Russian literature has been daring, insulting, direct and brutally honest.

While Limonov and Minaev sell millions of copies of their books at home, their work is virtually unknown in the West. I found no English translations when searching on Amazon.com, and elsewhere.

In his New York-based “Eddie”, Limonov is calling openly for terrorist acts against the Western regime, while some of Minaev’s characters also believe in an armed struggle, although of more conventional type.

Nothing is spared. When the US toy-producing corporation demands a special tax from its employees in Russia, for “helping out those poor children in the Third World”, the main character of R.A.B. thinks: “well, they can now use that money to buy coffins for children they employ and kill in Indonesia or Thailand”. When the tax goes slightly up, he comments: “now they will have enough funds to dig at least a few mass graves”.

All this is simply too outrageous for Western readers. Or more precisely, the ‘book business’ most likely ‘thinks’ that it is.

The fact remains that despite what is constantly repeated by Western propaganda, those who read Russian can clearly see and appreciate that Russian literature is actually much more free, daring and rebellious than its counterpart in the West.

When several Russian bestselling novelists are calling openly for combat against the global regime (the same regime which is, until now, at least partially, controlling the economy of their country), one has no choice but to be impressed by the level of freedom in the country which allows such work to be published and then promoted.

But in the West, you would never know all this, unless you spoke Russian. It is because in the West (and in its ‘client’ states and colonies) you are being extremely well ‘protected’ from such uncomfortable (and the regime would even say ‘dangerous’) thoughts!