



LETTER FROM MOSCOW

KREMLIN, INC.

Why are Vladimir Putin's opponents dying?

BY MICHAEL SPECTER

Saturday, October 7th, was a marathon of disheartening tasks for Anna Politkovskaya. Two weeks earlier, her father, a retired diplomat, had died of a heart attack as he emerged from the Moscow Metro while on his way to visit Politkovskaya's mother, Raisa Mazepa, in the hospital. She had just been diagnosed with cancer and was too weak even

to attend her husband's funeral. "Your father will forgive me, because he knows that I have always loved him," she told Anna and her sister, Elena Kudimova, the day he was buried. A week later, she underwent surgery, and since then Anna and Elena had been taking turns helping her cope with her grief.

Politkovskaya was supposed to spend

the day at the hospital, but her twenty-six-year-old daughter, who was pregnant, had just moved into Politkovskaya's apartment, on Lesnaya Street, while her own place was being prepared for the baby. "Anna had so much on her mind," Elena Kudimova told me when we met in London, before Christmas. "And she was trying to finish her article." Politkovskaya

STEVE BRODNER



was a special correspondent for the small liberal newspaper *Novaya Gazeta*, and, like most of her work, the piece focussed on the terror that pervades the southern republic of Chechnya. This time, she had been trying to document repeated acts of torture carried out by squads loyal to the pro-Russian Prime Minister, Ramzan Kadyrov. In the past seven years, Politkovskaya had written dozens of accounts of life during wartime; many had been collected in her book *"A Small Corner of Hell: Dispatches from Chechnya."* Politkovskaya was far more likely to spend time in a hospital than on a battlefield, and her writing bore frequent witness to

robbery, rape, and the unbridled cruelty of life in a place that few other Russians—and almost no other reporters—cared to think about. One day at the Ninth Municipal Hospital, in Grozny, Politkovskaya encountered a sixty-two-year-old woman named Aishat Suleimanova, whose eyes expressed "complete indifference to the world," she wrote in a typical piece. "And it is beyond one's strength to look at her naked body. She's been disembowelled like a chicken. The surgeons have cut into her from above her chest to her groin." Two weeks earlier, a "young fellow in a Russian serviceman's uniform put Aishat on a bed in her own house and

shot five 5.45-mm. bullets into her. These bullets, weighted at the edges, have been forbidden by all international conventions as inhumane."

In the West, Politkovskaya's honesty brought her a measure of fame and a string of awards, bestowed at ceremonies in hotel ballrooms from New York to Stockholm. At home, she had none of that. Her excoriations of Russia's President, Vladimir Putin, insured isolation, harassment, and, many predicted, death. "I am a pariah," she wrote in an essay last year. "That is the result of my journalism through the years of the Second Chechen War, and of publishing books abroad

Vladimir Putin, the former K.G.B. agent Alexander Litvinenko, and the journalists Paul Klebnikov and Anna Politkovskaya.



GOOD SHRINK, BAD SHRINK

about life in Russia.” Despite the fact that Politkovskaya was articulate, attractive, and accomplished, she was barred from appearing on television, which is the only way the vast majority of Russians get news. To the degree that a living woman could be airbrushed out of post-Soviet history, she had been. “People call the newspaper and send letters with one and the same question: ‘Why are you writing about this? Why are you scaring us?’” she wrote. “‘Why do we need to know this?’” She provided an answer as much for herself as for any reader: “I’m sure this has to be done, for one simple reason: as contemporaries of this war, we will be held responsible for it. The classic Soviet excuse of not being there and not taking part in anything personally won’t work. So I want you to know the truth. Then you’ll be free of cynicism.”

That afternoon, Politkovskaya drove to a supermarket near her mother’s apartment, on the Frunzenskaya Embankment. Her daughter had planned to meet her there but was delayed. Nonetheless, as a surveillance camera at the store later showed, Politkovskaya was not alone. A young woman and a tall, slender man whose face was obscured by a baseball cap lurked in the aisles as she shopped. When Politkovskaya finished, she drove home in her silver Vaz 2110 and parked a few feet from the entrance to her building.

She carried two bags of groceries up to her apartment, on the seventh floor, in the building’s tiny elevator and dropped them at the door. Then she went down to fetch the rest of her parcels. When the elevator opened on the ground floor, her killer was waiting. He shot her four times—the first two bullets piercing her heart and lungs, the third shattering her shoulder, with a force that drove Politkovskaya back into the elevator. He then administered what is referred to in Moscow, where contract killings have become routine, as the *kontrolnyi vystrel*—the control shot. He fired a bullet into her head from inches away. Then he dropped his weapon, a plastic 9-mm. Makarov pistol whose serial number had been filed away, and slipped into the darkening afternoon.

The murder of Anna Politkovskaya was at once unbelievable and utterly expected. She had been hunted and attacked before. In 2001, she fled to Vienna after receiving e-mailed threats claiming that a special-services police officer whom she had accused of committing atrocities against civilians (and who was eventually convicted of the crimes) was bent on revenge. While she was abroad, a woman who looked very much like her was shot and killed in front of Politkovskaya’s Moscow apartment building. Police investigators be-

lieve the bullet was meant for Politkovskaya. In 2004, she became violently ill after drinking tea on a flight to Beslan, in North Ossetia, where, at the request of Chechen leaders, she was to negotiate with terrorists who had seized a school and taken more than eleven hundred hostages, most of them children. The Russian Army, which had bungled its response to the siege, did not want her there. Upon landing in Rostov, she was rushed to the hospital; the next day, she was flown by private jet to Moscow for treatment. By the time she arrived, her blood-test results and other medical records had somehow disappeared. She survived, only to be called a “midwife to terror.” The threats became continuous: calls in the middle of the night, letters, e-mails, all ominous, all promising the worst. “Anna knew the risks only too well,” her sister told me. Politkovskaya was born in New York while her father was serving at the United Nations, in 1958; not long ago, her family persuaded her to obtain an American passport. “But that was as far as she would go,” Kudimova said. “We all begged her to stop. We begged. My parents. Her editors. Her children. But she always answered the same way: ‘How could I live with myself if I didn’t write the truth?’”

Since 1999, when Vladimir Putin, a career K.G.B. officer, was, in effect, anointed as President by Boris Yeltsin, thirteen journalists have been murdered in Russia. Nearly all the deaths took place in strange circumstances, and none of them have been successfully investigated or prosecuted. In July, 2003, the investigative reporter Yuri Shchekochikhin, a well-known colleague of Politkovskaya’s at *Novaya Gazeta*, died of what doctors described as an “allergic reaction.” Shchekochikhin, who became famous in the Gorbachev era with his reports on the rise of a new mafia, had been investigating allegations of tax evasion against people with links to the F.S.B., the post-Soviet K.G.B. Nobody ever explained what Shchekochikhin was allergic to, and his family is convinced that he was poisoned. On July 9, 2004, Paul Klebnikov, the founding editor of the Russian edition of *Forbes*—who had made powerful enemies by investigating corruption among Russian business tycoons—was shot dead as he left his Moscow office.

The attacks have not been limited to journalists. In September of 2004, Viktor Yushchenko, a candidate for President of Ukraine who helped lead the Orange Revolution, and who was vigorously opposed by Putin, barely survived a poisoning. Doctors determined that he had been given the deadly chemical dioxin, which left his face disfigured and his health severely impaired. Since then, two members of the Duma, the Russian parliament, have been assassinated, and last September Andrei Kozlov, the deputy chief of Russia's central bank, was shot outside a Moscow stadium following a company soccer match. Kozlov had initiated a highly visible effort to rid the country of banks that were little more than fronts for organized crime. And just a few weeks ago, in an execution that could have been planned by Al Capone, Movladi Baisarov, a former Chechen special-forces officer who had come to be seen by Kadyrov as a rival, was gunned down on Leninsky Prospekt, one of Moscow's busiest thoroughfares. A series of control shots were administered in front of scores of witnesses, including high-ranking members of the police force. No arrests have been made.

Four weeks after Politkovskaya died, Alexander Litvinenko, a little-known former K.G.B. agent who had been imprisoned by Putin and had then defected to England, fell gravely ill in London. Like many others, including Politkovskaya, Litvinenko had accused the Russian President of creating a pretext for the Second Chechen War in 1999 by blowing up buildings in Moscow and then blaming Chechen separatists for the attacks. Putin's decisive response to those acts of terrorism propelled him toward immense and lasting popularity. He was outraged by Litvinenko's accusation and equally angered that Litvinenko had fallen into the orbit of Boris Berezovsky, one of his most despised enemies. Berezovsky, a shady billionaire oligarch, wielded huge power in the Yeltsin years, helped bring Putin to Yeltsin's attention, and even played a major role in persuading him to assume the Presidency. Once Putin took power, though, Berezovsky found himself shut off from the Kremlin; he accused Putin of turning his back on Yeltsin's reforms, and was driven from the country. Litvinenko subsequently charged that his F.S.B. superiors had ordered him to kill Berezovsky. On his deathbed, he lashed

out at Putin, saying, "You have shown yourself to be as barbaric and ruthless as your most hostile critics have claimed."

The manner of Litvinenko's poisoning was obscure almost until the moment he died. At first, doctors thought that he had an unusual bacterial infection; then they said that his symptoms pointed toward rat poison. When his immune system started to fail, they thought it more likely that the poison was a radioactive form of thallium, which had been used by the K.G.B. nearly fifty years earlier in a failed attempt to assassinate Nikolai Khokhlov, an agent who had refused to comply with an order to kill a prominent Russian dissident. Finally, just hours before Litvinenko died, the doctors provided a definitive and even more improbable diagnosis: he had been poisoned with polonium 210, a rare radioactive isotope; a millionth of a gram is enough to destroy a person's bodily organs. Litvinenko's murder was the first known case of nuclear terrorism perpetrated against an individual.

In Moscow, a city given to conspiracy theories, people could speak of little else: Putin had acted to silence a vocal traitor; no, Putin's enemies did it, to destroy the image of the Kremlin and gain leverage in the 2008 Presidential campaign; Putin's allies did it, so that they could use the affair as a convenient excuse to ignore the constitution and secure him a third term; the "Jews" did it, because Litvinenko had

converted to Islam; Muslim extremists did it, because Litvinenko had reneged on a promise to supply parts for a dirty bomb; Berezovsky did it, to embarrass Putin. The Kremlin even suggested that Leonid Nevzlin, a wealthy oil executive who fled Russia and lives in Israel, might have been involved. There was no proof for any of these assertions. Last July, however, the Duma passed a law, introduced by the Kremlin, to permit the assassination of "enemies of the Russian regime" abroad. For people like Boris Berezovsky, whose hatred for Putin has become an obsession, the new law explained everything.

"This guy is a K.G.B. guy," Berezovsky told me one afternoon over tea at a London hotel. "This guy issues a law allowing the Russians to kill opponents abroad. *So they kill opponents abroad.*" His voice rose, and he shrugged, and then he glanced at me as if to say, How could one draw any other conclusion? "This is absolutely logical. Why did they issue this law? For what? Because this is Russia and nobody agrees to kill without the signature of somebody more important who gave the order." The Kremlin has denied any involvement in Litvinenko's death. Whatever the truth, the manner in which he died has tarnished Putin's reputation in the West. And so has the execution of a journalist who had been accused of nothing more than doing her job.

At first, Putin, like most other Rus-



"I see that, in college, you got along equally well with the jocks and the stoners."



A memorial for Anna Politkovskaya in St. Petersburg. "How could I live with myself if I didn't write the truth?" she asked.

sians, tried to ignore the Politkovskaya murder. He refused even to make a gesture of sympathy. As mourners gathered at services in Helsinki, Paris, and New York, and as many others—most of them members of Moscow's dwindling liberal establishment—laid flowers on the doorstep of Politkovskaya's apartment building and attended her funeral, at the Troyekurovskoye Cemetery, on the outskirts of Moscow, the President said nothing. On October 10th, he travelled to Dresden (where he had been stationed as a K.G.B. operative in the eighties) for a meeting with the German Chancellor, Angela Merkel. Afterward, they appeared at a press conference, and Putin was no longer able to avoid questions about the killing. He responded curtly, "She was well known in the media community, in human-rights circles, and in the West, but her influence

on political life within Russia was very minimal. . . . In my opinion, she was too radical, and by virtue of this radicalism she did not have a very strong influence on political life within the country, and especially in Chechnya."

The President's detached and clinical approach to the murder infuriated Politkovskaya's colleagues and shocked her family. "It was like he was saying she was of no value to the Kremlin, so she didn't deserve to live," Elena Kudimova told me. "I don't care what he thought of her work, but what kind of man speaks that way about the dead?"

In the late nineteen-eighties, at the Luring of Mikhail Gorbachev's Kremlin, Communist newspapers began publishing exposés of Russian politics and the war in Afghanistan, and stories

about many of the "blank spots" of Soviet history, going back to Lenin. The dull, formulaic journals of Soviet life—*Izvestia*, *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, *Ogonyok*, and *Moscow News*—suddenly became engrossing. Each morning, huge crowds would gather in Pushkin Square to read the papers, discuss the events of the day, and argue about what might come next. New papers were starting to appear as well; the first, and best, was *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*. By the end of the decade, the distinctly capitalist business journal *Kommersant* had also appeared, first weekly, then every day. Although truth, rather than profits, was the priority in that brief, emotional, and highly romantic period, circulations remained large, because people were still hungry for genuine information about their own lives and history.

Euphoria cannot sustain a business, however. When Yeltsin instituted the economic reforms known as “shock therapy,” in 1992, prices soared and the costs of publishing a newspaper became prohibitive. There were no advertisements, and subscriptions all but evaporated, along with whatever innocence remained. The moral tone of the journalistic world began to shift, from idealistic to mercenary. The practice of writing biased news articles for money became routine even at the best papers. Restaurant owners, businessmen, and public officials knew that the right price would bring them favorable coverage almost anywhere. “It would be good to say we had our hands clean at all times,” Raf Shakirov, who later became the editor of *Izvestia*, told me. “We tried. But it was done by everyone. Absolutely everyone.”

As the process of Soviet disintegration accelerated, the Yeltsin government was consumed by economic and social chaos. Leaders of several Russian regions, including Siberia and Yakutia—both with vast reserves of diamonds, oil, and gold beneath their frozen ground—began to speak openly of seceding. One Soviet general, Dzhokhar Dudayev, watched from his post in Estonia as the Baltic republics demanded independence. He resigned his commission as commander of a strategic wing of nuclear bombers, went home to Grozny, and, after a dubious election, proclaimed himself the leader of an independent Chechnya. Boris Yeltsin did not take the Chechen threat seriously, but he began to worry that this rebellion, in a part of the country that had been hostile to Moscow for centuries, might set off similar demands in other republics. Yeltsin was struggling to keep the country together, and in 1993 he was even forced to turn his tanks against his own mutinous parliament.

By the end of the following year, Yeltsin had heard enough talk of Chechen independence. To those who encouraged the President to negotiate—as he had with Tatarstan and other regions seeking greater autonomy—Yeltsin replied by asking if the President of Russia should really be bargaining with “a bunch of shepherds.” Pavel Grachev, the Defense Minister, promised that he could win a war against Dudayev’s forces with one paratroop regiment “in two hours,” and Yeltsin told him to go ahead.

Instead, what became known as the First Chechen War dragged on for nearly two years. By the time it ended, in the summer of 1996, Grozny had been levelled, tens of thousands of Russians and Chechens had died, and Europe’s largest army had been forced into a historic retreat.

Most Russians had quickly come to oppose the war in Chechnya, largely because of reports they saw on television, particularly on the NTV network. NTV was owned by Vladimir Gusinsky, one of the earliest Moscow “oligarchs.” Its correspondents were fearless. “Those pictures created an overwhelming sense that the war was unjust and that Yeltsin had to end it,” Masha Lipman, who was the deputy editor of Gusinsky’s magazine *Itogi*, said. “It hurt him very badly—his popularity plummeted. The war was seen as cruel.” For the first time, the Russian press had played a central role in altering the nation’s political direction. Indeed, with the single exception of the economic windfall granted to a few well-placed men—oligarchs who were permitted to buy state property at ludicrously low prices—the war in Chechnya did more to unravel the promise of Yeltsin’s Presidency than any other event.

By 1996, with a Presidential election scheduled, Yeltsin’s popularity ratings had fallen into the single digits. He suffered from heart disease and other ailments, and was drinking heavily and behaving erratically. Just five years after the “collapse of Communism,” the Communist candidate, Gennady Zyuganov, promising to bring back a stable, coherent past, seemed almost certain to win the Russian Presidency. To have even a hope of victory, Yeltsin was forced to sue for peace in Chechnya and form a political alliance with a gruff, theatrical, and very popular general, Alexander Lebed, who had openly and eloquently criticized the war. More important, just a few months earlier Yeltsin had made common cause with the Moscow oligarchs, including Berezovsky and Gusinsky, who set aside their rivalries to help the President. After all, he had made their fortunes possible, and they knew that a Russia led by Zyuganov would have no place for them. So the oligarchs and the journalists they employed conspired to pour limit-

less funds into Yeltsin’s campaign, and insured that the networks would provide only favorable coverage.

The young liberals who worked at Moscow’s newspapers and television stations, and had championed Yeltsin’s rise during the Gorbachev years, were terrified that their new liberties would vanish under a neo-Communist government. For all his faults and his increasing malevolence, Yeltsin rarely challenged the right of the press to do its job in Chechnya or anywhere else. “Yeltsin was an opportunist, as every politician is,” Igor Malashenko, the founding president of NTV, told me recently. “He had terrible personal flaws and made many mistakes. But he did not need to control everything. He had a visceral taste for democracy and for freedom. And he loved the mess.” So, despite Yeltsin’s precarious health, his loss of public support, and an inner circle riven by factional disputes and corruption, the most influential journalists in Russia—led by Malashenko and NTV—decided that nothing was more important than protecting Yeltsin’s Presidency.

They wanted to drive Communism from Russia forever; impartiality, they felt, was too decorous a response to what they considered to be a national emergency. As a Moscow correspondent for the *Times*, I saw that many of my friends were certain that a Yeltsin loss would be a disaster for the country. One day, I travelled with the press corps to Novosibirsk, a center of Soviet-era science and scholarship, to watch Zyuganov campaign. He was attempting to convince people that their new freedoms were filled with false promises. At that time, factory salaries were often paid in dish towels, tires, or cheap cutlery. Inflation had rendered pensions almost worthless, and people in the crowd listened to Zyuganov with hope and relief. My friends in the Russian press, however, were disgusted. “We got rid of this shit,” one of them told me that night, “and we are never going to let it back. Never.” They wrote accordingly. Any suggestion that journalism shouldn’t work that way was rebuffed with assertions that people in America and Europe had less at stake.

“When NTV was busy reëlecting Yeltsin, when he had two per cent and it magically went to fifty-four per cent, why didn’t you in the West say, ‘Careful, Russia, this will lead to a system you will

regret?” Leonid Parfyonov asked me recently. Until two years ago, Parfyonov was the nation’s most influential television host, but he was abruptly fired after a dispute with the Kremlin over the censoring of his Sunday-night political news program. He is now the editor of the Russian edition of *Newsweek*. “No. We never got that from the West. You all said, ‘Good job. Yeltsin good, Zyuganov bad.’ You prevented the return of Communism as much as we did.” That is true, no doubt. But when Russia’s young democrats jettisoned the rules of democracy they also forfeited their independence. That made what came next for the media, and for Russia, possible—perhaps even inevitable.

The 1996 election “put a poison seed into the soil,” Andrei Norkin, a former anchor for NTV, told me. Norkin now works for the satellite network RTV1, which is owned by Gusinsky. “And, even if we did not see why, the authorities understood at once: mass media could very easily be manipulated to achieve any goal. Whether the Kremlin needed to raise the rating of a President or bring down an opponent or conduct an operation to destroy a business, or a man, the media could do the job. Once the Kremlin understood that it could use journalists as instruments of its will, and saw that journalists would

go along, everything that happened in the Putin era was, sadly, quite logical.”

A few months before Putin became President, in 2000, there was a battle for control of parliament—and, by implication, the government—as Russia prepared for the end of Yeltsin’s administration. One group was backed by the Kremlin and the other by former Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov and the extraordinarily powerful mayor of Moscow, Yuri Luzhkov. The outcome was determined wholly by television coverage. Most newspapers had lost what influence they had had. Channel 1, the main state network, unleashed a barrage of biased, defamatory reports that destroyed Primakov in less than two months. As Alexander Rodnyansky, who is the head of CTC, one of Russia’s major television networks, put it, “Television is the only reality in which we exist.”

Putin had seen what true press freedom could accomplish during the First Chechen War, and he was not about to repeat Yeltsin’s mistake. In 1999, after the explosions that terrorized Moscow and provided the rationale for instigating the Second Chechen War, the Kremlin quickly assumed control of essentially all television in Russia and responded harshly to those who tried to resist. On April 14, 2001, the state-controlled energy mono-

lith, Gazprom, forcibly took over NTV—cutting Andrei Norkin off in the middle of a sentence as he tried to explain what was happening inside the studios. The screen filled with colored stripes. Igor Malashenko referred to the seizure—a decisive moment in the muffling of free speech in Russia—as “a creeping coup.” Networks soon became wholly owned by the state or by companies—like Gazprom, which owns three networks and also *Izvestia*—that function as corporate arms of the government.

Propaganda has become more sophisticated and possibly more effective than it was during the Soviet years, when television was a tool used to sustain an ideology. The goal today is simpler: to support the Kremlin and its corporate interests. “It’s a magic process now,” Anna Kachkaeva, who broadcasts a weekly interview show on Radio Liberty, told me. Kachkaeva, who is also the head of the Television Department at Moscow State University, went on, “There is no censorship—it’s much more advanced. I would call it a system of contacts and agreements between the Kremlin and the heads of television networks. There is no need to start every day with instructions. It is all done with winks and nods. They meet at the end of the week, and the problem, for TV and even in the printed press, is that self-censorship is worse than any other kind. Journalists know—they can feel—what is allowed and what is not.”

The Kremlin’s relationship with this pliable, post-Soviet press corps becomes obvious in any political crisis. Last January, for example, every channel helped wage an information war against Ukraine during that country’s price dispute with Gazprom. Oil and gas revenue is almost wholly responsible for Russia’s current economic boom—not to mention the Kremlin’s rapidly growing political confidence. Since Gazprom is the central instrument of that success, Putin keeps a careful watch on its interests. Dmitry Medvedev, the chairman of the Gazprom board, is also Putin’s first deputy prime minister and a likely Presidential candidate next year. (Many commentators have wondered if he and Putin will simply switch jobs.) In the corporatist, semi-authoritarian structure that Putin has created—the Kremlin refers to it as “sovereign democracy”—what is good for Gazprom is good for Russia, and no Rus-



“If they invite us in, just politely decline.”

sian television station would have dared to present the Ukrainian side of the story.

The Putin government has made a clever calculation: a few newspapers, with tiny elite audiences, can publish highly critical investigations and editorials as long as that reporting and criticism stays absolutely disconnected from television. (And as long as their journalists keep out of Chechnya.) Anna Politkovskaya began writing about the war in 1999, after the rules of press freedom changed, and she violated those rules every time she went to work. Not long before her death, she wrote, "I will not go into the . . . joys of the path I have chosen—the poisoning, the arrests, the threats in letters and over the Internet, the telephoned death threats, the weekly summons to the prosecutor general's office to sign statements about practically every article I write (the first question being 'How and where did you obtain this information?'). Of course I don't like the constant derisive articles about me that appear in other newspapers and on Web sites presenting me as the madwoman of Moscow. I find it disgusting to live this way. I would like a bit more understanding." The fact that *Novaya Gazeta* continued to exist says more about the paper's minimal impact than about its openness.

Politkovskaya, like many others, attributed the precipitate decline of press freedoms to Putin's background and his reflexes. In her book "Putin's Russia: Life in a Failing Democracy" (2004), she wrote that he is "a product of the country's murkiest intelligence service," and "has failed to transcend his origins and stop behaving like a K.G.B. officer." Putin has indeed presided over a remarkable resurgence in the power of the secret services, and many current Russian leaders are products of the K.G.B. and its successors.

"Reform of the K.G.B. never really happened," Evgenia Albats, a professor of political science at Moscow's Higher School of Economics, said a few weeks ago, after the deaths of Politkovskaya and Litvinenko. Albats has written more incisively about the K.G.B. than any other Russian journalist. "The organization was broken into several agencies in the early nineteen-nineties, but the reforms were abandoned, especially after Putin became President," she went on. "The K.G.B.'s capacity to be a political organi-

zation is back. And, unlike in the Soviet era, the secret services are now in full power."

Two stories dominated the news in Moscow just before Christmas: the centenary of Leonid Brezhnev's birth and the death of the Chilean autocrat General Augusto Pinochet. Both men received adoring attention on television and in newspapers. Brezhnev held power for eighteen years as General Secretary of the Communist Party in an era most notable for economic stagnation and human-rights abuses. And yet he has never been more in vogue. A poll taken last month by the daily paper *Moskovsky Komsomolets* found that "the overwhelming majority of Russia's people have very pleasant memories of Brezhnev's era and of Leonid Ilyich himself, who would have turned a hundred on December 19th." During the Brezhnev years, the decaying state was kept aloft almost exclusively by stratospherically high oil prices.

"Those years are now increasingly called the Golden Age of the great power, which preceded the turmoil of

Gorbachev and Yeltsin—theirs was the age of a weak and lost Russia, ended by the return of Russia's past grandeur under President Putin," the columnist Sergey Strokan noted in *Kommersant*.

Like Brezhnev, Pinochet evoked a sense of stability, a lack of turmoil. Russia's most popular paper, *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, asked readers if the country needed its own Pinochet. The overwhelming response was yes. "We don't need a dictator," the liberal legislator Irina Khakamada wrote. "But we might need an economic Pinochet." Others were far more effusive. "Pinochet made an exemplary and glamorous nation out of Chile," one typical reader wrote. "Stable and strong."

Putin, who has called the breakup of the Soviet Union "the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century," clearly agrees. Sick of the lines, the empty shops, and the false promises of Soviet life, Russians looked first to the West—and particularly to the United States—to provide an economic model. What followed was an epic disaster: the sell-off of the state's most valuable assets made a few dozen people obscenely rich, but the lives



of millions of others became far worse. The health-care system fell apart, and so did many of the social-service networks. Russia became the first industrial country ever to experience a sustained fall in life expectancy. Russian males born today can, on average, expect to live to the age of fifty-nine, dying younger than if they were born in Pakistan or Bangladesh. It is not surprising, then, that by the time Putin became President most Russians were only too happy to exchange the metaphysical ideas of free speech and intellectual freedom for the concrete desires of owning a home and a car and possessing a bank account. They also wanted to feel that somebody was in control of their country.

In today's Russia, as Politkovskaya wrote, stability is everything and damn the cost. Gorbachev and Yeltsin are seen by an overwhelming majority as historical disasters who provoked decline, collapse, chaos, and humiliation before the triumphal West. The opportunities created in those years, the liberation from totalitarianism, have been forgotten. "Yes, stability has come to Russia," Politkovskaya wrote. "It is a monstrous stability under which nobody seeks justice in courts that flaunt their subservience and partisanship. Nobody in his or her right mind seeks protection from the institutions entrusted with maintaining law and order, because they are totally corrupt. Lynch law is the order of the day, both in people's minds and in their actions. An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth."

Vladimir Putin's relationship with democracy is not ambiguous: in December of 2004, he signed a bill that effectively eliminated the election by popular vote of Russia's eighty-nine governors. The President now nominates them himself—and then waits for regional legislatures to confirm his choices (as they always do). In another change that nobody protested and few people noticed, Putin also assumed the power to appoint the mayors of Moscow and St. Petersburg. Last November, again at the President's behest, the Duma abolished any requirement that a minimum number of voters must participate in order for an election to be valid.

"I don't know of a single case in the past six years when the Duma voted against any Presidential initiative," Vla-

NOON

They're not grown up—more like a boy and girl, really.
School's over. It's the best part of the summer, when it's still beginning—the sun's shining, but the heat isn't intense yet.
And freedom hasn't gotten boring.

So you can spend the whole day, all of it, wandering in the meadow.
The meadow goes on indefinitely, and the village keeps getting more and more faint—

It seems a strange position, being very young.
They have this thing everyone wants and they *don't* want—but they want to keep it anyway; it's all they can trade on.

When they're by themselves like this, these are the things they talk about.
How time for them doesn't race.
It's like the reel breaking at the movie theater. They stay anyway—mainly, they just don't want to leave. But till the reel is fixed the old one just gets popped back in, and all of a sudden you're back to long ago in the movie—the hero hasn't even met the heroine. He's still at the factory, he hasn't begun to go bad. And she's wandering around the docks, already bad. But she never meant it to happen. She was good, then it happened to her, like a bag pulled over her head.

The sky's completely blue, so the grass is dry.
They'll be able to sit with no trouble.
They sit, they talk about everything—then they eat their picnic.
They put the food on the blanket, so it stays clean.
They've always done it this way; they take the grass themselves.

The rest—how two people can lie down on the blanket—they know about it but they're not ready for it.
They know people who've done it, as a kind of game or trial—then you say, no, wrong time, I think I'll just keep being a child.

imir Ryzhkov, one of the last liberal legislators willing to speak critically and publicly, told me. "I also don't know of any case where the Duma adopted an initiative that came from the regions. One man makes all the rules in Russia now, and the Duma has become like a new Supreme Soviet."

No company, foreign or domestic, can prevail in an argument with the Kremlin. That became clear on October 25, 2003, when armed and masked F.S.B. agents stormed a private jet and arrested Mikhail Khodorkovsky as he was about to depart from the Novosibirsk Airport, in Siberia. Khodorkovsky was Russia's richest and, after Putin himself, easily its most influential man. He ran Yukos, the largest—and, by most assessments, the best

managed—oil company in the country. Khodorkovsky had failed to honor an unspoken pact with the Kremlin: stay out of politics and stay rich. Instead, he had begun to speak out, act independently, and support Putin's opponents. He even started appearing in foreign capitals—often acting more like a head of state than like an oil magnate. Khodorkovsky was charged with fraud and tax evasion, and was then convicted in a trial that few observers, in or out of Russia, believed was fair. He was sentenced to nine years in prison and is serving them at Prison Camp IZ-75/1, in Chita—one of Siberia's most remote and inhospitable regions. The Kremlin then set out to destroy his company, suing Yukos for billions of dollars in what it said were unpaid

But your body doesn't listen. It knows everything now,
it says you're not a child, you haven't been a child for a long time.

Their thinking is, stay away from change. It's an avalanche—
all the rocks sliding down the mountain, and the child standing underneath
just gets killed.

They sit in the best place, under the poplars.
And they talk—it must be hours now, the sun's in a different place.
About school, about people they both know,
about being adult, about how you knew what your dreams were.

They used to play games, but that's stopped now—too much touching.
They only touch each other when they fold the blanket.

They know this in each other.
That's why it isn't talked about.
Before they do anything like that, they'll need to know more—
in fact, everything that can happen. Until then, they'll just watch
and stay children.

Today she's folding the blanket alone, to be safe.
And he looks away—he pretends to be too lost in thought to help out.

They know that at some point you stop being children, and at that point
you become strangers. It seems unbearably lonely.

When they get home to the village, it's nearly twilight.
It's been a perfect day; they talk about this,
about when they'll have a chance to have a picnic again.

They walk through the summer dusk,
not holding hands but still telling each other everything.

—*Louise Glück*

taxes. Yukos's assets are being distributed among the President's allies, the biggest beneficiaries being the two companies that are sometimes referred to as the only meaningful political "parties" left in Russia: Gazprom and Rosneft, the state-run oil concern. (In December, the Kremlin began to assemble yet another case against Khodorkovsky, this time involving money laundering.)

The Russian government has become bolder and more assertive throughout Putin's tenure. On New Year's Day of 2006, Russia abruptly cut gas exports to Ukraine after the government there objected to a sharp rise in the prices charged by Gazprom. Gas headed to Europe from Russia passes through Ukraine, and the disruption—which was widely

seen as punishment for Ukraine's political intransigence—affected many European countries. This month, Belarus was treated in the same fashion: Russia doubled the price it charges for gas and began to impose much higher export duties on oil. Putin clearly sees today's ideological battles in economic, rather than military, terms. Vladislav Surkov, who is essentially the Kremlin's chief ideologist, told delegates at a meeting of the President's party last year, "For all globalization's benefits, all the talk of friendship, the Americans count their dividends at home, the British count theirs—and we count ours. The majority count their losses. So when they tell us that sovereignty is outdated, as is the nation-state, we should ask ourselves what they are up to."

The Kremlin recently provided a particularly audacious example of how it sees its role as an "energy superpower": Royal Dutch Shell, which had invested billions of dollars to develop the world's largest oil-and-gas field, Sakhalin II, in the Russian Far East, was forced by the government to sell its controlling stake in the project. The company had endured a year of regulatory harassment—including absurd threats that the pipeline would not meet Russia's environmental standards. The moment Shell surrendered to Gazprom, however, those environmental concerns vanished. And what was Shell's response after its holding in the project was reduced from fifty-five per cent to twenty-five? "Thank you very much for your support," the company's chief executive, Jeroen van der Veer, told Putin at a meeting three weeks ago. "This was a historic occasion."

With thirty per cent of the world's gas exports, Russia can impose its will for one simple reason. "The entire world is obsessed with energy security and resources," Fyodor Lukyanov, the editor of the quarterly journal *Russia in Global Affairs*, told me. "You need it. We have it. It is up to us to decide how to deal with that. India and China are seeking new sources of energy to secure their very rapid growth. The U.S. is lost in its war in Iraq, the European Union has no idea what it is anymore. And then there is Russia: stable, wealthy, controlled very solidly. No opposition. There is really a feeling of superiority, a sense that Russia is now an indispensable nation, as Mrs. Albright said just a few years ago about the United States."

For the first time since the nineteen-eighties, when a steep drop in the price of oil brought on an economic crisis that helped destroy the Soviet Union, Russia feels truly independent. Throughout the nineties, every Russian leader, including Putin during the first years of his administration, was preoccupied with financial problems, in an attempt either to repair the broken Soviet economy or to respond to humanitarian crises or, finally, and most humiliatingly, to persuade the International Monetary Fund to help the country survive its birth. "Today, it is ridiculous to remember," Lukyanov said, "but through much of the nineties economic decisions in Russia could be taken only after consultation with the I.M.F."



"Hold it! We almost forgot your backdated stock options."

and sometimes after the approval of the American Embassy in Moscow. Russia was weak. Russia didn't know what to do. And today's greed is a reaction to all of that. To poverty and humiliation. Our official ideology is to make more money."

The gains of the past seven years have been remarkable, and, while the country's two great cities, Moscow and St. Petersburg, have benefitted most from the new wealth, the rest of the nation has not been left completely behind. A friend of mine recently visited Perm, at the base of the Ural Mountains, and he was astonished to find seven Italian restaurants in the city where a dinner I had about a decade ago consisted of an unsightly slab of cold meat and some deep-fried potatoes.

Moscow has changed even more. Parts of the city are coming to resemble colder versions of Riyadh or Dubai. One afternoon, as I walked to the Lenin Library from my hotel, I noticed that one of the library's main signs now shares space with another local landmark: Planet

Sushi. Nearby, a few hundred yards from Red Square, is the Moscow Bentley, Ferrari, and Maserati dealership, and each new model seems to sell out faster than the one before.

Putin is proud of Russia's economic achievements, and he took advantage of the press conference in Germany where he spoke with so little passion about Anna Politkovskaya to describe them in detail. "When I became President, our foreign-currency and gold reserves stood at twelve billion dollars, and now they have increased by eighty billion over the first half of this year alone, and currently come to a total of around two hundred and seventy billion," he said. "We have paid off our debts in full. We have now become a grain-exporting country." He added, "But none of this would mean anything if it did not bring change to people's lives," noting that incomes and pensions have risen nearly ten per cent each year since he became President. Nevertheless, the country is literally dying. When Boris Yeltsin took office, the Russian population stood at nearly a

hundred and fifty million. By 2050, most official projections suggest, the number may fall below a hundred million. In describing the new Russia, neither Putin nor his loyalists mention the country's rapidly expanding AIDS epidemic, its endemic alcoholism, or the vast differences in incomes among its citizens. Nor do they acknowledge that, despite the robust G.D.P., Russia's rankings on such essential global economic issues as competitiveness and labor efficiency are appallingly low.

"The majority of the population, they are absolutely happy," Alexei Volin, who served for three years as deputy chief of staff in Putin's government and now runs a highly successful publishing house, said when we met in Moscow. "They get more money. Consumption has increased two and a half times in the last six years. People are buying cars, country houses, they are going to big shopping malls—as big as those in the United States." Volin, a trim, clean-cut, forty-three-year-old man dressed in a white button-down shirt and khaki Dockers,

smiled. "They are just as happy as they can be," he said. "They don't have a headache because of some political problem or the concentration of power. They don't watch TV news. They don't care."

"There is another group," he went on. "They are unhappy, because political life has been frozen. They don't like the situation with Russian television or the press. Several months ago, I talked to one important Kremlin person and I asked him why is our TV news so awful and dull. And his answer was 'Why are you watching TV? People like you should go read the Internet if you want information. TV is not for you. It's for the people.'"

In this context, freedom of the press doesn't matter much and, increasingly in Russia, doesn't exist. "Here we have this question of freedom or wealth," Aleksei Venediktov, who runs the radio station Echo of Moscow, told me. It's the one remaining station in the capital that broadcasts truthful, and even combative, news reports and live call-in shows—a genre that has disappeared from Russian television. "People chose wealth. They do not understand that freedom is a necessary condition for preserving that wealth and the security that they have come to value. To be engaged in honest reporting about delicate subjects like corruption or to travel to Chechnya is too dangerous. People don't want it, they don't ask for it, and they really don't understand that they need it."

Anna Politkovskaya seemed to draw energy from the public's indifference. Her pieces could be shrill and polemical, and even those who agreed with her often failed to read them. She didn't care. "She was on a mission for justice," Aleksei Simonov, the longtime leader of the Glasnost Defense Fund, told me when we met for a drink at Moscow's House of Journalists. "Anna was a very peculiar figure in journalism. She was not loved, because she was never part of a team. She was a loner. She could address her best friends in a most rude and dismissive manner if she thought they were wrong about something."

Simonov, a bull of a man with a pointy white beard and the ability to smoke two cigarettes at once, gulped his beer. "Truth to tell," he said, "she was a very difficult woman." He sighed and waved his arms. "Very difficult. But nobody can say she was not honest. She one

hundred per cent believed in what she wrote. And she had the facts. She had the facts and the truth, and for that she will always be a hero of Russia."

When it comes to press freedom, Russia is now ranked below countries like Sudan, Zimbabwe, and Afghanistan. It has become nearly impossible to work in places like Chechnya, and Politkovskaya, despite support from her newspaper, was often alone there, unprotected, and out of touch. That made it easy for the Russian Army to abuse her.

"First they ordered me to stand right in the middle of a torn-up field for more than an hour," she wrote in "A Small Corner of Hell," describing how she was tortured in 2001 by the Army. "Hour after hour of interrogation followed. A succession of young officers completely took away my freedom." The officers constantly reminded her that they answered to Putin alone. She went on:

I was not allowed to make a phone call or walk around, and I was forced to put all my personal belongings on the desk. I choose to omit the nastiest details, since they are completely indecent.... From time to time, the zealous young officers were joined by their senior officer, a lieutenant colonel with a swarthy face and dull dark bulging eyes. He would send the youngsters out of the tent, turn on music that he considered romantic and hint at a "favorable outcome" of the affair if I were to comply in certain ways. Between the lieutenant colonel's visits, the young officers tortured me, skillfully hitting my sore spots. They looked through my children's pictures, making a point of saying what they would like to do to the kids. This went on for about three hours. Finally the worldly-wise lieutenant colonel, who would boast now and then that he was giving his life for the Motherland, glanced at his watch and said in a businesslike tone, "Let's go. I'm going to shoot you."

Politkovskaya was eventually released. Afterward, she came to see Chechnya as a metaphor. "This vicious cycle of widespread lies has been maintained by people who call themselves officers," she



wrote. "After this lawlessness, they leave for their homes, all over the country. Chechnya as a mode of thinking, feeling, and acting spreads everywhere like gangrenous cells and turns into a nationwide tragedy, infecting all strata of society."

The last time I saw Akhmed Zakayev, he was wearing a camouflage outfit and carried an AK-47. He had a bandolier around his waist and a Motorola walkie-talkie tucked into his web belt. It was August, 1996, days after a few hundred Chechen separatists had surrounded thousands of Russian soldiers, capturing them and the city of Grozny. Zakayev was the vice-premier of the last legally elected Chechen leader, Aslan Maskhadov. Before the war, he had been a Shakespearean actor and the Chechen culture minister. Putin regards Zakayev as a terrorist. In 2002, while attending a conference in Copenhagen, Zakayev was arrested at the request of the Russian government and held in a Danish prison for more than a month. But the Danish courts—saying that they could find no evidence of any crime he had committed—refused to extradite him. When he was released, Politkovskaya came to collect him. "We both would have cried if we were capable of it," she wrote. She accompanied Zakayev to London, where he settled, living across the street from Alexander Litvinenko, to whom he became very close. The courts there, too, refused Russia's request to extradite Zakayev, saying that he ran a high risk of being tortured. Zakayev looks more like a lawyer these days than like a revolutionary; when we met he was wearing a blue suit, a white shirt, and a red tie. His shoes were spit-shined. When Litvinenko died, on November 23rd, Russian prosecutors once again began an effort to extradite him—and also Berезovsky. "Putin won't stop till every one of us is dead," Zakayev told me. By "us" he meant not only the Chechen people but also those who oppose Kremlin policies, people like Politkovskaya and Litvinenko. "Alexander and Anna were killed to send a message," he said. "I am sure of that."

The Russian press belittled the British response to Litvinenko's death. The night after he died, all three major national networks, Rossiya, Channel 1, and NTV, led their news shows with extensive coverage that focussed not on his death but on the British reaction to it.

Rossiya began its broadcast with the words “Panic in London,” and Channel 1 opened with images of British police officers on the streets of central London. “Britain is on the brink of panic,” the correspondent said in a grave voice. On NTV, Gazprom’s channel, one man suggested that “thousands of people around the world might now start panicking.” What had happened to Britain’s legendary stiff upper lip, they wondered—as if it were somehow childish to respond fearfully to an act of nuclear terrorism carried out on one’s own soil.

Polonium 210 is not easy to acquire—at least, not the amount necessary to kill a man. Nearly all of it is produced in Russia. Even though the amount necessary to kill Litvinenko was minuscule, it would almost certainly have required a sophisticated organization to procure, transport, prepare, measure, and administer it. Most people in London, and many in Moscow as well, believe that that organization was the F.S.B. Its members reserve special hatred for those who turn on it, and Litvinenko was a very high-profile traitor. He had accused the Russian President—a member of

their secret fraternity—of killing his own citizens to start a war, and he had joined with the forces of Berezovsky. The F.S.B. had the motive, the skills, and the money.

“You know, for the first time in my life I really watched how the mass media in a free country works,” Berezovsky told me when we met in London. “When Litvinenko died, there were a thousand theories: He killed himself, I killed him. Al Qaeda. Jews. Putin. Everybody. But the free press has competition, and step by step it started to get rid of the stupid versions and go to the mainstream: Kremlin. Kremlin. Kremlin. I was impressed. These are people who don’t even understand about Russia, and yet, step by step, they got there. And in Russia it’s the opposite. The press presents an artificial story, and if you open a Russian newspaper you just have to laugh.”

Initially, Berezovsky did not believe that the F.S.B. was involved in the murder—it was too obvious and sensational, certain to bring Russia and Putin unwanted publicity. Then he learned that the job had been botched. “I think that the people who were planning to elimi-

nate Sasha were sure that nobody would be able to trace anything,” he said. “They screwed up. They underestimated the British doctors, and they also overestimated their own talents, which is common. Nobody expected so many traces left. It was clearly a sloppy job. So what happened is that they outsmarted themselves. The polonium was discovered three hours before Sasha died. Three hours. If he had died in the first week or the second week, nobody would ever have known a thing.”

Alexei Volin, the former Kremlin official, thinks that Berezovsky’s conjecture stems more from a hatred of Vladimir Putin than from evidence or reality. “I don’t believe it was the Russian state that killed Litvinenko with polonium,” he told me. “He is not one of the people who should be killed first. We have Mr. Kalugin,” he said, referring to Oleg Kalugin, the former chief of K.G.B. foreign counterintelligence, who became a harsh critic of the agency and now lives outside Washington. “We have a lot of high-ranking Russian spies living abroad. We have Mr. Berezovsky, Mr. Zakayev. They are more interesting people to kill to demonstrate the power of the state. Also, if somebody from the secret forces wants to kill a person he wouldn’t kill him in a way that is evident to the entire world that this is from Russia. Polonium is produced in Sarov. One city in this whole country. Say, for example, I am the head of the F.S.B. You come to me and you need to kill Mr. Litvinenko. There are a lot of Arab and Martinique and Jamaica guys who are drinking alcohol and using drugs in London and who can kill Mr. Litvinenko by knife. It doesn’t cost a lot of money. It’s not hard. Bringing these containers of polonium from Europe, from one city to another, bringing them on British Airways and Aeroflot flights—that is absolute madness. Why would you bother?”

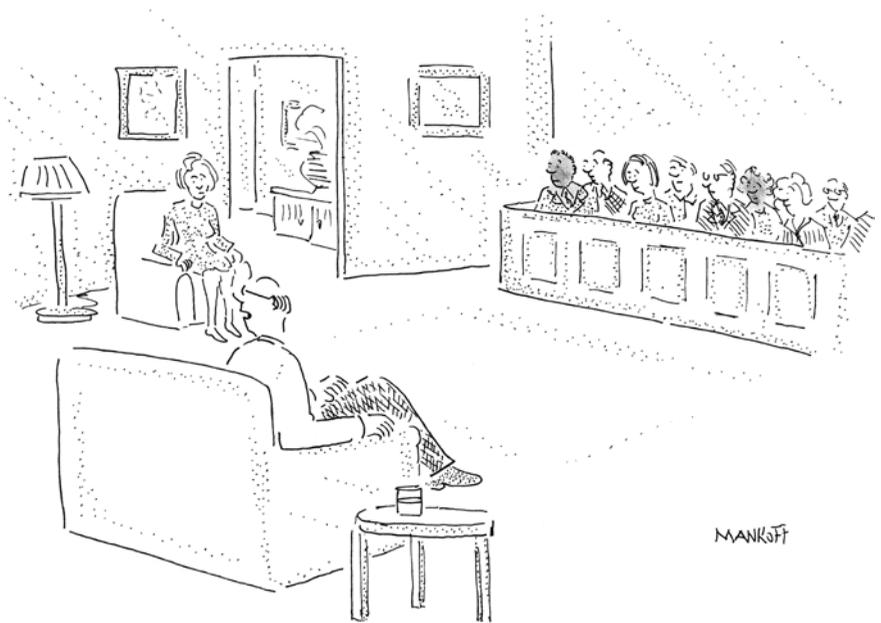
A couple of days before leaving Moscow, I went to see Viktor Shenderovich at what was once an NTV building; it still houses Vladimir Gusinsky’s cable channels. The place looks like a Courtyard Marriott—a central atrium with big trees, a glass roof, and lots of chrome. It is one of the last refuges for liberal journalists in Moscow. Shenderovich is a grumpy-looking former



standup comedian whose satirical television show “Kukly” (“Puppets”) aired on NTV between 1994 and 2003. For much of that time, it was required viewing for anyone who cared about politics—a weirdly effective combination of “Saturday Night Live” and “60 Minutes.” Shenderovich was savagely funny, using his puppets to ridicule whoever held power. Nobody was spared, not Boris Yeltsin or Mikhail Gorbachev, and certainly not Vladimir Putin. But Putin does not take well to being made fun of. A few weeks after he was portrayed by a puppet as a nasty dwarf, Shenderovich was out of a job. He now has a weekly radio broadcast on Echo of Moscow and another on Radio Liberty.

Shenderovich had just received a phone call from his daughter, who had heard something about Garry Kasparov, the chess champion. Kasparov has emerged as the most prominent man in what is called the Other Russia—a coalition of Putin’s most outspoken critics. “The office is being raided as we speak,” Shenderovich said. “The police are there locking down computers and confiscating everybody’s cell phone.” They took away newspapers, books, and other literature to see if any of it was “extremist” and therefore illegal.

The raid occurred a few days before the Other Russia planned to hold a Saturday-afternoon march from Triumphalnaya Square to the Kremlin; permission was denied, so more than a thousand people gathered across from the Tchaikovsky Concert Hall, beneath an enormous billboard featuring a picture of Gisele Bündchen. There were nearly ten thousand police officers—in green, blue, and brown uniforms, denoting different services—and two helicopters hovered above. To enter the square it was necessary to walk through one of the many metal detectors that the police had provided—and one might well have walked through a time machine. The protest was a bizarre ideological stew; Kasparov spoke about liberty and openness, but Communists spoke about liberty and openness as well. Ancient Stalinists stood on the curb selling anti-Semitic literature, Order of Lenin badges, and yellowing copies of *Zavtra!*, one of Russia’s most rabidly right-wing newspapers. There were chess players, too. Speakers talked



“I know it’s not perfect, but, by and large, I think the jury system has served this marriage very well.”

of “saving Russia from the horrors that had descended upon it.” People chanted for a while, and then everyone went home.

The next afternoon, Sunday, brought glorious weather, and thousands of people took advantage of it to do some shopping. Many of them ended up in Red Square. Workmen had placed a giant skating rink between Lenin’s Tomb and Christian Dior’s new flagship store at GUM. Hundreds of young parents stood in line holding their children’s hands as they waited to skate. They seemed happy. The gray, thousand-yard stare so representative of Soviet life was gone, replaced with, of all things, a smile. It was not difficult to see why so many Russians—more than seventy per cent, in most polls—seem to support the President. Since Alexander Litvinenko’s death, there has been much public discussion of what Putin will do next year, when his term concludes. He has promised to step down, but he has also said that he intends to “retain influence,” and people have speculated on the many ways he could do that: as Prime Minister, for example, or as chairman of Gazprom. Nobody knows, perhaps not even Putin. Russia today, and not for the first time, has wagered its well-being on the price of oil, and, as long as salaries con-

tinue to rise, people seem untroubled by the future and unwilling to dwell on even the most compelling warnings from the past. Oil prices have crashed before. In recent months, they have fallen more than twenty per cent. At some point, if the fall continues, it may no longer be possible to ignore Russia’s dead Cassandra.

“I have wondered a great deal about why I am so intolerant of Putin,” Politkovskaya wrote. “Quite simply, I am a forty-five-year-old Muscovite who observed the Soviet Union at its most disgraceful in the nineteen-seventies and eighties. . . . Putin has, by chance, gotten his hands on enormous power and has used it to catastrophic effect. I dislike him because he does not like people. He despises us. He sees us as a means to his ends, a means for the achievement and retention of personal power, no more than that. Accordingly, he believes he can do anything he likes with us, play with us as he sees fit, destroy us as he sees fit. We are nobody, while he whom chance has enabled to clamber to the top of the pile is today Tsar and God. In Russia we have had leaders with this outlook before. It led to tragedy, to bloodshed on a vast scale, to civil wars.” For her part, she said, “I want no more of that.” ♦