

# Franklin Roosevelt in Post-Soviet Russia

by Rachel Douglas

Viewers of Russia's First Channel TV news on Feb. 8 saw President Franklin Delano Roosevelt looking at them from the screen, as the largest Russian national TV network joined in plentiful media coverage of a Moscow conference titled "The Lessons of the New Deal for Today's Russia and the Whole World." Held before an overflow crowd at the Foreign Ministry-linked Moscow State Institute for Foreign Relations (MGIMO), the event commemorated the 125th anniversary of FDR's birth. Taking part were top representatives of Russian political and academic institutions, including Kremlin Deputy Chief of Staff Vladislav Surkov, State Duma Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Konstantin Kosachov, Academician Sergei Rogov of the U.S.A.-Canada Institute, Academician Andrei Kokoshin (also a Duma committee chairman), Grigori Tomchin from Yevgeni Primakov's Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Boris Titov of the Business Russia association, *Expert* magazine and Public Chamber member Valeri Fadeyev, and numerous other political scientists and commentators. U.S. Ambassador William Burns also addressed the meeting.

The most sensational presentation was that of Surkov, who strove to link his own "sovereign democracy" concept for Russia, with Roosevelt's ideas. He drew a parallel between FDR and President Vladimir Putin (nobody could miss the hint about Presidents who serve third, and fourth terms). Said Surkov, "Like Roosevelt in his time, Putin today is forced to, is obliged to strengthen administrative governance, and to make the greatest possible use of the power of the Presidency, in order to overcome a crisis." Putin's aide recalled that FDR took office at a time when people felt hopeless, and "the press and the financial sector were almost totally controlled by oligarchical groups."

"History does not repeat itself," Surkov went on, "but Russia seeks freedom from want and from fear, and there are leaders and societies that inspire us, and Franklin Roosevelt and America are among them. . . . While, in the 20th Century, he was our military advisor, in the 21st, he is becoming our ideological ally. For the majority of Russians, Roosevelt remains the greatest of the great Americans."

There were dozens of articles published in the Russian press on the occasion of FDR's anniversary, and not only because of Surkov's speech, in which he built up President Putin as a latter-day FDR. The government newspaper *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* headlined its coverage of the MGIMO event,

"Roosevelt Is Our Ally, Once Again." The Strana.ru website featured Roosevelt as the apostle of "Capitalism With a Human Face." And the customarily cynical *Kommersant*, sniping at Surkov's speech as being a PR job for a third term for Putin, asked, "Vladimir Vladimirovich Roosevelt"?

## Two Contrasts

The outpouring of Russian publicity around the Roosevelt anniversary was startling, first and foremost, because it made such a contrast with the U.S. media. A Google news search turned up articles only in the *Poughkeepsie Journal*, *Cape Cod Today*, the *Worcester Telegram*, the *Hyde Park Townsman*, and a Profile America news feed carried in the Lincoln, N.C. *Tribune*. Of course, there was Pamela Lowry's excellent "This Week in American History" column in the Jan. 30 issue of *EIR Online*, and Sen. Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.) entered remarks into the *Congressional Record*.

Secondly, the Roosevelt celebrations make a sharp contrast with how things were in Russia 15 years ago. In the years after the 1991 break-up of the U.S.S.R., the policy choice before Russia was generally reduced to radical free-trade liberalism, mandated by "globalization" and ideologically promoted by the followers of Friedrich von Hayek and Milton Friedman, vs. the old "command-administrative methods" of the Soviet economy. Where was Friedrich List's National Economy, where was the American System of Political Economy, where was a revival of the work of Dmitri Mendeleev and Count Sergei Witte, who took the "American System" as the basis for creating a Russian System at the end of the 19th Century?

In 1992, nobody was talking about those things, with perhaps the sole exception of Lyndon LaRouche's friend, and mine, the late Prof. Taras Muranivsky. In the September-October 1992 issue of *Profsoyuzy i ekonomika* (*Trade Unions and the Economy*, a 50,000-circulation journal of the Russian Federation of Independent Trade Unions), Muranivsky published an article called "Shock, or Fate?" questioning the inevitability of the neo-liberals' "shock therapy," which that year was ravaging Russia with 2,600% inflation. (Its author being Professor Muranivsky, the article's epigraph was a joke: "Mitterrand has 100 lovers, but he doesn't know which one has AIDS. Bush has 100 bodyguards, but he doesn't know which one is a terrorist. Yeltsin has 100 economic advisors, but he doesn't know which one is sane.") Muranivsky appealed for Russian economists and leaders to study the "instructive" example of Roosevelt's New Deal.

LaRouche did likewise, in his *Memorandum: Prospects for Revival of the Russian Economy*, which was presented at State Duma hearings in early 1995.

Then, in April 1996, LaRouche addressed a seminar of leading Russian economic specialists—all of them opposed to the continuing rape of the Russian economy under the Yeltsin regime—with a perspective on "Russia, the U.S.A., and the Global Financial Crisis." The purpose of that seminar, as



*Josef Stalin, Franklin D. Roosevelt, and Winston Churchill at the wartime Tehran Conference, Nov. 29, 1943. Said Kremlin Deputy Chief of Staff Vladislav Surkov at a recent conference on Roosevelt's legacy, "While, in the 20th Century, he was our military advisor, in the 21st, he is becoming our ideological ally. For the majority of Russians, Roosevelt remains the greatest of the great Americans."*

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LaRouche describes it in his preface to the forthcoming English translation of Prof. Stanislav Menshikov's *The Anatomy of Russian Capitalism*, "was to define a launching-point for a possible role of the U.S.A., then under President William J. Clinton's leadership, in halting the carpetbagging process [of looting of the former Soviet Union], and beginning new forms of collaboration between Russia and the U.S.A., which might end the ongoing process of carpetbagging. Some in the U.S.A. strongly advised the Clinton Presidency against the course of action implied in that April 1996 Moscow seminar. On that account, the implied threat from President Clinton's political opposition, which included some of the most powerful predators of the Transatlantic financier community, was ominous. This U.S. rejection of the course of action implied in that Moscow seminar, had serious consequences for not only Russia, but the world at large, including much of the worsening global economic nightmare which has been experienced to the present day."

LaRouche centered his remarks before that audience of Russian notables, on Franklin Roosevelt's policy for the post-World War II world.

### **Post-1998 Shift**

By the time of the 1998 financial meltdown in Russia, the discussions of Roosevelt's legacy by the LaRouche movement and its Russian friends were no longer isolated voices.

Academician Leonid I. Abalkin, the moderator at the 1996 seminar with LaRouche, weighed in with a monograph on the relevance of Count Witte's economic thinking for today. A team around economist Sergei Glazyev, an active figure in the Academy of Sciences, as well as on the opposition political scene, undertook a serious study of the infrastructure projects, in particular, of the New Deal. During the premiership of Yevgeni Primakov (September 1998-May 1999), it was no longer taboo to talk about the "indicative planning" of New Deal America or Charles de Gaulle's France. Valeri Fadeyev, the *Expert* editor who attended the recent conference on FDR, last year published a collection of essays by List, Mendeleyev, and Witte, calling this school of thought the missing element in Russian economic policy discussions during recent years.

President Putin's Feb. 10 speech in Munich was not the first time he has invoked FDR in a major presentation. On May 10, 2006, there was his annual message to the Federal Assembly, in which Putin quoted Roosevelt about treading on the corns of "those who attempt to gain position or wealth, or even both, by taking shortcuts at the expense of the common good."

Primakov, now functioning as a senior figure in Russian policy circles, and an informal advisor to Putin, made a high-profile television appearance on an NTV Sunday evening program, Jan. 28. He said that Russia is being criticized today more sharply than at any time since the end of the Cold War,

because of “subjective factors on the other side”: expectations that Russia would be a towel boy for Western institutions, beginning in the early 1990s.

Primakov recalled how, when he was Prime Minister, “a representative of the International Monetary Fund came over and tried to impose certain models of development on us. They were trying to impose on us a system whereby the state was not to be involved in anything, everything was to be left at the mercy of the market, and the market was supposed to take care of everything.”

As against the fallacies of the IMF, Primakov cited Franklin Roosevelt, saying: “No country has ever managed to extricate itself from an economic crisis situation without decisive interference of the state. This is what Roosevelt said, and this is what [Ludwig] Erhard in West Germany after the Second World War said, and he acted accordingly. . . . We have seen a turning point; at long last we have rejected the views of the people I would describe as dogmatic liberals who thought that the market would provide all the answers. . . . At present the state is increasingly involved in the economy. It does not mean that the state will revert to [the Soviet central planning agency] Gosplan, to issuing directives. But indicative planning and even industrial policy as such were also denied. Now, thank God, we have abandoned this, and this is not liked.”

The current Russian deliberations about Roosevelt go far beyond any opportunistic considerations that might be involved, having to do with Putin’s team seeking a third term for him. They bring to the front of the agenda, where they should be, three things.

First, a reminder of what a difference for the world, the quality of leadership in the United States of America makes.

Second, an understanding of how the collaboration of the United States and Russia, as two of the world’s great nations, has shifted the course of history for the better, in the past, and could do so again. MGIMO, the venue for the Feb. 8 “New Deal” conference, recently issued an in-depth study of what a multipolar world could look like, and it by no means excluded the U.S.A. (See “Moscow Discussion: Can U.S.-Russian Relations Improve?” in *EIR*, Dec. 8, 2006.) And when his NTV interviewer asked if Russia should form a bloc with countries that have been ostracized, e.g., for seeking nuclear weapons, Yevgeni Primakov strongly condemned any notion of turning anti-American: “To form a bloc against America? I am against it. . . . There should be no anti-Americanism in our policy. We should look for ways to uphold our national interests without confrontation. This is Putin’s course and I support him on that to the hilt.”

Lastly, the American System economics of the Roosevelt period in the U.S.A., with all it implies for basing relations among nations on their mutual interest in the improvement of life for their populations, is exactly what needs to be brought into action in Russia, in the United States itself, and throughout the world.