

Oxford's 'Project Democracy' Goes Hard-Core: 'Pussy Riot' Against Russia

by Rachel Douglas

Aug. 20—Project Democracy institutions, the media, and Obama Administration, and European Union officials are among the promoters of cultural degeneracy leading new attacks on Russia and its President Vladimir Putin, in connection with the Aug. 17 conviction and sentencing in the “Pussy Riot” case. Three members of the self-styled feminist punk band were sentenced to two years incarceration (minus double the time served in pre-trial detention) for criminal hooliganism, defined as “gross violation of social order, expressing overt disrespect for society,” particularly through acts “motivated by political, ideological, racial, national or religious hatred or hostility, or hatred or hostility toward any group in society.”

Last February the three young women were among those arrested while cavorting and making vulgar gestures on the ambo (a platform in front of the iconostasis in an Orthodox church, restricted to priests and participants in sacraments) in Moscow’s Church of Christ the Savior, clad in brightly colored miniskirts, tights, and balaclavas. They were screaming an obscenity-laced “prayer” to the Virgin Mary to free Russia from Putin. The intruders were quickly released, but began to be rearrested two weeks later. In the interim, Pussy Riot had posted a [video of their action](#) on YouTube, with a sound track and editing that made it even more blasphemous. The three were held in jail for five months

before their trial began.

Under Article 213 (“Hooliganism”) of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation, such crimes are punishable by up to three years in prison, or seven years if committed by an organized group. The prosecution in the case, which was tried at Moscow’s Khamovnichesky Court, asked for a sentence of three years; the judge imposed two, which is comparable with the punishment for acts of desecration committed in churches or temples in many countries, ranging from Poland to Israel.

Major international media outlets, however, hastened to call the Pussy Riot case a demonstration of alleged “authoritarianism” by Putin. Typical headlines were “Russian Female Punk Rock Band Trial Sets Tone for Putin Presidency” (Reuters) and “Pussy Riot Verdict Caps Putin’s 100 Days” (*USA Today*), referring to the time that has passed since his inauguration in May.

Amnesty International has declared the women “prisoners of conscience.” Sir Paul McCartney posted an open letter to “show my support for [them] at this difficult time.” Last week Madonna vocally supported the three from the stage of a concert in Moscow (prompting Deputy Prime Minister Dmitri Rogozin to tweet about Madonna being an “old b—” —standing for “whore” in Russian).

After the sentencing, Obama White House spokeswoman Victoria Nuland wrote in an of-



British press coverage of the Pussy Riot makes no attempt to disguise the political intent of the media campaign: to “take down Putin.”

ficial statement sympathetic to the convicted hooligans, “The United States is concerned about both the verdict and the disproportionate sentences handed down by a Moscow court in the case against the members of the band Pussy Riot and the negative impact on freedom of expression in Russia.” Spokesman Josh Earnest said to reporters that Pussy Riot may have been “offensive to some” (this refers to screaming obscenities on the altar of the cathedral), but that the three women were treated badly. EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton opined that the court’s ruling had placed a “serious question mark over Russia’s respect for international obligations of fair, transparent, and independent legal process.”



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The Cathedral of Christ the Savior in Moscow, scene of Pussy Riot’s obscene demonstration. Some Western observers are complaining that the Russian population fails to appreciate the artistic irony of Pussy Riot.

By the Oxford Playbook

Several elements of the Pussy Riot provocation link it to the Oxford University-centered attack on Russia, documented in *EIR*’s “Michael McFaul and His Oxford Masters” dossier (Dec. 16, 2011, Jan. 20, and Feb. 3, 2012). The group’s m.o. matches points from the “198 Methods of Non-Violent Action,” promoted by Oxford’s Gene Sharp in his irregular warfare handbook *The Politics of Non-Violent Action*: #27—New signs and names, #30—Rude gestures, #32—Taunting officials, #161—Non-violent harassment, #178—Guerrilla theater.

Formed in Autumn 2011, Pussy Riot was ready to go into action after the Dec. 4, 2011 State Duma elections. On Dec. 14, they filmed themselves doing their maenad [dances](#) and setting off Roman candles on the roof of the detention center where blogger Alexei Navalny and others were being held after the first arrests for unauthorized street protests.

Pussy Riot went on to make a 19-second [video](#) for Navalny’s Rosvybory (Russian elections) organization. It was posted in February 2012, as Navalny was attempting to rekindle a campaign to block Putin’s return to the Presidency in the March 4 elections, through a “White Revolution” built around accusa-

tions of vote fraud and featuring himself as the hero of the streets.

This Summer, Navalny attempted to testify as a character witness for Nadezhda Tolokonnikova, one of the accused, but was barred by the court. Former chess champion and current *Wall Street Journal* columnist Garry Kasparov, another White Revolution activist, was one of those arrested in a rowdy demonstration outside the courtroom after the verdict.

Vladimir Pastukhov, an advisor to Russia’s Constitutional Court, writer for Mikhail Gorbachov’s newspaper, and currently a Visiting Fellow at St. Antony’s College, Oxford, has put out two major articles in support of Pussy Riot. The British OpenDemocracy.net site posted his “Pussy Rysteria, or the Awakening of Russia’s Conscience,” in which Pastukhov said that Pussy Riot has drawn more sympathy than “Khodorkovsky alive or Magnitsky dead,” referring to two Project Democracy poster cases, and compared their potential impact with that of the Cossack Yemelyan Pugachov’s uprisings in the 18th Century. The week of Aug. 13, in the Gorbachov-owned *Novaya Gazeta*, Pastukhov launched a new diatribe against Putin’s Presidency as “a regime of the lumpens,” using the Pussy Riot “witch-

hunt” and non-lumpenized population’s alleged support for the women as evidence.

“Free Pussy Riot” international propaganda emphasizes the pre-trial imprisonment of “mothers with young children.” Baronnes Ashton regretted the “sentencing of the three young women, two of whom are mothers of small children, to two years in prison for a peaceful, if controversial, expression of their views,” calling it “deeply troubling.” The London *Guardian* loves the “lightness and gaiety” of the group with their “bright colours and tights and mocking balaclavas,” saying that their protest is “crafted from art, dance and performance.”

But these latest Project Democracy favorites are a bit different: They combine “#22—Protest disrobings” with points not even listed by Gene Sharp. According to well-documented investigations posted in Russian and English blogs, Tolokonnikova and another of the convicted Pussy Riot members, Yekaterina Samutsevich, are former members of the vandalism/“art” collective Voyna (“War”). In a recent manifesto, Tolokonnikova praised the radicalism of Voyna’s early days, around 2008. Videos made by Voyna and posted online in the late 2000s include obscenities such as the same Tolokonnikova, naked and very pregnant, with giant cockroaches crawling all over her, and one in which she has or simulates sexual intercourse during an orgy staged and filmed next to a taxidermically stuffed bear in a natural history museum (supposedly to mock then-President Medvedev, whose name means “bear”).

In another Voyna video, a female member of the collective perform a sex act involving a frozen chicken in a supermarket, in the presence of a small child.

The Voyna group received a 90,000 pounds sterling donation in late 2010 from the British graffiti artist called Banksy, who sympathized with two members who were in jail after their arrest for a Voyna action called Palace Revolution, in which they overturned police cars (one of them reportedly with a policeman inside) in St. Petersburg.

In the Russian media, the name “Pussy Riot” is often translated with words meaning “Kitty Cats” or, at worst, “Blasphemers.” But one member of the gang proclaimed its credo more openly, in a February interview published on www.vice.com: “A female sex organ, which is supposed to be receiving and shapeless, suddenly starts a radical rebellion against the cultural order, which tries to constantly define it and show its

appropriate place. Sexists have certain ideas about how a woman should behave, and Putin, by the way, also has a couple [of] thoughts on how Russians should live. Fighting against all that—that’s Pussy Riot.”

Copy-Cats

Pussy-Riot support actions throughout Europe have been raucous and sometimes extremely nasty. A violent pro-Pussy Riot action took place on Aug. 17 in Kiev, Ukraine, where a member of the feminist group Femen—topless and with “Free Riot” painted on her skin—attacked a wooden cross that stands in a monument ensemble near the ancient St. Sophia Cathedral, as one of several memorials to victims of political repression in the Soviet period. The woman cut down the cross with a chainsaw, then delivered an aggressive statement that her action was “a warning” to Russian President Putin and Patriarch Kirill that Femen’s chainsaws would be turned against them, if they allowed Pussy Riot to be convicted. This spectacle was video-recorded and posted online.

Also on the day of the conviction, the New York Council on Foreign Relations posted an interview with Stephen Sestanovich, a geopolitician, former aide to the late Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan, and former advisor to Madeleine Albright as Secretary of State, on “Putin’s Cultural War.” Sestanovich’s view is that the Russian population fails to appreciate the artistic irony of Pussy Riot. He said, “A lot of Russians are unaware that these performance artists are inspired by [French deconstructionist] Jacques Derrida” and therefore these uninformed people perceive “not post-modernist irony, but sacrilege.”

The Moscow Patriarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) officially called on the government to review the sentence and show mercy. Archimandrite Tikhon (Shevkunov), the influential head of the Sretensky Monastery in Moscow, said on state television, “We did forgive them from the very start. But such actions should be cut short by society and the authorities.”

At trial, the accused claimed their action was not anti-Orthodox, but only a protest against the ROC’s endorsement of Putin. The President, asked about the case, said that the offenders are young and “should not be punished too harshly” if convicted. He added that the girls were lucky they hadn’t tried to do their act at some holy place in Israel or a mosque in the North Caucasus, “because they would never even have made it to the local jail.”