

## *Summing Up*

ALL THAT I HAVE written above does not of course constitute a history of the October revolution or of the post-October period. These were simply reflections on that history, and if someone is displeased because certain events were not mentioned, there is no cause for complaint. This is especially true since much has been written elsewhere about the history of October and the years that followed. The key to the thoughts presented here, and my starting point, was to reflect on a many-faceted and contradictory past. Without giving way to the stereotyped thinking that has become ingrained in society and keeping my emotions in check (although that is difficult; after all a substantial part of post-October history took place before my eyes, and I played a direct role in it during the last few decades), I have tried to examine objectively the results of the path that has been taken.

I have shared my thoughts with readers. To summarize briefly, I believe that the October revolution undoubtedly left an ineradicable mark on the entire history of the twentieth century. This is simply a fact. In essence, the entire course of events since 1917 has absorbed all aspects—both positive and negative—of our great revolution and the decades that followed.

The revolution—despite the price that was paid—brought historical renewal to Russia, freed it from the heritage of the feudal and absolutist past, and allowed the modernization of our country to begin. And that was accomplished through the mental and physical labor of our people—a truly heroic achievement. To forget this, to portray the decades of Soviet rule simply as a lost era, would be dishonest. It would be especially dishonest to the people, the individuals, the entire populations that lived and labored during those times. True, an excessively high price was paid—above all, because of the totalitarian system, the product and consequence of Stalinism. One of the most important lessons of those years is the need to reject

and condemn unconditionally the totalitarian system, a system that tramples on all that is human in human beings, that turns people into slaves.

Another aspect of this whole question is that Soviet history has shown once again that totalitarianism, which on the surface seems so solidly entrenched, so powerful, ultimately condemns a country to impotence. Alienating the people from government, property, politics, and culture and seeking to suppress the slightest manifestation of diversity, totalitarianism deprives society of any incentive toward self-development and thereby dooms itself. And conversely, one final conclusion may be drawn, a conclusion based on what we experienced: Only democracy can serve as the basis for society's healthy and dynamic growth, for drawing out and utilizing all its possibilities.

All these assessments are not just lessons from the past. They are reminders for all of us today. The tendency toward authoritarianism, if not totalitarianism, has by no means disappeared in the world. By no means has democracy triumphed everywhere, and where it has triumphed, fundamental improvements are still needed if democracy is to adapt to new global challenges and to the needs of individual citizens.

All this is critical for today's Russia. Entangled in a situation created by extreme radicalism [the extreme radicalism of a neoliberal school of thought], Russia has not yet found a reliable, democratic, and truly free road of development; it is still burdened with authoritarianism. It has not yet found a road that would enrich its citizens, not ruin them, a road that would ensure their political and social rights, rather than restrict or limit them.

I remain an optimist, not only because I wish my people well. I also believe in them. To be sure, much depends on what occurs in the current situation. Even two or three months can bring about great change. Perhaps an intention to change Russia's present course will arise. To democratize the process of reform and strengthen its social orientation. Perhaps an entirely different course will be taken. As of the summer of 1998, I see no fundamental changes occurring, but I am hopeful. If we are to examine the root of our problems, however, we will see that it is a question of democracy. Only with democracy will everything proceed more smoothly and naturally.

Once when I was in Japan (I was still president of the USSR), a young woman, a student, asked me: "You are for democracy and free elections. But you yourself might not be chosen in an upcoming election; what would happen then?" In reply I said that I would still believe I had won. I wanted people to have freedom of choice, and that is what I achieved.

One might ask: But what about the October revolution? It remains one of the most important and unforgettable turning points in world history. It is my hope that its lessons, and those of the entire subsequent development of Russia, will serve the further cause of human progress. The lessons of October are highly instructive and should be absorbed and reflected upon for their genuine significance, not simply used to make a particular point. All who strive for the general good and wish peace and happiness for all humanity should reflect on those lessons and take them to heart.

