

The Beginning of History?

THE NEW THINKING and its application in the late 1980s and early 1990s had practical results of considerable importance. Substantial changes took place in the everyday life of the world community: It was freed from confrontation and Cold War, and the danger of nuclear catastrophe was removed from center stage. A fundamental renewal of the geo-political and geo-economic landscape had begun. At the same time and by the same token, we observed a consolidation of universal civilizing processes.

Recent years have witnessed criticism of the new thinking and of the results of its practical applications. It is true that despite substantial achievements and the undeniably positive shift that occurred in the world thanks to the new thinking, not everything we planned has succeeded. Much was not carried through to completion, to a great extent because the dissolution of the Soviet Union in December 1991 prevented continuation of the changes that had begun. Later on, the changes we had implemented were even declared to be unsuitable and unnecessary.

In recent times Russian foreign policy in some respects has returned to the kind of approach typical of the new thinking and to ideas we had initiated. In this way the new thinking has proven that it corresponds to the spirit of our times and that it flows from the objective needs and trends of the modern era. But life moves forward, raising new demands and posing new tasks. Naturally the new thinking, too, must continually evolve and progress.

If we were to attempt to make a concise generalization of everything set forth in this book, we might propose the following formula: Humanity cannot be simply a community constantly seeking to survive; sooner or later this approach will lead to catastrophe. It must become a community of progress for everyone—for North and South, East and West, for countries that are now highly developed as well as those that are relatively deprived.

As I have said, the idea of progress itself needs to progress. For humanity to realize the meaning and purpose of its own history, it must do so without irreparable harm to itself and to the rest of nature, without exploitation of some groups of people or entire nations, and without irreversible moral and spiritual losses. We must advance through worldwide cooperation based on complete equality, without any use of force, and with peaceful co-development of all nations.

This necessitates a profound change in the course of history itself, a change in the present paradigm, in the human community's very way of existence. In the history of the human race such changes are known to have occurred. They have varied in depth and extent, but they have occurred more than once and changed the foundations of existence, the means of existence, indeed humanity's basic way of life.

The pace of historical development has increased with the passage of time, and the intervals between epochal changes have grown smaller. The transition from a consuming economy to a producing economy (the Neolithic revolution) took several thousand years. Many centuries were required before the stage of small handicraft production had exhausted its potential and industrial production came into existence. But only a single century was needed to pass from industrial society to so-called postindustrial society, to the information economy.

An urgent need has arisen for a new transition in which societies would be organized according to principles that would allow elimination of the unparalleled threats endangering the very existence of humanity: We need to replace a civilization that produces without thinking, that is exhausting the natural resources on which its existence depends, with a civilization that constantly reproduces the conditions required for its existence, accumulating and not destroying the potential for future development. We need a civilization that aims not merely to survive but to live to the fullest and provide a full life for present and future generations.

This transition naturally will depend on the domestic policies of states and of the world community as a whole, and on the way that each country or community disposes of its worldly goods. It will depend on the paths they choose for domestic development.

The new thinking does not limit its horizons to international and global problems and processes. It is directly concerned with domestic policies and links these policies to the actions of governments in the international arena. Properly speaking, perestroika in the Soviet Union was an application of

the principles of the new thinking to the solution of domestic problems that our country was then facing. I emphasize the international-political aspect of the new thinking because global problems are among the most important problems humanity will face in the transition to a new form of existence.

Another task of the new thinking is to search for answers to new problems that may be posed by changing times and that will face the entire world community. The intention of the new thinking is to call for joint efforts worldwide to find answers because it is impossible to impose on humanity some predigested answers thought up by only a few people. The only effective answers will be collective ones that make collective action possible. This presupposes the understanding that no one has a monopoly on the truth but that by generalizing the entire collective experience that has accumulated and that reflects the input of all ideological tendencies, we can arrive at truly joint conclusions and decisions.

The modern world can no longer be built on the basis of an endless confrontation of ideologies. Differences of opinion cannot be eradicated, but while they will continue to exist, it is possible to find a synthesis for the collective solution of problems and the construction of a platform on which we can work jointly.

The means of advancing to a new way of life can and must vary from country to country, from continent to continent. This is only natural. The forms in which decisions are made, the modes of operation, are bound to be multiple and diverse. What is important is that everyone must pursue the common goal: a genuine renewal of the life of the entire world community in order to arrive at new conditions of existence for the human race.

Various answers to current challenges have been proposed in the sphere of international politics and relations. Unfortunately these variations too often turn out to be new only in their outward manifestation. Their actual content leaves old methods and approaches untouched.

The changes that began in 1985, first in the Soviet Union and then in other countries (and all countries have changed in the past ten years, regardless of the different ways the results may be evaluated) reflected objective needs, the needs of the future, the need for a new world civilization. These changes have sometimes been described as the end of history. It has been asserted that with the worldwide spread of market relations the end of history has arrived. In recent times, this point of view has most prominently been expressed, as we have said, by Francis Fukuyama. But it is not an original idea. Walter W. Rostow, much earlier than Fukuyama,

expressed the view that the consumer society is the “highest stage of progress.”

The idea of the end of history contradicts the actual course of history. Essentially it represents a denial of any further forward movement in history, or it oversimplifies to an extreme degree the meaning and purpose of history by reducing it to a mere accumulation of wealth and expanding consumption. History has not stood still and will not. Its evolution, of course, does not follow a straight line. History constantly rises to new heights and multiplies its own characteristics both qualitatively and quantitatively.

A serious evolution in all aspects of the life of the world community is predetermined by the profound and unstoppable processes that have begun in the world. I am convinced that a necessary stage on humanity's path toward a new state of being must be, and cannot help but be, a renewal of its thinking. It is an insistent need of our times that this kind of thinking be given its rightful place and developed further, that the new thinking be enriched, for it has already proven capable of overcoming impasses and opening the way for breakthroughs in politics where it had seemed no breakthrough was possible.