

# Life on the Russian Extreme

By Charles R. Sauer

“THE rumors of our death have been greatly exaggerated.” With this statement Dmitrii Vasiliev opened the most recent public assembly of NPF-Pamiat (National Patriotic Front-Memory) on 5 December. Under low gray skies the NPF-Pamiat platform nestled beneath the arches at the entrance to Gorky Park. Complete with a stylish podium emblazoned with the group’s seal (a bell with the name “Pamiat” projected over it), black, yellow, and white flags, and two youths in military uniform mounted on half-starved horses, Vasiliev and his entourage of clergymen and assistants pressed onto the platform to bring once again their nationalistic, xenophobic message to the Russian people. “The people,” in this case, consisted of a quiet crowd numbering around 500.

Having captured press attention several years ago, NPF-Pamiat is one of many groups that form the extraparliamentary opposition to the government in Russia today. The vileness and violence of their attacks on Jews and other groups

has repeatedly drawn Western attention to this organization. The atmosphere of near-anarchy in Russia has allowed informal groups such as

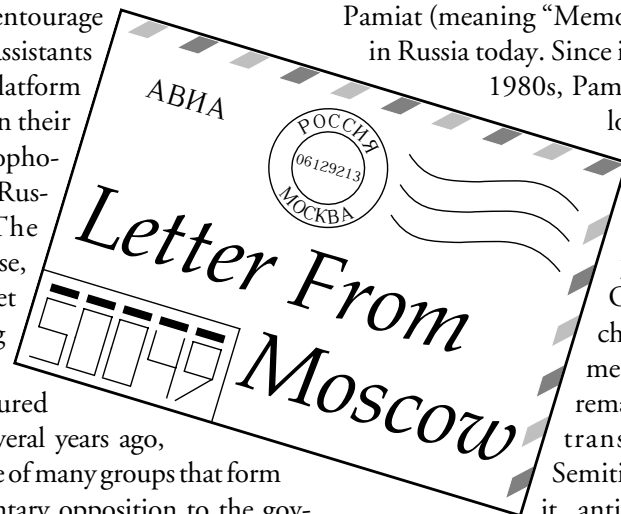
ticated population of change, economic decline and seeming social disarray. Such groups also appeal to a sense of nostalgia, that the “old days” — whether of Stalin or the Tsar — were better. While there is no reason to think that Russia will fall into the hands of such extremists, these groups do bear watching. Their continued activity and modest popularity is a sign that all is not well with Russian reform and that greater attention ought to be paid to the political consequences of economic change.

NPF-Pamiat is the most vocal and active Pamiat (meaning “Memory”) chapter existing in Russia today. Since its origins in the early 1980s, Pamiat has evolved ideologically from an

active circle of National Bolsheviks (during the early perestroika years) to Orthodox-Monarchists today. One element of the ideology has remained constant in this transformation: anti-Semitism (and linked with it, anti-Masonism). As the

line goes, it is the Jews and their helpers the Masons who are to blame for Russia’s ills, from economic collapse to a gradual genocide of “real” Russians. NPF-Pamiat is the surviving core of true-believers after Vasiliev purged earlier members in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Some former associates took the initiative in breaking with Vasiliev and formed other Pamiat chapters, including the late Smirnov-Ostashvili who organized (and has now been “canonized” by) one of the most virulently anti-Semitic splinters, and Aleksandr Barkashov, who graduated from the Pamiat school into full-blown fascism. Barkashov founded the group Russian Unity (*Russkoe edinstvo*) — no relation to the parliamentary faction of the same name — and now publishes one of the newest Russian fascist newspapers — *Russkii poriadok* (The Russian Order). As a result, Vasiliev adopted the designation NPF-Pamiat to distinguish his group from the six or

*Continued >*



This article has been reprinted from:  
**East/West Letter**

Okno Group’s Bimonthly Analysis of Economic and Political Issues in Eastern Europe & the former USSR

Volume 1, No. 4    Fall 1992

NPF-Pamiat and several other so-called “political parties” to step out of the shadows to express the most irrational and dark sentiments of an unstable society. NPF-Pamiat most recently captured Western and Russian attention by occupying the offices of one of Moscow’s most popular and widely-read newspapers.

Though peripheral, fringe groups like NPF-Pamiat are a sign of important changes taking place in Russian society. Their appeal is based mostly on fear — the fear in a largely unsophis-



Pamiat's  
denunciations of  
foreign capital  
and capitalists are  
as shrill as ever.

seven other existing splinters that use the "Pamiat" name.

Ostensibly, this December meeting was called to protest current criminal proceedings being conducted against NPF-Pamiat. On 13 October of this year a band of Vasiliev's followers "stormed" the editorial offices of the popular daily newspaper *Moskovskii Komsomolets*, reportedly tied up the security guard and proceeded to harangue the editorial staff for its "unpatriotic," anti-Pamiat position, the whole time video-taping their own activities. The group carried on from 20 to 40 minutes (depending on whose version one believes) and left before police arrived. Three days later charges were filed against NPF-Pamiat for violating Russian Federation statutes on inciting racial tensions, curtailing journalistic activities, and causing a public disturbance. Pamiat officer Nikolai Detkov has been arrested in connection with these "patriotic activities." Vasiliev delivered his own attack against *Moskovskii Komsomolets* and demanded that all charges be dropped and all prosecutors involved be forced to resign.

Another purpose of the meeting was to issue a call to "end the selling-out of Moscow to foreigners" and to convene "a peoples' court against the traitors of the fatherland — the Zionist, the Masons, and the Demo-Fascists." Pointing towards the Kremlin, Vasiliev pounded the podium and shouted, "The Hasids are having a Sabbath in the Kremlin." As he called out, "Why isn't the president HERE? Why aren't the deputies HERE?", an older woman raised her fist in response and shouted, "Because they're Masons!", and looked around for the smiling approval of the crowd. Vasiliev drove on: "People call me a fascist. That's just fine because fascism means UNITY, fascism means GOD, fascism means NATION!" Having shouted himself nearly speechless, he took up the chant of "God, Tsar, Nation," urging the crowd to join in, which it did with little enthusiasm.

The audience was composed mostly of teenagers and the elderly. Free Pamiat newspapers were distributed to women and the older members present (as well as to the onlooking militia men who seemed to show varying degrees of interest). Despite Vasiliev's frenzy, those collected remained fairly calm and mostly passive, yielding only some directed applause, a few clenched-fist salutes and comments like, "He's

right about that!" The NPF-Pamiat membership obviously enjoys the spectacle of its own performances, proudly posing for the press and actively working the crowd. One practice which disconcerted this observer was being subjected to constant photographing and video-taping. The NPF-Pamiat leadership seems obsessed with recording its own activities and making a visual record of the crowds it attracts.

Reflecting on such activities, and considering such recent events as the three-day NPF-Pamiat congress in early October, it is reasonable to conclude that NPF-Pamiat really has not attracted any greater following than the fringe of society that supported it in the days of *perestroika*. The group has shown no willingness to actively join the "red-brown" coalition shaping up on the political right that has seemingly united communists, nationalist, and fascists of varying hues. Vasiliev did not join the chorus of right-wing voices singing the authoritarian tune in the recently-formed "Front of National Salvation." Judging from his past behavior, he seems too egotistical and dictatorial to enter into any association that might diminish his self-constructed authority. Happily, the FNS has not sought Vasiliev's endorsement, at least not openly. NPF-Pamiat seems content to avoid the arena of serious politics: it has not attempted to register as a political party; it has not entered into the political discourse of post-Soviet Russia in a serious fashion; it does have a well-defined political platform (in the form of a written manifesto) but no clear program to implement or achieve its goals. The group has functioned and continues to function more as the nationalistic "conscience" of "true Russians" and sees its mission, as Vasiliev said repeatedly in 1985-86, "to inflame and provoke."

The denunciations of foreign capital and capitalists are as shrill as ever as NPF-Pamiat has focused on the new foreign business presence in Moscow. Vladimir Zhirinovskii, a supporter of NPF-Pamiat in deed if not in word, remarked in public recently that it was time to start persecuting foreigners in Moscow, echoing a statement made by Vasiliev some time ago, "You know where they live!" And they probably do, though as yet such calls for violence have been largely unheeded and will probably remain so, as long as the foreign presence remains so lucrative for Russians providing services and no major political upheaval

spreads hatred to a wider audience. Direct threats against the Jewish population of Russia by NPF-Pamiat seem to have tapered off, but there are plenty of other Pamiat-like groups that have taken up this torch and now spread violently anti-Semitic propaganda — for example, Viktor Korchagin's Russian Party and Nikolai Lysenko's National Republican Party of Russia.

So, for the time being, Vasiliev's share of the right-wing extremist spectrum seems secure but stable. The impact of these fringe groups, and the more organized, mainstream conservative/nationalist opposition, is important both for Russian politics and for the

economic climate. The apprehension shared by such a large part of the population is a sign that the political and economic changes have not been adequately explained to Russian citizens, and that the people have not yet been given an effective stake in the changes. Political infighting at the top levels has hampered efforts to build grassroots support for reform. The fear of change and economic decline may also make the road more difficult for foreign investors, who must be careful and modest in their operations in Russia, lest they be painted as exploitative. Both Russian policymakers and Western observers ought to take these groups as a sign that much more needs to be done. ◇

For more information about Okno Publications, including:

- *East/West Letter: Environment & Health*
- Environment & Health Online
- Okno Occasional Papers

please visit our web site and online bookshop at <[www.okno.com](http://www.okno.com)> or at the address below.

**Okno Group**

1217 Olivia Avenue

Ann Arbor, Michigan 48104 USA

Tel: +1-734-995-5934

Fax: +1-734-995-6349

Internet: [pubs@okno.com](mailto:pubs@okno.com)