

financial crisis in Thailand—but doesn't actually know much about it—there are only two options: engage in painstaking research or serve up a tender solipsistic anecdote on some other subject.

Some writers, to be sure, buck the trend. When Maureen Dowd replaced Quindlen on the *Times* op-ed page in 1995, she was taken to task for not meditating sufficiently on the plight of the sisterhood. "Dowd appears to have no interest in addressing women's rights," Susan Faludi complained in *The Nation*, "and she seems only to write about individual women when she can make fun of them." In her defense, Andrew Rosenthal, the *Times'* Washington editor at the time, explained, "You'll get her viewpoint ... but you won't find out how her inner child feels about Bosnia." Greenfield couldn't have said it better herself. ■

Russia's oligarchs stage a comeback.

As the Kremlin Turns

By JACOB HEILBRUNN

EVER SINCE THE collapse of the Soviet Union, two Western camps have emerged to argue about the Russian future. The first camp, led by Zbigniew Brzezinski, emphasizes the immutable character of an authoritarian Russian political culture. The other camp, championed by Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott, takes a more upbeat view: no matter how bumpy the Russian road to democracy may be at any given moment, the country is still headed in that direction.

The tumultuous political changes in Russia a week ago gave a bit of sustenance to both camps. When Boris Yeltsin fired Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov, *The Economist* expressed the bleak view: "[C]onfusion—and the possibility even of bloodshed and the demise of Russia's frail democracy—are back with a vengeance." But, now that Yeltsin has exposed the Duma's threat to impeach him as empty and his candidate to replace Primakov as prime minister, Sergei Stepashin, has been approved by the Duma, it's the optimists' turn. "GOOD NEWS FOR THE PRO-WESTERNERS?" asked the May 24 *Newsweek*. The Carnegie Endowment's Anders Aslund, who has been closely associated with Russian economic reform efforts, argues that Yeltsin's peaceful victory over the Duma's push for impeachment showed that Russia has passed a major constitutional test.

But what if neither camp has it right? Instead of Russia being poised between old-style Soviet authoritarianism and full-fledged democracy, the events of the past week may end up ratifying the power, not of a reform movement, but of a



BORIS YELTSIN BY DAVID COWLES

group of industrial oligarchs who have selectively applied economic reforms in order to enhance their own power. The Communists most likely had their last hurrah in attempting to impeach Yeltsin. But this only means that the country confronts another problem: Russia may be mutating into a kind of hybrid democratic state that has free elections but remains under the control of a corrupt oligarchic industrial elite—something resembling what Foreign Affairs editor Fareed Zakaria has identified as "illiberal democracy."

Like Stepashin, the leading Russian "reformers" hail from

St. Petersburg, where they formed a clique headed by politician Anatoly Chubais, now head of the multibillion-dollar Unified Energy Systems corporation. In the early years of Yeltsin's presidency, Chubais assembled what his friend Deputy Treasury Secretary Larry Summers called a "dream team" to handle most of the Western aid flowing into Russia. But the Chubais team ended up supervising rigged privatization schemes that benefited themselves rather than the country; according to Janine R. Wedel's book *Collision and Collusion*, the reformers "obstructed reform when such initiatives originated outside their own group or when the initiatives were perceived as conflicting with [their] agenda." The reign of this clan came, or seemed to come, to a close with the economic crash in August and Yeltsin's removal of Prime Minister Sergei Kiriyenko.

WITH THE INSTALLATION of Yevgeny Primakov as prime minister, Yeltsin seemed to be moving back toward a Soviet-style command economy. At a minimum, the selling off of the state to a few wealthy entrepreneurs came to a grinding halt. Furthermore, Primakov actually attempted to combat economic corruption. In the process, he did at least two things that got him into hot water with Yeltsin: he permitted prosecutors to investigate the Kremlin's property-management company, and he allowed them to issue an arrest warrant for tycoon Boris Berezovsky.

These developments did not sit well with business leaders such as Chubais and Berezovsky. Although the two men had fought each other in a media war in 1997, it turned out that they hated Primakov more than they hated each other. (The weekly *Kommersant Vlast* says that Chubais has even pressed the Kremlin to immediately jail Yuri Skuratov, the state prosecutor investigating Berezovsky.) The reform camp was also worried that the Communists might eventually gain power under Primakov, and that this might lead to an expropriation of the oligarchs' assets. And Yeltsin, of course, was infuriated by Primakov's popularity: "The radical reformers," says Dimitri Simes of the Nixon Center, "were adding poison to Yeltsin's well-known predisposition not to have anyone overshadow him."

Stepashin emerged as an attractive replacement. He first drew the reformers' attention when, as interior minister, he ignored an arrest warrant for Berezovsky issued by Skuratov. And Chubais, who was closeted with Yeltsin just prior to Primakov's sacking, pushed for Stepashin. "Yeltsin has a strong personal affinity for the young reformers, especially Chubais," observes Andrea Rutherford, an investment banker at Moscow brokerage firm Brunswick Warburg. Of course, the members of the old reform elite most likely won't officially make it back into Stepashin's Cabinet since he is pushing for a centrist government, but they may have something more important than the trappings of office—Yeltsin's ear. Meanwhile, Berezovsky's puppet Nikolai Aksyonenko, formerly railways minister, has now been named first deputy prime minister. Thus, as Andrei Zolotov Jr. cogently observed in the May 14 *Moscow Times*, "The same group of oligarchs and political operatives who came

together to secure Yeltsin's reelection in 1996—and then divided up the Cabinet portfolios and offices in the presidential administration, oil companies, and television frequencies—are back in action."

Where does this leave the United States? With a cautious government in charge in Russia and the oligarchs given a free hand, the chance of Russia adopting any real economic reform is slim—and the likelihood that it will combat the massive corruption that has infected the political class is even slimmer. Having loaned billions to Russia only to see those sums funneled into Swiss bank accounts, Western bankers and government officials have finally become a bit warier about extending new credits to the Kremlin. But the impulse in the United States and in Europe to appease Russia can't be ignored, either. It's not unlikely that, in order to gain Russian cooperation in the Balkans, the Clinton administration will lean on the IMF to approve new loans, or at least to forgive debts on the old ones.

Indeed, with the Clinton administration desperate to salvage something from the relationship it has cultivated with Russia, the firing of Primakov and the installation of a nominally centrist Cabinet will probably heighten its ardor to assist Russia. True, Stepashin is already calling on the Duma to pass fiscal austerity measures—measures the IMF insists upon before it will release \$4.5 billion in credits. But in order to be a successful prime minister he will have to establish a Cabinet that is acceptable to the Communist-dominated Duma. The Clinton administration would do well to realize that, whatever Russian government is appointed, the mess in Moscow is not about to go away. The Communists may be fading into history, but the oligarchs surely are not. ■

Union and man at Yale. Class Struggle

By TYCE PALMAFFY

IN 1992, JOSHUA ROWLAND entered Yale's doctoral English program with dreams of becoming a professor of nineteenth-century American literature. But now, just on the verge of earning his Ph.D., Rowland has decided to forgo a career in academia to attend law school—with hopes of becoming a labor lawyer. "I had wanted to be one of them," Rowland laments, speaking about his professors, "but collegiality is a total myth; it's a sham."

Rowland's bitterness—and change of plans—stems from the battle he and a number of other Yale graduate students have waged for nearly a decade as members of the Graduate Employees and Students Organization (GESO), a labor union seeking to represent Yale's graduate students, whom the university relies on to help teach undergraduate classes, in negotiations with the university. Yale has stead-

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