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Territory of Hopes

Nowadays you do not often hear Lomonosov's celebrated dictum concerning Siberia and Russian might. The times of passion and planning in the development of Siberian mineral resources have passed.

Assessing the economic situation that has taken shape in our region, we have to conclude that today's Siberia is characterized more by depression than by prosperity.

There are now many disputes over the industrial prospects of Siberian territories. For a number of years, specialists from the laboratory Ekoprognoz at the Siberian Scientific Research Institute of Farming and Chemicalization of Agriculture of the Siberian Division of the Russian Academy of Agricultural Sciences in the settlement of Krasnoobsk (Novosibirsk Oblast) have been engaged in forecasting the future of Siberia not only in its economic but also in its historical and geopolitical aspects.

Let us take a look into the past.

In the opinion of the scientific leader of the laboratory, Candidate of Geographical Sciences and Academician of the Russian Academy of Natural Sciences Vladimir Pon'ko, nothing is as useful for forecasting the future as a knowledge of the past.

How long ago was Siberia settled, and how did this take place? The traditional view is that large-scale settlement and development of the territory beyond the Urals began with the industrialization of the Soviet Union and continued during the years of the Great Patriotic War. It is true, for instance,

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that the war was the cause of the rapid growth of Novosibirsk. At that time hundreds of enterprises were evacuated there from the European part of the country. In Siberia there are also young cities that grew up later, mainly thanks to the planned economy: Angarsk, Bratsk, and others. But Tobolsk, Tiumen, Irkutsk, Chita, Krasnoiarsk, Tomsk, and Berdsk were established and settled long before the dominant influence of socialist planning—indeed, long before the first signs of a capitalist economy emerged in tsarist Russia. Many old Siberian villages appeared by themselves in exactly the same way.

A good example is the history of the village of Dovolnoe, which celebrated its three hundredth anniversary almost immediately after St. Petersburg did the same. According to legend, it was given its name by Cossacks, migrants from the central zone. After traveling many versts from the west of Russia, they stopped to rest by a very picturesque lake. Around them were thick woods rich in game, the lake turned out to be full of fish, and the soil itself was black earth just waiting to be put to the plow. Why look further? Enough [*dovol'no*], the Cossacks resolved. We shall stay here! And that is how the village of Dovolnoe came into being. [The word *dovol'nyi* also means “content.”—Trans.]

The very first grain harvest showed that the migrants had not erred in their choice. Even today Dovolnoe is worthy of its name. And here are a few other names of our Siberian villages that speak for themselves: Zhulanka—“desired” [*zhelannaiia*], Chernovka—“black earth” [*chernaiia zemlia*], Krasnozerka—“beautiful grain” [*krasnoe zerno*].

What drew people to these places? Do any factors impel people to establish their lives in Siberia, despite the harsh climate?

There are such factors—says Vladimir Pon'ko, author of numerous works on geography, the history of climate in various parts of the world, and natural catastrophes. Moreover, he thinks that although Novosibirsk arose for economic reasons it did so at a place that was by no means chosen at random.

Let us start with the fact that Siberia is one of the most favorable territories on the planet in terms of seismic activity and the risk of natural cataclysms. Here there are practically no earthquakes, no destructive hurricanes, tornadoes, or other disasters. The geomagnetic situation on currently settled Siberian territories is also favorable. And even our climate is quite adequate—clearly marked seasons, absence of polar nights, summer temperatures high enough to grow crops. In addition, we are in the black earth zone.

History confirms that these conditions are optimal for life. Our laboratory is now engaged in a kind of “restoration” of the climate of Siberia over periods from hundreds to thousands of years ago. In this project we work very closely with archeologists. On the territory of Siberia there are sites

of ancient settlements the age of which allows us to conclude that people lived here thousands of years ago.

In ancient times, the place where Novosibirsk now stands was a whole country of settlements. Climatic conditions in those times were similar to those today, with brief cold spells (of hundreds of years) when the population resettled further south. Between successive waves of large-scale settlement of Siberian territories there is an interval. The age of the oldest settlements from the last wave is 350–500 years, when it was, perhaps, even cooler in Siberia than it is now.

Let us speak of the future.

According to Sair Khizametdinov, director of the laboratory Ekoprognoz, economists who prophesy the rapidly approaching fall of the Siberian empire are quite right only in the sense that Siberia will not always be the continent's storehouse of raw materials. The limits of its mineral deposits are already in sight. The oil will last a few decades, the gas somewhat longer. What will happen when they are gone? Many specialists now raise this question. Having passed through the phases of the industrial and the scientific-technological revolutions, the world must inevitably make the transition to a new postindustrial model of society. This is a natural stage in the development of mankind. The chief role in postindustrial society will be played by high technology, alternative sources of energy, and ecological farming. Countries in which all of this makes a timely appearance will be in the lead.

In the opinion of Sair Khizametdinov, Siberia has all that is necessary for successful ecological farming. For in order to grow crops without chemical fertilizers you need, above all, free land ready for use. We have more of such land than anyone else. By the way, European countries are already beginning to conclude contracts for the supply of ecologically pure grain from farms in Novosibirsk Oblast. Europe's own grain is grown on soils saturated with fertilizer solvent. Rolls made from such grain have a rubbery taste. But Siberian grain, grown in a relatively dry zone, matures into hard varieties that are in high demand on the world market.

Let us turn to the question of our water resources. The enormous unused hydro-energy potential of Siberian rivers will enable Siberia not only to obtain energy without relying on nonrenewable sources but also to export it. The rivers of the Siberian plain are capable of supplying a huge quantity of thermal and electrical energy, and not only by means of hydroelectric plants. Scientists at the Institute of Thermal Physics of the Siberian Division of the Russian Academy of Sciences in Novosibirsk, together with colleagues from the Krasnoiarsk Scientific Center, have worked out their own technology for obtaining thermal and electrical energy from the difference in potentials of

the temperatures of water and air. In winter, the water in the rivers is warmer than the air, while in summer it is the other way around. Special heat pumps equipped with freon devices are capable of greatly amplifying and using this temperature differential. This is especially relevant, for instance, to the Yenisei, which below the Krasnoïarsk hydroelectric plant does not freeze even during severe frosts. According to specialists' calculations, if the heat of the waters of the Yenisei can be used to supply the heating needs of Divnogorsk then about 3 percent of the capacity of the Krasnoïarsk hydroelectric plant can be freed up.

In Moscow, Viacheslav Stepin, Academician of the Russian Academy of Sciences and director of the Institute of Philosophy of the Russian Academy of Sciences, provides independent confirmation of the forecasts of the Krasnoïarsk specialists. Deliberating over the priorities of the coming postindustrial society, he says that it is wrong to understand the values of postindustrial society as a continuation of the values of the departing technocratic civilization. In Stepin's view, it will be a characteristic tendency of postindustrial society to borrow some of its values from traditionalistic society. Above all, this will pertain to man's interaction with nature. It is characteristic of traditionalistic societies, which still exist on the planet, to adapt themselves to the environment rather than adapt it to them, as in technogenic society. Thus, there is a perfect fit between ecological farming, non-oil energy, and the other scientific-technological rudiments of the new society that we now observe in Siberia and the theoretical concept of postindustrial life.

Last year there was a lot of noise over the book *The Siberian Curse: How Communist Planners Left Russia Out in the Cold*, written by two researchers at the influential Brookings Institution in Washington, Fiona Hill and Clifford Gaddy. The book argues, in particular, that Russia pays a certain price for its cold climate. The price, in the authors' view, is so high that it is time to begin resettling people from Siberia. It seems that the Americans have not just been overhasty in drawing such global conclusions but are also badly mistaken. The research of Siberian specialists proves the opposite: Siberia is a territory of hopes.

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