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## **A New Social Class: From Proletariat to Precariat\*\***

### **Reasons of appearance of precariat**

The word *precariat* is a blend of two words, the Latin *precarium* (unstable, not guaranteed) and the word *proletariat* which in its time denoted the social class alienated from the results of its labour and subjected to exploitation by the ruling class, the bourgeoisie. Precariat is a new coinage denoting the social stratum that embodies alienation not only from the results of its labour, but from all the other significant social groups. The members of this new stratum are exposed to particularly sophisticated forms of exploitation of their labour, knowledge and skills and ultimately of the quality of life. These groups include people who are constantly (!) engaged in temporary, sporadic jobs, are engaged in the shadow or, as Olga Golodets, the Vice-Premier of Russian Government, put it, “non-legitimized” sector of the labour market owing to which they have truncated social rights and an inferior social status. These groups form a significant stratum in many countries, accounting for 30-40% of the able-bodied population. This warrants calling them a social stratum which, I believe, constitutes a new social class that goes a long way to determining the character of modern societies. The last point needs to be elaborated. The precariat did not spring up overnight. I will not dwell on its historical antecedents. All societies at all times had people in temporary or seasonal employment. Let us look at the modern period when these groups have come to represent not occasional, but sustained and increasing prevalence of specific forms of the use of the able-bodied population and the emergence of specific socioeconomic relations. These groups began to be formed under the impact of the ideas and policies of neoliberalism in the 1960s and 1970s. The neoliberals categorically rejected the role of the state in solving economic problems, they shied away from the ideas of centralized planning and regulation. They described the world and the market economies as a free space where employment, profit and, accordingly, investments flowed freely to places where capital had

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\*\* The study of this problem was supported by the Russian Science Foundation (project No. 18-18-00024).

no restrictions. Moreover, they were fiercely opposed to social democratic policies embraced to varying degrees by the majority of West European countries after World War II. The neoliberals were convinced that social guarantees for the working class, concessions to labour unions inevitably slowed economic growth, accelerated de-industrialization and undercut production efficiency. They argued that the economy could develop and become more competitive only if the market principles permeated not only the economy, but all spheres of society. Essentially, this attitude implemented the main aim of neoliberals, i.e., to shift the burden of risks and all concerns about social and personal (private) life on the people themselves. The liberals ignored the fact that such organization of the economy made people more vulnerable to circumstances beyond their control. This neoliberal policy engendered a new sophisticated type of exploitation of the labour resources which relieves the proprietor of any responsibility for the normal existence of millions of people and their families. After many years of touting their ideas the neoliberals in the 1980s won support, as embodied in the policies of Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher, who proceeded to act in accordance with their recommendations. The implementation of the neoliberal ideas did make the economy more efficient, but at the same time it led to a distortion of the social structure, unemployment, and the emergence of social groups whose positions were vague, unstable and ambiguous. The stratum that emerged was fast becoming a social class which began to be referred to for the first time as the precariat.

### **Who makes up the precariat?**

First, the able-bodied population permanently doing temporary jobs. That social group, which in Russia accounts for an estimated 30-40% of the able-bodied population, has only some or none of the rights enjoyed by workers in guaranteed employment. The members of that group typically have no social rights, they have no paid leave. They cannot count on assistance in acquiring housing. Childcare is their personal problem just as education and upgrading of skills. This is compounded by a virtual lack of opportunities for career growth. Most important of all, temporary employment becomes a permanent value with which a person is stuck for life. Secondly, the precariat consists of people who work part-time or eke out their incomes by seasonal or "gig" jobs. This phenomenon permits to hide the true scale of unemployment. In most cases these people have to agree to work short hours. Practice shows that they have to work more and get smaller remuneration than they counted on. Moreover, many members of that group often discover that they are subjected to greater exploitation and self-exploitation which does not match their remuneration. In Russia, for example, this was dramatically manifested in the so-called rationalization of the work of teachers at higher education and other institutions when under the pretext of social concern they were switched to shorter

hours with a disproportionately increased labour intensity. That group is stuck in a situation when they suffer from various restrictions that force them to look for another job. Such change of employment is becoming more and more widespread. Thus, a nationwide survey *The Living World of Russians* conducted by the Russian State University for the Humanities in October 2014 on a sample of 1800 people in 8 regions revealed that almost 50% were doing jobs other than those for which they had been trained, while other respondents did not know the answer.

Thirdly, the precariat includes jobless people; their number is also considerable, especially in crisis years. Thus, in the wake of the 2008 crisis, unemployment shot up 50% to 6,373,000 people in 2009<sup>1</sup>. A similar situation existed in 2014-2015 amid crisis phenomena in the economy, sanctions against Russia and falling oil prices. Experts believe that real unemployment is between 3.5 and 7 times higher than registered unemployment. Sergey Glazyev, member of the RAS and adviser to the Russian President, believes that "hidden unemployment stands at 20%"<sup>2</sup>. It has to be noted that hidden unemployment is also disguised as reluctance to get registered, odd jobs, seasonal employment in private, typically agricultural jobs. The 2014-2016 crisis significantly increased the unemployment. Vice-Premier Igor Shuvalov speaking in Davos said: "We must prepare ourselves for a rise in unemployment". Thus, official unemployment in Yekaterinburg increased to 6.8%, i.e., the level of depressed regions. Fourth, the precariat includes people in the so-called creative professions, specialists in information technologies, programmers, etc. engaged in freelance work<sup>3</sup>. They are sometimes presented as freedom-loving people independent from rigorous and petty-fogging regulations of official (state, joint stock, private) enterprises and organizations<sup>4</sup>. However, non-conformism and lack of daily external monitoring does not prevent their vaunted and in some ways attractive independence by being blighted by the same constraints as the whole of the precariat – vulnerability, lack of social guarantees, loneliness in distress, lack of stability, and a sense of insecurity.

Fifth, similar characteristics can be applied to people engaged in borrowed labour, that is, are hired as staff members who fulfill orders or render services to other firms (enterprises, organizations)<sup>5</sup>.

Sixth, some migrants, whose numbers are considerable in many countries, including Russia, come close to being part of the precariat. Many of them have their rights in-

<sup>1</sup> *Russian Statistical Yearbook: 2012*, Moscow 2012, p. 127.

<sup>2</sup> V. Istomin, *Crisis and Unemployment Threaten the Country with a Social Explosion*, "Nasha versiya" 2015, No. 3, p. 17.

<sup>3</sup> D.O. Strebkov, A.V. Shevchuk, *Freelancers on the Russian Labor Market*, "Sotsiologicheskiye issledovaniya (SOTSIS)" 2010, No. 2, pp. 45-55.

<sup>4</sup> A.P. Davydov, *Zinaida Golenkova and Russian Sociology*, "Filosofskiy nauki" 2014, No. 10, pp. 139-141.

<sup>5</sup> I. M. Kozina, *Borrowed Labor Workers*, "Sotsiologicheskiye issledovaniya (SOTSIS)" 2013, No. 5, pp. 19-30.

fringed upon, have lower pay and are denied many social benefits. They are often the victims, if not of overt then indirect, to ethnic and religious discrimination<sup>6</sup>.

And, finally, the ranks of the precariat are swelled by interns and some students who seek to achieve stability in society and within their profession. These young people are prepared to take odd jobs for which they are often overqualified and which fall short of their justified claims to a worthier place in life.

It was these social groups Olga Golodets had in mind when she said that “our labour market is practically illegitimate, and only a small part of it functions according to normal rules”. Of the 80-odd million able-bodied population there are no data as to where, what and how 38 million Russians are doing and their living conditions and incomes are not reflected in official statistics.

Thus, in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries there emerged in Russia, like all over the world, a new social class, the precariat, characterized by temporary or part-time employment which is an intransient, constant and enduring condition. And it has to be noted that its numbers are constantly growing, including among people who hold permanent jobs and are often referred to as the middle class.

### **The main features of the precariat**

Thus, a social class called precariat has emerged in Russia, like in the rest of the world. It goes a long way to determine the look of present-day society. It includes significant social strata whose members are in a precarious socioeconomic situation and have a “truncated social status”<sup>7</sup>. In spite of variations and various life styles the groups of this social class have some common features.

First of all, members of the precariat have a precarious social position leading to “deintellectualization of labour”<sup>8</sup> and distortion of the labour process. It cannot be otherwise. In the context of the spreading crisis the social position of many people in the world has seriously deteriorated. The ranks of unemployed (in Spain, for example, one-third of the able-bodied population are unemployed) are swelled by young people graduating from educational establishments. This affects not only small and medium-sized businesses, but also such giants as Gazprom, Rosneft and IBM. The latter announced that it was laying off 110,000 staff, i.e., one-quarter of its workforce.

It has to be stressed that mass dismissals will affect not only workers, but all the social strata and even part of the middle class which is often held up as a model of stability, a model to be emulated. Temporary or part-time work is a clear sign of a worker’s vulnerability which neoliberals often justify by the urgent need to use labour resourc-

<sup>6</sup> V.S. Malakhov, *Allochtons and Autochtons: Migrants as the Subject of Social (Inter)action*, “Politicheskiye issledovaniya (POLIS)” 2015 No. 1, p. 115.

<sup>7</sup> G. Standing, *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class*, London 2011, p. 8.

<sup>8</sup> R.S. Grinberg, *The Great Transformation: Unlearned Lessons. Lecture at the International University, 17 September 2009, Moscow 2009*, p. 4.

es in a flexible manner. Although this approach may be justified from the technocratic point of view, flexibility imposes heavy social costs expressed in loss or lowering of the social status. The danger of the lowering of social status is a major cause of anxiety among many people. According to a nationwide survey of economic perception (Russian State University for the Humanities, 2012, 12 regions, 1207 respondents) 31.2% feel that losing (fully or partially) their jobs is a real possibility.

The situation in the Russian economy being what it is, people qualified for a certain job have to settle for lower paid and less prestigious jobs. The result is a status discord. It is especially widespread among youth entering adult life who have to accept the terms proposed in the hope that this is a temporary phenomenon that will soon pass. Yet, even then a sense of injustice creeps into the consciousness of these people, a sense that is confirmed by far-from-encouraging situations. Indeed, how can they feel otherwise if they see the children of high ranking parents promoted to prestigious positions skipping all the intermediate stages and looking down their noses on their less fortunate colleagues. For instance, how should young people suffering from status discord react to reports that a 25-year-old son of the head of Rosneft became first deputy director of a department at that firm and after 9 months in that job was decorated with the Services to Fatherland Order 2<sup>nd</sup> Category. The Presidential decree specifies that he has been decorated “for major contribution to the development of the fuel and energy complex and for many years of dedicated work (?! – Zh. T.)<sup>9</sup>.

What is to be made of this situation by young people who have to look for a job or settle for a job below their qualifications? This is just one of many cases, which means that the social lift has stopped working. It is not just the fact that people reach the top of the social ladder in accordance with dubious criteria, but also the fact that the opportunities for renewal of society by injection of new talent from various social strata are curtailed, but also that socially determined generation of capable and creative people for the following rungs of the career ladder are seriously restricted.

An equally important characteristic of the precariat is its social vulnerability and deprivation of many social guarantees. This is manifested not only in lower wages, the precariat is denied guarantees in the field of healthcare, assistance in educating children and organizing leisure time. As a rule these people are “in no danger” of being “incentivized” on a regular or even occasional basis.

The status of a temporary worker relieves the employer of extra costs of retaining labour, reduces his costs, increases profits and most importantly (the dream of neoliberals) leaves the worker to fend for himself “to encourage him to be independent, responsible and competitive”. The precariat as a rule has no legal protection (or it is kept to a minimum) which could guarantee employment in exchange for a commitment to obey and comply with the general requirements and exhibit a measure of loyalty. The overall feel-

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<sup>9</sup> Y. Yuryeva, *Bonus Order*, “Sovetskaya Rossiya”, January 24, 2015, p. 2.

ing of insecurity is compounded by the fact that they live by themselves, get no social benefits (unless they are registered as unemployed, something many avoid doing not to be stuck with the reputation of being “uncompetitive” and drop to the very bottom of the social heap). Nor does this class have effective legislation to shield them against arbitrary acts by their employers, which is frequently manifested in the violation of basic labour rights. According to the nationwide survey (1207 respondents aged over 18, 12 regions, 2012, Russian State University for the Humanities), only 20.2% said their employment and/or additional work were sealed in an employment contract with the employer or an agency authorized by him<sup>10</sup>.

The precariat has no future under the current structure of society and the state. This means giving up a professional career, professional growth and professional perspective. This admission and abandonment of this goal is compounded by the fact that the incomes of the precariat are unstable, occasional and liable to fluctuate due to various circumstances. The sense of insecurity infects other members of the family and close ones making people think of ways out of the situation. Several options are open to them:

- a) to resign and swim with the current;
- b) to look for ways of adapting themselves resorting to short- or medium-term measures to put their lives on an even keel;
- c) to act aggressively, either by protesting against the ruling regime or descending into the underworld.

The precariat is essentially deprofessionalized because it changes jobs frequently, not because it wants to, but because it is a line of behaviour imposed by the neoliberal economy on a huge mass of people who increasingly have to work in areas other than those for which they have been trained. Opinion samplings show that the percentage of people who could not find a job for which they have been trained increased from 17.6% in 1995 to 37% in 2002 and to 49.1% in 2013<sup>11</sup>. Each time he/she loses a job he/she usually gets a job in a different sphere which requires a certain non-specialized background and set of work skills. This is highlighted by the fate of graduates of universities and other educational establishments (who make up the bulk of office plankton) and who are employed with little regard for their previous training. Most of them, in spite of having a profession, perform menial duties, such as writing memoranda, doing preliminary research, gathering data, and running errands, i.e., perform functions that do not require a higher education. If a young person has a degree it does not matter in what field it is and what professional skills he has. The result is massive deprofessionalization, loss of professional identity and professional culture. Not surprisingly, a growing number of the members of the precariat are losing a sense of professional identity even

<sup>10</sup> See more in: Z.T. Toshchenko, *Economic Consciousness and Behavior: a Quarter Century On (late 1980s-early 2010s)*, “Sotsiologicheskkiye issledovaniya (SOTSIS)” 2014, No. 7, pp. 51-63.

<sup>11</sup> N.M. Volovskaya, L.K. Plyusnina, A.V. Rusina, A.V. Inozemtseva, *Unemployed Population and Self-Employment in the Siberian Region*, “Sotsiologicheskkiye issledovaniya (SOTSIS)” 2015, No. 5, pp. 52-60.

if they have past experience of work in a certain specialty and used to hold important positions. It is assumed that the precariat will work when necessary and however necessary under conditions that ignore its own wishes. In this situation all the members of the precariat share a feeling and awareness that their employment is for the most part accidental and insecure<sup>12</sup>.

In identifying the immanent qualities of the precariat it has to be noted that its position is marked by a strange and bizarre circumstance: many of those who are referred to as the precariat have never seen their employer, do not know who owns the organizations or enterprises they work for, do not know their development plans or their future. In other words, unlike the proletariat, the precariat is totally deprived of any opportunity to influence those in whose employ it is. This perfectly reflects the situation in Russia. It will be recalled that in the wake of the terrorist attack at Domodedovo the authorities spent more than a year establishing who owned the airport. Equally mind-boggling are cases of illegal use of illegal migrants at numerous construction projects in Moscow and other parts of Russia when it is impossible to identify the owners and the officials responsible for the projects.

All this suggests that the world is confronted with a new type of alienation history has never seen in such a guise and on such a scale. The place of the proletariat has been taken by the precariat whose position is in many ways similar to that of the working class from the eighteenth to twentieth century. The precariat is recruited from practically all the strata of modern society, representing a huge mass of people who have a precarious social status over long periods of time. These people are not sure that society needs them, that they have the right to be employed in their own or related professional field, that they are entitled to social protection, that their families and close ones are guaranteed a future in a situation when there is no one to present claims to other than anonymous and uncertain social institutions.

### **The place of the precariat in the structure of stratification concepts**

For more than two centuries social thought has used the concept of class structure. The main classes were the proletariat (the working class), the bourgeoisie and the peasantry. This Marxist interpretation was tweaked in the Soviet period: the working class and the collective farm peasants were declared to be classes while the intelligentsia and salary-earning office workers were declared to be a stratum.

The modern world is changing fast, and not only technologically, economically and politically. Its social structure is changing. The Marxian idea of classes based on the relationship to property (means of production) and man's place in the labour process does

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<sup>12</sup> P. Bizyukov, *Dictatorship of the Precariat*, "Gazeta.ru", April 29, 2014, [http://www.gazeta.ru/comments/2014/04/29\\_x\\_6013393.shtml](http://www.gazeta.ru/comments/2014/04/29_x_6013393.shtml) [access on: 11.07.2018].

not fully characterize the modern structure of society. However, the class structure has not gone away, it merely acquired a new shape and different parameters. Because the former benchmarks have disappeared, the search began for new definitions of the social state characterizing the majority of societies existing at present. The question the answer to which has not only theoretical, but practical significance is this: what is the social structure of modern society, including Russian society?

Obviously, next to nothing has remained of the former perceptions except vague designations that reflect reality in very approximate terms. Being aware of this situation, modern scholars set about looking for an answer to the question life has confronted them with. In the 1960s-1980s Western scholars made much of the division of society into “white collars” and “blue collars” believing that the ratio of intellectual work had changed the landscape of the class structure of society.

Russian scholars studying the new realities, turned their attention to processes and social groups that did not exist in Soviet society, but became part of the reality of post-Soviet Russia. Their quests stimulated the study of the social position of people connected with the phenomena of unemployment (Ovsey Shkaratan, Renald Simonyan), downshifting (Nikita Pokrovsky), freelance (Denis Strebkov, Andrey Shevchuk), etc. The concept of the middle class loomed large in the search of answers to the question of the social class structure. It became particularly popular and was vigorously pursued (for more detail see the works of Lyudmila Belyayeva, Vyacheslav Bobkov, Mikhail Gorshkov, Zinaida Golenkova, Natalya Tikhonova and others). The attributes imputed to this class were material wealth, stable consumer demand, social prestige, guaranteed employment, a sense of autonomy.

However, those who studied the middle class (stratum) discovered early on that this class (stratum) was very heterogeneous. Attempts to divide it into the upper, middle and lower middle class were largely based on the size of income and the explanation of what the middle class actually represented was not always convincing. No wonder the quantitative assessments of this class in sociological literature vary from several percentage points to one-third of the population.

Along with this approach other ideas of social structure began to germinate which were based not on income and social prestige, but on guaranteed employment, social security, sustainable professional identification and confidence in the future. This took on added importance, if only because the social strata that possessed these characteristics were growing, rapidly making inroads not only on the working class and the peasantry, but also on other social strata. It took some time, however, for an awareness of the emergence of a new class/stratum to sink in. Initially, the old formulation of classes was questioned. Theories sprang up explaining radical changes of society's social structure.

Andre Gorz wrote about “the end of the working class”<sup>13</sup>. Class structure was to all intents and purposes denied in the works of Alvin Toffler in connection with the advent

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<sup>13</sup> A. Gorz, *Farewell to the Working Class: An Essay on Post-Industrial Socialism*, London 1982.

of the information revolutions. There was no room for the former social class structure in the reflections of Samuel Huntington.

French sociologists studying the position of seasonal workers in the 1980s pioneered a fundamentally different approach to changes in the social structure. Pierre Bourdieu broadened out the problem by including in his analysis the growing mass of workers engaged in temporary and odd jobs. That was when the word precariat first appeared to denote workers with unstable employment, lack of guaranteed social benefits and vulnerability in periods of difficulty<sup>14</sup>. These strata attracted the attention of other scholars, such as Michel Foucault, Jurgen Habermas, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri<sup>15</sup>.

Russian scholars too moved closer to understanding the new situation<sup>16</sup>; the Department of Sociology at Kazan University<sup>17</sup>, journalists interpret the precariat in different ways, but agree that it is a new phenomenon to be reckoned with.

The new realities of the second half of the twentieth and early twenty-first century demonstrated that a growing number of people in many countries found themselves in a sector that many chose to call shadow or informal. This meant that the labour relations between the employer and the employee came to be dominated by agreements without mutual legal obligations, without guaranteed protection of the most elementary rights that existed in the civilized world. As a result of such relations the employer (or his representative) could arbitrarily change the sphere of employment, the nature of the job, remuneration, urging the employees to be “moderate” in their demands citing objective and other difficulties.

Rightlessness is particularly apparent in the position of interns who are hired without pay for several months (up to six months) allegedly to test whether they are fit for the job; then they are fired on the grounds that they have “not lived up to the promise” and other people are hired who are prepared to suffer temporary privations.

All this goes to show that the existence of such a number of people suggests that we are not looking at some by-effects of development but at a steady trend of the formation of a new social class – the precariat.

### **Precariat: victim or creature of neoliberal policy**

The Labour model of a welfare state practically spent itself in the 1980s and 1990s: the number of jobs with long-term employment guarantees and corresponding social security dropped sharply. In fact the solution of the problem of sustained employment and

<sup>14</sup> P. Bourdieu, *La precariteestaujourd'hui*partour, *Contre-feux*, Paris 1998, pp. 95-101.

<sup>15</sup> Z.T. Toshchenko, *Economic Consciousness and Behavior: a Quarter Century On (late 1980s-early 2010s.)*, “Sotsiologicheskoye issledovaniya (SOTSIS)” 2014. No. 7, p. 9.

<sup>16</sup> Z.T. Golenkova, Y.V. Gollyusova, *New Social Groups in Modern Stratification Systems of the Global Society*, “Sotsiologicheskaya nauka i sotsialnaya praktika” 2013, No. 3, pp. 1, 3.

<sup>17</sup> E. Marmer, *What is precariat*, “NeueZeiten” 2009, No. 5; A. Mekhanik, *The Miserable of the Modern World*, “Ekspert”, 2014, No. 1; Y. Melnik, *Precariat of all lands, unite*, “2000 – Svoboda slova” 2007, No. 48.

“unprotected labour” was practically swept under the carpet. The newly-proclaimed policy of a flexible labour market included many aspects:

wage flexibility meant speeding up adjustments to changes in demand, particularly downwards; employment flexibility meant easy and costless ability of firms to change employment levels, particularly downwards, implying a reduction in employment security and protection; job flexibility meant being able to move employees around inside the firm and to change job structures with minimal opposition or cost; skill flexibility meant being able to adjust workers' skills easily<sup>18</sup>.

In short, flexibility meant that hired workers could be put in an increasingly vulnerable position under the pretext that sacrifice was needed to preserve the organization (production) and consequently jobs. In such conditions any difficulties in economic development and specific production entities were attributed to lack of flexibility and lack of structural reforms of the labour market.

The emergence of the precariat on the historical stage spelled unforeseen economic, social, political and cultural-moral effects which exceed other destructive and long-term consequences known to history in terms of their impact on the life of societies and states. How do they manifest themselves? With the emergence and spread of flexible employment policy social inequality increased dramatically. The class structure characteristic of industrialized society gave way to a more complex but no less class-defined structure. All the material and financial resources are concentrated more and more in the hands of a small group of people in the world and in Russia. The Gini coefficient (ratio of the incomes of the top 10% and the bottom 10%, not counting the incomes of top managers and oligarchs) is 1:16, although experts put it at 1:30, and in Moscow at 1:45/50. The 3% of the population own 70% of national wealth and the indicator is steadily rising, with 110 oligarchs owning 35% of all assets. As for official inflation, it amounted to 19% in the last 10 years while the real social inflation (rising prices of food, housing and utilities services, public transit, etc.) amounted to 32%<sup>19</sup>. It is a measure of uncertainty and misery that although the scale of poverty diminished in the 2010s it was still considerable, with 12% of the population living below the subsistence level. The size of vulnerable or poorly protected population continues to grow. According to the nationwide survey of economic perception (October 2012, 1207 respondents), 8% are afraid of being fired, a further 23.3% say it is a real threat. These include representatives of the middle class as well. They are also potential candidates to join the precariat. Potential members of the precariat include workers in various spheres on short-term contracts, a practice that is spreading. This is the lot of many professors and teachers in the course of the reform of higher and secondary education. Similar processes are taking place in the sphere of healthcare which has also come in for “optimization.” In other words, more

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<sup>18</sup> G. Standing, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

<sup>19</sup> L.N. Zaytsev, Y.N. Vikulin, *In the Safeboxes of the Rich and in the People's Treasury*, “Sovetskaya Rossiya”, January 24, 2015.

and more workers move into a suspended state forming a loose, jelly-like and unstable mass concerned about the growing instability and precariousness of its social position.

Owing to this state this class will not become a support base for official policy because it has no reason to be pleased with its social position, its diffuse and uncertain social status. The precariat will certainly look for a way out of its plight first through spontaneous and subsequently organized action. This will heighten social tensions. Although the precariat has not yet become aware of itself as “a class for itself” it may happen just as it happened to the proletariat which had for a long time been “a class in itself.” The present-day precariat is using not only time-tested instruments of class struggle such as strikes, rallies, etc., but some new and largely untested forms, for example, European May 1 in Western Europe and Japan. Of course these actions are a far cry from a well-thought-out tactic of fighting for rights. Indeed, it is not yet known exactly who the adversary is, and against whom the fight should be waged and by what methods.

Besides, the precariat does not yet have a coherent programme or leaders who could unite the motley mass and come up with ideas about the means and methods of upholding their interests. One thing is clear: social discontent is fueled by these people and not by the underclass and pauperized strata of the population.

It has to be stressed that discontent is rising even among that part of young intellectuals who seem to be comfortably off, but do not feel secure and able to build a professional career and ensure a safe future. This is borne out by sociological data. According to Yelena Shestopal (2014, 8 regions in the RF, 898 respondents), 52% take a negative view of the current Russian regime and only 22% of the respondents approve of it<sup>20</sup>. Would it not be true to say that this half correlates not with the 12% of those who live below the subsistence level, but with the approximate number of people who feel ill-done-by in one way or another? The question facing the precariat is how to move from sporadic and spontaneous expressions of discontent to an articulate political action programme. Some negative consequences have to do mainly with people's personal lives.

The precariat does not have a clear vision of its future, it is unsure of a comfortable guaranteed old age after retirement. In this situation the attitude to work and work duties changes. Seeking to keep their jobs some work their fingers to the bone in order to keep afloat, to prove to their employers that they are irreplaceable, important and useful, committed to their jobs, which often leads to occupational diseases and moral and physical exhaustion due to overstrain.

Many social groups that make up the precariat, because of their fickle and vague civic position have a diffuse and twisted consciousness which manifests itself through all sorts of actions from anomic behaviour to destructive activities, connected with criminal and delinquent behaviour. Spiritual and moral degradation of the individual takes the form of loss of ideals, faith in justice and the world order. Uncertainty of the pre-

<sup>20</sup> Y.B. Shestopal, *A Quarter Century of Political Reform in Russia from the Psychological Point of View*, “Politicheskiye issledovaniya (POLIS)” 2015, No. 1, p. 144.

sent and the future affects such an important problem as marriage and having children. Because of wobbly life attitudes the decision is put off until at least a modicum of guaranteed employment is achieved.

The precariat is very unsure of its present and future position. Hence the fear, mistrust, disenchantment and rejection of establishment structures. Many feel they are victims of circumstances beyond their control. This kind of mentality leads to a rise of suicide rate, which in Russia is the fourth highest in the world. In 11 months of 2014 alone 24690 people took their own lives. Experts say social reasons are beginning to outnumber medical ones. Suicides are most often associated with the level of anxiety and crisis when people see no way out of the domestic, economic and financial impasse<sup>21</sup>. These causes are not characteristic of the underclass (whose members usually resign to the situation), but precisely of the precariat, which is actively looking for ways to steady its position.

All this warrants the conclusion that the precariat is a fundamentally new social entity which today has still many features of a proto-class. The groups constituting it have yet to develop a sense of solidarity, are poorly organized, if at all, and still have a vague idea of the political programme and ideology. The precariat is still “a class in itself” but it stands on the threshold of becoming “a class for itself”. It is already a stable socioclass entity bringing together huge masses of people and consolidating their status of precariousness of their social position and clear awareness of their inferiority complex and limitations in making use of their opportunities and abilities. As this realization sinks in, the precariat threatens to become a social class whose consciousness and behaviour would determine the destinies of Russia.

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**Abstract:** The article deals with the emergence of a new social class, precariat, explains the causes that brought it into being, its structure and key characteristics. It traces the maturing of the idea of precariat in scientific thought, in world and Russian social practice. The main features of this class are revealed and a comparison is made with other social groups. The article reveals the specificities of this class, its place and role in contemporary division of labour, its position in the labour market and the first sprouts of its self-awareness as "a class for itself." The consequences of the existence and functioning of the precariat are discussed.

**Keywords:** society, social class, precariat, proletariat, labour market, employment

Article submitted: 10.02.2018, article accepted: 20.03.2018.