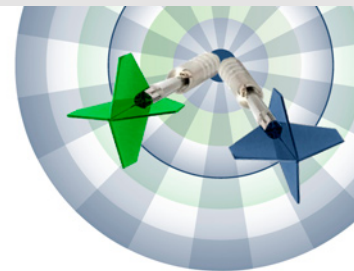


Dictatorship of the mediocre

Vassily Aksyonov, a Russian writer who died 10 days ago, wrote a fun novel, "The Island of Crimea," on the premise that the Crimea resisted the Bolsheviks in 1917 and became a capitalist playground. Czechs might imagine what could have been if the Americans hadn't stopped in Pilsen. The gradual but eventually overpowering takeover by incompetents and nonentities, to use Aksyonov's words, might have been avoided. The idea that any figure standing out from the mass of nonentities would become an object of scorn (again using Aksyonov's words) might not have prevailed. Aksyonov didn't just criticize the "raging" mediocrity that was bred under Communism, though. He said that the "insolent behavior of any elite," including a Western one, leaves a mark on the genetic code of a people. In the end, he became a victim of Russia's march toward capitalism. When his health problems first began 18 months ago, he was shunted into the corridor of an overflowing Moscow hospital. It was mediocrity at its best.



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