Truth and Order
The Program Manifesto of Alexander Ivanovich Lebed

Editor’s note: A leading contender to replace Boris Yeltsin as president of the Russian Federation, Alexander I. Lebed is one of his country’s most popular and enigmatic political figures today. The former army lieutenant general ran his 1996 presidential campaign on the theme of “truth and order,” pledging to crack down hard on corruption, crime, and other societal ills. After placing third in the June balloting, Lebed was named President Yeltsin’s national security adviser and placed in day-to-day charge of the presidential security council. From those posts he subsequently confirmed his intention to succeed Yeltsin.

Lebed’s 1996 campaign manifesto, translated here, in many respects sets the retired paratrooper apart from his main rivals, Yeltsin and Communist leader Gennady Zyuganov. Apart from its informal tone and strong rhetoric, one of the document’s most notable thematical differences is that Lebed did not seek scapegoats in the West for Russia’s deteriorating condition, but argued that the country’s problems and solutions are the responsibility of the Russian people themselves.

—JMW

The Illness of Society
Before one can cure an ill society, one has to understand what the illness is. We live poorly; we don’t even understand accurately how poorly we live in comparison to normal countries. And there is no country in the world richer than us. What is the matter? It has long been explained to us that our poverty was in Marxism and Socialism, that a market was necessary, a change in the form of property ownership, that reforms were necessary.

The reforms came.

Where is the labor market, the market for jobs, where a person can profitably sell his labor? Where is the market of real goods, where one can choose one’s quality and one’s price? Where is the capital market, where with a new project based on a good idea, a person can get money?

These things do not exist. Why? What are we lacking? The prices have been freed, property has been privatized, industry has been converted, inflation has...
been controlled (we even took the step of not paying salaries as a guarantee of this). Well, is something still lacking for total happiness?

One can buy the best, the most thoroughbred sheep, buy feed for it according to all the laws of science, and send it to pasture. Then one sits, quietly rejoicing, waiting until the time comes to shear the wool. And when the time comes, instead of wool we get the naked skeleton of the sheep. What is the matter? We forgot the shepherd, and there is a forest near the pasture where wolves run, and we did not place a sheepdog on watch over the flock.

I hope that my example is transparent. Our market sheep have not fallen into a clean, Swiss pasture, but into a real Russian forest. Bureaucratic jackals and criminal wolves gobbled up the sheepdogs, leaving one skeleton behind as a memorial. This is not written down in the economic theory of privatization and stabilization. Therefore, it is being written in our lives. So we and you understand what the matter is here.

The economists thought that they could build a market by theory. It was built by life. They promised to do the best for the people, but acted as always for the nomenklatura. There is the whole formula of our reforms. The nomenklatura and the banks which are connected to her—this is who really won out in the reforms—fantastically enriched themselves, became kings of the market. We are the subjects of these kings. The lowly subjects.

Our poverty is not in the market. Our poverty is the bandit state, which from the first has been taking from the economy its “Mongol tribute,” suffocating production with taxes and then distributing the money it gathered among its own banks and enterprises in return for bribes. As a result, a misshapen economy is growing, the economy of the racket, like the cast-off son of an alcoholic father.

This is the social truth of our life—bureaucrats came, they stole; then bandits came, and they stole. Where does the capital end up? Life gives the answer—abroad. And not one tongue wags to reproach them—after all, one would have to be a hero to risk losing all every minute to carry on business in Russia, to carry on business with bandits and bureaucrats. Thus, production dies and jobs disappear. This is our real market. Raw materials and capital are being taken out of Russia. Who profits by this? Those who cannot manage production but want to enrich themselves. What do they need? To keep power in their hands and to take bribes.

The Cure

According to my understanding, if the illness is defined it is clear how to cure it. The state should not be a wolf, devouring the economy, but a wolfhound, defending the economy. And here at the head of the country one does not need an economist or a party worker or a comedian. Here it is good to have a man with a strong will. A man not entangled in the threads of power, not tied to the nomenklatura. A man who is not living for the interests of the nomenklatura. A man who knows what duty is and can command obedience, who can establish order. That is why I put forth my candidacy for the post of President of Russia.

What do I see as my task as president?
To establish order in the state and the economy.
Order does not mean having one’s collar sewn into place or workers lining up in formation outside the factory gates, universal abstinence, or tiresome Swiss precision. All this is nonsense. Order is something entirely different. Order is simply rules and laws by which all life in the country runs. Not mere formal laws, but real laws, which we really obey. As the rules are, so is life.

Let’s say that in a city there are many catastrophic automobile accidents. They search for the reason—in the construction of the automobiles, in the quality of the gasoline, in the condition of the drivers. But there is one detail: In this large city, not one traffic light is working. Does one need to look for further reasons?

No, our traffic lights are working. It’s just that they are being changed by bureaucrats and bandits. They always give us the red light and themselves the green. And there is one, overarching rule, more important than the whole constitution, the basis of life and the economy. This is the foundation of the new morality of society. He who does not steal, does not eat. Short and clear. What kind of order is this? One might call it a brothel. This is the order which rules from the Kremlin down to the last village—it’s nothing surprising that the economy is decaying. What is surprising is how we are still living this way. In any case, there is no reason to work under such conditions.

There is only one way to remedy the situation. To end the brothel-like disorder and establish order.

If a general talks about order, it is simple in our understanding. Give out a million shovels and tell everyone to dig fenceposts until lunchtime. And if anyone loafs, string him up by his thumbs! In politics, a dictatorship. In the economy, the seizing of private property. In general, such order is completely hollow. It’s no worse than under Stalin.

I know this type of order, and not from books. Before the war, they sent my father to a camp for lateness to work.

So my family gave its tribute to this order. Enough, we don’t feel drawn there anymore. But it is not just me, personally. One can wag one’s tongue about anything one likes, but really, is it possible to establish such order? It is, if one slaughters about five or six million Russians. But I am not an executioner. And although there are many crooks and fools among our politicians, I do not see any executioners or butchers. So one cannot talk in earnest about a Stalinist order.

We don’t need prison camp routines, but regular humane order.

First, there should be clear and universally understood rules for life, first of all for economic life. If these rules are not obeyed—salaries go unpaid, debts are not repaid, money is not returned to depositors—there should be clear and swift punishment. I will put through a series of decrees “Concerning Debtors’ Prisons.” They who do not pay salaries, do not give money back to depositors, and do not repay credits will be subject to criminal liability and confiscation of property. A director is not always to blame when he doesn’t pay salaries, but a banker is always to blame when he doesn’t repay loans. But today he knows that he is not risking anything for this. Tomorrow he will know that he risks all. And I am sure that money to pay salaries will immediately be found, and loans will be repaid, and they will be afraid to lie to depositors. The bankrupt will become
bankrupt, and not have their bankruptcy transferred to the person who grew pale laboring to put up the money, while the bankrupt transfer the money of others into a different firm and then, in full comfort, close up their old store. I’ll put a stop to this mockery.

This will sharply improve the lives of the people. It will, at last, clear the hidden mines from our economy. Today, after all, everyone walks as if in a mine field, not knowing where he’ll blow up. He can’t trust anyone or anything. How can there be any economic life, any money set aside, any job creation? People don’t build factories in mine fields. But when we clear the mines, then the renaissance of our economy will begin.

Secondly, there is fear. I will immediately carry through a massive, powerful blow against organized crime. Detectives work from the bottom up—what gangs to expose, which ones to break up, and then arresting them.

I, however, will proceed differently: from the top down. I will conduct the war on crime like a strategic operation. This is when one knocks out not one individual enemy soldier, but the amassed forces of one’s opponent, when one delivers the knockout blow from the commanding heights. Crime today is not a judicial but a political problem. This problem must therefore be solved not judicially but politically. This is where force should be applied, and not in Chechnya.

The heads of these groups are known. Their staffs are known. Their connections are known. I will publish a decree on the war against organized crime. With this decree it will be possible, on the basis of data gathered by our agents, to seize all of the capos and the ordinary “soldiers” of the criminal groups. A short series of powerful, simultaneous, nationwide blows, and the octopus will have its tentacles cut off and be wounded in the heart.

Yes, many of them will escape. But the network will be broken up, and they will not be able to weave it anew. I will battle criminality wherever it exists, in any country. There are spheres in which we will be in an eternal state of war with it: traffic in drugs, weapons, and live animals. But I will throw this garbage out of ordinary business. After this, crime, at last, will become merely a criminal problem, and not a political or economic one. Then it will be the minister of internal affairs’ headache, and not the president’s.

One more thing. While the government sleeps, the bandits are collecting debts by force, getting loans repaid, “defending” entrepreneurs from other bandits. When all these roles are filled strictly by the government, the bandits find themselves out of work, and these filthy protection rackets will be unnecessary.

Legal businesses—small, mid-size, or large—will become safe. One will not fear to compete and lower prices.

The third point. To break up the system of corruption and the market for bribes. The popular method is to crack some skulls among bad bureaucrats and seek out better ones. One may savor the head-cracking, but the problem is that honest new bureaucrats can’t be found. The problem is not with individuals. Of course, certain gentlemen who go too far will need to be shaken out. I have materials concerning the almost unlimited robberies of about twenty current and former min-
isters or their deputies. I will demand quick investigations of all these cases from
the prosecutor and, for a start, I will ask these gentlemen not to cross the borders
of the Motherland.

But you can’t carry a lot of water in a sieve.

To struggle not against individual bandits but to destroy the breeding ground
of banditry, to destroy the system of banditry, that is the problem. And as with
the bandits, it is not a criminal but a political problem.

A bureaucrat will not stop stealing when he is frightened. The bureaucrat will
stop stealing only when he is unable to steal anything.

The conclusion—the right to manage property and, first and foremost, money
needs to be taken away from
the bureaucrat. The amount of
money which bureaucrats have
control of needs to be sharply
reduced. I will reduce taxes by
several times (and the “mafia
tax,” as I already said, I will
eliminate entirely). How is this
possible? By reducing the state bills. We will cross out entire articles of expen-
ditures. Only that which the government must always take care of will remain.
Earmarked spending for social assistance—pensions, care for the disabled, etc.
Expenditures for defending the people against bandits. The defense of the coun-
try. Free medicine and education. Support of science and culture. Emergency sit-
uations (natural disasters and so forth). It goes without saying: government
branches of industry (atomic). That is all.

What will this give?

The problem, in the final analysis, is not with bureaucrats and their bribes. The
problem is to change the entire economic system. The epoch of under-the-table
dealings is ending. The market, which so far exists only in the fevered brains of
theorists, will become a reality. The psychology of entrepreneurs and directors
will change; once it is no longer possible to get loans from bottomless govern-
ment pockets they will be forced, sad as it may be, to work. And if they are unac-
customed to business—to earning instead of begging? Well, they won’t succeed;
they will fade into the distance. Those who can succeed will come onto the scene.
This is called competition, or natural selection.

Who will not profit by this? Those who are accustomed to feeding at the
trough. Who will profit? People of action, who are now thrashing about in a
web of bribes. And the main thing is that it is profitable and necessary for the
country.

But for ordinary people, those who work as hirelings? In the beginning it will
be difficult if what you produce is not in demand. But really, how is the govern-
ment helping you today? With promises and discussions. . . .

Then, fairly soon people will feel a real easing of their lives; the beginning, at
last, of a real growth in the economy, production, and the appearance of high-
paying jobs. For this to happen, the government will guarantee:
• The firm security of property from violation.
• Clear and precise laws of economic life, giving complete freedom to manufacturers.
• Deliverance from fear of bandits and bureaucrats.
• An end to the under-the-table distribution of money from the treasury.

All of these taken together will secure order within the economy. Then tens and hundreds of millions of dollars will be invested in the Russian economy, put into long term projects. It will no longer be profitable to steal and take money out of an unstable Russia, but to manufacture and invest in a stable Russia.

The state will become a sheepdog instead of a wolf. I will firmly, reliably cover the flank of the Russian economy.

And, finally, the moral atmosphere in the economy and society will change. Today’s principle of “he who does not steal—neither shall he eat” will be transformed by life into a different one, the eternal “he who does not work—neither shall he eat.”

State Structure
Here we also need an induction of order. I will list the main points.

Chechnya. A tangle of thread soaked in blood. It’s no longer possible to untie them. We have been trying to break apart for almost two years, and the results are well known. What is to be done?

I am sure that on such issues no clever schemes can help. There is only one medicine and it is radical: The truth. The Chechens have the right to separate themselves from Russia if the majority of them really want this, being prepared to die for it. To hold onto them by force and to throw trillions of rubles down that hole so that the local warlords don’t fight among themselves—“you can steal, but don’t leave us!”—I don’t intend to do that. I would propose to them that they hold a referendum: Do you want to go or stay? If you vote to stay, then abide by our laws and disarm. Those who do not disarm I will annihilate with a clear conscience, with the knowledge that I am completely in the right. If you vote to go—good riddance. Just stop cursing Russia, fighting with Russia and living off the Russian budget, off the taxes we collect in Moscow and the Urals.

Local self-management. Here we need to begin by looking at people’s real needs. We have given almost all rights to the center and the oblasts; cities and towns retain few rights. This is not just. After all, people’s real lives are focused in those cities and towns. That is where all the necessities of life are located. Accordingly, the right to establish order and collect tax revenues should be given from the federal and regional levels to the localities.

Relations with other CIS countries. Russia will naturally and inevitably be dominant throughout the CIS, whether people like it or not. She may unite with other Slavic republics. But we will not feed anyone and we will stop these trade terms which are deadly for us. We will provide, by all possible means, help to Russian
people who wish to resettle in Russia. A Russian anywhere must know that he is not an orphan, that he has his own country. In this respect one can learn from Germany and Israel. They help their own—and we will help our own.

**Russia's Path**

When the USSR came unsoldered, I felt like I had lost the earth under my feet. That feeling has not completely gone away yet. But facts are facts: the time of empires has ended throughout the world. Now a Russian state has appeared. But it is still in form only, as it was five years ago. Our state has no clear understanding of its tasks or its future. People do not trust the state and do not keep its laws. The state keeps the people under its heel. It, this new state, carries within it the same terrible illness which killed both Tsarist Russia and the Soviet Union.

It is a soulless state with one huge, flabby body.

It is a garbage heap, greedily attracting more bureaucrat-flies.

Such a state will always be foreign to the people. It will only collect its tribute from the people, not giving them security, assurance or a sense of pride.

Why do I want to come to power? I am a fighting general and would like to apply myself to my favorite profession. But first of all, I am a Russian. I want my children and grandchildren to live on the same land where my father, grandfather, and all my ancestors rest. I want to do everything possible so that they can take pride in their country. Americans say, “How lucky we are, that we were born in our country, in America, how happy we are about that.” Can we, Russians, say that today? Yes, I can and I don’t want to live in any other country, breathe a different air, speak a different language, look into the eyes of other women. But we must do so much to make our country comfortable to live in, so that things are not done to the detriment of man, but to his benefit, so that the Russian does not feel himself humiliated and defenseless!

Our Russian state is only being born. We are obligated to refine it from the dross of previous governments. We have to make it humane.

* I have the will to carry out my work together with you and not to stray from the path.

* Your vote is the strength which will overcome all impediments on our road to a new life.