

Homeless Russian boy raised by stray dogs

Richard Tyler
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Such are the appalling conditions facing homeless Russian children that six-year-old Ivan Mishukov preferred to live with stray dogs. The child told social workers, 'I was better off with dogs. They loved me and protected me.'

His parents abandoned Ivan when he was just four years old. The boy survived by begging for food, which he then shared with the dogs that roamed the streets with him. In return they protected him and found warm places to stay in Reutova, west of Moscow, where the winter temperature can reach minus 30C. The bond that developed between Ivan and the dogs was so strong that it took police nearly a month to separate them.

The article in the July 16 edition of the *Guardian* newspaper that reports this story is one of the rare occasions when the press gives a glimpse of the real situation in Russia today. Tom Whitehouse, the story's author, writes, 'the conditions outlined in Dickens' *Oliver Twist* are like Disneyland in comparison with the lot of an average homeless Russian child.'

He reports how some 10 percent of teenagers thrown out of orphanages when they are considered able to look after themselves later commit suicide. Last year 17,000 children were the victims of attempted murder and 200 were actually killed by their parents.

Today the Russian economy has all but collapsed, with millions of workers receiving no wages for months on end. By 1995, prices had increased over 10,000 times, while wages had risen just 1,500-fold. The pressure this has placed on ordinary Russian families is enormous.

For those unfortunate children who have no family to care for them, the state-run homes and orphanages, starved of money and resources, offer only the barest minimum provision. Ivan Mishukov is just one of 2 million homeless children in Russia that are left to fend for themselves.

The fate of children and attitudes towards them can

be regarded as a fundamental measure of the health of any society. What has befallen Ivan Mishukov shows that the once-vaunted rebirth of capitalism in the former USSR has produced the greatest social, economic and indeed moral collapse that has occurred in any country during peacetime.

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