

futile to argue with a monomaniac.

Reagan's policy in Central America has been vindicated by the electoral defeat of the Sandinistas and by the removal of Noriega. Reagan's assistant secretary of state Elliott Abrams began the defenestration of Noriega when almost no one thought it possible or even prudent. The goal was a democratic Panama, and that goal is now being realized. Reagan's military aid for El Salvador was meant to shore up democ-

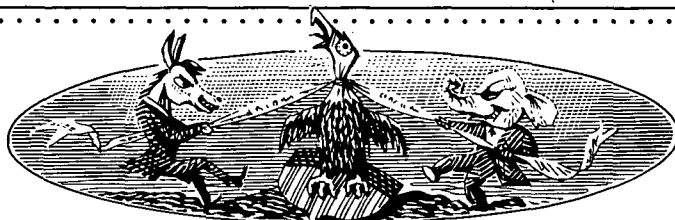
racy there, and that goal too is being slowly realized. His support of the contras was always viewed as instrumental toward a democratic outcome in Nicaragua. Through the years he aided the contras against all his critics worldwide, none of whom summed up the left's confused complaint more pithily than British Labour party leader Neil Kinnock, who in 1986 said: "The people of Nicaragua are still struggling to keep their infant democracy alive against the

attacks of terrorists armed and funded by the government of the United States. What makes a great country like America, itself born in revolution, finance the evil people who murder the innocents in Nicaragua?"

Reagan's goal of a democratic Nicaragua is now being realized despite all the twisted charges he endured. His adversaries denied the soundness of American policy right up to the day when the Nicaraguan people voted

tyranny out. As late as February 20, on the ABC evening news, Peter Jennings would cite a dubious poll and prophesy: "For the Bush Administration and the Reagan Administration . . . the poll hints at a simple truth: after years of trying to get rid of the Sandinistas, there is not much to show for their efforts." Apparently Anthony Lewis and his left-wing fans still believe this, though not many Central Americans do. □

CAPITOL IDEAS



MOON OVER MOSCOW

by Tom Bethell

We passed through customs at Moscow with scarcely an official glance at our luggage. It seems the Soviet authorities have given up trying to control what people bring into the country. On the other side of the door, where the general public waits behind the barrier, the lighting was dim. Visible was a grimy counter where they seemed to be serving snacks. Our guide, employed by Novosti Press, told us in the bus not to drink the tap water in our hotel rooms. Not safe, apparently. Stick to mineral water. Or Coca Cola. Along with several other Novosti people, the guide was working temporarily for the World Media Association, helping to organize their giant conference in Moscow, to which I and about 500 other people had been invited.

Rev. Sun Myung Moon, 70, who was imprisoned by the Communists in North Korea at the time of the Korean War, and subsequently founded the Unification Church (of which the World Media Association is an offshoot), was long considered to be anti-Soviet, and certainly anti-Communist. Recently, however, he has been making very friendly gestures toward the Kremlin, taking out full-page ads praising President Gorbachev as a "man of great courage and conviction," and declaring himself "willing to support his program any way that I can." When a fire damaged the offices of *Moscow News* on February 15, Rev. Moon promptly pledged \$100,000 in support.

We were staying at the Mezhduna-

rodnaya Hotel, built in the 1980s by Armand Hammer. Jude Wanniski of Polyconomics was in the hotel lobby, advising the Soviet government (he told me) to adopt his proposal to make the ruble convertible to gold. The problem is that he does not know that the Soviets in fact have a store of bullion. They may already have sold it all (within days of mining it). All attempts to extract reliable information from the Soviets on this point (including an attempt by Wayne Angell of the Federal Reserve Board) have failed.

It was good to see the unflappable Larry Moffitt once more. The hotel had completely reneged on its contract with the World Media Association, he told me. In fact, they seemed to have no notion of the meaning of contract. Organizing a conference in Moscow had been far more difficult than anywhere else in the world (and this was the World Media Association's eleventh conference). "If you're thinking of putting on a conference here," Moffitt said by way of summary, "don't." The money they had paid to the conference center had not been passed on to subcontractors but had been treated as captured booty rather than a medium of exchange.

In the last six or seven years, Moffitt has made numerous trips to the Soviet Union. He said the economy was declining, illustrating the collapse of socialist morale with the following story. In Gorky Park he saw a man selling, for five kopeks each, broken light bulbs—"the kind that are black and rattle when you shake them." Russians take them to work, unscrew the good light bulbs in the office and replace

them with the burnt-out ones. "The man who goes around replacing the broken light bulbs notices that they aren't the ones he put in," Moffitt said, "but he doesn't mind because he sells the broken ones back to the man in Gorky Park." Socialist property is shamelessly privatized whenever it can conveniently be carried away.

Cathy Young, who grew up in Moscow, left ten years ago (and changed her name), and lives now in New Jersey, was a member of the group and the next day she decided to visit her old neighborhood in the Sokolniki district of Moscow. I went with her, together with Dan Fefferman of the American Freedom Coalition. The taxi driver would take nothing but dollars. This seemed to be the common experience of everyone on the tour. Dollars (and presumably other hard currencies) or American cigarettes were routinely demanded by taxi drivers. Rubles are rejected. Inside our hotel, nothing could be bought with Russian money. You can now legally exchange one dollar for six rubles, but taxi drivers and risk-takers on the streets will give you twelve and according to an estimate by an economist I met (a student of Hayek and Von Mises), the market rate is now about twenty to one. Inflation is obviously soaring and by the end of the year no doubt the figures I have just provided will seem quaint.

"The newspapers have become more interesting to read but unfortunately you can't eat newspapers," the cab driver told Cathy Young. We were driving past the Riga train station, through

the grime and smoke and decay of Moscow's northern streets. Half the buildings are disguised ruins, never maintained because The Plan did not anticipate the need for maintenance. Grit filled the air, old military lorries belched smoke, ancient transmission systems were grinding for lack of oil. Piles of long-abandoned gravel were heaped on verges of muddy grass. We were surrounded on all sides by mud and dirt and shabbiness. The driver said he had relatives in the States. "Not everyone can go to America," he said. "Some have to stay here to improve things."

We walked around and went into a few of the shops that Cathy used to visit. She said that she could not honestly see that much was different. Everything looked run down, she said, but then it may have been that way ten years ago. She would have taken it for granted. There was food of a sort in the shops (contrary to the direst predictions she had heard). A meat shop we entered was so revolting that I only just got out before being overcome by nausea. Cathy's experience corresponded to mine. I had only once been to Moscow before, four years earlier, and everything looked terribly run down, dirty and hopeless then. It is not easy on these occasions to report honestly what one sees and to distinguish this from what one hears from others (who may well be repeating what they have heard from still others). Moscow looked the same to me. The shops were, as before, either pathetic or revolting.

What clearly has changed is the political and intellectual climate. Glasnost is a reality. The newspapers are filled

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with debate. People are no longer afraid to express opinions to strangers. Outside the office of *Moscow News*, which we visited that afternoon, there was a vocal debate about the merits of Communism (one man contending that it worked for him because he was paid without having to work). Inside the pages of *Moscow News* there has been a running debate about the merits of private property. At the same time,

however, the old constraints on economic life are still in place, more or less. Police power and the will to exercise it is breaking down, but it is still exercised with sufficient frequency to prevent the free exchange of goods between consenting adults. In fact, one of our conference attendees was picked up on the Arbat (a rudimentary flea market and pedestrian mall about a mile from the Kremlin) and impris-

oned for three hours for exchanging currency at an illicit rate.

The vacuum created by the decline of police power has partly been filled by local mafias, their leather-jacketed representatives now conspicuous at hotel entrances. By all accounts party officials are routinely bribed and the underground economy is growing rapidly. If this were to continue without interruption, economic life would of

course improve, not decline. It is possible that even today there really has been some improvement. But this may not have been recognized as such because (I am guessing) the real improvement of glasnost may have created a general expectation that life in general would be transformed. This has not happened, and the subsequent disappointment may have been construed as economic decline.

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... Leftist Actor John Randolph

Incidentally, it is a little noticed paradox of our time—showing how deeply embedded and socialistic are the premises of our age—that freedom of expression should be regarded as a more basic right, and granted a more urgent protection from state power, than the freedom of contract. One should have thought that society might well be organized with these priorities reversed: the people allowed to manufacture material goods and exchange them among themselves without requiring permission from the authorities; while understandably at times being restricted in what they may say or put into print. After all, people are almost always harmlessly engaged while making a living, but with soap boxes, printing presses, and pamphlets they can cause no end of trouble.

The original idea of (classical) liberalism was that both contract and expression should be free; the original idea of Communism was that neither should be. For decades the American liberal-left sought to curtail freedom of contract (except where the freedom of exchange served the greater good of assaulting religious values, e.g., in the production of porn); this is the ACLU agenda in a nutshell. Now, at least in the universities, the left is striving to curtail expression as well. In the Soviet Union today, expression is much less restricted, and it is probably only a matter of time before contract is likewise liberated. In any event, the current "imbalance" between the two (the people free to express discontent but not free to seek contentment) surely cannot be sustained. One or the other will have to go.

On my earlier visit to the Soviet Union we met the female "commandant from the Urals" who told us she was happy to be in Moscow because "Lenin is here." This time the corpse in Lenin's tomb had been removed, apparently for repair work, and there was no longer a line outside Lenin's Mausoleum in Red Square. Walk several blocks up Gorky Street, however, and you encounter an even longer line—outside McDonald's. Is this not a perfect symbol of the change that has taken place? The McDonald's line was truly amazing, one of those long snaking affairs winding back and forth be-

tween police barriers; a half-hour wait, I was told. It was a poignant sight: hundreds of people standing patiently in a fine drizzle on the muddy sidewalk, queuing up for hamburgers and french fries. One could not but feel sorry for these poor people, subjected for over seventy years to this futile, evil experiment in the transformation of human nature.

The perseverance required by McDonald's executives to get the place open must have been extraordinary. I hope they are given permission to open several more, one ideally on the site of Lenin's Tomb, which should be demolished.

"Almost certainly a waxworks, isn't it?" said Nikolai Tolstoy, of Lenin's mummy. Tolstoy, who was attending the conference, is a British writer and collateral descendant of the famous author. One day I walked with him halfway across Moscow, from the beautiful Yelokhovskiy Cathedral (where we attended a service on Good Friday) to the Kremlin. "Sad, isn't it?" he said of the city. "It's like a gigantic junkyard." But (like Richard Pipes, the Harvard University historian) he said the Russians wanted to publish all his books, including *Victims of Yalta*, *Stalin's Secret War*, and his recent book *The Minister and the Massacres* (about the forcible repatriation of Cossacks to the Soviet Union at the end of World War II).

Back at the hotel, the Rev. Moon was in place at the center of the tremendous dais, surrounded by thirty-five former heads of state, mostly Latin American, mostly wearing double-breasted suits (three former presidents of Costa Rica!). Behind them was a festive forest of national flags and a motto on the wall read: "The Summit Council for World Peace." The president of the Soviet Council of World Peace praised Gorbachev in terms that outdid even Rev. Moon's eulogy. There was much talk of global cooperation, the efforts of humanity being extolled, with a new day dawning for all mankind. This was beginning to look uncannily like a UNESCO conference. The only difference was that sitting in the audience were some of the world's leading anti-Communists, such as Reed Irvine of Accuracy in Media and Arnold Beichman of the Hoover Institution. Outside the hall was a Novosti Press display, with pamphlets documenting Gorbachev's visits to Cuba and China, "Cultural Life in the Soviet Republics," and so on.

"The Soviets have been doing this for a very long time," Beichman said to his neighbor in the back of the auditorium.

"Doing what?"
"Setting up popular fronts."

"Is this turning into one more peace front?" Joachim Maitre of Boston University said to Beichman.

"It could be."

A couple of days later there was a Little Angels (Korean schoolchildren) concert in the Lenin Hills; Raisa Gorbachev in attendance; happy flags waving, floral bouquets exchanged, children hugging, international peace and harmony wherever you turned. Rev.

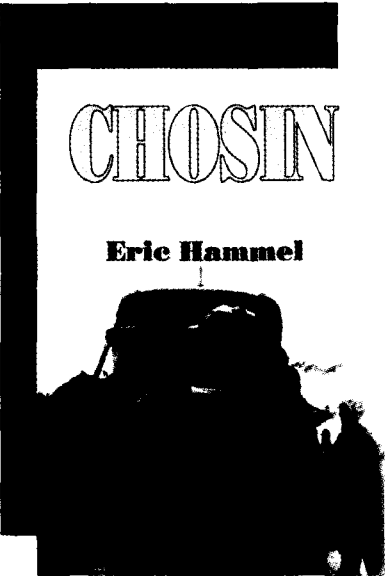
Moon spoke earnestly about how he loved the Soviet people and how much he was praying for them. Joachim Maitre walked out at that point. When Beichman got back to the hotel, he spotted Arnaud de Borchgrave, the editor of the *Washington Times*, sitting in the lobby. Some years ago de Borchgrave wrote a popular novel about Soviet disinformation, called *The Spike*. "I'm just waiting for you to repu-

diate it," Arnold said to Arnaud, "to deny that you wrote it." Arnaud laughed. Then again, Beichman pointed out after a few minutes' thought, the mutual embrace of Gorbachev and Rev. Moon "was a kick in the teeth for Kim Il Sung," the North Korean dictator. De Borchgrave added that the reunification of Korea was a key objective of the reverend. So maybe Rev. Moon won this round after all. □

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MR. GORBACHEV'S BIZARRERIES

As he flails away at Lithuanians and others who desire freedom, the visionless and weak-willed Mikhail Gorbachev is revealing himself a worthy successor of not so much Konstantin Chernenko as the Shah of Iran.

In all the discussions of The Fall of Empires, few have paid attention to the central element. It is not Professor Kennedy's "economic overreach" that brings them down, nor the various Leninist contradictions, nor the "inevitable" cycles of civilization, à la Toynbee or Spengler. What brings down empires is something that cannot be quantified, and is often very hard to spot. It is called "failure of will," and it is what happens when the rulers of the Empire lose their belief in their own unique legitimacy. In thinking about Gorbachev, I am often reminded of the last months of the Shah, as the mobs gathered in the public squares of Persia, denouncing the Pahlavi dynasty, and demanding the return of Khomeini to Tehran. The Shah could have unleashed his armies on them, as his generals begged him. Had he done that, he would almost certainly have prevailed, the only question being the number of victims that would be claimed by the repression. But he did not, in large part because he did not wish to go down in history as a man who had spilled the blood of his own people, and in part because he awaited guidance from forces more powerful than himself—primarily the Americans.

The Shah fell because he would not fight to keep his throne, and once his enemies sensed that he would not fight, they destroyed him and all that he had built. There was nothing inevitable about the end of the Pahlavi dynasty; the Shah had ruled by force, and once he proved unwilling to use force to maintain himself, he passed into history. To be sure, there was another way out: he could have shared power, giving himself a different kind of legitimacy, and thereby providing the monarchy with a broader base of popular support. This would almost surely have worked, provided it were done early

enough and was clearly his own decision, rather than a concession of power in the face of an assault against him. But once the revolutionary process got under way, it was a question of whether he was determined to prevail.

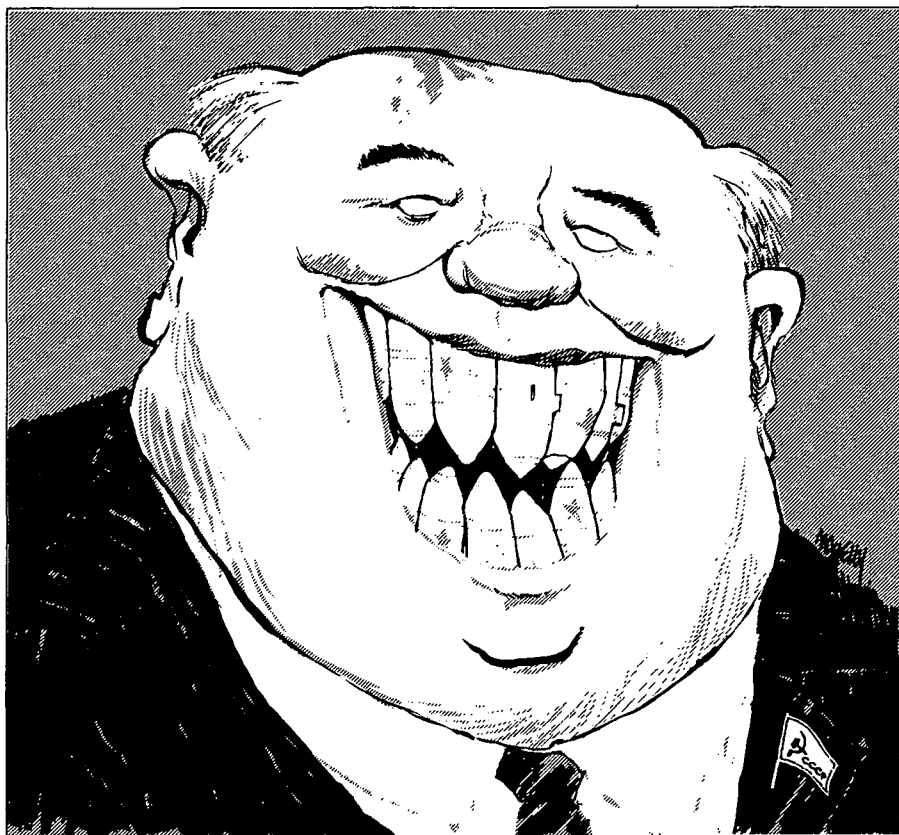
So it is today with the Soviet Empire. The revolutionary forces were unleashed when Gorbachev attempted a Leninist purge of the old-line Communist leaders of the Empire. His plan was to eliminate the Honeckers, the Ceausescus, and the Kadars, and replace them with Gorbachevites. He eliminated the former, but most of the latter were then swept away by, of all things, a popular uprising demanding self-determination and democracy. In the face of this revolutionary uprising, Gorbachev blinked twice: first, on Eastern Europe, which promptly left the Empire and is now busily negotiating with the Western world for entry, and second, on the Baltics, which are trying to do the same thing. But

halfway to the happy ending, Gorbachev abruptly changed course, and after first accepting the legitimacy of self-determination (even if that meant secession from the USSR), he has now denounced it. He has sent the Red Army and KGB goon squads into Lithuania and has brandished his iron fist at the Estonians and Latvians. At this writing, he is threatening the Lithuanians with an economic blockade.

These measures won't work, for two reasons. First, it is by now obvious to everyone that Gorbachev has no workable vision for the future of Soviet society. Indeed, it is almost impossible to determine what Gorbachev wants to do about almost any of the problems he faces. Lacking vision, his actions are disconnected and incoherent. One day he accepts the legitimacy of Lithuanian calls for independence; the next day he

sends in the troops when the Lithuanians take him seriously. One day he announces the failure of Communism; the next day he reasserts the importance of central planning. And of course each new step exposes the hollowness of the preceding efforts, further undermining Gorbachev's credibility and legitimacy. The real label for his program was coined by a Russian émigré in Paris: *catastroika*.

Second, the failure of nerve is by now clear to the citizens of the Empire, who know that it is only a matter of time before they get the better of Gorbachev. His performance over Lithuania is one of the most bizarre in recent history. He traveled to Vilnius to beg the Lithuanians not to declare independence (if you do, he said, I may lose my job). Then he offered to accept independence at a price, and even proposed \$33 billion as a reasonable fee. When the Lithuanians observed that this was the first time in history that a rapist was charging his victim for his services, the Red Army arrived, but even that has been a model of ineffectiveness and confusion. The primary mission of the army, and the KGB special forces that accompanied the regular troops, seems to have been the same as in Baku: provoke the locals into acts of violence to justify military repression. But the Lithuanians are not so easily tricked, and they have responded calmly and firmly to each new Soviet provocation. This leaves thousands of Soviet soldiers with an uncertain mission in a country where the vast majority of the population hates them. And as the warm weather comes, there will be other independence movements in other Soviet republics. Already tens of thousands of people have demonstrated in behalf of the Lithuanians in Estonia, Latvia, Kiev, Leningrad, and even Moscow. The Baltics have proclaimed the imminent creation of their own little economic community, based on free enterprise. And the Central Asian republics, along with Georgia



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