

After Fifty Years

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THE YEAR 1967 marks the fiftieth anniversary of two events of world importance, the consequences of which are still very much with us. One event was the United States decision to intervene in World War I, following the German declaration of unlimited submarine warfare. The other was the seizure of power in the vast Russian Empire by a small disciplined band of extreme revolutionaries, then known as Bolsheviks, now more descriptively designated as communists. The first put the United States on a merry-go-round of European and world power politics, easy enough to mount, but costly to ride and hard to get off. The second replaced the authoritarian, tradi-

tional rule of the Czars by a much more ruthless, scientifically organized dictatorship of a single political party – more accurately, by the top leadership of that party.

Russian communism has experienced many changes in methods of administration and in governing personnel. Most of its founding fathers perished in Stalin's paranoid purges. However, two basic principles have survived intact. Lenin is supposed to have said that there could be any number of political parties in Russia – provided that the Communist party was in power and all the other parties in jail. This is an excellent description of how the Soviet Union is governed. Stalin, writing in the official party newspaper, *Pravda*, on November 26, 1936, spelled it out plainly:

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In the Soviet Union there is no basis for the existence of several parties or, consequently, for the freedom of parties. In the Soviet Union there is a basis only for the Communist party.

There is no toleration for opposition parties; and organized dissenting groups within the Communist party are also strictly forbidden. The consequence is that effective decision-making power is concentrated in the hands of a very few men, sometimes one man, at the head of the party organization.

Total Control

The other permanent principle of communism in practice is that the government, in one form or another, undertakes to manage the whole economic life of the country. In the first phase of the Revolution all private property, except for personal belongings, was confiscated and nationalized. After an early period of chaos, all factories, mines, railways, public utilities, and stores were placed in charge of a host of state bureaucrats.

At first the peasants were left more or less undisturbed on their small twenty-acre farms, following the confiscation and dividing of the estates of the large and medium landowners. But 1929 marked the beginning of a process lasting over several years and carried on with the utmost brutality. Peasants

were subjected to such measures as wholesale deportations to forced labor and one politically organized great famine. They found their individual possession of land abolished and themselves regimented in collective farms; what they raised and what they received for their produce were determined by the government.

Communism was an outgrowth of World War I. And world war led to an extension of the area under its control. By 1945, communist power prevailed in a large number of formerly independent states in Eastern and Central Europe. Stalin had once declared: "We do not want a foot of foreign soil; we shall not yield an inch of our own." But he might more accurately have said: "We do not want a foot of foreign soil, except Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, Roumania, Yugoslavia, parts of Finland, East Germany."

At least, this was how the political map of Europe looked shortly after the end of World War II. Yugoslavia, to be sure, broke away to the status of an independent state in foreign relations, although it retained the one-party system and a somewhat modified form of state control of the economy. These were not, as the Russian had been, spontaneous revolutions, arising out of the miseries and dislocation

of war. Communism was imposed on Eastern and Central Europe from without, by the tanks and bayonets of the Red Army.

China, on the other hand, experienced pretty much what happened in Russia in 1917. Eight years of exhausting war with Japan, accompanied by Japanese occupation of the largest Chinese cities, had created a situation in which the power and authority of the nationalist government, under Chiang Kai-shek, were gravely undermined. Inflation had almost destroyed the value of the Chinese currency and many Chinese — mistakenly, as they realized too late — believed that communism could be no worse than existing conditions and might bring some improvement.

In the first years of the Soviet state, created by the communist revolution of November, 1917, the system was so new, so untried, that there could be the widest differences of opinion about its future prospects. Majority opinion in the West was most impressed by stories of terror, violence, hunger, and general misery. But a minority clung to the hope that communism would provide an answer to the problems and frustrations of modern society. So varied were reports of observers returning from Russia that it was hard to believe they were speaking about the same country.

There are still pronounced differences of opinion, judgment, and emphasis in writings about the Soviet Union. But the facts are now well established, and some broad conclusions may be stated with confidence.

Endurance of the System

First, communism, as it has developed in Russia, is a tough, durable system, which cannot easily be overthrown, either by a palace coup or by erosion from within. One need only look at the historical record. The governing system set up by Lenin has survived numerous threats:

- Prolonged civil war;
- Allied intervention, although on a halfhearted and ineffective scale;
- Two major famines;
- A German invasion that led at one time to the occupation of a large part of European Russia;
- The savage struggle to bring the peasants under the yoke of the collective farm;
- Several periods of distress and general shortage and misery uncommon even by Russian standards (the years of civil war and economic collapse, 1917-1921, the time of forced collectivization, 1929-1933, the years of war with Germany and postwar reconstruction).

This was due to the formula of government worked out, consciously or unconsciously, under Lenin. It was further modified by Stalin and was imitated to a considerable extent by the fascist dictators, Mussolini and Hitler. What this amounted to was rule by a combination of unlimited terror and unlimited propaganda. The people who were not convinced by the propaganda were intimidated by the terror, by the knowledge that there was no means of organized effective resistance.

Free men who are accustomed to the expression of diverse views find it difficult to understand, even to imagine, the power concentrated in the hands of the Soviet totalitarian state. Suppose the government in this or any Western country controlled every printed or publicly spoken word, directed the policy of every newspaper and magazine, used the theater, the movies, the youth organizations as instruments of propaganda, dictated what should be taught from kindergarten to university, employed radio and television as its mouthpieces, forbade the importation of foreign newspapers and politically questionable books from abroad. Suppose, in addition, that anyone suspected of disloyalty was liable to arrest and banishment to hard and disagreeable work in some remote part of the country.

The chances are there would be few open dissenters.

Survival Depends on Use of Some Capitalistic Practices

Second, communism has only been able to function as a going concern by adopting some of the methods which its advocates violently denounced in what they called the capitalist system. The old communist ideal, "From each according to his ability, to each according to his need," has been consigned to the mothballs. Extensively copied are the incentives of a wage and salary system, with higher pay for higher skills. Differences in food, dress, and standards of living are sharper in the Soviet Union than in the West, especially so because there is much less to go around.

Such egalitarian experiments as equality of wages and the limitation of the pay of communists to the standard of a skilled worker have been discarded as impractical. In recent years there has even been an attempt, with little success, to gain some of the recognized advantages of the free market system without instituting its essential component, private ownership. Despite communist propaganda to the contrary, the transfer of economic ownership has been, not to the workers, but to bureaucrats who are less concerned with the inter-

ests of the workers than in making a profit for the state.

No Proof of Superiority

Third, after fifty years, communism has emphatically failed to prove itself a superior productive system in comparison with an economy based on individual ownership. Lenin and his followers took over a huge country, so rich in natural resources as to be almost self-sufficient. Five decades later, the Soviet living standard is one of the lowest in Europe, much lower than in the United States and Western Europe, even lower than in such satellite states as East Germany and Czechoslovakia.

Nor is there any reason to believe that in the foreseeable future the Soviet Union and other communist-ruled countries will achieve or approach the ideal proclaimed by Stalin and Khrushchev: to overtake and outstrip America. The agricultural record of the country under collective farming is a disgrace. Quite recently the Soviet government found it necessary to make large purchases of grain in the United States and other foreign countries, whereas prerevolutionary Russia had been a large exporter of wheat. Removing the automatic incentive of private ownership from Russian farming was like taking an irreplaceable dynamo from a machine.

The consequences of nationalizing all shops and service industries have been equally disastrous: indifference to the customer, poor quality, absence of initiative in making improvements. To be sure, there have been striking advances in the quantity of industrial output, in scientific accomplishment, and especially in the exploration of space, in the spread of education, in certain modernizing changes in urban life.

But Russia under any system would have achieved substantial progress over half a century. It was experiencing a rapid economic growth in the decade before the outbreak of World War I. Many projects of which Soviet publicists like to boast were on engineers' drawing boards before the Revolution. The Soviet Union should be compared, not with Russia in 1917, but with Russia as it might otherwise have been in 1967. Judging from pre-Revolutionary trends, the noncommunist Russia of 1967 would have shown substantial economic and social progress, less spectacular than the Soviet in some fields, but better balanced and more conducive to the comfort of the average citizen.

Maintained by Force

After fifty years, there is no indication that communism could win majority support in any coun-

try without the use of force, violence, and terrorism. Voluntary movement is almost always away from, not toward, communist-ruled countries. There have been two waves of migration from Soviet Russia, involving hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of people. One was immediately after the Revolution; the other was after World War II when many Russians who had been forcibly or voluntarily evacuated from the Soviet Union during the time of German invasion chose not to go home. The part of Germany under Soviet occupation, quaintly called the German Democratic Republic, lost some four million of its citizens to prospering, free enterprise West Germany. Then the communists set up a penitentiary wall in the divided city of Berlin and an elaborate, closely guarded system of barbed wire entanglements and booby-traps along its entire frontier to prevent this continuous wholesale flight.

Hong Kong is packed with refugees from communist China. In the divided countries of East Asia, Korea, and Vietnam, it is the same story: a stampede to get away from communist rule. There has also been a large exodus of voluntary exiles from Poland and other satellite lands of Eastern Europe.

Among millions of "defectors," refugees from communism in many

lands, one recent case arrests attention. It is the flight from the Soviet Union, first to India, then to Switzerland, of Svetlana Alliluyeva, daughter of the formidable dictator, Josef Stalin, and her later appearance in the United States. Seeking the freedom of expression she was denied at home was a dramatic blow to the Soviet system in world public opinion.

The wheel, in her case, had come full circle. In April, 1917, Lenin left Switzerland, where he had found political asylum, to lead the communist revolution in Russia. Exactly fifty years later Stalin's daughter had returned to Switzerland — a refugee from the regime founded by Lenin and consolidated, built up, shaped in every detail by her own father.

Serious Problems Persist

Fifth, the United States and other noncommunist countries have their problems, big and small, political, economic, and social. But it would be an error to imagine that, merely because they have devised effective means of suppressing open criticism and discussion, the rulers of communist countries face no difficulties and problems of their own.

In China, there has for months been an obscure but evidently bitter state of near civil war between supreme dictator Mao Tse-

tung (whose "thought" is recommended as the panacea for all ills) and some of his closest associates. The consequences are still uncertain. There is more outward appearance of stability in the Soviet Union. But Lenin's and Stalin's heirs have not found the answers to two questions of paramount importance.

They have not found a means of transferring political power in peaceful and legitimate fashion. The quiet, unquestioning handing over of supreme authority from a President or Prime Minister to the representative of another party that has been victorious at the polls would be ludicrously impossible under Soviet conditions. As a result there is constant rivalry, tension, intrigue, in-fighting among the few men at the sources of political and economic power.

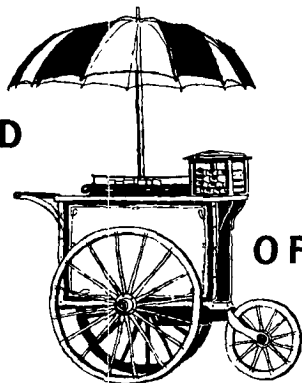
And, as the Soviet economy gets out of the primitive stage of trying to produce as much as possible and faces the need to make investment choices, even to pay some attention to consumer tastes, the lack of a substitute for the free market system becomes more and more painfully apparent. The free market presupposes free enterprise and private ownership; and efforts to obtain its benefits where these elements are lacking are foredoomed to failure.

Our Danger from Within

Sixth, what does communism, half a century after it was launched as a system of government in a large country, mean for the United States? If the United States will hold to the principles of economic individualism, communism is not and never will be a challenge in the sense of providing a better life for more people. Nor is there any serious threat of military conquest; the predictable suicidal consequences of a nuclear clash are the best assurance that such a clash will not take place.

The danger to the advanced industrial societies of the United States, Canada, Japan, and Western Europe is from within, not from without. Intensification of the trend toward omniscient government, drying up of the sources of future investment through excessive taxation, throwing more and more of the burden of supporting the unfit and the unproductive on the producing part of the population threatens to erode and finally destroy the incentives to hard work which help to make an individualist economy so superior to a collectivist. If America will live up to its better historic ideals, it can face the challenge of communism undaunted and unafraid. ♦

A STAND



OF ONE'S OWN

DONALD WARMBIER

ONE of the forgotten men of our age is the entrepreneur, the individual who, on his own initiative and judgment, at his own risk, goes into business for himself. The agonies and ecstasies of these unorganized iconoclasts have usually been ignored by press, politicians, and public, including myself. But a chance encounter with one of these otherwise forgotten individuals has given me a feeling of empathy with an entrepreneur.

He sat next to me on my flight back to Detroit from Kennedy International, a trimly-built gentleman about 45 years of age, with gray hair and gold-rimmed glasses. We began conversing on the AFTRA strike, then in its second day. I found my traveling compan-

ion to be the owner of an advertising agency, a self-made man who through long years and hard work secured for his firm numerous accounts for the producing of TV and radio commercials. This production had been halted by the strike, however, and his firm was experiencing losses. He told me of those losses, incurred because of an unforeseeable strike to which he was not a party, without resentment, as if the bearing of such risks were a part of the standard operational procedure of his profession. And so it is. For the entrepreneur works without seniority, tenure, or unemployment compensation, deriving income when his firm earns profits, suffering if it doesn't. And while that day's newspaper accounts of the AFTRA strike told of the wages foregone

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