

Leninist ideology and Russian "Spirit" are obstacles to the true transformation of the
USSR

There is no room for an Empire in the European House

By Roger Mottini

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Just in time for her 200th anniversary the sprightly old lady was blessed with a host of offspring. The talk is about the French Revolution whose ideas still do have the power to banish authoritarian and totalitarian ghosts, even Marxist ones. With the ending of last year a wave of truly popular and spontaneous revolutions swept the all-powerful party dictatorships in Eastern Europe away within a couple of weeks, leaving the souvenirs of their celebrated coup d'état revolutions to ridicule and oblivion. Two hundred years after their first pronouncement, the concept of Human Rights has proved once more that it is probably the only proven truth for the political aspirations of all human beings not dependent on language, race and culture. From China, Burma, and Eastern Europe to Chile, this idea is still challenging the powerful robbing their sleep and then their sceptre.

Where to go from here?

Can Gorbachev change the substance of the Soviet system? There is no doubt anymore that he wants to. The obstacles, however, seem to increase becoming ever more insurmountable. Bolshevism – the rule of a tiny party elite and a planned economy – is still standing. An economic bureaucracy, loath to any reform, is sabotaging the emergence of a market mechanism. Right now, new ideas are required and not old Leninist recipes.

As a result of the force of events in Eastern Europe another fact has by now completely taken a backseat: the USSR – (behind Hungary, until recently a leading force in the reform of real socialism) has now lost its character as an example to follow. Practically overnight she finds herself now once more far at the lower end of European political civilization. Like a symbol of that position we see the grim Soviet contribution to the celebrations of the French Revolution in the summer of the past historical year: rifle-bearing red guards clad in old Bolshevik felt coats marching through an artificial snow storm along the Champs Elysées to the tune of dull drum beats.

Indeed, the "common house Europe" is now reuniting all those countries which always looked towards western Europe as they participated – in the Enlightenment to a certain degree. On the other hand, Russia remained untouched by it, tormented by cultural self-doubt and left to herself, changed only the form of her tyranny.

A non-violent socialism is impossible without overcoming Lenin

What Gorbachev began and appeared as a mighty and keen undertaking among the revolutions in Eastern Europe, now looks as only a modest first trial to cross the divide separating Soviet Bolshevism from the moral idea of freedom and Human Rights. While the peoples of Eastern Europe seemingly crossed that divide successfully, landing in a new quality of political culture, the USSR still remains on the grounds of Leninist Bolshevism. Even under Gorbachev the basic characteristics of Bolshevism remain intact: complete validation of Lenin's thought underpinning the rule of an all-powerful elitist single party, as well as state property, the compulsory planning of economic relations, the preservation of a Russian dominated empire on the grounds of a precedence of class interests over national interests, and the right of self-determination. The existence of these features of a Marxist-Leninist order shows that on-going reorganization is not necessarily irreversible as Gorbachev is asserting. Although the chosen direction is correct and there can be hardly any doubt that Gorbachev is indeed willing to transform the Soviet in a qualitative sense, the Soviet has only reached the Rubikon, however, not crossed it yet. Even Glasnost (openness) and democratization cannot hide this fact. Under the still valid conditions of Lenin's ideology they smack of the old Leninist morale which does not accept an end in itself, applying every means necessary to fight a political enemy and to preserve the rule of Bolshevism. The danger of failure is real as calls for a "strong man" become louder in the face of mounting difficulties. Falling back on traditional Russian forms of rule might always be possible with recourse to Lenin. An enlightened humane socialism as called for by Gorbachev cannot be defined with a difference between Lenin and Stalin or Brezhnev because what Stalin did was that he brought the ideas of his master Lenin to their bitter logical end. And Brezhnev was in the same sense the very correct administrator of the inherited imperial and ideological heritage. A non-violent socialism can only be realized by overcoming Lenin. However, this means not only to discard Lenin's concept of a leading elitist party and an all-powerful state economy, it means a farewell to an empire based on the rule of Marxist-Leninist ideology.

All at once and now – Russian excessiveness

Wishful thinking - not only by Gorbachev – is the idea that the red empire might have a future as a federation if only its peoples were given far-reaching economic, cultural and social autonomy. The de-colonisation process has clearly shown human beings wish for self-determination. It is not obvious that for example Namibia's nomadic tribes should rightly gain independence as should the Baltic nations be content with autonomy. Gorbachev's federation plans are probably very hard to explain to the latter. It becomes more and more obvious that the Soviet reformers can hardly fulfil the expectations they raised with their vague and hopeful visions of a better socialism. With their unrealistically high and contradictory objectives Gorbachev and his men betray a Russian spirit already described by Dostoyevsky as boundless trying to realize everything at once.

In the economic sphere, price and currency reforms shall be undertaken without any concessions to current living standards, production is to be increased without inflation and together with efforts towards technological improvement the exploration of Siberia

has to be accelerated as well; as part of a food program investments in agriculture are to be increased, however, existing structures are not tinkered with.

In the political sphere a "socialist democracy" is to develop within the framework of the only legitimate party of Lenin responsible for all sins committed. So far the conditions to join the party are to be tightened, strengthening thereby its elitist character. But the "Socialist rule of Law" intended by the jurist Gorbachev has so far not found an answer to how the "leading force of Soviet society and the core of all state and social organisations" (art. 6 of the constitution) can be defined and tamed legally.

The dilemma arising from these contradictions is manifold. In order to minimize the social cost of adapting a contorted economy to the logic of the market, only classical administrative measures can be applied as economic instruments are lacking. This however, obstructs the emergence of market mechanisms, strengthening the bureaucracy loath to reform. Abolishing party rule might be welcome in the name of a far reaching democratisation, however, there are no other civil organizations and forces with the necessary authority and leadership competence required to avert a possible descent of this giant country into chaos. Gorbachev's vain insistence on Soviet chairmen taking over the chairmanship of the party on all levels of administration also shows the concern not to allow other centres of power to emerge. On the other hand, this course of action contradicts his efforts to strengthen the state Soviets, as such, an undertaking that can only come at the expense of the party. And here "glasnost" turns against Gorbachev becoming less and less effective as a weapon against the enemies of reform while being turned more and more against its inventor who is not able to reach his ambitious goals.

Despite the enormous efforts to gain a new sight of things through the "New Thinking", the language of the reformers still betrays the unbroken optimism peculiar to Marxist-Leninist social mechanics: trust in allegedly proven historical-economic laws in the belief not only to be able to free social forces but to apply them in a systematic way in order to "reconstruct" Soviet society and to boost her "social economic acceleration".

The events in Eastern Europe, however, have shown that freeing up social forces resembles more the breaking of an avalanche whose direction cannot be determined. Recent events have clearly demonstrated that a party as defined by Lenin is not viable anymore under the terms of openness and pluralism. A further development of that "New Thinking" is necessary. Otherwise Gorbachev, now being driven more than being the driver of progress, is incurring the risk of being finally overrun by these events. This requires the insight that applying the old recipes of Lenin's "New Economic Policy" will not resolve the problems of the Soviet Union for good. At best one can only expect a kind of economic jester's licence whereas repression elsewhere rules supremely, not unlike what China is demonstrating nowadays.

The Soviet Empire has to be liquidated politically

Fortunately Gorbachev so far seems not to heed the advice of those who demand suppression of all insubordinate forces for the sake of reform, suggesting that he is not willing to follow the Chinese example. This attitude is certainly not in Lenin's sense who, during the heyday of his reform policy had his foremost political enemies condemned to death, but more in the spirit of a truly new and enlightened Russia. The only chance to realise this new Russia and to get rid of the greater part of domestic policy problems at the same time is to abandon the illusion of a multi-ethnic Soviet Federation, because the unfortunate heritage of Greater Russian policy towards other nationalities just weighs too

heavily to be forgotten at the stroke of a pen. Furthermore, coming to terms with the Stalinist past, without correcting the situation created by Stalin, lacks credibility. As a consequence and in order to avoid a violent collapse of the Soviet Union, the empire has to be liquidated in a political way following the example of the former colonial powers France and Great Britain. Only in such a way the Soviet Union might have a chance to fit into a common Europe.

As a logical consequence of declaring the Hitler-Stalin pact from 1939 null and void, the Baltic republics have to gain their independence first, preferably as neutral countries according to the Swiss model. A truly viable, modern and enlightened Soviet Union capable of any development can only be envisioned as a confederation of the RSFSR (Russian Federation) together with the Ukraine and White Russia without the indigestible and backward remains of an unholy policy of violence and conquest.