

role of economic world leadership is as unrealistic as pretending that the implosion of the Soviet Empire was simply the result of Leninist-Stalinist errors and not the obvious failure of communism as a vital force in the world today.

But still the true believers persist. There comes to mind, as a bit of further evidence, a dinner a few years ago in a rather elegant Black Forest spa. Somewhat distracting was a large affair in the adjoining banquet hall, the sound level rising with each round of drinks, speeches accompanied by rhythmic handclapping, then group singing, some nostalgic tunes, others rather martial. Curiosity overcoming decorum, the maître d', an Italian of some presence, was asked about the gala next door. "Ah," he said. "A reunion of sorts. They are all one-time officials of the former East German government. No longer Communists, of course. I would imagine they are all Democratic Socialists now." And he shrugged, as only the Italian shrugs, "They are getting together now from time to time, I suppose, to forget."

Somehow this affair seemed more than merely noisy and nostalgic. There were

overtones both sad and upsetting, a reminder that while some dangerous and destructive ideas fade away, others seem never to die, and *Empire*, in this view, would seem a case in point.

### ***Lost Inspiration and the Fall of the Soviet Union***

MATTHEW RICHER

**Political Will & Personal Belief: The Decline and Fall of Soviet Communism**, by Paul Hollander, *New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1999. xi + 356 pp.*

LEGEND HAS IT that in the early 1920s one of Vladimir Lenin's fellow Bolsheviks asked him to justify the growing number of

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atrocities they were committing in the name of a socialist future. "If you want to make an omelet," Lenin insisted, "you have to be willing to break a few eggs." To which the Bolshevik replied, "Comrade, I see the broken eggs everywhere. But where, oh where, is the omelet?"

The twentieth century was, in many ways, a history of broken eggs in the name of progress; a fact Paul Hollander understands very well. A native of communist Hungary, many of Professor Hollander's previous studies (*Political Pilgrims, Anti-Americanism*) have focused on the attraction Marxist-Leninist ideals have had for Western intellectuals. However, his most recent work is a study of the decline and fall of those ideals—not from the perspective of Westerners, but of the Soviet ruling elite.

Hollander has sifted through the many recently published memoirs of former Soviet leaders and has conducted several personal interviews in order to answer two general questions: Why did the Soviet Union collapse so suddenly? And why was this event so completely unforeseen?

Within the West, the sympathy many liberal intellectuals had for socialist ideals no doubt blinded them to the prospect of Soviet decline. But Hollander argues that "conservative critics of the Soviet empire were no more farsighted in predicting its collapse than were those less averse to its prolonged existence." Specifically, most critics of the Soviet Union "overestimated the efficiency of the apparatus of control, the political cohesion of the Soviet ruling elite, its commitment to power, and its ability to manipulate the citizenry regardless of their growing discontents."

This is what sets Hollander's book apart. Unlike other historians, he does not emphasize the economic or institutional factors in the Soviet demise. Rather, Hollander shows that within much of the Soviet elite, Marxist-Leninist ideals had

lost their power to compel devotion. In other words, there was an erosion of personal belief that led to a decline in the political will to act on those beliefs. Thus, as the ideological cohesion of the Soviet ruling elite splintered, so too did their commitment to power and this, Hollander argues, is what most directly led to the demise of the Soviet Union.

By the 1980s, Soviet ideology had become, in George Kennan's words, "a lifeless orthodoxy.... [Though] Still able to command a feigned and reluctant obedience, it had lost all capacity to inspire." Hollander explains how this "lost inspiration" factored in the "decline of ruthlessness the preservation of the system required."

The most obvious reason why Soviet ideals lost their ability to inspire is the age-old disjunction between theory and practice. While "it was among the proud claims of Soviet communism that it succeeded in uniting theory and practice," these claims were only true in an imaginary future. Over the years, it had become increasingly obvious to many Soviet leaders that this future was never going to take place, and the practice of cracking eggs in its name became harder to stomach. As Alexander Yakolev, one of Gorbachev's closest advisors during perestroika, put it: "By making the illusory future more important than humanity, Marxism gave people *carte blanche* to use any means when it came to power."

The hypocrisy of the Soviet political class was another big thorn in the conscience of many Soviet leaders and a significant source of lost inspiration. Indeed, while working hard to bring about the socialist future, Party members enjoyed a lavish present in neighborhoods segregated from the proletariat. There they luxuriated in food, fashion, appliances, Hollywood movies and other amenities imported from the West. Arkady Shevchenko, a former advisor to Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko and

undersecretary-general of the United Nations, complained that "While condemning consumerism...the privileged valued above all else the consumer goods and comforts of the West." Victor Kravchenko, a Soviet diplomat who later defected to the United States, described a visit to a wood product plant during World War II, where, despite the horrible suffering of the people during the war, he learned that workers were busy making "elegant furniture" for "top Party, government and Red Army officials."

The high standard of living enjoyed by the Soviet elite forced many to compartmentalize their lives in order to hide their misgivings over Marxist ideals and Russian realities. After seeing first-hand the squalor of the rural peasantry, Kravchenko said he had to acquire the ability "to squelch those emotions, to drive them into the underground of my mind. I labored to repair my loyalties. With the purge in the offing this urgency was even greater." Or as the Czech General Jan Sejna put it: "Either I could quit, in which case not only would I myself be finished but so would my family...or I must lead a double life—on the surface, the official Party life, but privately, the life of a pleasure-seeking bourgeois." Hollander's psychological depiction of this "double life" existence is easily the most compelling aspect of his study.

Perhaps nothing better reveals the ideological incoherence of Party members than the defection of Arkady Shevchenko to the United States. Shevchenko was the highest-ranking Soviet ever to defect and his action evidently shocked many members of the Soviet elite. The former Soviet Ambassador to America, Anatoly Dobrynin, wrote Shevchenko an apparently honest letter expressing his utter astonishment at his defection. However,

as Hollander points out:

In a system that compelled members of the ruling elite to wear a tight-fitting mask of unconditional loyalty, there was no way to know and test the depth of their loyalty; it was hard to distinguish genuinely committed supporters from opportunists who would desert the regime once conditions allowed them to do so without risk. Increasingly during the Gorbachev era, this conformity revealed its hollowness and contributed to the unexpected unraveling of the system.

Not surprisingly, the overriding tone of these accounts is one of fatigue; the mental and emotional exhaustion that comes with consciously living a lie. Granted, many Party members, like

Dobrynin, never fully disavowed Marxist-Leninist ideals, but a significant number lost the will to go on fighting for them. In the end, the problem of lost inspiration and a consequent "eroding sense of legitimacy" abetted the decline of political will. Or as General Leonid Shebarshin of the KGB put it, the "decisive factor" in the collapse of the Soviet

Union was "a lack of political will at the centre."

Hollander places great emphasis on Nikita Khrushchev's famous "secret speech" at the Twentieth Soviet Party Congress in 1956. Khrushchev's speech denounced the crimes of Stalin and buoyed the spirit of Party members (as well as many Western intellectuals). Although it is important to note, as Hollander does, that "Khrushchev's de-Stalinizing policies coincided with his brutal crushing of the Hungarian Revolution in 1956 and the placing of missiles in Cuba in 1962—neither policy [was] a sign of a weakened will to power." Still, Khrushchev rejected Stalinist means and reaffirmed a commitment to Soviet ends,



Paul Hollander

even though the gap between theory and practice continued to grow.

Similarly, Gorbachev's glasnost was really supposed to revitalize the Soviet system, not destroy it. Glasnost was to be the sequel to the "secret speech," only geared toward a wider audience. But like most sequels, the audience reaction was very different. Glasnost, unlike de-Stalinization, went further by allowing "ordinary people to learn about virtually everything that was wrong with the system and at the same time to realize that their dissatisfactions were widely shared," which made it less necessary to lead the double life, both among the leaders and the led. Moreover, because of the double life a growing number of Party members had been leading, Gorbachev had no way of accurately gauging the strength of political will among his ostensible supporters.

Hollander provides a stark example of this decline in political will by highlighting the different ways the Soviet and Chinese leadership responded to dissent in the late twentieth century. In June 1989, the "Chinese communist leaders ordered their elite troops to crush (literally, with tanks) the young rebels in Tiananmen Square" and "the commanders of the troops executed their orders without perceptible difficulty." In contrast, in August 1991, "the leaders of the aborted coup against Gorbachev were incapable of taking decisive action against those they wished to oust."

Whatever the case, *Political Will & Personal Belief* is clearly not the last word on this subject, nor is it intended to be. No one can perform an autopsy on a body until it is really dead. Perhaps only after all those former Soviets have passed from the scene, and when the doors of their archives have been opened up a little wider, will we have a clear understanding of just how and why the Soviet Union collapsed. Until then, we are fortunate to have Paul Hollander's informative study.

## ***The Maturing of a Humane Economist***

JOHN ATTARIAN

**Wilhelm Röpke: Swiss Localist, Global Economist**, by John Zmirak,  
*Wilmington: ISI Books, 2001. 241 pp.*

IN GLARING CONTRAST to the mainstream minds of his profession, free-market economist Wilhelm Röpke (1899-1966) viewed man as an embodied soul and not as the reductive utilitarian stick figure of *Homo economicus*. Röpke expounded his ideas in such books as *The Social Crisis of Our Time* (1942), *Civitas Humana* (1944), and *A Humane Economy* (1957), and numerous pieces in periodicals including *Modern Age*. In this compact and deftly written book, screenwriter and free lance journalist John Zmirak, seeking to illuminate "the intimate relationship that binds free markets, social order, and the search for the common good," provides an informative and helpful, if seriously uneven, introduction to Röpke's thought.

Born in Schwarmstadt, Germany, Röpke acquired a classical education and became extraordinarily well read. In his youth he flirted with socialism, but was soon disabused of this by reading the Austrian economist Ludwig von Mises (1881-1972). For the rest of his life, Röpke consistently repudiated socialism, indeed all forms of statism, and consistently and strongly endorsed the free market.

In addition to these consistencies,

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JOHN ATTARIAN received his doctorate in economics from the University of Michigan and is the author of *Social Security: False Consciousness and Crisis* (Transaction, 2002).