

"Tough love" message from Russia's false friends

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During the heyday of the Cold War, when political considerations required that American imperialism mask the essentially reactionary character of its struggle against the USSR, the spokesmen of the former would profess an almost touching concern for the lives and fate of the Soviet people. Opposition to the Soviet Union was couched primarily in terms of a struggle against a form of totalitarianism which trampled upon democratic rights. This was the basis of innumerable tendentious works produced by American academics who manipulated and falsified historical facts to establish that Stalinism was the inevitable outcome of the 1917 October Revolution and that socialism was incompatible with democratic rights.

Among the most politically reactionary and intellectually unscrupulous of the 'totalitarian' school of American Sovietologists was Professor Richard Pipes of Harvard University. In a career that epitomized the unsavory linkage between US foreign policy and the halls of academe, Pipes moved effortlessly between Cambridge, Massachusetts and Washington, DC. As a member of Reagan's National Security Council, he was among those who argued fervently for a massive increase in US military spending and other 'hard-line' policies that were widely viewed, as he gleefully acknowledged, as dangerous and provocative. As a member of Harvard's faculty, Pipes wrote books in which he denounced at inordinate length the brutality of Bolshevism in general and the villainy of Lenin in particular.

This is not the place to detail Pipes's explanation of the Bolshevik Revolution. For the sake of brevity, we will confine ourselves to noting his central argument: that the October Revolution was plotted and led by ruthless intellectuals who were utterly indifferent to the fate of the masses they claimed to represent--'the

'masses' neither needed nor desired a revolution.' Indeed, according to Pipes, one of the principal differences between the Bolshevik leaders and the last Russian tsar was that 'Nicholas cared for Russia.' All attempts to explain the revolution as the outcome of deep-rooted historical processes were, according to Pipes, illegitimate. The outbreak of revolution in 1917, Pipes insisted, had little to do with social and economic factors. Nor was there any real popular opposition to the tsar. 'The record,' wrote Pipes, 'leaves no doubt that the myth of the tsar being forced from his throne by the rebellious workers and peasants is just that.'

What, then, was the October Revolution? Nothing more nor less, according to Pipes, than a wild utopian scheme conceived by ideologically motivated intellectuals who had no understanding of either human nature or the real everyday desires of people.

For Pipes, the collapse of the Soviet Union represented, above all, the return to what he considered a natural historical order. He declared with satisfaction, 'events since 1917 have cured Russians of the belief in their uniqueness and historic mission: Russians today desire nothing more than to be 'normal.' For the first time they are willing to learn from foreigners and to follow rather than lead.'

Part of Pipes's satisfaction derived from the fact that he had become, thanks to the general cynicism and debasement of thought that prevailed among demoralized Russian academics in the wake of the collapse of the USSR, one of the most prominent of the new foreign advisers. At long last Pipes was to have the opportunity to put theory into practice and show the Russians the correct path to a 'normal' and presumably humane society.

And the sage of Cambridge was not short on advice. The future of Russia would be assured only if it

dismantled whatever stood in the way of a full-blooded capitalist market economy. Replying in 1993 to those who warned that the precipitous unleashing of market forces had begun to tear apart the social fabric of Russia, Pipes declared:

'The breakdown of government and the disorganization of the national economy, which in other countries would spell disaster, in Russia has a positive role to play. For in a country which had traditionally stifled private initiative, political as well as economic, these disintegrating processes bring into play the instinct of self-preservation, leaving the population no choice but to take matters into its own hands, as it must if it is to acquire the habits of democracy and free enterprise.'

Five years after those words were spoken, their stupidity and irresponsibility have been exposed by the terrible results of market economics. Yet Professor Pipes is not about to offer apologies. In an article published last Sunday in the *New York Times*, Pipes admits that a social, economic and political catastrophe is unfolding in Russia. But no longer obligated by the realpolitik of the Cold War to feign concern for the fate of the Russian people, Pipes delivers a blunt and callous message: 'Let Russia Fend for Itself.'

Pipes writes that there are three possible outcomes of the crisis in Russia. The first, which he terms 'impossible,' is a 'return to Communism.' The second, which Pipes considers a 'possible though unlikely alternative,' would be the breakup of Russia into various smaller and more manageable states.

But the most probable outcome, according to Pipes, 'remains the option of Russia turning into a Latin-American, quasi-democratic, quasi-capitalist state, with an economy that relies heavily on the export of natural resources and cheap labor.' This is an attractive scenario, Pipes asserts, because it will at least 'foster the illusion that Russia is following its own path.'

The practical implications of the third option, as envisaged by Pipes, would be the reduction of Russia to the status of 'a third world country.'

Without realizing it, Pipes has substantiated one of the essential justifications offered by the Bolsheviks for their seizure of power in October 1917. The choice that faced the Russian masses in 1917, they insisted, was not between a workers state and a flourishing bourgeois democracy. If the Bolsheviks failed to take power,

Lenin and Trotsky warned, the alternative would be a counterrevolution leading ultimately to the physical dismemberment of Russia and its reduction to semicolonial status.

In conclusion, Pipes urges the United States and the International Monetary Fund to refrain from lending any more money until it offers further proof of its determination to persist with 'reforms,' i.e., additional massive reductions in the living standards of the people. 'It seems to be,' Pipes writes, 'that under existing conditions the best policy toward Russia is one of hands off.'

In delivering his cold-blooded message, Pipes gives not the slightest indication that he feels at least slightly abashed by the results of the policies for which he supplied so much ideological justification.

As far as he is concerned, it is not Professor Pipes and capitalism that have failed the Russian people. It is, rather, the Russian people who have failed Professor Pipes and capitalism.

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