

THE COMING COLLAPSE OF THE SOVIET UNION

by Jack Wheeler

Five years does not seem like a long time. Yet when I first began speaking to conservative groups five years ago, about remote guerrilla wars in unknown places like Angola and Mozambique and Afghanistan, about guerrilla armies and leaders with strange-sounding names like RENAMO and Afonso Dhlakama, UNITA and Jonas Savimbi, it seems that it was a long time ago that all of this was so unfamiliar. Today, there is no one in this room who does not know who Jonas Savimbi is, who is not a knowledgeable supporter of the freedom fighters.

Five years ago, the struggle of the freedom fighters seemed to be against almost insurmountable odds, especially in Afghanistan. Who among us back then would not have been stunned to learn that by early 1989, the Red Army of the Soviet Union would have retreated from Afghanistan with its tail between its legs, defeated on the field of battle?

So I would like to talk to you this evening about what I see for the next five years — because they promise to be even more amazing than the last five. What I see is the Soviet Union going belly up.

Soviet Communism has been the disease of the 20th century. Centuries from now, historians will observe that the 20th century was infected with a deadly social disease called Communism or Marxism-Leninism spread primarily by the Soviet Union. By the end of the 20th century, they will further observe, the plague will have died out, like other murderous epidemics in man's history such as the Black Death of the 14th century.

Radio Liberty in Moscow. It is happening before our eyes. A friend of mine, Alex Alexiev of the Rand Corporation, who speaks fluent Russian, was recently in Moscow. Alex was staying in a hotel that had Russian travelers as well as foreigners, and he was awakened at two in the morning by a radio blasting in the hotel room next to his. Slowly it dawned on him that it was Radio Liberty, broadcast from Munich. Still, it was impossibly loud, so he went out into the hall, knocked on the adjoining room's door, and asked in Russian, "Could you please turn down the radio just a bit?" A Russian voice cried out, "What's the matter, don't you like the station?" Alex replied, "I love the station, the director is a friend of mine — but I've got to get some sleep!" The voice through the door responded, "Well, who are you with, the CIA?" Alex answered, "No I'm not with the CIA — but I've done some work for them before." Now the guy of course thought Alex was KGB. Whereupon he shouted through the door, "Oh, yeah? Well screw you, you Stalinist scum!!"

Nothing exemplifies the astonishing deterioration of the Soviet Union than Gorbachev's heralded policies of *glasnost* and *perestroika*. They are policies of panic-stricken desperation, an admission of mortal vulnerability, of how desperately bad off the Soviet economy is.

Jack Wheeler is Executive Director of the Freedom Research Foundation, Washington, D.C.

He spoke at a Heritage Foundation Third Generation meeting on May 17, 1989.

ISSN 0272-1155. ©1989 by The Heritage Foundation.

Massive Failure. Gorbachev thought he could loosen things up a bit, tinker with the system, give people a little more freedom to generate enough economic recovery to save the system. It was a dangerous gamble that he has now lost. *Perestroika* is a massive failure, and the only reason he has not been replaced by another apparatchik on the Politburo is that nobody else has a better idea: no one knows what to do.

So Gorbachev goes gallivanting around the world chasing headlines and accolades in the Western press. In the meantime, in the Soviet Union, he is being called a *baltoon*, a blabbermouth. There are six million homeless now in the Soviet Union. Of the 284 million Soviet people, some 40 percent, or over 110 million, live below the current Soviet poverty line of 70 rubles or 110 dollars per person per month. Millions of Soviet families have never seen a bathtub in their lives; their children learn about them from textbook pictures. The average Russian worker consumed less meat in 1988 than in 1913. Real hunger and real famine is starting to appear in places across the USSR. Sugar is rationed in Moscow. The Soviet Union is the only industrialized country in the world where the life expectancy rate is dropping, the infant mortality rate is rising, and the average height is shrinking due to poor nutrition. Pretty soon, the average Russian male will be shorter than Michael Dukakis. The average Russian woman has in her reproductive life-span ten abortions. In the United States, there is one abortion for every four live births. In the Soviet Union, it is the other way around: there are four abortions for every one live birth. Soviet Communism is causing the Russian people to commit what I call auto-genocide: genocide upon themselves.

Economic Catastrophe. And it is getting worse. Not only is the gap between the economies of the West and that of the Soviet Union widening, but the rate at which it is widening is itself accelerating. The Soviet budget deficit has now reached, according to Judy Shelton's latest calculations, almost 19 percent of GNP. To put that in perspective: U.S. total GNP is approaching five trillion dollars. If we had a deficit the size of the Soviets it would be over 900 billion dollars. Four days ago on May 13, a prominent Soviet economist, Otto Latsis, predicted on Soviet television that because of the budget deficit, there will be an "economic catastrophe in the USSR in the coming months," with the "rationing of all basic goods throughout the country," and a "complete disintegration of the system of supplies of food products."

The West, the media in particular, has a fixation with Gorbachev. The mantra of the State Department is, "We've got to help Gorbachev," and has become frantic in its efforts to do so. But what Gorbachev does, whether he survives or not, is rapidly becoming irrelevant. At the State Department, there is an expression: O.B.E. In England, to have the initials O.B.E. after your name is an immense honor, signifying a member of the Order of the British Empire. Mikhail Gorbachev will soon possess these initials, but they will mean what they do at State: Overtaken By Events.

Gorbachev is trying to square the circle, trying to save a system that cannot be saved any longer. He is in the Catch-22 of the century: because the necessary price of genuine economic reform in the Soviet Union is unleashing the centrifugal forces of democratic nationalism which have always required the most brutal suppression to keep in check.

Three Layered Empire. Remember that the structure of the Soviet colonial empire is in three layers: the peripheral colonies in the Third World, such as Cuba, Nicaragua, South Yemen, and Soviet Indo-China; the border colonies of Eastern Europe, Afghanistan, and Mongolia; and the inner colonies inside the USSR. The Soviet Union thus does not just possess a colonial empire beyond its borders, it is itself a colonial empire within its borders. It is composed of countries which were historically, and would be now if they were free to

choose, sovereign independent nations: the Baltic nations of Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia; Byelorussia and the Ukraine; the Transcaucasian nations of Georgia and Armenia; Moslem Turkestan; and Russia itself.

The Soviet Union, as we speak here tonight, is coming apart. And it is coming apart fast. As the Director of Radio Liberty in Munich just told me, the momentum of it is growing exponentially.

Growing Flaws. A little over a year ago, I wrote an article for Heritage entitled, "The Brittleness of the Soviet Empire." I argued that the structure of the Soviet Empire, including the Soviet Union itself, was brittle. When a physicist describes a physical substance as brittle, he has definite characteristics in mind. A brittle structure may be very stable. Unbending and unchanging, it may be able to withstand a great deal of pressure and remain unaltered for a considerable time. But it is inflexible; stresses cannot be redistributed except by causing the flaws to grow until a sudden, catastrophic failure occurs shattering the material and breaking it apart. A brittle structure does not change slowly and gradually. One moment it seems sturdy and unyielding; the next moment it is in pieces.

This is the fate of the Soviet Union. The *Catch-22* of *glasnost* is causing the centrifugal forces within the Soviet Empire to become rapidly uncontrollable. Three Soviet republics are now under military occupation: Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia, with Soviet generals running their governments. The elite military forces required for such occupation: Army Spetsnaz, Interior Ministry Spetsnaz, Special Assault Forces, the Airborne, and so forth, have quite limited manpower. There are only six small divisions of Soviet Airborne, less than 40,000 troops. They will not be able to occupy many more republics. Yet even under military occupation, in the capital of Armenia, Yerevan, eleven days ago, 300,000 people demonstrated in front of the Central Committee headquarters demanding the resignation of the Armenian Communist government; six days ago, 400,000 people were on the streets in Yerevan.

Demanding Resignations. In Hungary one year ago, the Communist Youth Union or Komsomol had one million members. In twelve months, 800,000 members turned in their membership cards and formally resigned. Two weeks ago, the remaining members held a congress and voted to disband the entire organization. Komsomol no longer exists today in Hungary. Last January, the Deputy Chief of the Hungarian Armed Forces, Lt. Gen. Janos Sepok, announced on Hungarian television that the Hungarian Army was not exclusively loyal to the Communist government, but that it will be loyal to any elected government in Hungary. One month ago, one of the major opposition parties in Hungary, the Alliance of Free Democrats, demanded that Hungary withdraw from the Warsaw Pact, that the Communist government resign and be replaced with a "government of experts" as a transition to a freely elected government, and that all assets and property of the Communist government be "immediately seized."

What are known as "informal groups," or *informaly*, have sprung up throughout the Soviet Union, independent private associations, many with a political purpose, such as erecting monuments to victims of Stalin. There are now over 60,000 of these informal groups. Huge Popular Fronts have arisen in a number of republics, like Sajudis in Lithuania with over 200,000 members, or Rookh in the Ukraine, which are flying their national flags, singing anthems of national independence, and demanding an end to their colonial status. This is even taking place now in Russia itself. Russia is also a colony of the Communist regime in the Kremlin. In March, the principal Russian opposition group, the Democratic Union, held a demonstration in Mayakovsky Square in Moscow. Over 2,000 people

demanded an official re-examination of the February 1917 revolution which replaced the Czar with a democratic parliament. It was this government, not the Czar's, that the Bolsheviks overthrew in October 1917. Two thousand people chanted, "Down with Communism," "Down with the CPSU," and "Down with the Bolshevik Counterrevolutionaries." The white, blue, and red national flag of pre-Bolshevik Czarist Russia was unfurled and waved. And when the police showed up, they were surrounded by the demonstrators who looked them in the eye and told them, "Your turn is coming. We're going to get you."

Toward a Liberation Doctrine. These are the people whom the State Department should be supporting, not the Communist apparachiks. What I want to propose to you tonight is that just as we developed a program of support for guerrilla freedom fighters in Soviet colonies in the Third World, such as the Contras and the Mujahedin — that is, the Reagan Doctrine — we now develop a program of support for these political freedom fighters behind the Iron Curtain: this is the Liberation Doctrine.

So, as Lenin once asked, what is to be done? Afonso Dhlakama, leader of RENAMO in Mozambique, told me once, "The Soviet Union is the world's curse." Just as physical good health is incompatible with a contagious disease such as syphilis or smallpox, so political good health — democracy and freedom — is incompatible with Soviet Communism. The goal of physical good health is not to tolerate or coexist or contain a disease, but to eliminate it — as world health officials eliminated smallpox. Smallpox does not exist anymore; you do not need to be vaccinated for it, nor do you need to carry proof of a smallpox vaccination on your yellow health card when traveling in foreign countries. The goal, then, of political good health, the goal of the Liberation Doctrine, our goal as Americans and as advocates and practitioners of democracy and bourgeois Western Freedom, should not be to contain or coexist with Soviet Communism, but to eliminate it, to cause it to cease to exist.

Ending Communist Power. It is exceedingly important here to note that we are not calling for the elimination of people but of an ideology, not of individual human beings but of a social and political system; we are not demanding that Soviet Communists be removed from the world, but that they be removed from power. What we demand is not war and conflict — it is the Marxist who claims they are necessary — but peace and freedom: Real peace and real freedom. "Peace" for the Soviets, the Russian word *mir*, does not mean peace but order; it does not mean the absence of violence, it means the absence of disobedience — disobedience to the dictates of the vanguard of the proletariat, that is, the CPSU, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. The fundamental concrete goal of the Liberation Doctrine is then to deny the CPSU legitimacy of power, to broach and eliminate the CPSU's monopoly of ruling power in the USSR.

We are going to do this. You and I, together, we, in supporting those who are struggling for freedom in the Red Empire, are going to do this. This is going to happen. If there still is a Soviet Union by the end of this century, it will not be governed by the CPSU.

Directing the Collapse. In a certain sense, the Soviet Union is already history, a part of the past. It has not got a future. It is still in the present, but not much longer. We have got to start thinking about what sort of post-Soviet world we want. How do we want the break-up of the Soviet state to come out?

The first thing we want is for the collapse of the Soviet Empire and the USSR as a nation-state to be an implosion, collapsing in upon itself, and not an explosion outwards.

We must, then, think of how we can control and direct the collapse to try and ensure that it *implodes* and not *explodes*.

The best way would be to help cause the implosion to be as peaceful as possible. The danger of widespread chaos and bloodshed throughout the USSR is now very real. The Soviets can contain most any single outbreak of violent rebellion. But as outbreaks occur with greater frequency, in Kazakhstan, Armenia, Georgia, close to it in the Baltics, getting closer in the Ukraine, starting now even in Russia, the margin of uncontainability will soon be reached.

Speedier Cycles. We will no doubt see at least one more cycle of repression in this process. The odds are good now for a vast wave of industrial unrest to begin surging through Russian cities while non-Russian nationalist outbreaks become more frequent, and for martial law to be imposed in response. This has not worked, however, in Poland, and it will even more so not work in the Soviet Union. It took eight years for the Polish Communist Party to capitulate to Solidarity, which last month it did. Today time is more compressed, changes and cycles happen with greater speed. It will take half the time it took in Poland, four years or less, for martial law to be unable to hold things together in the Soviet Union. Martial law is incredibly costly; it will be the death rattle of the Soviet economy. By putting off the inevitable for a few years by cracking down, however, the collapse will be far worse, anarchic, and bloody than if the CPSU stepped down from power now and got it over with.

The time is now for us, for conservatives, and particularly young conservatives who have both the capacity to think in new categories and the energy to act upon their thinking, to take the initiative on peace. It is time for us to demand that the liberals get serious about peace. When liberals talk about peace, they are not only naive, they are frivolous. The liberals' self-imposed burden of blame-America-first guilt infantilizes their concept of peace, makes it childish, pollyannic, and silly. We want a real peace, like we have with Germany or Japan or other former enemies like Spain or Britain, not a hands-across-America fairy tale peace. Real peace, however, has a price. The price is this. There is a real peace between America and Germany. But for there to be real peace between us and Germany, the Germans had to stop being Nazis. There can be real peace between America and Russia. But for there to be real peace between us and Russia, the Russians have to stop being Communists.

German Example. The Russians, ruler and ruled, must look at what happened to West Germany after World War II. It was not ground into the mud. It prospered. Russia, without an empire, without the burden of trying to control tens of millions of people who do not want their lives controlled by Moscow, with its great natural resources and educated people can prosper as well. Marxism really is wrong, profoundly wrong. Wealth is created, not exploited. The rich do not get rich by making others poor, anymore than the healthy people do not get healthy by making other people sick. Russians must realize that they can in fact prosper if they join the civilized world.

Now what can you do yourselves, right now, to help liberate the Soviet Empire? You can work for the creation of a Liberation Support Agency, as outlined in *Mandate III* (although that is just an initial formulation of the Liberation Doctrine; we have since changed the name from the Resistance Support Agency). You can work with Congressman Dana Rohrabacher to increase funding for the National Endowment for Democracy. You can work to make support of political freedom fighters in Eastern Europe and the Inner Colonies an *issue*, generate a debate about it, ask every Congressman, Senator you know and especially their staffers what they think of the Liberation Doctrine. Ask them why

should not the goal of the U.S. be to eliminate the monopoly of power the CPSU has in the Soviet Union? Why should not we want to bring democracy, political and economic freedom to the Baltic countries illegally occupied by Moscow due to the Hitler-Stalin pact, to Georgia whose independence the Kremlin recognized by formal treaty in 1920?

Letting Gorbachev Stew. Now, what about the Administration? It may surprise some of you, but I think what the Bush Administration and the Baker State Department are doing is not so bad. It is what Vladimir Bukovsky and Michael Ledeen call *The Italian Strategy*: Do absolutely nothing. Notice how unhappy the liberals are getting. This is a good sign that the Bushies are on the right track. *Time Magazine* last week thundered in its cover story that George Bush is missing a "historic opportunity" to save Communism. Herblock draws a cartoon for the Post showing Gorbachev as a trapeze artist flying through the air and about to fall because Bush stands nonchalantly at the platform, arms folded and refusing to catch him. The liberal clamor for accommodation, negotiation, capitulation, is being resisted by this Administration. Why be in any rush, Bush and Baker ask. It's our money, our credits, our technology that Gorbachev is desperate for. Every day Gorbachev's situation deteriorates a bit further. What's the hurry? We're studying the situation. That's an interesting proposal you have, comrades. We'll get back to you about it in a month or two. I think this is great.

But letting Gorbachev stew is only half a policy. We must make every effort to persuade the Administration to articulate and vigorously advocate a particular vision of peace: *Peace through the decolonization of the Soviet Empire*.

A constant, unrelenting refrain of the Administration should be to refer to the Ukraine, the Baltics, to Georgia and Armenia and Turkestan and Poland and Hungary and Cuba as Soviet colonies — keep calling them colonies at every opportunity, never miss a chance to say that the only path to true peace is for Moscow to let them go.

Voluntary Commonwealth. We can call for the Soviet Empire to transform itself into the Soviet Commonwealth, along the lines of the British Commonwealth. Americans must be made unremittingly aware of one of the most amazing facts of the 20th century: that of all the wars of this century — and that is a very long list — not one of them has been fought between two democracies. Democracies do not fight each other. Real peace — not liberal fairy tale peace — can only be achieved by Moscow changing its involuntary union of colonies into a voluntary commonwealth of free democracies.

For it is our bourgeois democratic ideals that inspire people now. Marxism is dead as an ideological force. The only people in the world who still believe in Marxism are some Third World dictators and a few looney tunes American university professors caught in a 1960s time warp.

Reversing History's Detour. When de Tocqueville wrote about democracy in America over 150 years ago, he thought that history was moving in the direction of democracy around the world. For centuries, ever since the end of the Middle Ages, history, for de Tocqueville, had been continuously moving, albeit slowly and often fitfully, towards ever widening democratic freedoms. In America, he saw the historically current epitome of this process. *Democracy in America* was the direction he saw the rest of the world moving towards. But with Marx and Lenin, history took a horrible detour, underwent a virulent reaction against democracy, which devoured countless millions and entire populations.

Now, finally, we — those of our generation — have at last the opportunity for which all those millions of lost lives dreamed in vain and anguish, and that is to end the threat of

