

GLASNOST': GENUINE CHANGE OR ILLUSION?

by Vladimir Bukovsky

JULIANA PILON: My name is Juliana Pilon. I am a Senior Policy Analyst with The Heritage Foundation, and like our guest today, I was born behind the Iron Curtain. He is Vladimir Bukovsky, one of the greatest men alive today, and it is our privilege to have a man of his courage and modesty, his intensity and political acuteness join us. As you probably know, Vladimir Bukovsky spent twelve years in prisons, labor camps, and psychiatric hospitals. He was expelled from the university and physically attacked by the KGB after organizing readings of unpublished poets in Maiakovsky Square in Moscow.

Two years later, in 1963, he was sentenced without trial to indefinite detention in the prison hospital at Leningrad. From then on, he was perpetually in and out of prison, struggling to come to terms with his persecution, the threats against his family, continued attempts to trap and taint him, and severe physical deprivation of all kinds. Finally in December 1976, Vladimir Bukovsky, along with his mother, sister, and a nephew, was released to the West in exchange for the Chilean communist leader Luis Corvalan. He continues his studies in biology and his lifelong anticommunist activities.

VLADIMIR BUKOVSKY: Thank you, Juliana, for that impressive introduction. I am not sure I deserve it. I am very sure, however, that you all care about the recent news from the Soviet Union. It is very confusing to many people. Even some of our more experienced compatriots have lost touch, after hearing this campaign of *glasnost'*, or cultural openness, or whatever the current term might be. Indeed the signals are very contradictory. And it is mainly because so many people want to see changes in the Soviet Union.

A few dozen prisoners get released, and of course it is very pleasant, a very good thought for all of us, but it is important to remember that the main reason that they were released was to get the prisoners to maximize the public impression with immediate concessions. But if we really had a change of heart, because of the way the Soviet Union works, we would not release one by one the most prominent dissidents over the duration of a year, we would simply declare amnesty. And we would not demand that these prisoners sign a statement that they would not continue anti-Soviet activity.

Legalizing Moonlighting. We also hear now and then of Gorbachev speaking, the press tells me, of the necessity for radical economic reforms in the Soviet Union. It is, of course, very pleasant to hear. Unfortunately, though it remains on paper or in words, to date, there are no reforms in the Soviet economy. The only reform or law recorded dealt with so-called individual labor activity. And in practice and fact, this simply legalized the

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He spoke at The Heritage Foundation on March 11, 1987.

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moonlighting that has existed in the Soviet Union since the 1960s. It was so widespread that nobody even tried to punish for that activity. Now, by introducing double monthly liberations into individual labor activity, the Soviets can hardly expect to encourage people to expand these activities. They simply will reduce them. Those people who are already involved in it will continue to be involved, but now they are expected to pay taxes, which they did not do before, and Soviet people by and large do not believe in paying taxes. Before, they could be punished for engaging in these activities, as such, and now they will be punished for not paying taxes for these activities.

Now, another question which has attracted a lot of public attention is that of a Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan—or their statement of intentions as to the withdrawal from Afghanistan. But even that is not very convincing, or rather, it is rather confusing too. Because if they really want to stop the war, why don't they just pull out their troops and their collaborators and resettle them in the Soviet Union. Clearly it is easier to resettle six thousand or five thousand Afghan communists than to settle five million Afghan refugees.

If they want to leave a stable government behind themselves, as they say in the negotiations, why not allow free and honest genuine elections under strict international supervision as was done in Zimbabwe or in El Salvador, under more or less similar conditions. But if neither condition will satisfy them, what do they want? They want to be viewed as leaving Afghanistan, without doing so.

A Long Line of Dead Writers. But I tell you, the most confusing and the most objectionable maneuver is the current policy of so-called glasnost'. Indeed, I cannot imagine that many people believe it when they read in the Soviet Union, in Pravda, statements and facts that only a few years ago would have been branded as anti-Soviet slander and for which people could have been imprisoned for up to several years. However, these policies make virtue of necessity because the Soviet propaganda machinery is built entirely on lies, it seems to be accepted. At least people have started reading the newspapers in the Soviet Union. Before, they didn't. Now you can come across, in one of the articles in TASS or Pravda, facts which previously you had obtained only from Voice of America or Radio Liberty.

And a person may be frustrated. It is even dangerous to rely on a huge propaganda machine that does not charm anybody any more. More or less could be said about the so-called cultural show. While a few writers who died long ago have finally been published in the Soviet Union, and they of course, can be read. But we should remember always--be aware--that they are already dead, and therefore cannot do anything unexpected, and that we have a very long line of these dead writers who are waiting for the next cultural thaw to come around so they can be legalized.

Threat of KGB Control. That is, in a way, a sad thing. That is the tragedy of Russian culture, because in order to become known to readers and viewers, Soviet writers, musicians, dancers, or film producers have to become either dead physically or dead spiritually to become a part of the propaganda machine in order to be allowed to show their art in the Soviet Union. We hear, of course, that emigre cultural figures were invited secretly to come back and be pardoned, but that is the most ridiculous proposition. I know most of them, and I can assure you that none of them will go back. They are not that stupid. After living in the West and breathing the air of freedom it would be impossible for these people to live under the constant threat of KGB control. That is senseless to them.

If the Soviets really wanted to liberalize the access to their culture, they should have started by allowing the works of prominent writers, musicians, and film makers to be available to the Soviet readers, viewers, listeners, and then there would be no need for these so-called backdoor negotiations. In that case, we would return with pleasure.

Huge Public Relations Campaign. So, as you can see, all these so-called changes in the Soviet Union are rather contrived and not formal. The first impression you get from what they are doing today is of a huge propaganda campaign, a huge public relations campaign calculated primarily for the consumption in the West, but partly also to encourage, to invigorate people, who stopped paying attention. We simply forget that the Soviet regime is excessively repressive and restrictive. And that even with much bigger changes, its essence, its nature will not change. Indeed they can release all the prisoners they have right now, they can allow immigration, they can publish the work of many writers, and they even can publish The Gulag Archipelago by Alexander Solzhenitsyn, and the Soviet system will not be destroyed.

They might become free and capitalistic and operate as they did in Hungary and Poland, but only for a very short duration of time, much shorter than they did in Hungary or Poland, or even China. Because unlike Hungary and Poland, they do not have big brother looking over their shoulders, always ready to come up and pull them back. And unlike China, there are a host of small brothers to look after. So, the question right now is not how far these so-called changes of Gorbachev have gone, but how long will they continue. For instance, if you take the smallest change, and imagine its continuing for five years, you immediately see that it might make some irreversible changes.

In five years, those who are fourteen years old right now will become nineteen, as we used to be during Khrushchev's time and his efforts at some liberalization. Five years later, the KGB did not know what to do with us. The same with the liberation of Sakharov and his return to Moscow. Right now, it is probably a big advantage to the Soviet leaders, because no matter what he said, the impression he produces is that Gorbachev is really a liberator, because he has allowed Sakharov to speak. But five years from now, if he were still allowed to speak what he speaks, it would create a tremendous problem, because naturally, a lot of people would come in contact with him, and a network of contacts and connections would organize itself around him all through the country, as it used to be in the 1960s and 1970s when we had just started the movement for human rights. And then, it would be an alternative structure--something the Soviet Union would not and could not tolerate.

Pragmatic Stalinism. We are so used to the Soviet system being absolutely unmovable and unchangeable that the smallest deviation is considered radical and almost revolutionary. Let us consider the most daring, the most courageous of Gorbachev's suggestions today--namely, to liberalize the election rules within the party. Now if that were allowed to happen, the people of the Soviet Union would get somewhat closer to the situation that black people have in South Africa, with our "whites" being only 7 percent of the population having free elections for themselves. But if that continued for more than five or ten years, it would be very serious, and maybe it would lead to irreversible changes. It might actually lead to a split in the ruling party and that would be serious.

Now the impression that I get is that the current campaign is not calculated to continue very long, and the Soviet rulers know it very well. It is just a short and very intensive effort. Another confusing part of what is happening right now, which is confusing primarily in the West, among the specialists, the Kremlinologists or whatever, is how to define this new Soviet leadership. Some assessments call them the new Stalinists, others have called them liberal and pragmatic. And frankly, I do not see much of a contradiction in these, if there is such a thing. Because, after all, Stalin could be very pragmatic and liberal when he needed. For example, when he wanted, very quickly, to have nuclear weapons created in the Soviet Union, he allowed the scientific community in the Soviet Union much more freedom than anybody else enjoyed. And was very pragmatic about that. Or during World War II, in the most difficult times, the most dark times when the Germans were advancing to Moscow, Stalin was pragmatic and liberal enough to address his nation as brothers and sisters, and not as comrades. And throughout the duration of World War II, he never mentioned socialism or communism, he just mentioned the great Russian tradition. And a lot of people at that time and after the war, were bought by this change in Soviet policy. Some old emigres from Paris went back to the Soviet Union believing that the system had changed, simply because Stalin had opened the churches, only to find themselves very quickly in jail in the Soviet Union.

Killing and Torturing. So, what we are dealing with is these typical, goal-oriented people, people who are revolutionaries. I have recently been reading a book about economic policy, and I discovered, among the memoirs of some communist people of that time, a very interesting detail, a very interesting fact. Apparently, even Felix Dzerzhinsky, the founder of the Cheka, the original KGB, became incredibly liberal and pragmatic when he was appointed by Lenin to chair the group directing Soviet industry, while, at the same time, remaining at the head of the secret police. Now, those who worked with Dzerzhinsky at that time say that he was incredibly liberal with the so-called bourgeois specialists, the scientists, and engineers, who were working in Soviet industry. As long as he remained in charge of Soviet industry, none of them was arrested or harassed by the secret police. He was a great liberal figure to them, so much so that they would exchange anti-Soviet jokes while working and he would not as much as notice it. He would be embarrassed when he came into a room and a number of professors would rise. He would beg them not to rise, to remain seated. But at the same time, at exactly the same time, working for the secret police, he would be killing and torturing virtually millions of people. How can one explain?

It is a very simple scenario of goal-oriented people. If they need, in order to reach their goals, to kill millions of people, they will do that. If they need, to reach their goals, to become very liberal and pragmatic, they will do exactly that--as long as they can achieve their purpose. Current Soviet leaders are direct descendants of Lenin; they are his peers and students. Not only because the proportion of KGB in the Politburo right now is probably higher than at any time in Soviet History, and not only because it was the chief objective of Andropov himself as the head of the KGB for fifteen years, but mostly because psychologically they are goal-oriented. They will do anything to reach their goals.

Making the West Pay. And it just so happens that you cannot improve economic performance or force development of high tech by repressive measures at home. I do not think there is any need here to go into the details or reasons for this policy to give a detailed analysis of the failure of the Soviet economy. I think most of you know about that, and the figures are available and equally well known that real economic reforms are not possible without some dismantling of party control over the country.

The choices the Soviet leadership faces right now, seventy years after the creation of the Soviet state, are very painful. Either they have to lose their advantage in the correlation of forces, that is the foreign policy, the external achievements, the expansion of their empire, and the achievements in strategic forces, or they have to lose control over their country. And neither proposition is attractive or acceptable to the Soviet ruling elite. The solution is to make the West pay for their economic solutions, and to somehow elicit massive economic assistance by offering concessions and joint ventures as Gorbachev calls them, to get credits and transfers of technology, and above all, to freeze the current balance--the current correlation of forces--to maintain this advantage while they are trying to improve their economic position. That is the main reason, the main goal, of current policy in the Soviet Union.

Lenin's Detente. This is what Lenin tried in 1921, before going into a new economic policy and a temporary retreat before the next onslaught. It later became known as detente. At this time, detente will be conducted and organized differently from what it was in 1970. The Soviets, after all, have learned something from their mistakes in 1970. Their main mistake at that time concerning detente was a lack of public sources. These Marxists believe that capitalist societies have to be run by capitalists. So they made their detente with big business and enterprises by impressing on them the huge potential of the Soviet market and by the possible governmental guarantees and duties in the Soviet Union.

They made a great effort to achieve detente with the government, but in pursuing the goal, the Marxists did not believe in the true, natural democracy of the West. They underestimated it. As a result of this, detente appeared to be unsuccessful. Since they could not believe and because of a campaign of some Jewish organizations and human rights organizations, the government in the Kremlin, and all the present leadership, and all their effort, huge as it was, were frustrated by one Senator who stood up in the Senate and said "No," he would not go with that. And he finally prevailed.

Learning to Speak to the West. That might be a shortened blow to the Marxist leadership. The current leadership is much wiser. They started their detente with public organizations. As you may remember, a few years ago, they started to move toward some American public institutions and some European too: the American Bar Association, the Physicians for Social Responsibility, the National Academy of Sciences. With all these bridge builders and individual citizens this time, they reckon that the very same forces that opposed the first detente in the 1970s will actually lobby for it.

Today, a lawyer will overlook his impressions of the Soviet Union, physicians will advise us not to pay attention to psychiatric torture, scientists will say that the execution of scientists by the Soviets in the Soviet Union bears no relationship to arms control, and Jewish organizations will start advocating the suspension of Jackson-Vanik, which ties emigration to most favored nation status. That is exactly what they are doing. The next move was, of course, a masterpiece. When they went into a campaign of releasing a few prisoners with great publicity, they therefore pulled the rug out from under the people who would otherwise oppose it.

I myself find it bizarre to talk about the current campaign of glasnost'. I was imprisoned in 1965 for demanding glasnost' and in 1967 for the review of the articles of the penal code,

which used to imprison people on political grounds, Articles 17 and 190. And now Gorbachev says that he is going to review them. What Gorbachev did was quite skillful. He actually hijacked our slogans. But he still does what he wants to. For example, I believe that glasnost', and we believed this at the time that we were speaking about it, when it was the slogan of our movement--that glasnost' is something that the public does, not the government. Now, in my view, the interests of glasnost' would be much better served if the Soviets were to allow free access to Xerox machines rather than to conduct all this criticism of operations directed from the top. The Party still maintains a monopoly on the truth. And tomorrow, after all, the truth might be different.

I Know What the Soviets Want. Now, the question that is important for the West to decide, to dwell upon all this campaign with all its changes and semi-changes: Do they make the Soviet Union more dangerous or less dangerous? I can perceive this question occurs to many people. I believe that the Soviets become more dangerous, not because I believe that the danger of the Soviet Union is in their huge accumulation of weapons or their desire to launch mobile and sea-based weapons, because they do not have such good weapons. The danger of the Soviet Union always is that it is so skillful in manipulating public opinion: in morally disarming the people of the West and in eroding the defense mechanisms of the West by selling battle images of the past, and therefore recruiting a lot of people into actions and policies that might help or support them. That has been true from Lenin's time onward. Take the recent position, which you have already observed, all this skepticism of the public. With all the conservative governments there are right now, they are already talking seriously about arms reductions. They are already talking about the elimination of intermediate missiles in Europe. And I know that is exactly what the Soviets want. They do not want the process of rearmament in the Western world to deprive them of their advantage in the correlation of forces. It is very easy to predict what will happen if these missiles are to be eliminated on both sides. In reality, they will be eliminated only on one side. There are no mechanisms for the verification of this. And what, in reality, will happen is that the West will destroy its part of the weapons, while the Soviets will withdraw these mobile missiles to some other location and keep them there for a while, till the time comes when they need once again to be stronger than others--when they need to increase their blackmail.

Then suddenly we will have all these SS-20s, which were supposed to be destroyed, surfacing again in Czechoslovakia and Poland and East Germany and the Western part of the Soviet Union, placing the West, once again, under the threat, forcing the West once again to rearm itself, creating once again the struggle for peace and massive peace movements and heading it all back to square one of 1980. That is what they do. That is their guaranteed method.

Accusations of Cold War. But even more dangerous is the current trend to discuss the possibility of East-West trade as something very promising, as something very positive. There are many voices already heard, in the newspapers, and the other media, in discussions, that Gorbachev is a true reformer, and therefore, we have to help him. I always love it when somebody wants to help the General Secretary of the Communist Party, because he has the power to do whatever he wants. But that seems to be the reality in the West. Already, once again, as in the 1970s, we hear this discussion of doves and hawks in the Kremlin who fight each other, and that Gorbachev must be supported against his own hawks. This is very dangerous, because as I described, the current opening is going to be very short and not terribly deep. And certainly, not irreversible. But what the U.S.

