



U.S. FRIENDS OF THE SOVIET PEOPLE

"CONTINUING THE WORK OF THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF AMERICAN-SOVIET FRIENDSHIP"

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Seven Myths about the USSR

BY STEPHEN GOWAN (part 1)

The Soviet Union was dissolved 30 years ago, on December 26, 1991. It's widely believed outside the former republics of the USSR that Soviet citizens fervently wished for this; that Stalin was hated as a vile despot; that the USSR's socialist economy never worked; and that the citizens of the former Soviet Union prefer the life they have today under capitalist democracy to, what, in the fevered parlance of Western journalists, politicians and historians, was the repressive, dictatorial rule of a one-party state which presided over a sclerotic, creaky and unworkable socialist economy. None of these beliefs is true.

Myth #1. The Soviet Union had no popular support. On March 17, 1991, nine months before the Soviet Union's demise, Soviet citizens went to the polls to vote on a referendum which asked whether they were in favor of preserving the USSR. Over three-quarters voted yes. Far from favoring the breakup of the union, most Soviet citizens wanted to preserve it. [1]

Myth #2. Russians hate Stalin. In 2009, Rossiya, a Russian TV channel, spent three months polling over 50 million Russians to find out who, in their view, were the greatest Russians of all time. Prince Alexander Nevsky, who successfully repelled an attempted Western invasion of Russia in the 13th century, came first. Second place went to Pyotr Stolypin,

Credo of US Friends of the Soviet People.

U.S Friends of the Soviet People is dedicated to supporting the struggles to restore socialism in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. USFP is the US affiliate to the International Council for Friendship and Solidarity with the Soviet People. The International Council carries on the tradition of the "Hands of Russia" Committees that were established internationally in 1918 to help protect the young Soviet Republic from foreign intervention. The aim of all Friends of the Soviet People is international cooperation in building socialism and solidarity with the anti-imperialist forces of the world who are struggling against US Imperialism - the main enemy of humanity. USFSP acts as a unifying force to help consolidate and coordinate the anti-imperialist forces of the world with the ongoing movement to restore the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe as socialist states. We act as a unifying front, but are not a forum for ideological debates. The people of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe themselves will chose their paths towards socialism.

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SOVIET ECONOMY GREW FASTER THAN CAPITALISM

who served as prime minister to Tsar Nicholas II, and enacted agrarian reforms. In third place, behind Stolypin by only 5,500 votes, was Joseph Stalin, a man that Western opinion leaders routinely describe as a ruthless dictator with the blood of tens of millions on his hands. [2] He may be reviled in the West, not surprisingly, since he was never one after the hearts of the corporate grandees who dominate the West's ideological apparatus, but, it seems, Russians have a different view—one that fails to comport with the notion that Russians were victimized, rather than elevated, by Stalin's leadership. In a May/June 2004 Foreign Affairs article, (Flight from Freedom: What Russians Think and Want), anti-communist Harvard historian Richard Pipes cited a poll in which Russians were asked to list the 10 greatest men and women of all time. The poll-takers were looking for significant figures of any country, not just Russians. Stalin came fourth, behind Peter the Great, Lenin, and Pushkin...much to Pipes' irritation. [3]



Myth #3. Soviet socialism didn't work. If this is true, then capitalism, by any equal measure, is an indisputable failure. From its inception in 1928, to the point at which it was dismantled in 1989, Soviet socialism never once, except during the extraordinary years of World War II, stumbled into recession, nor failed to provide full employment. [4] What capitalist economy has ever grown unremittingly, without recession, and providing jobs for all, over a 56 year span (the period during which the Soviet economy was socialist and the country was not at war, 1928-1941 and 1946-1989)? Moreover, the Soviet economy grew faster than capitalist economies that were at an equal level of economic development when Stalin launched the first five year plan in 1928—and faster than the US economy through much of the socialist system's existence. [5] To be sure, the Soviet economy never caught up to or surpassed the advanced industrial economies of the capitalist core, but it started the race further back; was not aided, as Western countries were, by histories of slavery, colonial plunder, and economic imperialism; and was unremittingly the object of Western, and especially US, attempts to sabotage it. Particularly deleterious to Soviet economic development was the necessity of diverting material and human resources from the civilian to the military economy, to meet the challenge of Western military pressure. The Cold War and arms race, which entangled the Soviet Union in battles against a stronger foe, not state ownership and planning, kept the socialist economy from overtaking the advanced industrial economies of the capitalist West. [6] And yet, despite the West's unflagging efforts to cripple it, the Soviet socialist economy produced positive growth in each and every non-war year of its existence, providing a materially secure existence for all. Which capitalist economy can claim equal success?

PEOPLE OF RUSSIA CELEBRATING SOCIALISM

Myth #4. Now that they've experienced it, citizens of the former Soviet Union prefer capitalism.

On the contrary, they prefer the Soviet system's state planning, that is, socialism. Asked in a recent poll what socio-economic system they favor, Russians answered [7]:

- State planning and distribution, 58%
- Private property and distribution, 28%
- Hard to say, 14%
- Total, 100%

Pipes cites a poll in which 72 percent of Russians "said they wanted to restrict private economic initiative." [8]



Myth #5. Twenty-two years later, citizens of the former Soviet Union see the USSR's demise as more beneficial than harmful. Wrong again. According to a just-released Gallup poll, for every citizen of 11 former Soviet republics, including Russia, Ukraine and Belarus, who thinks the breakup of the Soviet Union benefited their country, two think it did harm. And the results are more strongly skewed toward the view that the breakup was harmful among those aged 45 years and over, namely, the people who knew the Soviet system best. [9]

According to another poll cited by Pipes, three-quarters of Russians regret the Soviet Union's demise [10]—hardly what you would think of people who were reportedly delivered from a supposedly repressive state and allegedly arthritic, ponderous economy.

(PART 2 WILL BE CONTINUED.....)

FOOTNOTES:

1. "Referendum on the preservation of the USSR," RIA Novosti, 2001, <http://en.ria.ru/infographics/20110313/162959645.html>
2. Guy Gavriel Kay, "The greatest Russians of all time?" The Globe and Mail (Toronto), January 10, 2009.
3. Richard Pipes, "Flight from Freedom: What Russians Think and Want," Foreign Affairs, May/June 2004.
4. Robert C. Allen. Farm to Factory: A Reinterpretation of the Soviet Industrial Revolution, Princeton University Press, 2003. David Kotz and Fred Weir. Revolution From Above: The Demise of the Soviet System, Routledge, 1997.
5. Allen; Kotz and Weir.
6. Stephen Gowans, "Do Publicly Owned, Planned Economies Work?" what's left, December 21, 2012.
7. "Russia Nw", in The Washington Post, March 25, 2009.
8. Pipes.
9. Neli Espova and Julie Ray, "Former Soviet countries see more harm from breakup," Gallup, December 19, 2013, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/166538/former-soviet-countries-harm-breakup.aspx>
10. Pipes.



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