

WRONG SIGNPOSTS : A Russian Tragedy

SOVIET DISSIDENTS STILL SUFFER FROM WRONG PREMISES

(Notes on From Under the Rubble)

The work of Igor Shafarevich has reinforced my view on the MACS system. His article "Socialism in our Past and Future" (in Solzhenitsyn's From Under the Rubble), which is said to be a summary of a full-length, but as yet unpublished, book, provides some needed detail in the area of examining collectivist and statist systems. More importantly, the author's attempt to provide a unified view of the Socialist sickness, not only from a historical and philosophical standpoint, but from a psychological basis, indicates a fundamental gap in libertarian scholarship. Shafarevich's approach to Socialism which views it as the result of a fundamental sickness of the human spirit (and not merely the result of a "misunderstanding" of economic theory or of philosophical premises) is extremely bracing to me. That a scholar of such divergent background, ideology and approach from mine should detect such a similar thread of reasoning is reaffirmation of my attempt at an integrated explanation.

Reading Shafarevich's statement with those of Solzhenitsyn have provided me with evidence of how far in advance my thesis is to theirs. Of the two, Solzhenitsyn is the more confused; in spite of his denunciation of Communist tyranny, he is more than ready to accept any old-style tyranny merely if it does not deny him religious freedom. Shafarevich depicts with masterful strokes the anti-life, anti-individualist and anti-reasoning characteristics of Socialism, but he fails to identify the similarity of sentiment with mysticism and, hence, religion. In spite of the fact that his intellectual honesty compels him to identify the historical roots of Socialism in numerous Christian heretical sects, and in spite of a recognition of the nearly identical similarity of the "urge to self-destruction" in Buddhism and in other religious sects, he fails to conclude a relationship between the broader precepts of mysticism and coercive collectivism. Religion for Shafarevich (and for Solzhenitsyn) is the antithesis of Socialism. The latter is viewed more or less as a heretical perversion of the true faith. The fact "that it is only just over two hundred years since Socialist ideology assumed a rational exterior" (i.e., philosophically and physically disassociated from the Gnostics, Chatharists, Albigensians, the "Zwickau prophets," Patarenite, Taborite and Apostolic Brethren -- as well as the religious Socialist doctrines propounded by the works of Campanella and Winstanley) does not appear to hint at any fundamental connection for him.

In spite of the wealth of historical documentation and discursive probing into the unreasoning blindness and horrifying aberrations of collective-statist doctrine and practice, Shafarevich's ultimate assessment of the motive cause reduces to an embarrassingly trite resuscitation of neo-freudian psycho-history: "THAT AMONG THE BASIC FORCES INFLUENCING HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT IS THE URGE TO SELF-DESTRUCTION, THE HUMAN DEATH INSTINCT." But in the next paragraph, he hedges his "instinct" notion by telling us that: "An understanding of this urge as a force analogous to INSTINCT also enables us to explain some specific features of Socialism." Then, in spite of his earlier statement, the "force" is merely an analogy (i.e., not the same as, but similar in its function) to "instinct." So it is not instinct at all, but something almost quasi-mechanical like the semi-robotic fanaticism and self-hatred of the religious zealot.

Shafarevich goes on to present a weak explanation of instincts connecting to emotions which provide a "deep feeling of satisfaction and emotional uplift." In other words, consciously and willingly participating in the eradication of one's own individual identity and in the mass enslavement of humankind is then to be seen as a necessary and involuntary "instinctual" function of human nature. Instincts in animals are involuntary mechanisms which automatically and involuntarily provide life-preserving responses to external stimuli. Shafarevich, thus, not only assumes instinct motivation in humans (something unproven in science) but instincts contrary to survival. It would seem, at the least, that he would consider the survival of the human species for several million years as casting a slight shadow of doubt on the validity of his hypothesis!

In Solzhenitsyn and in Mikhail Agursky (who contributes the essay "Contemporary Socioeconomic Systems and their Future Prospects") one sees a psychology, or rather, a mentality of Christian conservatism. These men have had it with the world. They are pessimistic and trust little in the nature of humankind. In the stark bleakness of their experience, their hope is limited to maintaining the privacy of a mystical solitude. Their articles, in spite of a broad intellectual perspective on the western democracies gained mainly through secondhand sources (Agursky, for example, cites Galbraith and Toffler) betrays a basic distrust of freedom. They are horrified by the exploitation of sex, free expression for extreme political views in the media and by what they think is the stimulation of unessential consumer demand.

Agursky speaks almost fondly of the security permitted by the lack of "agonizing" choices offered in a totalitarian society. One slowly gains the view in perusing these essays that, in spite of their dissidence, they are at heart desirous of authoritarian conformity. And with this Christian twist of mind, one finds all of the anti-world, anti-market, anti-individual tendencies and bugaboos of the secular mystic.

Agursky's hope for the future resembles the decentralized, small, autonomous socioeconomic units much like the misguided garden-city type utopia so esteemed by American social science academics in the sixties. One almost cries at the fuzzy Christian-Socialist contradictions so naively forwarded by Agursky. Although he renounces violence, his every phrase implies coercion. Nowhere is there an affirmation of property rights or, much less, of individual rights. He states with unqualified equanimity, "The aim of the future (sic. The "future" may not be reified to aim at anything; only objects may be aimed and only conscious individuals may choose to aim) should not be productive growth, not the constant rise of production and consumption, but the maintenance of productivity, production and consumption at the level compatible with the restrictions dictated by the INTEREST OF SOCIETY and the real level of resources." (Emphasis mine)

Agursky makes no reference to how the ultimate interest of society will be determined. For those of us who do not desire to live in parsimonious monkhood, or in small boring communities under the benign (?) tyranny of the local community council, we will just have to accept the prophetic paternalism of "society." In Agursky one can note the seeds of the same kind of philosopher-king Platonism so well defined as one of the intellectual roots of total collectivism in Shafarevich's essay. Agursky's inbred acceptance of coercion comes across ever clearer; he says, "Enterprises WILL HAVE (emphasis mine) to be small enough for every employee to understand the production process and be genuinely able to participate in its management." The old Marxist-inspired aversion to occupational specialization and to the market economy constantly creeps into Agursky's depiction of the "future." He refers to Kropotkin's communes, "where physical labor would be combined with the intellectual." The kibbutzes of Israel are seen as "approach (ing) the ideal," but the fact that they "work mainly for the outside consumer" is seen as a failing. In these words we see Agursky's latent Marxist hatred for the employment of labor.

This panoply of Marxist irrationalities is combined with mystical-religionist prejudices against urbanization, technology and the "monstrous excesses of the contemporary world." Even the realm of "civil liberties" and specifically in the area of intellectual and political expression, an area in which most collectivists and closet authoritarians generally disguise their motives, Agursky raises the curtain on his true repressionist character. He states unequivocally: "Censorship of the mass media is absolutely indispensable, but it should be exercised not by bureaucratic organizations, but by elected persons." How true to form the MACS syndrome repeats itself! This pious, pompous "neighborhood Socialist" is not the self-indulgent and disoriented product of American liberal arts education. No! This authoritarian little weed grows in the dirty crevices of the Soviet samizdat counter-culture!

In Agursky we can see the thunderous and morally grandiloquent contradictions of Solzhenitsyn's religiosity and mysticism miniaturized and brought to earth in all its ridiculous triteness and, I must add, in all its tragic coercive-authoritarian consequences. Agursky represents a distillation of Christomarxian (altruist-collectivist) civilization. In a pitifully unfocused way, Agursky opposes tyranny and the lack of ethical values. He opposes the use of violence and desperately desires "social justice for all." And as is the case with Christomarxian thought, he never comes to grips with the violent contradictions of his own assumed premises. He does not realize that the solution he proposes is nothing more than a repeat of previous mistakes -- a miniaturization of the horror which has afflicted mankind for millennia.

Agursky asserts that "A just and rational system can be built only on a foundation of spiritual and moral values." Can this be so when he himself does not take the opportunity to even briefly define the spiritual and moral values which should guide the world in the collective march to justice and rationality? The question has probably never occurred to him. After all, we all know to what moral and spiritual values he is referring! Certainly not moral values based on the objective qualities of human nature which would require an absolute recognition of the right of the individual to his own life and its products! No, this would be a selfish and anarchistic view of life. One not in keeping with the altruist requirement of self-sacrifice. One not in keeping with authoritarian requirements of individual conformity to assuage the anxious insecurities of those who are threatened by the freedom of others and their competition.

Agursky and Solzhenitsyn provide us with a model composite of the basic personality defect of the mystic: the fear of actively expressed self-ownership. Their obsession with monogamy and phobia of open sex and pornography is an indication of not merely a Soviet type of "social conservatism," but of the mystic's profound resentment of the natural, sensual, phenomenal world. It is not a hatred of freedom per se which afflicts them, but a resentment of action. They desire stasis and homogeneity. The expressed intellectual desire for small "organic" communities is an attempt to truncate the variety and complexity of large specialized systems. It does not come from a desire for variety, which is most widely achievable at the individual level, but for noncompetitive conformity. This is the distillation of the religious mentality which historically and, as shown in the very pages of Agursky and Solzhenitsyn's writings, logically is the parent of Socialism. Mysticism, the hatred of the phenomenal world, leads inexorably to the self-hatred of altruism, which demands a resentment of any expression of self-assertion in others, thus evoking a support of authoritarian repression through social collectivism and the political-economic control of the state.

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The synthesis of this condition is to some extent mirrored in Agursky's description of the authoritarian-slave mentality. Tragically, it becomes a description of himself: He states, "...many people living in totalitarian countries, having survived terror and been brainwashed by propaganda, are not only genuinely content with their position, but virtually consider themselves to be the happiest people on earth. This, however, engenders an inferiority complex vis-a-vis the democracies, so that the inhabitants of totalitarian countries often turn into implacable enemies of freedom, ready and willing to destroy everything that reminds them of the free will they have lost. This applies in many respects to the intellectuals of these countries, who often display a pathological fear of freedom." This is exemplary of the schizoid "liberalism" of the authoritarian personality. While his left hand is strangling free expression and forcing us into quaint little communes, the right hand is pointing a finger of shame at the perverse benightedness of modern-day serfs.

So here we have it: an open admission of the murderous envy of the altruist-collectivist mentality. And this should be no surprise to those familiar with Solzhenitsyn's identification of the quality of self-negating envy so prevalent in the Soviet people. The purity of pathological expression in a totalitarian society is perhaps still too subtle to be appreciated by the relatively healthy occidental, much less a libertarian who actually rejoices at the accomplishments of his fellows. But if illustration is any value, can you imagine the depth of despair, of self-loathing, of bitter resentment expressed in the leeringly smug satisfaction that Solzhenitsyn tells us occurs when the KGB leads away a neighbor. Anyone who gains an advantage is hated and viciously envied. Such is the result of the MACS syndrome: such is the tragedy of the Soviet dissidents!

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Thus, we urge the repeal of all laws which discriminate against young persons now arbitrarily classed as underaged minors such as: (1) compulsory education and punishment for truancy; (2) juvenile codes and detention systems; (3) ballot restrictions based on age; (4) curfew laws and ordinances; (5) statutory rape and incest laws; (6) child labor "protection" laws; (7) censorship of publications of entertainment laws and ordinances; (8) prohibition of alcoholic beverages and other substances; and (9) forced wage and property transfer to parents and guardian laws.

We further assert the right of parents to their own lives and property and to the right to terminate their obligation within the scope of voluntary contractual agreements.

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