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Bush's Gift to Gorbachev

We laughed nine months ago when Congressman Richard Gephardt (D-MO) called for U.S. foreign aid to bail Mikhail Gorbachev out of his economic problems and consolidate his control. But the Gephardt folly is now a George Bush project.

President Bush has announced, without any by-your-leave from Congress or the American people, that he will send $1 billion in U.S. aid to the Soviet Union. Critics are calling it the "Red Bear S&L bailout."

"Sellout" would be a better word because it makes the American taxpayers pay the costs of keeping Gorbachev in control of a nation desperately striving to be free from dictatorship. Unlike the Marshall Plan, which helped European countries remain free from Communism in the aftermath of World War II, the Bush bailout will help Gorbachev maintain centralized Communist control openly enforced by the KGB.

The initial $1 billion will go to the Soviets mostly in U.S. agricultural products ranging from grain to cheese, paid for with credits guaranteed by the U.S. taxpayers. It's called a "loan," but if it were an honest commercial loan, the Soviets could have borrowed from big U.S. banks; it's only the taxpayer guarantee that makes the deal go through.

Bush has already said that our massive food aid will be supplemented by pharmaceutical, technical and economic assistance, as well as a "special association" with the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. It has been widely reported that the Soviet subsidy will be up to $3 billion in government-guaranteed farm credits, restored access to U.S. Export-Import Bank loans, equal tariff treatment on Soviet imports, and possible investment insurance.

This Bush handout to Gorbachev is not just a temporary deal to help the Soviet Union through a bad winter. The new Bush initiative will probably evolve into a permanent foreign entitlement program.

Administration spokesmen are calling this aid "humanitarian," but nobody is fooled by the euphemism. In any pre-Christmas listing of the "100 neediest cases," Gorbachev wouldn't rate a mention.

The Soviet Union isn't needy, and, at 115 million tons, had a rather good harvest this year. Empty shelves and hungry Muscovites are the result of appallingly inefficient Communist bureaucracy and of the fact that the Captive Nations within the U.S.S.R. are using their tool for freedom.

President Bush granted the Soviets a six-month waiver of the Jackson-Vanik Amendment, which since 1974 has prevented U.S. credits to the Soviet Union unless the U.S.S.R. adopts a liberalized emigration policy. While some Soviet Jews and ethnic Germans have been allowed to emigrate in the last year, the Soviet Union has declined to make emigration a legal right, which is what Jackson-Vanik requires.

Bush's gift will delay a fundamental reform in the Soviet Union. It will strengthen national authority in Moscow at the expense of democratic forces in the Soviet republics. It will finance Gorbachev's continued centralization policies for which he is keeping the KGB active.

Why don't we demand that Gorbachev pay for thee U.S. food from his large hoard of gold? Or with the oil he has available for export? Or with the money he could save by canceling the modernization of his intercontinental nuclear missiles? Or, if we really need to buy Gorbachev's toleration of our military action in the Middle East, why don't we make the Japanese pay for the food, since they are the chief beneficiaries?

If the American taxpayers have an irresistible urge to tax themselves to help deserving foreign countries, why don't we help the struggling democracies of Eastern Europe? Or the emerging democracy of Violeta Chamorro's Nicaragua, now just hanging on by its fingernails?

Let's be blunt about the Bush gift to Gorbachev. It is a foreign policy decision to spend American taxpayers' money to perpetuate "stable" KGB-enforced, centralized bureaucratic Communism in the U.S.S.R. instead of encouraging free-market economy and liberation for the Captive Peoples inside the U.S.S.R (such as Lithuania).

But that's not all. Bush's gift to Gorbachev shows that his Administration is arranging for the large business and agricultural corporations to put their risk of doing business with the Soviet Union on the backs of the U.S. taxpayers.