FROM: Phyllis Schlafly

68 FAIRMOUNT, ALTON, ILLINOIS 62002 (618)462-5415

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DON'T RUSH TO FALSE CONCLUSIONS ABOUT RUSSIA

The CIA recently came up with a report on the Soviet Union which described the economic failure of Communism and the miserable life of the people there. Food is inadequate, children's diseases are out of control, infant mortality is rising, life expectancy is falling, 60-70% of all pregnancies end in abortion, and the industrial base is tottering.

All true. But those facts do not mean, as the CIA concluded, that the Soviet Union is "the world's last empire ... [and] after 67 years of Communism ... has entered its terminal phase."

Measured by American standards of successful human living, Russia is, indeed, "a demographic basket case" and the "downward spiral" seems unalterable. But the ruling clique, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), which took power in 1917 and still holds sway, has been astonishingly successful and shows no signs of collapsing.

It is illustrated by a New Year's Day editorial cartoon showing two Russians on a park bench. One said, "Well, 1984 is finally behind us." The other replied, "No, Comrade, it is always 1984 in the Soviet Union."

Under Communist management, the state indeed is "total." The state is the sole employer; it fixes all wages and prices, and the quantity and quality of goods to be produced. Education, publications, the arts, sports, entertainment, and recreation are all state monopolies. Internal movement is tightly regulated; external movement is practically prohibited.

Konstantin Chernenko admitted at a meeting of the Central Committee that the 1984 harvest suffered "a substantial shortfall." In Communist countries, the harvest has a shortfall every year. Under the Czars, Russia was a grain-exporting nation; under Communism, food imports have increased tenfold over the last decade, and Russia is wholly dependent on the excess production of American farmers.

Soviet farm production requires at least a fourth of the labor force (compared to

less than five percent in the United States). And guess who has been in charge of Soviet agriculture since 1978? Mikhail Gorbachev, that smiling emissary who supposedly charmed the British on a recent visit in London and who is presented by the media as having a new-style, Westernized, friendly approach.

Many Americans find it hard to believe that the Soviet military economy could be productive when the consumer economy is such a disaster. Their incredulity is based on the biggest mistake which Americans make about the Soviet Union -- namely, reading Soviet actions in terms of our own values.

Alexander Solzhenitsyn has repeatedly pointed out this error. Most recently, in a major lecture at the Hillsdale College Shavano Institute, Dr. Gerhart Niemeyer, professor emeritus of Government at the University of Notre Dame, spelled it out.

"Guns or butter," he said, is simply not a dilemma that would occur to the Communist mind. "Consumer goods and military needs will never be allowed to compete with each other" because "guns" represent the basic commitment of Marxism-Leninism, the survival of the CPSU, and its vehicle to achieve its longterm goals.

Professor Niemeyer concedes that "the Soviet focus on an ultimate socialist victory ordained by history is certainly a source of irrationality." But we must face the reality that such irrationality exists.

Only a consuming lust for power would force the Kremlin bosses to continue to regurgitate their failed plans for centrally controlled agriculture rather than allowing expansion of the 3% of land in private hands which produces nearly a third of the food. Only a consuming lust for power would force the Kremlin bosses to put twice their percentage of Gross National Product into military weapons than does the United States.

The ruling Soviet Communists have a different value system and, by their own standards, they have been highly successful. They have iron control over their population and their satellites.

They have made the Soviet Union into the preeminent military power on land and sea. And it is of no consequence to them that the lot of the average woman is to suffer eight abortions and spend literally years of her life standing in long lines for such bare necessities as a head of cabbage and a roll of toilet paper.