

The Real End of 'History'

Gorbachov was arrested and then returned to power by popular demand (for the time being). Apparently the old guard hoped they could stop the 'capitalist rot' by silencing its figurehead-but it was too late. It was too late for the old guard before Gorbachov took control; he merely picked up the anti-communist ball and ran with it when he saw that this would be popular. The ideas were already in currency and could not be arrested.

Arresting Ideas

Arresting ideas often occur in the sense that ideas we may not like get a grip on us, and we can do little about. In this way, willy nilly, our views of the world are fixed for us (though we might be, and often are, mistaken). We cannot simply choose to see the world as we like. We can shun argument and evidence, but that is refusing to face facts rather than genuinely seeing the world as we choose.

One idea that is currently arresting the minds of the world is that political intervention can be bad for your wealth and liberty. This is important because, as David Hume and Etienne, de La Boetie correctly observed, all government ultimately rests on popular opinion (though mere apathy is a sufficient form of this).

Ideas themselves are rarely arrested. It is true that belief in the Albigensian heresy (extreme Christian asceticism) was wiped out with the Albigenses in the Albigensian Crusade (1208-29). But later popes could not similarly wipe out Protestantism despite many attempts - it was simply too popular. This argument applies with added force in the USSR (or whatever it might be called by the time you read this). The old guard would have to arrest (or exterminate) the entire population of the USSR if they were to stop the truth about politics that has been ineluctably dawning even on the many millions there, and thereby undermining the existing regime.

In China, the crushing of the demonstration in Tiannanman Square was 'successful'. But that is because the bulk of the Chinese still fundamentally accept the existing regime. The average Chinese peasant was not too sympathetic with the 'student troublemakers'. However, China too will eventually follow the Soviet path.

The End of Politics

There is a foolish idea that every social change is a change in a positive direction-'progress'. This is expressed in the tendentious remark that 'you can't put the clock back'. But society is not like a clock the progress of which can be determined and once seen never undone. Rather, having taken a wrong turning, such as down the road of state-regulation, we can perceive this fact and turn back again.

There is a superficially similar but patently true idea that, despite wars and oppressive laws (all state-caused of course), life is generally getting better and better. This is a sort of global Whig interpretation of history.

Now, history will not 'end' with universal liberal democracy, as one such Whig interpreter, Francis Fukuyama, opined in 1989. History will 'end' with the death of politics in favour of universal anarchy. 'History', in the sense of what 'kings and countries' (i.e. states) do, will disappear as voluntary interaction and the market-protection of persons and their property replaces state-coercion and incompetence.

The political history of the world hitherto (to generalise somewhat) has evolved slowly from great tyranny and destruction to lesser degrees of these evils. This is because the vast majority of people has slowly seen these evils as unnecessary and has supported efforts to diminish them. Democracy (towards which we have moved as a result) is probably, as Churchill observed, the worst form of government - apart from any other. To this the libertarian might modestly add. 'but anarchy is even less bad'.

For we libertarians are not, despite 'pragmatic' Tory propaganda, perfectionist

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dreamers. Our theory is not that the market is perfect, in any sense, but that state regulation has a built-in tendency to make things worse. Our theory is not that individuals always know best what is good for them but that they are better off learning from their own (and others') occasional mistakes than having some state elite impose mistakes countrywide.

The 'Cure' is the Cause

So, even if we had seen the political demise of a 'great statesman' (who would soon have been replaced by some political opportunist who in time would have been just as 'great'), politics in the USSR still would have slowly continued to decline, as it will in the rest of the world. This is really thanks to the inexorable power of the deeper truth that is increasingly arresting the minds of the world (starting with the intellectuals): Politics, by its coercive and bureaucratic essence, causes all the ills it claims to cure.

Free Life