

Document 10.#

Interview with Richard Pipes (Professor Emeritus, Harvard University)

PBS: http://www.pbs.org/heavenonearth/interviews_pipes.html

Did Gorbachev think communism could work in Russia if it were reformed?

Gorbachev abandoned the idea of reforming Russia. I know this from one of his close assistants who told me that they tried to make reforms in 1985, 1986, 1987 and he told me that by 1988 they realized that the system is unreformable. You either take it as it is or demolish it. So he began slowly to demolish it by bringing the population into the process. By allowing *glasnost*, which is freedom of speech, and having elections. And that destroyed the system. I don't think he wanted it originally but he found that he could do it no other way.

He was at Harvard here last week or was it two weeks ago, he gave a speech in which he said, the *perestroika* which he launched is not in the past, it's in the future. Russia still has not gone through *perestroika* which he wanted for it.

Gorbachev probably believed in socialism, I mean he was raised by it and he could not have gotten where he was, membership in the Politburo and then chairmanship of it, if he hadn't. But he developed very profound doubts and he describes it in his memoirs when he says, when he traveled in Western Europe, he traveled definitely in France, I think also Belgium, and so on, he said he was astonished by what he saw. Not the wealth and the prosperity, but the way people talked and the way people behaved. How free they were. How freely they expressed their opinion. That had a shattering effect on him, in a very positive way. He came back to Russia he was a changed man.

What do you think the future holds for socialism? Is it dead and buried?

Socialism is not dead and even communism is not completely dead because the idea of a truly egalitarian human society where nobody is richer than anybody else, everybody shares everything, is very deeply embedded in the human psyche. It goes back to the eighth century BC. You have it in Plato. Plato is of course later than eighth century, fourth century, but Plato spoke about that, about dissolving our personality in society and so on -- sharing our wives and sharing our children. I think this idea will always exist. Temporarily it has suffered a terrible setback but I wouldn't consider it buried forever.

What is the legacy of socialism, as you see it?

The worst legacy of socialism is the destructiveness, which, if you consider communism part of socialism, the destructiveness which it caused in so many countries, which followed it. I mean, Russia today is far worse off than Russia was in 1913, 1914, before World War I. Cuba is much worse off. North Korea is a disaster area where children are malnourished and raised deformed. This is a horrible thing. Has it left any positive effect? I was at a conference in Switzerland ten years ago right after the collapse of the Soviet Union and it was the first time this was a World Economic Forum, the first time the Russian delegation came and we talked to them, and I said, "Do you see any positive effect of communism, any legacy that it left that is positive?" And they scratched their heads and they talked to each other and then said, "Yes one positive legacy -- the educational system. We have a better educational system than we've had in the past." That may be granted perhaps.

Why didn't the Soviet Union's social welfare system work?

The social welfare system was not sustainable. Social welfare can only be sustainable where you have a high level of productivity, such as in our societies. You can then spend a lot of money on social welfare. But they couldn't, therefore the social welfare system even as it existed provided the bare, bare minimum. I think something like half the population under communism lived on less than \$10 a month. So if you want to have a good social welfare system, you first of all have to increase productivity and it cannot be done under socialism or communism.

Can socialism work anywhere today?

I definitely feel the flaw lies embedded in socialism because people have certainly tried to enforce it by peaceful means, such as in Chile, in very violent means as in China or Cambodia, it always has failed... it's not a good idea that didn't work out, it was a bad idea, and it cannot work.