

PERESTROIKA or GLASNOST

Which should we do first?

I know it is not as simple as that. And it is unwise to proceed too dogmatically from a seemingly careful analysis of events to an assumption that you have discovered an eternal principle.

You might argue that the relatively rapid openness of Gorbachev's Glasnost made his more gradual socially transforming Perestroika vulnerable. First it was threatened by a poorly organised Old Guard Coup. But then what we might see as the 'Gorbachev Project' was stolen by Yeltsin whose motives I regard as heavily linked to his ego. And who would have thought that what Gorbachev had in mind would lead to Russian billionaire ownership of Chelsea Football Club? I do not think he anticipated that.

Reading Archie Brown's book, *THE HUMAN FACTOR Gorbachev, Reagan and Thatcher and the end of the Cold War* (2020) reminds me how little I know. It also reminds me that ignorance is not a natural bar to speculation.

I think, however, I am allowed to form impressions, even on a temporary basis. Reagan was thought to be a good communicator. Perhaps this meant latching on to an idea, simplifying it and never questioning it. His 'Star Wars' notion had a validity that should have lasted very few questioning seconds. The idea that the USA could simply shoot down incoming missiles from the USSR was a nonsense. All the USSR had to do was to fire lots of missiles with dud warheads so that the USA used up its resources uselessly while the missiles with real warheads sneaked in.

This was explained to Reagan but he remained spellbound by his well-loved notion. And, of course, the people that would gain financially from the idea encouraged him. What was that phrase of Eisenhower's, "The Military, Industrial Complex"? In the USA it is a huge economic driver. What good does it do for society?

Thatcher was different. I knew someone who was a fellow undergraduate student with her. Her strength? A very good memory. And as Archie Brown shows, she did her homework conscientiously. The effectiveness of her long conversations with Gorbachev owed much to her preparedness, which impressed him.

Fundamental to her was, however, a belief in possessive individualism. Attempts have been made to qualify her statement to *Woman's Own* (1987) that "There is no such thing as society". To me, her transformation of the Tory Party helped to make it today's Nasty and Greedy Party. It seems that if you are not selfish you must be unworthy.

Gorbachev remains, I believe, a star. And, as we know, stars fall. A big mistake was the promotion of Yeltsin. His motive? I think he loved having power. Gorbachev, however, wanted a better society. Try defining that in such a way that the people of power are willing to surrender some of it. That, he did not manage.

I shall say nothing about Putin. Well, I suppose by writing that I just have.

I still don't know the answer to my first question. I must read more Karl, Popper that is. He felt more comfortable with questions than with assertions based upon what could only be limited observation. For years, he told us, people in the West believed that swans could only be white. Travel showed that to be wrong.

Must stop before I break into a famous song by T. Rex. Just one word change is needed.

Cliff Jones, 25th. October 2021

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