

The Corpse of Communism

By Dr. Greg Bahnsen

Tragic developments in Moscow during the first week of October have now substantiated the personal evaluation I brought home from Moscow last May.

Despite reservations about the overbearing powers which President Yeltsin wishes to exercise (too much like the tsar for most of us), he appeared to represent the only viable hope for a new future for Russia -- a future which exemplifies greater personal freedoms, market reform, and the democratic process. Yeltsin's opponents in the so-called Parliament actually embodied -- as much as two-thirds or more -- the old communist leadership, now wearing new (and hypocritical) hats of representative democracy. Having taken advantage of their previous positions of power to remain in office, in no meaningful sense did these people's "representatives" truly represent the people.

The Parliament predictably, consistently and bitterly thwarted Yeltsin's attempts at reform. It was evident to most observers that eventually one of the sides in this escalating tension would have to go. And in a culture which for centuries has experienced and come to expect powerful leaders to resolve political problems by resorting to force, President Yeltsin dissolved the Parliament and eventually backed up his order with a military assault which enjoyed popular approval.

During the siege/assault on the "White House" -- an attack staged on the very place where weeks before I had taken my tourist photos of the impressive building -- Yeltsin's parliamentary opponents unfurled a red communist flag. Their "true colors" were now flaunted for all of Russia, not to mention all of the world, to see. Unlike the October Revolution of 1917, however, in the October insurrection of 1993 the communists were full of bluster, but were defeated ignominiously.

Communism is dead in the land where it became the world's first laboratory testing ground for "scientific socialism."

And now it seems that communism's most famous corpse -- the embalmed body of Vladimir Lenin -- is heading for a dishonorable eviction from its marble mausoleum on Red Square. I visited this holy sepulchre of atheism last May, where the waxen corpse of the Bolshevik leader in a dark suit and polka-dot tie lies in a glass sarcophagus and mournful music quietly plays. I was struck with the mood of reverence enforced by the soldiers from the elite Kremlin regiment posted there and displayed by a few true devotees. Here was an eerie shrine for a religion-less religion -- ironically, one which dogmatized that no man could be more important than another. Lenin himself had

denounced the "cult of personality" with contempt during his lifetime. In his death he exemplified it.

When Lenin died in 1924 (the official state death certificate listed "excessive brain activity" as the cause), his body was laid in a wooden building on Red Square, which was replaced in 1930 with the present marble structure, from atop which Stalin and subsequent leaders would review the May Day Parade each year. (Lenin's brain had by then been removed for scientific analysis -- the results of which were never reported publicly.)

But the day following the ouster of the communists at Parliament, President Yeltsin abolished the goose-stepping guards at the Lenin mausoleum -- a prelude to the eviction of the corpse itself. This final, embarrassing, sacred symbol of communism needs to be removed from public life, the reformers in Russia believe. Some night the corpse will be quietly removed and probably interred next to his mother's tomb in St. Petersburg (which has reverted to its original name, defiantly canceling the memory contained in the communist-era name of "Leningrad").

This will complete the public burial of communism in Russia and erase the ugly memorial of its apostle of atheism. The poet Mayakovsky had declared: "Lenin lived, Lenin lives, Lenin will live." Such faith was misbegotten and futile. Lenin is dead and soon will be gone.

Christianity, which Lenin hoped to stamp out, is not tied to the symbol of a corpse, but to the historical reality of an empty tomb. Christians have no corpse on their hands as an embarrassing reminder of failure. Lenin is dead, but Jesus the Christ defeated death, rose from the grave, and lives forevermore as the Lord over all -- indeed, Lord even over Russia. "The same yesterday, and today and forever!" (Hebrews 13:8).