

Norwegian Nobel Institute Lecture Series

Richard Pipes

Communism:
The Vanished Specter



Scandinavian University Press
Oxford University Press

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华东政法大学图书馆



04013608

华东政法学院
图书馆藏书

Scandinavian University Press
Oxford University Press

Scandinavian University Press (Universitetsforlaget AS), 0608 Oslo
Distributed world wide excluding Norway by
Oxford University Press, Walton Street, Oxford OX2 6DP

London New York Toronto
Delhi Bombay Calcutta Madras Karachi
Kuala Lumpur Singapore Hong Kong Tokyo
Nairobi Dar es Salaam Cape Town
Melbourne Auckland Madrid
and associated companies in Berlin Ibadan

Oxford is a trade mark of Oxford University Press

Published in the United States
by Oxford University Press Inc., New York

© Universitetsforlaget 1994

ISBN 82-00-21908-9

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
Data available

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication Data
Data available

Typeset in Times 11/13 by Universitetsforlaget AS
Printed in Norway by Foto-Trykk As, Trøgstad 1994

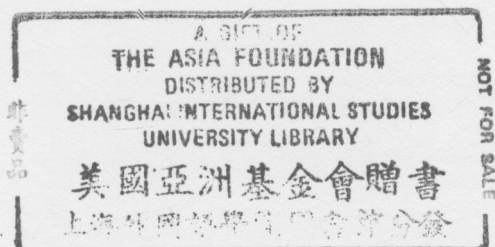
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Shanghai International Studies University Press

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He who abandons what is done for what ought
to be done, will rather learn to bring about his
own ruin ...

Machiavelli

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Introduction

In 1992, the Norwegian Nobel Institute decided to launch the Norwegian Nobel Institute Spring Lectures. The series was intended to be not only the most prestigious but also the most stimulating of the many academic lectures given at the Institute in the course of the year. The Institute invites an internationally prominent scholar to give a series of lectures on a topic which is both academically important and relevant to the Institute's work as secretariat to the Norwegian Nobel Committee, awarders of the Nobel Peace Prize. The invited scholar is to come from the academic fields mentioned in the Statutes of the Norwegian Nobel Committee as one of the seven categories of persons having the right to nominate candidates for the Nobel Peace Prize: "University professors of political science and jurisprudence, history and philosophy."

The first Spring Lectures were given in 1992 by Professor Paul Kennedy of Yale University under the title "*Beyond The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Demography, Technology, and the Future of the World.*" The main arguments presented in the lectures were included in Kennedy's book, *Preparing for the Twenty-First Century*, published in 1993.

The 1993 Spring Lectures were presented on May 4-7 by Professor Richard Pipes, Frank B. Baird Jr. Professor of History at Harvard University, under the title "Communism: The Vanished Specter." Pipes, who served as the Reagan administra-

tion's Soviet expert in 1981–82, is one of the world's leading authorities on Russia. He combines academic excellence of the highest order with political controversy. The first part of the lectures dealing with the rise and fall of communism gives ample evidence of Pipes's qualities as an outstanding historian; the second part on why communism had to fall and particularly the implications of this fall for the Western democracies illustrates the more controversial political nature of his work. This combination fully meets the expectations of the Norwegian Nobel Institute when this lecture series was established. We are, therefore, pleased to present the lectures to the general public.

Geir Lundestad

Director/Professor

I

The triumph and collapse of Russian communism

I would like to begin by expressing my gratitude to the Norwegian Nobel Institute for honoring me with the invitation to deliver two lectures on a subject of my choice. The Institute's main responsibility is to award the annual Peace Prize. Peace, of course, is the antithesis not only of war between nations but also of civil disorder and crime, of oppression, of every form of inhuman behavior. Its study takes as many forms as peace has facets. This the Institute has recognized since the 1960s when it began to award its prize to individuals who have distinguished themselves in the struggle for freedom and human rights. The purpose of my remarks will be to analyze the causes of the rise and fall of communism, an ideology that, based as it is on the concept of class warfare, has led everywhere to violence and the simultaneous suppression of both freedom and rights. In this sense, I will speak about peace in the broadest sense of that word.

All of us present in this room have witnessed a stunning event, the collapse of communism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. It has happened so suddenly and unexpectedly that one sometimes wonders whether a threat that for decades hovered like a dark cloud over the world, was not a phantom. History records many instances of great empires falling apart – the Roman and the Ottoman empires come readily to mind – but their disintegration extended over centuries and, as a rule, resul-

ted from military defeat. The Soviet Empire collapsed in a matter of days and did so without war. Communism, the specter that Marx and Engels had conjured a century and a half ago as haunting Europe, has vanished overnight.

My objective in these lectures is fourfold: to analyze the reasons for the success of communism in its homeland, Russia; to examine the causes of its collapse; to discuss the current situation there and the immediate prospects; and, finally, to draw from these events conclusions relevant to the post-communist world. For, as I hope to demonstrate, the communist regime that came to power in Russia in October 1917 was not a self-generated child of either Western ideology or of the Russian political tradition but the offspring of their union. The Soviet regime's disappearance has eliminated the specifically Russian ingredient but not the ideas that had given rise to it, ideas that remain part and parcel of Western culture.



The causes of the triumph of Communism in Russia in October 1917 are diverse and demand various levels of explanation. Some are cultural; some are political and economic; others yet are accidental. I shall try to disentangle these elements but I wish to make it clear that in stressing factors the combined effect of which was the ascendancy of communism I do not mean to imply that this result was preordained – that Russia was destined to be communist. As with all major historical events, we are dealing with probabilities, not certainties.

In our secular age it may seem strange to begin a sociopolitical analysis with reference to religion, but secularism is a very modern phenomenon: perhaps as recently as a century ago, the lives of nearly all of the world's inhabitants, Russians very much included, were shaped by religious beliefs and rituals. This probably still holds true of the bulk of mankind today. Travelers to Russia as late as the nineteenth century were struck

by the devotion of her people to their faith and the extent to which their daily lives were shaped and circumscribed by religious observances.

The Orthodox religion was of all the branches of Christianity the most intolerant of socialist doctrines, which is why, after they came to power, the Bolsheviks singled it out for persecution. And yet, its hostility notwithstanding, Orthodoxy inadvertently made Russia receptive to communism, and this in two ways.

The Orthodox Establishment believed that its concern was not with this world but exclusively with the salvation of souls for the world to come. It refused to involve itself in the affairs agitating Russian society: it offered a refuge from life's trials rather than leadership in the struggle for the realization of Christian ideals. Such withdrawal abandoned the entire realm of public life to secular groups, most of them hostile to religion and committed to the idea of class conflict. Unlike Western Europe, where the churches actively participated in public life and religious teachings informed public discussions, in Russia these were conducted without reference to religion. This helps explain why, after it had triumphed in Russia, communism faced little resistance from organized religion such as it would later encounter in Eastern Europe, notably Catholic Poland.

Secondly, adherence to the Orthodox faith made for cultural and psychological isolation. After the Turks had conquered the Byzantine Empire in the mid-fifteenth century, Russia remained the only major state professing the Eastern rite. This status did not trouble the Church. On the contrary: attributing the fall of Byzantium to its impious attempt at a union with Rome, it extolled Orthodoxy as the only true faith whose mission it was to convert the world. The result was Russia's estrangement from all her neighbors, except for the scattered Orthodox communities in the Balkans and the Middle East, and a sense of uniqueness that easily turned into messianism. The notion that their country was *sui generis* underpinned in tsarist Russia both conservative (Sla-