

# RRR

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### Lessons of the Three Days in August

by Murray N. Rothbard

The shattering and glorious events of the three-day coup and of the week of August 18-21 are destined to go down in history. At long last, at the end of a century it helped to drench in blood, the fateful and disastrous Bolshevik Revolution has been reversed, unforgettably symbolized by the pulling down of Lenin statues, the waving of the pre-Soviet Russian tricolor, and especially by the tearing down of the mighty statue of "Iron Feliks" Dzerzinski, founder of the malignant Cheka/KGB. Even the Soviet colossus itself, the Soviet "center" and heir to the Czarist Russian Empire, is unraveling and disintegrating before our eyes into its constituent republics and nationalities. The fall of Communism in Eastern Europe was historic and magnificent, but still the heartland of world Communism, the Soviet Union, remained intact, though shaky. But now, with the great Soviet Revolution of 1991, that too is gone. At least one Evil Empire in the world is finished.

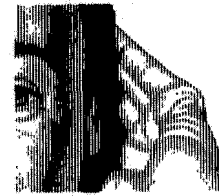
Amidst our well-deserved joy, however, there are some lessons that we must learn and

heed, to take the fullest advantage of the Revolution.

#### 1. Ideas Trump Guns.

Once again, the great lesson of political theory, first enunciated by the mid-16th century French libertarian Etienne de la Boetie, then repeated by David Hume two centuries later and by Ludwig von Mises in the twentieth century, has been gloriously confirmed: In the long run, ideas, not force, rule. Since the government is necessarily a minority ruling class in the population, it cannot win a contest of force with the majority. No matter how despotic or dictatorial, no government can last for long unless supported by the majority of the public. That consent need not be enthusiastic; but it must be there. But how about the guns? Well, we saw what happened during the Three Days of August that Shook the

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### THE EAR

by Sarah Barton

To those few LPers who are hysterically attacking the idea of Ron Paul running for President on the Republican ticket, I have one question: why are you being so all-fired NEGATIVE?

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**In the long run, ideas, not force, rule.**

At the end of 1990, Marshall ("The Boomer") Fritz left his Advocates for Self-Government, after many years of effort, to ride off into the wild blue yonder in pursuit of a new scheme: franchising private schools. Marshall turned over the presidency of the Advocates to Carole Ann

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World. Soldiers may have guns, but will they shoot? And if they do shoot, at whom will their guns be pointing? In the last analysis, the answer is a matter of will, and of the ideas ruling in the hearts and minds of the soldiers.

When the Soviet tanks rolled into Moscow to take over the Russian Parliament Building, they were met by ordinary Muscovites with linked hands, by people's barricades, and by middle-aged women, shouting: "Soldiers! Don't Shoot Your Mothers!" Promptly those soldiers and those tanks defected to guard the Parliament building instead of attacking it; their guns were henceforth pointed outward. And when, on Tuesday night, the KGB ordered its crack anti-terrorist Alpha squad to storm the Parliament Building, the dread KGB all lay down on the floor of their barracks and refused to budge. Again: it was the magnificent and unforgettable image of Boris Yeltsin climbing atop one of those defecting tanks to shout defiance at the Soviet putschists that played a large role in bringing the coup to an end. What is all this but a vibrant demonstration of the governing power of ideas, and, in the last analysis, that ideas trump guns?

One feature that made the coup days of August more powerful than the 1989 revolution is that, in Eastern Europe, much of the revulsion against Communism was intertwined with a revulsion against the imperial Russian occupiers. So that the ideas

that triumphed in 1989 were a blend of freedom and anti-Communism, with a national liberation struggle against Russian imperialism. But now, in Moscow, Leningrad and other parts of Russia, this anti-imperialist element was absent (though of course present in the other republics).

The ruling ideology among the Russian people was purely anti-Communist and anti-statist, in fierce opposition to the Russians' "own" State.

**2. Ideas Trump Cost-Benefit Analysis.** Economists in general, and public-choicers in particular, refuse to acknowledge that ideology, or indeed any ideas, play any role in motivating human action. It is all economic self-interest, they claim, based on narrow cost-benefit calculations. Public choice economists have never been able to figure out, as a result, why any revolution has ever been successful: After all, the benefits of revolution are diffused throughout the nation, whereas the costs, in life and limb as well as resources, are expended by a small minority of revolutionary cadre. So how could any revolutionaries have ever won?

But here, in the Three Days, Yeltsin and his band stood in and around the Parliament Building in Moscow, expecting that the blow would strike at any moment, and that they would be crushed. Why did they stay there? What could they get out of it? Why

weren't they home, snug-abled like the rest of us, watching the Revolution on CNN, or at least listening on BBC? Why indeed? Because they were, each one of them in their own way, genuine heroes, putting their Lives, their Fortunes, and their Sacred Honor on the line for ideas, for the ideas of freedom against despotism. Public choicers are Economic Imperialists; that is, they claim to be able to explain (and predict) all human

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action on the basis of economic cost-benefit considerations. Well, fellas, try to put the actions of the thousands of Muscovites in those few crucial days in your public-choice pipe and try to smoke it, and when you've figured it all out, come back again, but not a moment before.

**3. Ideas Trump Tradition.** We've heard it for many years,

and from all sides: left, right and center. But mostly we heard it from embittered Russian emigres (e.g. Alexander Yanov, in his *Origins of Autocracy*). We heard that the Russian people were hopeless, that they had no tradition of liberty, that they were the sort of people who liked to obey autocratic rule, that the Russian either wanted to wield the whip or submit to it.

And indeed these Russophobes made a plausible case—if one did not believe that all people yearned, down deep, for freedom. Classical liberalism did not loom large in Russian history: there were only the short-lived Decembrist rebels who were crushed in the 1820s, and the brief era of the Stolypin reforms after 1905. Not much tradition to build on. And Yanov insisted that the Russian people set themselves on an irreversibly hellish path when Czar Ivan the Terrible massacred nascent capitalists and merchants, and re-enslaved the Russian peasantry in the mid-16th century. Lenin and Stalin, wrote Yanov, were simply heirs of Ivan the Terrible: they *were* Russia.

Well, in the three days of August, the Muscovites, in effect, said Boo! to Ivan the Terrible, to Yanov, and to all the rest of the bogeymen they had been saddled with. The Russian people struck a mighty blow for the power of ideas, surmounting even tradition, and, of course, for the concrete living power of the idea of liberty.

**4. High-Tech Means Freedom.** Many conservatives and other opponents of despotism have worried about the march of modern technology. Doesn't high-tech ineluctably mean despotism? Won't the central government plan each of our lives to the hilt using high-speed computers, television, etc.? Look at how high-tech permitted a monstrous totalitarianism in 1984! Again, the concern was plausible. But Orwell and the other worriers about high-tech tyranny were wrong. For two basic reasons. First, because socialism can't work well enough to allow high-tech to function. Remarkably, in an era when socialists in the West were writing that socialist governments could plan easily by using computers, the socialist planners themselves found that it was impossible, and that they couldn't even afford to buy or build these computers to find out. And secondly, the nature of much modern technology makes for decentralization and for wide dissemination of information—precisely what despotism can't allow. Even if people could afford it, how could a communist government permit people to own their own copy machines, much less personal computers or fax machines? And we saw that one of the reasons the masses won out over the coup was the remarkably rapid spread of information among the resisters and among the people in general, in the Soviet Union and throughout the world: the

whole world watched on CNN, radio and fax machines were spreading information like wildfire, there was no way the putschists could bring back the bad old days of Stalin.

And now if we could only figure out how to avoid the media becoming stooges of Pentagon misinformation, as they did in the Gulf War!

**5. Not "Democracy," but Freedom and National Independence.** The Soviet reformers know what they're against: Communism, collectivism, and Russian imperialism. But what are they for? No one can expect them to spell it out immediately; this was a spontaneous uprising from below, a genuine "people's revolution," and no one sat down in a room to plan the program. So right now the reformers are groping toward a post-socialist, post-Soviet world. The reformers *call* what they want "democracy"; it's all over the place: "Democratic Party," "Democratic Movement," etc. But one has the feeling that they don't know what "democracy" is supposed to mean, that they have taken the word as a slogan from its ubiquitous presence in the Western media.

Hey: but if "democracy" means anything, surely it means elections. Soon after the failure of the coup, all over Western TV came a certain Professor Allen Weinstein, head of something called the Center for Democracy in Washington, who is clearly spending his time jetting back and forth between Washing-

ton and the various capitals of the Soviet republics, apparently running the show everywhere, including Washington. But what I want to know is: for all his prattle about "democracy," who ever elected Weinstein to anything, in any country? So how come he's in the saddle?

In the days before the neo-con takeover, everyone on the Right, including libertarians, was very clear about democracy. Democracy meant elections, it meant a process, and it had little or nothing to do with the *results*

of that process. Other things being equal, it's better to have elections than a self-perpetuating oligarchy in power. But what do you do if *elections* perpetuate the oligarchy, as is increasingly happening in the U.S.? (How many decades will it take for us to have a Republican Congress *and* a Democratic President?) And wouldn't it be better to have term-limitations everywhere, in all branches of government, and thereby impose severe limits on those democratic elections? Just as we do when we observe the Bill of Rights?

But now the neo-cons have stuck us with "democracy" as a package deal, including all sorts of incongruous and even contradictory notions, including majority rule, rights of mi-

norities, an "efficient" welfare state, the U.S. as world policeman and democracy-imposer, and amidst it all, various unelected Centers and Foundations and Institutes for Democracy giving all the direc-

But that's not what the Soviet people want. What they want, despite the confusion and rapid change, should be fairly clear for those who are willing to see. First, they want freedom: freedom to speak, freedom to publish and read, freedom to wor-

ship, freedom of the media, freedom of protest and assembly. And yes, they want free markets and private property. And of course they want a vast rollback of government power: of the Communist Party, the KGB, and all the other organs of despotism. And finally and not least important, they want national independence, freedom from Russian or Soviet imperialism, for the various nationalities: for Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Byelorussia, Uzbekistan, and all the rest. And the Moldavian Republic, now renamed Moldova, wants—after Romania has decommunized itself sufficiently—to rejoin its fellow Romanians, for it was yanked from Romania by Stalin after World War II.

The Bush Administration, of course, has been notoriously behind the learning curve on national independence for the republics. First, shortly before the coup, George Bush traveled to Ukraine to make his infamous and false attack on Ukrainian nationalism as suffering from ethnic bigotry. It is certainly possible that this blatant support for Soviet imperialism encouraged the "coup plotters" to make their strike, expecting the Bush Administration to look the other way. And, as we know, Bush dragged his heels on recognizing the independence of the heroic Baltic states. In every case, he eventually came around, but dragging his feet, impelled by the force of history and by the tremendous momentum for freedom and national self-determination. And even by the end, when it looked as if—gloriously—the entire Soviet Union might dissolve, Bush rushed in to help Gorbys, and even Yeltsin, save the "center." For it seems that superpower leaders such as Bush can't stand the idea of facing, and dealing with, a whole bunch of new republics. My God, who is George supposed to call up when he wants to shmooze? Boris Yeltsin, too, was only welcomed late and very grudgingly. Bush seems to be permanently bewildered that his good buddy Gorbys has a far lower popularity rating in the Soviet Union than he does in Washington, D.C.

Of course, the independent or quasi-independent nationalities are going to have

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problems among themselves, but the point is, and this is a particularly difficult lesson for buttinski Americans to learn: *They've got to sort it out themselves.* The Georgians want independence. Great! But their president, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, has replaced Communism with his own family-despotism and Gamsakhurdian Socialism? Terrible, but we have got to let the Georgians handle it themselves. The worst thing is for the United States, or the World, or the United States in the name of the World, to rush to decide in every dispute who the Good Guys are, and the Bad Guys, and then zap the Baddies. Let them work it out!

Within Georgia itself, for example, there are other grave systemic problems, aside from their present ruler. The Abkhazians, in northwest Georgia, have been oppressed by the Georgians, whom they hate, for generations. Shouldn't they be able to gain their independence? And how about the heroic South Ossetians, an enclave oppressed inside Georgia, who want nothing more than to join their brethren in North Ossetia? Good; I'm all for them. I yearn for the Abkhazians and the Southern Ossetians to achieve justice, throw off the Georgian yoke and breathe free. If I had the opportunity, I might even send people-to-people aid to the oppressed Abkhazians and Southern Ossetians, and if I were younger and more foolish, I might even join a South Ossetian International Brigade.

But let the governments of the U.S. and the world leave them be!

The correct path in inter-ethnic, inter-republic dispute was blazed recently by the ditherers of the European Community. When faced with the vicious aggression against the Croats by the rotten imperialist Serb-dominated Yugoslav army, what did the distinguished European gentlemen do? Riven by different views and factions and nations, they all expressed their sympathy and moral solidarity with the beleaguered and heroic Croats, and did ... nothing! Good. Third-party governments staying out sets a superb precedent, itself trumping, and one hopes quietly putting an end to, Bush's New World Order. For after all, the EC is supposed to be the European subset of the New World Order, and given their first case to use their might and fix the peace, decide border disputes and generally crack heads, they wisely if not very nobly decided to opt out. Let's hope that the New World Order follows the same path.

One hopes, of course, that all these nationalities will sort it out, and come to the same solution that the Baltic states did with their sizable Russian ethnic minorities: no voting

rights, but guaranteed human and property rights from the majority ethnic nationalities. But if they don't reach such a solution, the best thing the rest of us can do is follow that excellent injunction: "Don't Just Do Something! Stand There!" In other words, *laissez-faire*.

It would be wonderful if we could resurrect the spirit, and the foreign policy, of the great "isolationist" and paleo-libertarian Canon Sydney Smith. In 1832, Smith wrote

the following letter to Lady Grey, wife of the English Prime Minister—a timeless letter even more relevant now:

"For God's sake, do not drag me into another war! I am worn down, and worn out, with crusading and defending Europe, and

protecting mankind: I *must* think a little of myself. I am sorry for the Spaniards—I am sorry for the Greeks—I deplore the fate of the Jews; the people of the Sandwich Islands are groaning under the most detestable tyranny; Bagdad is oppressed; I do not like the present state of the Delta; Thibet is not comfortable. Am I to fight for all these people? The world is bursting with sin and sorrow. Am I to be the champion of the Decalogue, and to be eternally raising fleets and armies to make all

**The correct path in inter-ethnic, inter-republic disputes was blazed recently by the European Community.**

men good and happy? We have just done saving Europe, and I am afraid the consequence will be, that we shall cut each other's throats. No war, dear Lady Grey!—No eloquence; but apathy, selfishness, common sense, arithmetic! I beseech you, secure Lord Grey's swords and pistols, as the house-keeper did Don Quixote's armour. If there is another war, life will not be worth having.

'May the vengeance of Heaven' overtake all the Legitimates of Verona! But, in the present state of rent and taxes, they must be left to the vengeance of Heaven. I allow fighting in such a cause to be a luxury; but the business of a prudent, sensible man, is to guard against luxury."

**Epilogue:**

And so, miraculously, freedom, dissolution of the Imperial State, devolution into many constituent parts, is coming rapidly to the formerly enslaved peoples of the Soviet Union. And what of America? Here statism, centralization, and collectivist power are intensifying with almost comparable speed. Back in the New Left era they had a slogan, *in re Vietnam*: "Bring the War Home." How about another slogan for the new post-Soviet

era: Bring the Revolution Home? ●

**Cry for Christian Science!**

by M. N. R.

Poor Christian Science! In all too many churches, it seems, modernism and Mammon have triumphed over the faith, and CS is no exception. In recent decades, Outreach has tended to obscure the religious message, but at least that outreach was concentrated in a truly distinguished newspaper, the *Christian Science Monitor*. A few years ago, the modernist wing, in charge of the church, decided to pour a lot of money

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into a "mass communication" effort on radio and TV, a communications message far softer on religious content. A particularly expensive money-sink is the new 24-hour cable channel, the Monitor Channel; all in all, this media effort is costing the Church an estimated \$80 million this year.

Into this situation stepped the Knapp estate, the last of whose surviving three members died in 1972. The will left the Church over \$90 million,

provided that by 1993 the Church would publish as "authorized" a 1947, privately published book by the late Bliss Knapp, and display the book prominently in "substantially all" of the 2,500 reading rooms that the Church maintains throughout the world.

So why not publish the Knapp book, *Destiny of the Mother Church*? Because Knapp maintains what to the "traditionalist" wing of the Christian Science Church is arrant heresy: that Mary Baker Eddy, the founder of CS in 1879, was divine, a contention which Mrs. Eddy herself always had discouraged.

In August, the five-man board of directors of the "Mother Church," The First Church of Christ Scientist, Boston, effectively the ruler of the world-wide church, announced its decision: to publish the Knapp volume and collect the 90-odd mil. The traditionalists are understandably outraged, charging the church with selling out basic principle for money to keep the losing media empire going another year or so. Chairman of the Board of the Mother Church, modernist leader Harvey W. Wood, dismissed the charges as being spread by "disgruntled former employees" [why in the world should they be "disgruntled?"]. Does this mean that the modernists really believe that Mary Baker Eddy was divine, and if so, what kind of "modernists" are these? Oh, heavens no: to quote the *New York Times*