

Are We In Need of Perestroika Too?

“Where have all the leaders gone?” It is certainly a common question these days. Around the world, popular discontent with heads of state has resulted in almost unprecedentedly low approval ratings: François Mitterand 46%, Bill Clinton and Helmut Kohl 38%, Kim Campbell 32% (Brian Mulroney 13% before he stepped down), John Major 19%, Kiichi Miyazawa 9%, to name just a few. Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao has been called by local critics “the Prime Muddler of India.”

Common sentiment says that we are living through a difficult time of transition, one which cries out for enlightened leadership and tough decision making. The litany of problems is immense: deficits, poverty, crime and violence, dysfunctional educational systems, dilemmas with health care, ethnic strife, unemployment (above 10% in many Western European countries), bureaucratic stalemates, and internecine war in Bosnia and Somalia. Yet, none of the chosen leaders seem to be able to fill the shoes of their role. They are criticized for lack of defining vision and for emphasizing political over concrete gains.

On top of this, what the public finds most disheartening is that the opposition provides no viable alternative. They appear cut from the same faulty leadership cloth as the people in power and, often, they voice almost indistinguishable platforms. Each side offers a warmed-over brand of the same unsuccessful politics and the electorate is left wanting come election time.

But, are approval ratings alone enough to demonstrate a crisis of leadership? Such ratings are public impressions, not necessarily leadership reality. Many political pundits now point to an electorate that maintains inordinately high standards for its elected officials and an unreasonable desire to have their cake and eat it too. Rather than leaders, the public is looking for miracle workers to produce overnight successes.

However, at some point in the midst of this leadership crisis—whether real or simply in the public’s collective mind—the question must be asked: Are the failings of the individual leaders really the problem or is there something wrong with the structure of the system itself? After ‘fighting’ the so-called cold war, the Western world has finally been forced to come to terms with the condition of its own house. Since the Second World War, the development of democracy and capitalism were measured not against absolute conceptions of how society should be, but rather in terms relative to the path of communism. For forty-some years the West could be happy that they were outstripping their competition in all the areas that they deemed most important. Now, with the competition gone, the Western world is facing the fact that all is not how they would like it—that post-WWII democracy and capitalism has left a legacy of seemingly unsolvable dilemmas.

In the modern political process, the skills that bring an individual to office are not always the ones that serve the

nation best once in office. Moreover, the combination of democracy and capitalism hold inherent obstacles that no leader can ever fully eradicate: obstructionism, localism, apathy, deficits, disproportionate wealth distribution, the inability to account for race, and periodic recessions. Consensus decision making strings out the time it will take to be put an act in place. Leaders must answer to their specific constituencies or interest groups before answering to the society as a whole. Is the contemporary Western system of government, regardless of leadership, up to the challenge of the problems that it now faces? Or are we too in need of perestroika—a restructuring and rethinking—of how our system functions?



Congratulations on producing an insightful and relevant publication that will undoubtedly inspire intelligent thought and dialogue.

We wish to take this opportunity to commend the magazine for the accuracy of information in the article *Unity in Diversity* which profiled the Baha’i Faith.

Brit-Karina Regan, Assistant Director
Baha’i Community of Canada, Thornhill, Ont.

This is quite an undertaking and judging by the first number, it appears that you will deliver.

Allow me however to question a few statements: The origin of the word Slavonic. It certainly does not come from a swamp in Poland called Slave. More likely from the word *Slowo* meaning ‘word’ or *Slawa* meaning ‘glory.’ Macedonia certainly does not come from the bishop Macedonius (300 AD.). The reverse is probably true. The grandfather of Alexander the Great was King Philip of Macedonia in 300 BC. The bishop was probably from Macedonia and was thus called Macedonius. You also make a definite statement that Michailovic’s Chetniks often collaborated with Germans. This fable was, I believe, a useful excuse for an abhorrent abandoning of the allies by Churchill, a small bit of treachery politically motivated to please “Uncle Joe.” Others would follow in Yalta.

K.J.M. Godlewski, Barry’s Bay, Ont.

[And a personal letter to one of our writers:]

Congratulations on your new magazine. I like it. I am pleased to see that you write as well as your father, which is almost as good as I.

Sidney Wallach, Buffalo, NY