

New Democracies Need Ideas More Than Money

By J. Brian Phillips

As the nations of Eastern Europe move toward democratic governments and increased freedom, President Bush and Congress have increasingly argued for the necessity of American aid to these nations. If the democratic movements in these countries fail, the argument goes, we will witness a return to the communist dictatorships of the past. Material aid, the argument implies, will assure the triumph of freedom.

This argument brings to mind an old adage: If you want to feed a man for a day, give him a fish; if you want to feed him for a lifetime, teach him to fish. While these fledgling democracies are certainly in need of food and other material goods, their "lifetime" hunger is ideological.

Financial aid to Eastern Europe will assure neither its "lifetime" freedom nor its "lifetime" prosperity. It is not sufficient for East Europeans to reject communism and embrace democracy. Democracy may lead to individual freedom, but only if the voters have the proper ideology. Without that, the voters can easily be persuaded to vote for yet another form of tyranny. Let us not forget, the German electorate voted Adolph Hitler into power.

Throughout history, East Europeans have embraced individual subservience to one collective or another: the tribe, the Church, the Kingdom, the State, the Fatherland, etc. Under collectivism, the lives of some men are sacrificed for the benefit of others. It occurred in the theocracies of the Dark Ages and the feudal kingdoms of the Middle Ages. It still occurs today in every modern variant of collectivism—communism, socialism, fascism, nationalism and welfare statism. (Note the current popularity of nationalist movements in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. The freedom they seek is not for individuals, but for their fatherland.)

If the nations of Eastern Europe are to successfully make the transition from communist dictatorship to freedom and prosperity, they must do more than merely reject communism and embrace democracy. They

must reject the moral justification for tyranny: collectivism. They must embrace its antithesis: *individualism*.

Without individualist values, East Europeans can be persuaded to vote for another form of collectivist tyranny.

Individualism holds that each individual is a sovereign being, that each individual has a moral right to pursue his own values without intervention from others. Individualism is the moral premise which underlies America's freedom and prosperity.

America's Founding Fathers, influenced by the writings of Aristotle and Enlightenment thinkers like John Locke, rejected collectivism. They led a revolution of ideas; those ideas were expressed in the Declaration of Independence. "We hold these truths to be self-evident," wrote Thomas Jefferson, "that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

These rights—rights possessed by each individual—had never before been recognized and protected in a social system. The result was the freest nation in the history of mankind.

That freedom transformed a poor agrarian nation into the world's pre-eminent economic power. Individual freedom permitted scientists to make new discoveries about nature; it permitted industrialists and entrepreneurs to apply that knowledge and create new and better products. The result of individual freedom was material prosperity and a higher standard of living for all Americans. However, the justification for freedom is not its economic superiority. Freedom is an objective requirement of human nature.

Everything we need to survive and prosper ultimately rests on the thinking of individuals. From the food we eat to the cars we drive, from the clothes we wear to the televisions we watch, the material prosperity we enjoy has been made possible by man's most distinctive attribute: his reasoning mind.

But ideas are worthless without the freedom to act on them. As the author/philosopher Ayn Rand wrote, "Freedom is the fundamental requirement of man's mind." Freedom permits individuals to put their ideas into action.

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Those advocating material aid to Eastern Europe to assure freedom are attempting to reverse cause and effect. Material prosperity is the result, not the cause, of individual freedom. Prosperity flows from a system of government that recognizes *individual* rights, not the rights of the state or "the people." But East Europeans will only choose such a government if they grasp the moral superiority of individualism.

The nations of Eastern Europe lack neither the skilled manpower nor the natural resources to be prosperous. But they are starving for the ideas that will make their future freedom and prosperity possible: individualism as their moral premise and individual rights as its political manifestation.

If President Bush and Congress want to feed Eastern Europe and make it free "for a lifetime," then the aid that they should be sending is the individualist ideology that will make it possible.

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