

The demon in liberalism



Illustration on the Liberal tendency towards totalitarianism by Alexander Hunter/The Washington Times [more >](#)

By Daniel Pipes - - Sunday, July 14, 2019, ANALYSIS/OPINION:

“Why has [Sweden](#) become the North Korea of Europe?” That’s what a Dane semi-facetiously asked Swedish cartoonist Lars Vilks at a conference I attended in 2014. Mr. Vilks unconvincingly muttered about Swedes’ partiality for consensus.

Now, along comes [Ryszard Legutko](#), a Polish professor of philosophy and leading politician, with a better answer. His book, translated by Teresa Adelson, “The Demon in Democracy: Totalitarian Temptations in Free Societies” (Encounter), methodically shows the surprising but substantial similarities between Soviet-style communism and modern liberalism as defined by [Sweden](#) or the European Union or Barack Obama.

(But before exploring his argument, one clarification: [Mr. Legutko](#) discusses liberal democracy, a term I find too complex. So, I use liberalism here.)

[Mr. Legutko](#) does not claim liberalism resembles communism in its monstrosity, much less that the two ideologies are identical; he fully acknowledges that the first is democratic and the second brutally tyrannical. After recognizing this contrast, however, he gets down to the more pungent topic of what the two have in common. He first perceived those commonalities in the 1970s when visiting the West, where he saw how its liberals preferred communists to anti-communists; later, with the overthrow of the Soviet bloc, he watched liberals warmly welcome communists, but not their anti-communist opponents. Why so?

Because, he argues, liberalism shares with communism a powerful faith in rational minds finding solutions which translates into a drive to improve the citizen, modernize him and mold him into a superior being. Accordingly, both ideologies politicize, and thereby debase, every aspect of life, including sexuality, the family, religion, sports, entertainment and the arts. (Here's a mischievous but deadly serious question: Which is the more awful art, the communist or the liberal, Stalin's or the Venice Biennale's?)

Both engage in social engineering to create a society whose members are "indistinguishable, in words, thoughts, and deeds" from one another, aiming for a largely interchangeable population with no dissidents making trouble. Each sublimely assumes its specific vision constitutes the greatest hope for mankind and represents the end of history, the final stage of mankind's evolution.

Trouble is, such grand schemes for improving mankind inevitably lead to severe disappointment; human beings, it turns out, are far more stubborn and less malleable than dreamers would like. When things go badly (say, food production for communists, unfettered immigration for liberals), two nasty consequences follow. First, the ideologues retreat into fantasy which they fervently try to impose on unwilling subjects. Communists make colossal efforts to convince their vassals that they prosper far more than those wretches living in capitalist countries; liberals turn two genders into 71 or make immigrant crimes disappear. When things go seriously wrong with their projects, both respond not by rethinking their premises but illogically, by demanding the application of ever-more pure communism or liberalism. They rely heavily on conspiracy theories: Communists blame capitalists and liberals blame corporations — for example, to explain away San Francisco's having America's most property crimes or why "Seattle is Dying" from an epidemic of vagrancy. Second, when dissidents inevitably appear, communists and liberals alike do what's necessary to repress their opinions. Put differently, both are prepared to coerce their benighted populations "into freedom," as [Mr. Legutko](#) puts it. This means, of course, controlling and even suppressing free speech. In the communist case, government censorship offices exclude anything negative about socialism, with doleful consequences for anyone who persists.

In the liberal case, Internet providers, social media giants, schools, banks, ride-share services, hotels and cruise lines do the dirty work of de-platforming critics who

engage in what's called hate speech, which might mean outrageously asserting that there are only two genders. Of course, Islam is a treacherous topic: One can get fined for wondering if the prophet Muhammad was a pedophile or go to jail for a cartoon. The result? In Germany, a mere 19 percent of citizens feel they can speak their minds freely in a public setting.

[Mr. Legutko](#) does not offer a plan for conservatives, but his analysis implies they should build on his argument by pointing out liberalism's repressive elements, celebrate the beautiful freedom of conservatism and organize for the massive enterprise of bringing countries like [Sweden](#) back from the abyss. If the Soviet Union, which killed 62 million of its own people and threatened all humanity with its ICBMs, could be induced to implode, surely the strongholds of liberalism can be unshackled, with [Mr. Legutko](#) providing insight and inspiration.

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