



Freedom's Bounty

CARL A. KEYSER

A VARIETY OF REASONS have been given to explain the good life we Americans enjoy. One claims that it came about when steam power liberated factories from river valley sites and streams that were the source of energy. Another said it resulted when interchangeable parts led to mass production and the ultimate in division of labor. Still another credits improved metals technology, particularly the means to produce steel in large batches, steel from which rails and bridges and engines were made to bind East and West and open the granaries of the heartland. It has often been said that

our bounty is simply the result of a fortuitous marriage of resources to a congenial climate, this in spite of the fact that natives exposed to the same graces of nature for centuries barely managed to exist.

Of course, weight must be given to these explanations, and to others not mentioned, for our good fortune. They are, it is true, pieces of a puzzle which, fitted together, give us a picture that is incomplete. The missing piece can be found hiding in the 19th century history of Russia and the United States.

In the early eighteen hundreds the United States and Russia were both agricultural countries, the one young and sparsely settled with people who sought to escape European autocracy and the other

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slightly, but only slightly, more densely populated, an old country with a tradition of centralized power and despotism. Both countries were almost incalculably rich in resources and were blessed with temperate climates. Both countries were open to the influence of newly developed steam power, both were exposed to the effects of the industrial revolution, and both had access to the development of technology and advances in scientific knowledge.

Serfs and Slaves

At the midpoint of the century America was, excepting for its slaves, a free country. There were 3,000,000 slaves out of a total population of 32,000,000 when Lincoln issued the emancipation proclamation in 1863. At nearly the same time, in 1861, Czar Alexander freed 15,000,000 serfs out of an estimated total population of 75,000,000.

There were, to be sure, distinctions between serf and slave: slaves were considered personal property whereas serfs were required to perform services for a master who did not own the serf and whose power over the serf was limited. Serfs could escape their bondage if they could pay off their indebtedness to their masters, but since this was almost impossible serfs could be considered

for all practical purposes to be the equivalent of slaves. The proportion, then, of nonfree men to free men in the population was about 10 per cent in the United States and about 20 per cent in Russia at the time of emancipation. Until freedom was granted there were proportionately twice as many people in bondage in Russia as in the United States.

Slaves produce only what the threat of punishment forces them to produce since little or no additional rewards accrue for producing more. Free men, who stand to profit from their own ingenuity and effort, will attempt to produce more and more, to their own and the benefit of others, as long as their rewards increase. This will lead them to apply newly discovered knowledge, make new machines to increase production, accumulate capital, trade, barter, and sell. It seems likely, then, that the higher proportion of slaves in Russia helps to explain the growing gap in the well-being of Americans and Russians as the 19th century progressed. But this is also an incomplete explanation. What about the free men, that is, those who were neither bonded in Russia nor enslaved in America? What was their status and influence on development?

Probably the landowners came closest to being free men in

19th century Russia. Until 1803 they lacked even the freedom to free their own serfs, not that there was a strong inclination to do so. In 1803 Czar Alexander I granted noblemen permission to liberate their serfs, but only 47,000 were freed. In 1810 all legislative initiative rested with a Council of State presided over by the Czar. Elected assemblies in the cantons, districts, provinces, and states existed which could pass motions but not laws. Courts operated in secrecy and were susceptible to bribery. Rule of the land was by an officious bureaucracy whose arbitrary decisions stifled life. Higher education was permitted only for children of noblemen and officials. Censorship of the press and speech was very strict.

Local Government Reforms

Under Nicholas I, the same autocratic, arbitrary rule continued. Alexander II, the son of Nicholas I, was an absolute monarch who, responding to revolutionary threats, freed the serfs without payment to the landlords. In addition, serfs were granted allotments of land for which they paid a fixed rent to their landlords, with an option to buy, financed by government bonds. After the freeing of the serfs, local government was reformed by establishment of new provincial councils. Forty-eight

per cent of the seats were assigned to landowners, forty per cent to peasants, and the balance to town residents. Not until 1864 was trial by jury and an independent judiciary established. The reign of Alexander II was an era of reform and progress in spite of the fact that the country remained an absolute monarchy, essentially without freedom of press, speech, and even thought, and with no guarantee of person and property from the whim of the autocrat.

By 1889, under Alexander III who had come to power in 1881, much of the progress made under Alexander II was erased. The provincial councils were placed under civil service and became subservient to the provincial governors. The representation of landowners was raised from 48 to 57 per cent in the councils while peasant seats dropped from 40 to 30 per cent. The press was ruthlessly controlled and silenced and taxes increased by 29 per cent in the ten years from 1883 to 1892.

Two Kinds of Growth

Expansion of Russia eastward into Siberia was by Cossacks whose interests were military rather than productive, by political and criminal prisoners exiled to virgin land as laborers, by religious dissenters, and by fugitives escaping conscription in the

Czar's armies. Between 1823 and 1898, 700,000 exiles and 216,000 voluntary emigrants settled in Siberia, a region which had enormous wealth in timber, furs, and minerals. On the other hand, expansion of the United States westward was by natives seeking the opportunities of undeveloped land and by immigrants who chose freely and voluntarily to come to the new country to escape the stratified and stagnant society of the old.

From the beginning of the 19th century to the beginning of the 20th century Russian progress was minimal while the United States became the best-fed, best-clothed, and best-housed nation in the world. Today a wider than ever Russo-American gap remains, both in material well-being and personal freedom. This is no chancy coincidence. As long as the Ameri-

can free market exists where ideas, goods and services can be exchanged voluntarily, freely, and honestly, and where the primary function of government is to guarantee such a market place, the gap is not likely to disappear.

A friend of freedom recently summed up the situation this way:

It is well to remember, however, that serfdom is not necessarily the perpetual condition of the people of Russia. Nor can Americans comfortably assume that their government will limit its activities to the policing of the market and the preservation of freedom. A government that manipulates money and credit, that regulates and controls wages and prices and rents and profits, that owns or closely supervises numerous business activities, and that offers welfare programs from cradle to grave, is a government that threatens to tax the citizenry into serfdom. ☉

Why Man Must Be Free

IF MAN is to continue his self-improvement, he must be free to exercise the powers of choice with which he has been endowed. When discrimination is not allowed according to one's wisdom and conscience, both discrimination and conscience will atrophy in the same manner as an unused muscle. Since man was given these faculties, it necessarily follows that he should use them and be personally responsible for the consequences of his choices. He must be free to either enjoy or endure the consequences of each decision, because the lesson it teaches is the sole purpose of experience — the best of all teachers.

IDEAS ON



LIBERTY

F. A. HARPER
Liberty: A Path to Its Recovery

The ENIGMA

RALPH BRADFORD

OUR COUNTRY is experiencing a self-imposed malaise of massive proportions and suicidal import — a condition that is at once insidious and hard to define or explain. To state it simply and starkly, *the Americans are doing their utmost to destroy America!*

Intentionally? Deliberately? Of course not — except in the case of a relatively few dedicated revolutionaries. For the most part, the destroyers are people of good intention, who would be horrified at the assertion of their guilt.

“Who — me? Why I love my country! I’m only trying to save it from . . .” And then will follow the name or purpose of the organizations, interests or persons who have a different social, economic or political philosophy from that of the outraged speaker.

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Unhesitatingly, he attributes evil purpose to all who dissent from his viewpoint; and millions of other zealots like him are equally busy castigating the opponents of *their* particular philosophies or prejudices. As a result, the composite picture of America that emerges to the world is that of a dishonest, hypocritical, wicked, and no-longer-to-be-respected giant. And the picture is being painted, not by the Russians, Serbs, Chinese or Albanians — but by the Americans!

Nobody would contend, I suppose, that this country has ever been free, or should be, from a certain amount of critical introspection. This is part of the process of self-government. The competition of political parties assures a lively and continuing assessment of our customs, practices, laws, principles and institutions — an accepted procedure, understood by