

OUTLOOK

The startling fall of Stalinism: what next?

Not since the defeat of Hitler has the world seen such good news in its papers as the disintegration of the Stalinist regimes in Eastern Europe. Every day brings news of fresh advances towards freedom, democracy and religious liberty in most of the Soviet satellites. It is news which we have waited and prayed for for decades, and it has happened so suddenly that it was completely unpredicted. Hopefully, in time we might witness the further de-Stalinisation of Vietnam, Cuba, Albania and Rumania.

The implications of this de-Stalinisation are vast though uncertain at the moment. The first is of course the ending of the Cold War and the systems of alliances and arms races which divided East and West. On the positive side this allows the real possibility of continued drastic arms cuts, and for the savings to channelled into productive economic development. This will help minimise the risks of war between the superpowers, and lessen or eliminate the fighting of proxy wars by the superpowers in the Third World.

On the negative side, the dismantling of the Cold War alliances could lead to a break-down in the discipline imposed by the superpowers on their allies and clients, even in the Third World, and result in the outbreak of regional conflicts. With the rise of new military powers such as India and Brazil, not to mention countries as diverse as Libya, Israel and South Africa, it is difficult to be sure about what is likely to happen.

The West should be under no illusion that the disintegration of Stalinism means an end to more benign forms of Marxism. For the foreseeable future, it is likely that Russia and at least some of the communist countries will find ideological legitimacy in other forms of Marxism, more or less purged of Leninism. Thus the debate between Marxist and capitalist ideologies and systems is moving into a more positive and more demanding phase. It was easy to reject the inhumanity and authoritarianism of the older features of Stalinism. A reformed Marxism will prove more attractive,

and force westerners to think much more carefully about questions of distribution of wealth and forms of political power.

The changes in Eastern Europe also show the social thinking of Pope John Paul II in a new light, for he has been developing a new dialogue between some elements of Marxism and western thinking, critiquing both West and East, and urging a refocussing of world attention on the problems of North versus South, the rich world and the poor.

Undoubtedly he is correct in this perception; the East-West conflict tended to obscure the North-South polarity. Maybe it even suited elements in both capitalist and communist regimes to divide the world between them and use the threat of the other to discipline their zones of influence. With the collapse of the Cold War, the demands of the Third World for a greater share in economic resources are likely to become very insistent.

It is then, a moment of great opportunity, to be grasped with energy, courage and diligence. If a new Marshall Plan is possible for Eastern Europe, why cannot more be done for other parts of the world too? The resources released from the arms race open up the possibility of a vast reshaping of economic prospects and development. But the moment could be lost if the West remained locked into a selfishly consumerist life-style or exploited the economies of the Third World.

The opportunity could also be lost if powerful ideological influences in the West remain transfixed in a blinkered anti-communism which is unable or refuses to adjust to the new world situation.

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And a happy new financial year to you too

In wishing our readers the usual "shalom" for this season, we would like to ask: Have you noticed that the annual subscription rate has not been raised for two years? While tight financial management has helped us to achieve that feat, another factor has been a rise in donations. So heart-felt thanks to all donors for your contributions.

You will be receiving one more issue in our Volume 10 early in the new year, after which, look out for a brighter, better *Outlook* in 1990!