
The One Hundredth Anniversary of the Russian Revolution

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ROBERT M. WHAPLES

Growing up in suburban Washington, D.C., I learned that my neighbors and I were living with a target on our backs—that the nation’s capital was the bull’s-eye for enough Soviet missiles to end everything in an instant. I had the sense that the Iron Curtain was permanent and that once a nation was wrapped in the tentacles of communism, escape was virtually out of the question. Like so many others, I was floored by the swift collapse of communism in the Soviet bloc in the late 1980s and early 1990s (and equally surprised by China’s rapid turn toward markets). Now communism lurks and lingers in only a few odd places.

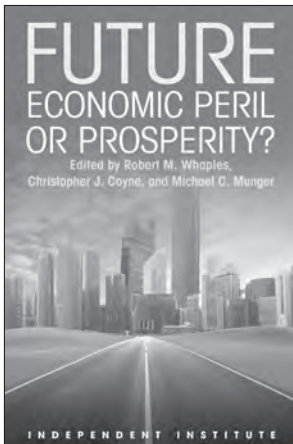
The fall of 2017 marks the one hundredth anniversary of the event that put the Communists in power—the October Revolution of the Bolsheviks in Russia. This event shaped the twentieth century like few others. Mercifully, the Soviet Union has come and gone. Why did the Bolsheviks gain control of Russia? How did communism affect Russia’s long-run economic development? How did it affect the Russian people? How did it affect the rest of the world? What, ultimately, are the legacies and lessons of this revolution a century later? Before the grass grows too thick over the graves of communism and its victims, these questions and others deserve to be answered. Thankfully, the authors in this symposium provide very illuminating responses.

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My own sense is that the chief lesson of the Russian Revolution and its aftermath isn't a lesson at all—because it is something almost everyone already knew: that devastation and misery will ensue whenever power is seized by amoral leaders who see people not as precious and capable of self-rule but as a collective of soulless pawns worthy only of sacrifice to the will of their masters and their masters' warped worldviews.

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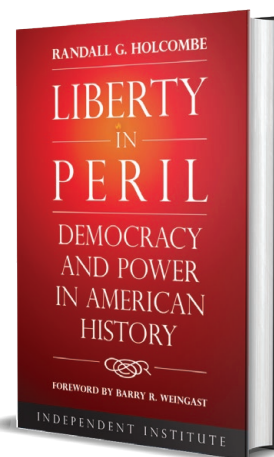
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