

St Stephen's News

ST STEPHEN'S ANGLICAN CHURCH · TIMONIUM, MARYLAND

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FROM THE RECTOR

Socialism is not entirely without its tiny triumphs

A friend – a trusting soul who tries to see the best in everybody – gently chided me last Sunday for being unwarrantably critical of socialism in general and the Soviet Union in particular.

“Can’t you think of anything good so say about the Soviet Union?” he asks, “Surely you have to admit socialism has had some successes.”

He’s right, of course. The Soviets notched some notable successes – but not quite the sort he was thinking about. The Soviet disinformation assault on the United States, for instance, was remarkably successful and is still paying dividends.

Indeed, more than a quarter of a century after the USSR’s collapse, you’d be surprised how many people in the Middle East, Africa and elsewhere in Third World believe AIDS was a creation of the CIA.

But what my friend really wanted to hear about were economic, industrial and social triumphs – the sort of thing covered in the Soviet Bloc’s interminable Five Year Plans.

Actually, one has to admire Gosplan, the Soviet central planning agency, responsible for the Soviets’ Five Year Plan. Much of the time, its economic forecasting was spot on. Quite often Soviet industry met its planning goals – or even exceeded them or missed them by only a small degree.

It was the goals Gosplan dictated, and the inflexible “production norms” they prescribed to achieve them, that were the problem. The central planners often seemed stunningly ignorant of the industries under their direction, and the unintended consequences of their plans were occasionally frequently quite hilarious.

My favorite Soviet central planning fiasco involved the saucepan factory that served Moscow. Back in the late 60s and early 70s, during the period known as “*détente*”, it was virtually impossible to find small saucepans in the city’s stores.

This was a very big problem: Families tended to be small – one child at most – because Moscow apartments were cramped and kitchens were frequently shared. Small and medium sized saucepans were what most people needed yet the only ones on sale were positively enormous.

Eventually *Trud*, the trade union newspaper, was goaded by its readers into investigating the dearth of small saucepans. It took some arm twisting, but eventually a reporter was granted an interview by the general manager of the saucepan factory that supplied Moscow.

After the snacks, slugs of Armenian brandy and the polite small talk that seemed to precede most Soviet meetings of this sort, the reporter got down to business.

“When, comrade manager,” he asked, “can we expect to see small saucepans in the Moscow?”

“Never,” replied the manager.

“Why on earth not, comrade?” asked the report, “That’s what the people need.”

“I know,” replied the manager wistfully, “That’s what my wife tells me. But we have no choice. Our production norms are calculated on the tonnage of steel we process.

“We are working at full capacity. They won’t give us new machinery or assign us more workers. This means the only way we can meet the increasing steel throughput quotas dictated by the current Five Year Plan is to make bigger saucepans. Next year our pots will be even bigger.”

Gosplan – unlike the average consumer – also seemed to have a touching faith in the quality and durability of the products manufactured in the Soviet Union. This unlikely conviction manifested itself in an endemic shortage of spare parts for everything from sewing machines to automobiles.

As a consequence even the most feckless motorists invariably removed their windshield wipers and locked them in the trunk whenever they parked their vehicles even for a short time. Drivers fortunate enough to have hubcaps would remove those too.

This lack of spare parts was common throughout the Soviet bloc. In Warsaw, for example, it was rare to see a state-owned taxi with all four doors. Most taxis were missing at least one door and it was by no means unusual to encounter cabs missing three.

Oddly enough, the one that was usually present was the driver’s door – leading to suspicions that taxi drivers were selling the doors of their vehicles on the black market.

While this can be taken as welcome proof that private enterprise will flourish in even the most unpromising of circumstances, travel by taxi was for the passengers a decidedly hazardous experience because the lack of doors was matched a similar lack of seat belts.

That said, I can personally attest to a triumph in at least one sector of Soviet industry – textile manufacture. It happened thus: Making use of East European hotel laundries

Parish Prayer List

Our Prayer Chain offers prayer daily for people on the Prayer List as well as the guests of the Joseph Richey Hospice. To add a name to the prayer list, or to the visiting list, or to join the Prayer Chain, ring the parish office on 410 560 6776.

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FOR RECOVERY: Hilarie, Phyllis, Edie, Bill, Terry, Helen, Jim, Adele, Linda, John, Judy, Neal, Aida, Nathan, Hobie, Betty, Helen, Eunice, Tom, Rosemary, Robert, David, Jan, Susie, Beth, Sophia, Bobby, Lee, Pam, Warren, Cary, Courtney, Jason Richard, John & Marie.

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FOR LIGHT, STRENGTH & GUIDANCE: Stephen, Melba, Scott, Vinnie, Doug, Ian, Lisa, Carey, Ned, Cindy

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IN MEMORIAM: Jennifer MacKessey,

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FOR THOSE WHO MOURN: Mrs Pamela Langham and family,

.....
ON ACTIVE SERVICE: Lt Alex Bursi, Capt. Charles Bursi, Lt Nicholas Clouse, Lt Col. Harry Hughes; Lt Cdr Emma Hawkins, RN

was a dicey proposition for Westerners back in the Soviet era. More often than not garments made in the Free World (as it was then known) tended to disappear forever – even well worn boxer shorts.

Many West European hands were, therefore, in the habit of washing out their shirts and underwear in the hotel room sink and hanging them up to dry overnight. The downside to this practice was that the garments were often still damp in the morning and clammy underclothes are decidedly unpleasant.

To get around, the problem, I purchased a dozen sets of quick-drying nylon singlets and jockey shorts. Nylon is less than ideal next to the skin, but it’s a lot more comfortable than clammy cotton. I tried them out on a visit to East Germany and, as I was going on to stay with a friend in Warsaw, I decided to wash them out in one fell swoop at his apartment and hang them up to dry in his bathroom.

Everything went according to plan and I left for the day

with eleven sets of underwear hanging on his bathroom washing line. When I returned, however, they had vanished as completely as if I put them out to be washed in an hotel laundry.

"I couldn't resist the temptation," my friend explained, "I got a terrific price for them on the black market." And so he had. He'd gotten the equivalent of two months pay for the average worker for each set of secondhand underclothes – a measure of the hunger for Western "luxury goods" in the East bloc.

After a bit of haggling, he settled for a finder's fee of 50 percent of the proceeds and agreed to supply me eleven sets of Soviet-made cotton underwear to replace the ones he'd filched. Experience, however led me to regard his assurance that they were guaranteed shrink resistant with some skepticism.

How wrong I was! They didn't shrink at all. Indeed, they grew and grew with every wash. In an amazingly short time the singlets had grown until they were almost down to my ankles, which made them quite unwearable.

By that time, however, the shorts had expanded to such a degree they could be safely pinned over the shoulders – dispensing with the need for a singlet entirely.

Somehow I find it very hard to throw clothes away, and it came to pass, after our marriage, that Charlotte came across these strange garments while inventorying my underwear draw.

"What on earth are they?" she asked.

"They're my triumph of socialism." I explained.

"Hmmp!" she snorted. But a couple of days later her tune had changed completely. "They're the best polishing cloths I've ever used," she told me.

A triumph, indeed! But somehow I don't think the Soviet central planners would be entirely pleased. GPH✘

The Ladies lunch on 20 July

This month the Ladies Who Lunch will meet at a venue to be decided on Wednesday, 20th July at noon. Why not join us for a convivial get-together over a delicious meal? Good food and good fellowship – what more could you want? Please ring Sara Douglas on **410 560 9026** if you are able to attend; she will need a final count by Monday the 13th in order to place the reservation.

St Stephen's Anglican Church

11856 Mays Chapel Road, Timonium, MD 21093

Office: 410 560 6776 · **Rectory:** 410 665 1278

Pastoral Care: 410 252 8674

www.ststeve.com

The Ven. Canon Guy P Hawtin, *Rector*

The Ven. Michael Kerouac, *Vicar* · The Rev. Michael Belt,
The Rev. John Novicki, The Rev. Robert Ludwig, *Associate Rectors*

The Rev. M Wiley Hawks, *Pastoral Care Chaplain*
Mrs Happy Riley, *Director of Pastoral Care & Wedding Coordinator*

SUNDAY SERVICES

8am: Said Eucharist

9.15am: Choral Eucharist (with Nursery & Church School)

11am: Choral Mattins (1st Sunday: Sung Eucharist)

6pm: Choral Evensong (as announced) –
evensong.ststeve.com

WEEKDAY SERVICES

Wednesday, 6pm: Evening Prayer

Friday, 12 noon: Healing Eucharist

Saturday, 5pm: Family Eucharist

Calendar of Events

WEEKLY

Monday, 6.30pm: Bridge Club

Tuesday, 7am: Fellowship Breakfast (Nautilus Diner)

Thursday, 10am: Knitting Circle

Friday, 10.30am: Bible Study

MONTHLY & SPECIAL

Wednesday, 29 June, 6.30 PM

Weekly Silly Summer Supper

Afternoon Tea

Thursday, 14th July, 2 PM - 3PM

For reservations, please call the Parish Office

Tel: 410-560-6776

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

St Stephen's Anglican Church
11856 Mays Chapel Road
Timonium, MD 21093

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