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IMPLICATIONS OF CHANGE IN THE U.S.S.R. FOR AMERICAN EDUCATION

> Changes in the U.S.S.R. and the Communist world should point, for American educators. the importance of civic education in our democracy and the value of informed introductions to the ageless arguments about political theory that sustain it.

So many of the current cutting edge movements in American educations (*e.g.*, multiculturalism, global education) suffer from the absence of firm grounding in the great books of Western political theory. The failure to make their study one of the requisites for recognition as an educated person has damaged so many current education endeavors. That failure has helped sink civics. It has made multiculturalism a banner for exercises in ignorance, pop psychology, and careerism instead of a legitimate call for broader, wiser curriculum content. It has rendered airy and vacuous though about the problems of global community and national identity.

Variation on these failures have all turned up in what was taught about the U.S.S.R. 1960-1989. Positions on the great and enduring questions of political theory, or on the reality of conditions in the Communist world, were judged not on the soundness of the argument, but on whether they buttressed or weakened favored positions of the political controversies of the moment.The result was widespread misinformation regarding the true character of the Soviet Union in those educational circles that prided themselves on their anti-anti-communism. In at least one respect their opponents too often erred. They failed to acknowledge the possibility for non-violent change in totalitarian political systems.

This failure to study the ground that sustains the best in democratic thought and practice also contributed to the disjuncture between a concern for peace and a concern for freedom, not only in the American peace movement but also in many academic peace and global education programs. Graduates then became critics of American democracy, not in the interest of something better, but what is now recognized - whether in the U.S.S.R., Czechoslovakia or Cuba, - as much worse.

Can the experience of the breakup of the Soviet empire lead us to lessons of how to develop rightly ordered political community that allows conflict to be resolved without violence?

Can sounder educational programs help lead to "diversity" as a proud mark of our *common* society, instead of a banner for those who would disassemble it?

Can education for an interdependent world replace airy and vacuous aspirations with hard though about problems of global community and national identity.

Change in the U.S.S.R. should lead to improvements in civics, in our area studies

programs, in global education, in approaches to international politics that reach for the non-violent resolution of international conflict through a focus on, rather than avoidance of, politic reality. Most of all, it should encourage the idea that our schools are a precious instrument in sustaining the values and the experience of our free society and that efforts to improve that society must first be grounded in an understanding of its development.

Can all this will be achieved by restoring the great works of Western civilization to their rightful place in a broadened and improved curriculum?

It would certainly help.

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