02-01-1999 Even Gorbachev is Broke Now

In December of 1998 Mikhail Gorbachev complained to the German magazine "Bund" that he is broke – flat broke. "All my money is gone." According to the magazine the bank in which Gorbachev kept his savings of $80,000 collapsed and took his money with it.

What a pity. And after all he did for the Russian people too.

In news reports the most often repeated comment was that "Gorbachev has never reconciled himself to the lack of gratitude from his countrymen for his role in introducing democracy, the free market and Big Macs to Russia."

Most surprising is that some people actually think this way. A few people, the ones who own the media in particular, are constantly surprised by Gorbachev's treatment inside Russia. They seem to think that the Russian people owe Gorbachev the treatment of a national hero, a savior of historic dimension. Of course, some people believe that the Earth is flat too.

Evidently life in Russia itself is a bit more balanced by reality. There Gorbachev is not a hero but a villain. Perhaps a little reality check: since the destruction of the Soviet Union GDP in Russia has fallen 40%, inflation has been at or around 30% per month, agricultural output has fallen 23%, industrial output 11%, millions go without even the payment of their paltry wages, 11% of adults are officially unemployed, 22% of the population now lives in poverty, there is rampant crime, pensioners are forced to beg for food, and the youth have no hope for the future.

And we are to believe that Gorbachev has the audacity to think he is owed something other than a long prison term? Can the man really be that out of touch with reality? The vast wealth of the Soviet people, accumulated through the mechanism of the socialist state during the years of the Soviet Union was stolen, sold off as parts of inside deals for pennies on the dollar leaving an entire nation – a once wealthy and mighty nation – impoverished. And one of those most responsible cannot reconcile himself with a lack of gratitude for these horrendous crimes? That is insanity!

I personally do not believe that Mikhail Gorbachev is insane or so deluded that he would believe such nonsense. It seems more likely that he understands his role in the great tragedy that was the end of the Soviet Union. The process started in motion with his election to General Secretary of the Communist Party – Soviet Union and could have produced very dramatic positive results.

No one questions that the USSR needed Glasnost, needed more openness. However, the ways in which Gorbachev pursued these noble goals was fundamentally flawed. The most basic flaw was his contention that the class struggle was ended. A shocking – even delusional belief – to be sure that ended with Boris Yeltsin's troops firing artillery and machine gun shells at the Russian White House in 1991. So much for openness, so much

for any hope at an extension of democracy. From there the country was turned over to petty and not so petty criminals and hoodlums calling themselves “businessmen.”

Not only did Gorbachev manage to prove in a most dramatic fashion that the class struggle was not ended, but he managed to undo 70 years of progress towards the construction of an egalitarian society. He must know all of this. His is well educated, intelligent, and was well positioned to observe the events he set in motion. He must know his guilt.

The problem with Gorbachev’s interviews with a magazine like Bund is not that he is so out of touch with reality, but that they are. I am sure it must be difficult for him to admit his guilt for there is nothing he could do now to obviate it. The damage has been done and it falls to the Russian people to rebuild their lives before it is too late. But the people who own Bund believe that Gorbachev should be treated like a hero in his now ruined homeland.

The ruling class, in true arrogant form, finds it incomprehensible that people everywhere, Russia included, don’t think of Gorbachev as a white knight who brought the wondrous free-market to the Soviet Union. And it is wonderful for them; there is a new class of rich people amongst the suffering that now comprises Russia. To the ruling class this is freedom and the world set right – to the rest it is misery and enslavement, but such is the class struggle as it moves ever onward, ever forward.

And so Gorbachev is relegated to the status of villain in the hearts of the people. There may be a mystery in this to some, but for the rest it is just one more chapter in the long story of the struggle for justice, the story of human history.