

## **NINA TUMARKIN INTERVIEW**

**Wellesley College Professor of History, Nina Tumarkin, discusses the beginning and the end of socialism in Russia, from Lenin and the Russian Revolution of 1917, to Gorbachev and the fall of the Soviet Union.**

**Describe Lenin's personality and how it affected him as a leader.**

Lenin was, first of all, probably Russia's most exuberant workaholic in a country that did not have a work ethic. He was enormously hard working. He was enormously smart. He had supreme self-confidence and a belief that he really knew what was right for everybody and, particularly, for the future of his country. He believed that you should never compromise when you know you're right. He believed that the ends justify the means. He was so devoted to the cause of revolution and socialism as he understood them -- that he absolutely thought that no matter what the means used to achieve those goals, that the goals would really be the most important thing.

There's a really telling incident: when Lenin was only 21 years old and not yet really a confirmed Marxist, a major famine hit Russia and so many other radicals ran to help starving people (something like 400,000 people starved). But he believed that famine victims should not be helped because he thought that the Russian people, and particularly the starving peasantry, should learn who their enemies were -- that their enemies were the state.

Therefore, the future was more important for him than the past. The future vision of what a socialist state would be was more important to him than the past and more important to him even than the present...

**How did the execution of Lenin's brother affect Lenin? Did it lead him onto a revolutionary path?**

After Lenin's brother was executed in 1887, Lenin didn't seem to take any different path than he had before. He continued to study in school. He did very well in all his subjects. He got the highest grades, except for one subject -- logic.

But it's clear that he himself was very troubled by his brother's death and went and read some of the books that his brother had read. It wasn't until 1889 to 1890 that he actually discovered the volumes of Carl Marx. He also read various Russian revolutionaries and began to come to the conclusion that it was just as important as his brother had thought to create a new social system for Russia -- that revolutionaries had to learn to toughen themselves, to make themselves into heroes who were going to give their all to save Russia, something like his brother had done. But he was determined to do it in a much more practical way and not get involved in the kind of heroic revolutionary martyrdom that his brother was involved in.

**What aspects of his socialist readings appealed most to Lenin?**

Lenin was very interested in the idea that Russian revolutionaries could take action by improving themselves, and therefore pitting their will against the inert Russian state and the inert Russian people.

It's very important to remember that in Russia there were really no channels for

energetic young people to set their stamp on history in any way, unless they would be writers or poets, or artists. This was a country where there was no parliamentary democracy. There were no political parties. There was no freedom of assembly. And therefore, virtually all of the talented people who wanted to flex their muscles and pit their strength against the inertia of history joined the radical movement and had to take extraordinary measures to make changes in Russia. And Lenin was very much like this.

He was a young man of enormous determination, enormous perseverance and dedication. He was very self-controlled, unlike so many other revolutionaries who would smoke and drink and spend all their time in endless chatter. Lenin did not do that. He worked very hard, he wrote very hard. It was important to him to isolate who his enemies were, who the other side was, who were these liberals who were interested in dissipating the people's energies. He wanted to be one of the new Soviet men and women who would really overturn Russia.

### **How did Lenin react to the waning revolutionary edge in Western Europe?**

Lenin began to see with great alarm that in Western Europe people, especially people who called themselves Marxists, were dulling their revolutionary edge. In fact, some of these individuals were saying that there was really no need for revolution anymore, that workers could get what they needed. They could get all of their social programs and political programs and have them put into effect without revolution, just through parliamentary democracy which appeared to be happening for example, in Germany. And this alarmed Lenin to no end.

He believed that the only kind of state that would save Russia would be a Socialist state that would be made through revolutionary activity. The very idea of waiting until the workers would get their needs met, would get a shorter working day, would get better wages, would get safer working conditions, and so on, was terrifying to him because if the workers became more satisfied, who was going to then make a revolution? Who would be in the army to overturn the system in Russia and make a socialist revolution? It was clear that the needs of the workers had to be met only through some kind of violent revolution. And Lenin was dedicated to that.

### **What characterized Lenin as a personality and political thinker?**

One of the things that really characterized Lenin both as a personality and a political thinker was that he developed quite early on what I would call a politics based on the absence of trust. First, of course, Lenin believed one could not trust the nobility. One could not trust any members of the intelligentsia who had different views from Lenin. One could not trust the bourgeoisie to help make socialism. One could not trust, surely, the inert peasant masses who had not engaged in the kind of revolutionary activity that they should have, given how oppressed they were.

Social democrats and Marxists put their faith in the industrial proletariat. In Russia, the industrial proletariat was rather small, but it was there. And all the Marxists felt that it is this industrial proletariat that will come to consciousness and understand that they have strength in their numbers, that they are oppressed, and that they must make a revolution. That it was in fact inevitable that this would happen.

It was Lenin who came to the conclusion in his famous book in 1902, called

*What Is To Be Done?* that if left to their own devices, the working class would only come to what he called a “trade union consciousness.” They will only be able to wage war for their own immediate economic needs and social needs: better wages and shorter hours and better working conditions. They would not actually be interested in or willing to make a revolution. So if you can’t then trust the workers to make a revolution whom can you trust? Lenin said the only people you can trust are full-time professional revolutionaries like him who will make a revolution in the name of the people and do what is best for the people.

And even within that full-time professional revolutionary party, Lenin had a very centralist and hierarchical view, and felt that the leadership of the party embodied in himself had to play a very strong role. He thought that the party had to be small, tightly knit, and organized in a hierarchical fashion with a strong leadership because effectively nobody could be trusted except Lenin himself, who knew what was best for all of Russia.

### **Discuss the events of the Second Party Congress of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party.**

In 1903, there was a congress of Russian social democrats. It was a tiny group meeting in Brussels, maybe 50-51 people. They were having arguments from the very beginning about how to organize membership and how to organize the editorial board of their newspaper, and there were fights that broke out immediately. Lenin wasn’t the only one of these revolutionaries who believed that you should never compromise when you know you’re right. This was very much the style of the Russian revolutionaries, how they thought and how they argued. Plus, there were actually various kinds of anti-Semitic innuendos as well, for many of the delegates were Jews, and were they more loyal to the Jewish workers or were they not loyal to the Jewish workers? All kinds of insults were being flung back and forth.

During the course of the meeting Lenin effectively organized a split of the party. Some of the revolutionaries walked out in anger because of the way the discussions had gone, and temporarily Lenin’s followers were left in the majority. (When we talk about a majority, we’re talking about 25 or 25 of Lenin’s followers, and 19 or 20 of people on the other side that thought that the party and the membership ought to be organized somewhat differently.) In the majority were Lenin’s followers and they called themselves Bolshiviki, which means majority. They called the other group Minshiviki, or Mensheviks, which means the minority. These were really both terms of opprobrium and they didn’t mean very much. They were supposed to be temporary but somehow the term stuck.

Generally speaking, the arguments among the party had to do with how the membership would be organized and whether there was going to be a large membership with a more loose organization the way the Mensheviks wanted or the tightly knit organization that Lenin was interested in.

### **Discuss the February Revolution and its aftermath.**

One of the things that’s so dramatic about the February Revolution is that Lenin had a politics based on the absence of trust. He did not trust the workers to make a

revolution, and low and behold they did. Lenin was absolutely devastated with shock. He was very surprised that the workers could make a revolution without revolutionary leadership. It was a spontaneous movement and it unfolded very quickly.

There was a kind of chaos and anarchy that grew very quickly in Russia after the February revolution, after the Tsar had abdicated. There was a provisional government and something called the Petrograd Soviet of Worker's and Soldiers Deputies. This Soviet was very left, very radical. It really had the power but it didn't feel like it wanted to exercise that power.

There was a series of coalition governments that kept moving further to the left. But more important, the revolution itself was snowballing of its own accord. It's as though it were some kind of organic process that was rapidly moving to the left. Peasants who were at first just saying that they wouldn't pay their rent or were arguing with their landowners, were now seizing land and were now killing landowners. There were mutinies in the army. Soldiers were coming back in droves, leaving the front with their rifles. And the worker in the factories, first you have the workers going on strike, then you have sit down strikes, then you have them seizing factories, taking control of factories.

The country was becoming ungovernable by the summer and fall of 1917. I think that the real revolutionary process was one that I call 'atomization', meaning Russia was falling apart into the smallest possible units. The provinces were falling away from the center. Regions were falling away from the provinces. Villages were declaring their independence and sewing their own flags. In a sense, you have the idea that whatever the bonds that hold a society together - fear, loyalty, tradition - it somehow melted away and evaporated with the result of Russia crumbling into the smallest parts.

I think that the Bolsheviks succeeded in seizing power because Lenin and the Bolsheviks were the only group that was willing to further the chaos, that wasn't terrified of chaos, that was willing to let the country just melt into civil war, and then would later impose order. In the summer of 1917, Lenin wrote a brochure called *State and Revolution*, which was an anarchist pamphlet. As there were land seizures and fires and murder and arson and pillage, Lenin was telling the peasants to seize the land. Marxists had viewed peasants as absolutely un-revolutionary, but Lenin had seen that the peasants were actually the most fiery group in the country. Therefore, he wanted to further the anarchy so that Russia would become absolutely ungovernable and that the Bolsheviks could come in and seize power.

Someone once said that the Bolsheviks actually didn't seize power in 1917. They picked it up. None of the other political parties were willing to assume responsibility, because the situation was so anarchic, except for the Bolsheviks, and particularly Lenin, who seemed to be afraid of very little in the political sense, although personally he was not a particularly courageous man.

### **What mistakes did the provisional government make that led to the October Revolution?**

The very biggest mistake that the provisional government made that surely led to the October Revolution was to pursue the war. Russia, remember, in all this anarchy was still involved in World War I and it was going very badly. Russia had

promised the Allies to continue to fight the war until a victorious conclusion but the army wasn't even able to retreat in an orderly fashion. So I think that this pursuance of the war was the worst mistake. It was enormously unpopular; the populace was dreadfully tired of the war.

Every country had privations during the war and vast losses and rationing. But the rationing and the privations were worse in Russia than in any other country. Had the provisional government made a separate peace with Germany, I think perhaps things might have gone very differently.

### **How did Lenin and the Bolsheviks seize power in 1917?**

In the summer of 1917, there was a coup from a right wing general. All the Bolsheviks who had earlier been arrested were invited to come out of jail because the feeling was that the revolution has no enemies to the left.

One of the things as a historian I think was terrific about the Bolsheviks was that they were very good at history, they were very interested in history. They saw themselves as learning from previous revolutions, particularly the French revolution. The French always said there are no enemies to the left. You always have to look to the right, looking for that Napoleon Bonaparte who's going to seize power. It didn't occur to them that somebody could come from the extreme left and seize the revolution from them.

### **Discuss the early international aspect of the Bolshevik Revolution.**

When Lenin seized power and became Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars, the head of state, I'm convinced that he and every single other one of the Bolshevik leaders thought that the revolution was going to spread beyond Russians borders. I don't think any of them thought that Russia could become socialist power for long without being joined by other countries, particularly Germany, which was headed toward defeat in the war after the United States entered World War I in December of 1917. The French workers were also mutinying and the British workers. So the assumption was that the revolution was going to be an international movement. After all, one of the great slogans in the Communist Manifesto was, "Workers of the world unite. You have nothing to lose but your chains." And it wasn't until the end of 1918, after socialist revolution fizzled in Germany, that Lenin and the Bolsheviks began to understand that they might be in this alone for a long time.

They responded in a number of ways, including the formation in 1919 of the Third International, which was an organization of communist parties throughout the world geared toward overthrowing the different capitalist governments.

### **Did Lenin act with good intentions?**

Did Lenin act with good intentions? I think it's far fetched to say good intentions. You don't think of him as someone who was generous of spirit, for example. But I think he had a socialist vision. I think he believed that the rapacious capitalism of the West was an evil thing, that the rapacious capitalism that had come to Russia, for however short of time, was something evil as well and that the people deserved something better.

He was certainly not, for example, a corrupt man who wanted to seize power in order to, let's say, enrich himself. He never did that. He was not greedy. He was not interested in building palaces with the people's money or anything like that. He lived very modestly. But he believed that he knew best what would save Russia and the Russian people.

So in terms of his intentions and whether you want to call them good or not, they were serious, they were socially based, and I think he honestly thought that he could create a state that would in some way liberate people who had been oppressed for centuries.

### **Discuss how Lenin and the Bolsheviks' power was legitimized and propaganda's role in this process.**

When Lenin and the Bolsheviks seized power, they really were a tiny minority. Of course, every party, and the Bolsheviks were no exception, had promised to have a constituent assembly, something like our constitutional convention, to make a constitutionally determined government in Russia. There was such a constituent assembly that was held for one day, January 5<sup>th</sup> 1918. But Lenin ordered that it be closed down because the Bolsheviks had only gotten about 25% of the vote. So another more dictatorial system was set up.

Immediately, or almost immediately, Russia found itself embroiled in a civil war, which the Bolshevik regime won militarily. They also won because the Bolsheviks had been very successful in their use of propaganda to win what we might nowadays call the "hearts and minds" of the Russian people. The propaganda was very good particularly at showing the people who their enemies were. There would be posters that would show fat gap-toothed capitalists. The enemy was usually fat and ugly or bestial looking.

The poster art often came actually from a base in religious art -- a method called, "new content but old forms." So for example, in Russian iconography, St. George would be shown on his white horse slaying the dragon. Poster art would have a red army soldier slaying a dragon that says imperialism or counter-revolution.

The Bolshevik propagandists were really quite clever in understanding the mentality of the people. But also, many of the Bolshevik propagandists actually came from the people, actually understood the vocabulary of the people, how the people understood power in religious terms, how people understood power in personal terms. There had been an age-old tendency to have a true rage against the government among the Russian peasantry, but a reverence for the Czar. Thus Lenin was portrayed in propaganda in many ways as the new Czar. The Russian people, peasants, were not used to abstract thinking, socialist views, or anything like that. But if Lenin's face was on a poster or on an engraving or in the newspaper and he was viewed as the new leader, people could respect that.

Lenin began to be portrayed more and more during his lifetime in strong poses, as the embodiment of all the ideals of socialism. Lenin's biography began to be changed. Even though he was actually born as a hereditary noble because his father had achieved the rank of hereditary nobility, he was always portrayed as coming from the poorest of the poor, always being one with the people. There was an idealized biography of Lenin that was worked out very quickly that grabbed the hearts of many

people. And I think this particularly showed itself when he died.

### **How did Lenin and the Bolsheviks stay in power?**

About a year after the revolution, Lenin and Trotsky had a conversation where one of them said to the other, "are we popular or does our regime hang by a hair?" When they seized power in 1917, the Bolsheviks had no idea that their experiment was going to work. It had been effectively a coup d'état. They had a very narrow base of support. The country was overwhelmingly peasant. And the Bolsheviks platform was not geared towards peasants. It was geared toward industrial workers. The socialist revolutionary party, which was peasant, believed in giving all the peasants the land - that's where the big support was. But somehow the Bolsheviks managed to survive.

Month after month, the Bolsheviks changed their policies. They did anything that was necessary just to stay in power. One of the most important things that they did, of course, was to pull Russia out of World War I and incur the utter wrath of the allies in so doing. That was in March of 1918, and Russia lost vast tracts of territory: most of Ukraine, all of Poland, much of European Russia. They were fortunate, of course, that after the United States had entered the war in November of 1918, then Germany lost the war. Therefore Russia ended up not having to lose all that territory.

You got a sense that the government was absolutely ad hoc, that from week to week, month to month, the Bolsheviks were changing their mind, changing policies, doing what they could creating an army. Trotsky created the Red Army in 1918 out of almost nothing.

Very few people, I think, supported the Bolshevik vision, but there was so much opposition to the old order. The Bolsheviks did a very good job in convincing the populace that only they could guarantee that the Tsar would not come back, that the landlords would not come back. That was the most important thing that the Bolsheviks did to stay in power.

### **Describe the creation of a socialist state in Russia and the people's reactions to it.**

The attempt to create a true socialist state in Russia came, I would say, too much and too soon, beginning in 1918 with the civil war. The policy of war communism was utterly devastating to the countryside. It meant actually having the government and party in power, to nationalize all industry and all the land, close down private trade, set out ration cards to the populace, and say that the workers involved, for example, in heavy and dangerous trades would get four times as much in the way of grain and bread as people like myself, college professors and doctors and lawyers and other white collar workers. To immediately install and instill communism, it was done very rapidly because the government needed to mobilize all the forces in order to win the civil war.

It's very important to understand that the soviet system really emerged in the crucible of civil war. Part of the reason it emerged as such a dictatorship was that the government and the party were literally at war and felt that they had to try to seize the reigns of power. In so doing, they incurred the enmity of many people who had

supported them. Even before the civil war was over there were many worker's strikes.

In 1920 there were land seizures by peasants and peasant protests that were put down very harshly. People began very early on to say, "just a minute, theoretically this is supposed to be socialism and we're supposed to get everything, but the country is nationalizing the land. We're not getting it." At the very beginning the Bolsheviks had said, "We're for peace and bread and land." And yes, they brought about peace, for a while, until the civil war started, but where is our land? Where is our bread? Where is our control? Many workers were very disillusioned by the end of the civil war.

### **Discuss the breakdown of Soviet society after World War I.**

By 1920, in some ways, you can say that civil society and civilization had stopped. There had been the most devastating losses, first in World War I where Russia had lost as many as France had lost, probably about 8 million on that eastern front, and then the anarchy of the revolution. We don't know how many died in the civil war, but it was a brutal civil war and concomitant with that, due to all those grain seizures, there was massive famine. Plus it was accompanied by epidemics of typhus and Spanish Influenza in 1919, which had devastated much of Europe as well.

The industry had broken down. The railroads stopped working. The economy had fallen apart. And people were really reverting to the most primitive kind of bartering. There were massive loss of life. It was a nightmare.

### **Discuss the aftermath of Lenin's death.**

When Lenin died in 1924, the populace really mobilized around his memory in a very dramatic way. There were a number of reasons for this. In part, the death of Lenin could be analogous to the death of President Lincoln in our own country. In each case, the death of this leader followed a devastating civil war in which many people had suffered and lost their loved ones. The funeral of Lenin was the first major public ritual of mourning, after all these years, of World War I, which was never commemorated, and of the revolution and the civil war. Lenin had come to symbolize and embody the values of socialism that had been touted as the reasons for all the sacrifice, as the image of what the new Soviet state would be.

Something like three quarters of a million people came to view his body as it lay in state. Of course, Lenin was a young man. He was only 53 years old. The populace was utterly shocked at his death because he was so young and because his illness had been kept very well hidden from the populace. There had been constantly false reports about how well he was doing, that he was on vacation, that he was going to come back to work. So his death took many people by surprise. Also, the propaganda had been so effective, even before he died Lenin was viewed as kind of a cult figure. There was a propensity to have his face on posters, there were busts of Lenin, and there were odes to Lenin already during his lifetime. His writings were already called Leninism. There were idealized biographies of Lenin for school children that talked about his marvelous character traits.

Interestingly enough, these were Leninist character traits. So for example, the biographies for children would talk about how Lenin never compromised when he knew he was right. He would never give in. This is very analogous to the kinds of

biographies that were written, for example, of George Washington, the whole story about his honesty and how he admitted to chopping down a cherry tree to inculcate certain values. So Lenin was really in some way deified even before his death.

After his death, the populace poured out, also the machine of propaganda and agitation actually rolled out an enormous campaign. They named the city of Petrograd Saint Petersburg, Leningrad after him. All of these people stood up with ideas of commemorating Lenin. There were mass meetings to honor Lenin's memory.

Lenin's death had been such a moment of emotion and of loyalty to the regime that the regime felt that they had to take advantage of it and make the reverence for Lenin a going concern. Therefore, that meant embalming his body and placing it in a mausoleum built in the Red Square, keeping lying in state a growing concern, and making the writings of Lenin more enduring than the current leadership of the party. The regime did this because many people thought that Lenin's death was going to mean the end of the soviet system. This was particularly true of émigrés abroad. I can say that in my own family, who were Russian Jews, I had one relative who was apparently so excited when he heard that Lenin died because he assumed that Bolshevism would fail.

People thought that Bolshevism could not survive Lenin's death.

### **Discuss the religious overtones to the veneration of Lenin after his death.**

There were decidedly religious overtones to the veneration of Lenin. After all, the "Cult of Lenin" had a gospel -- the idealized biography of Lenin. It had an iconography -- the ubiquitous portraits and busts of Lenin. It had sacred writings -- Leninism, the writings of the leader. And it had a shrine, which was the body of Lenin that drew so many pilgrims to actually see him lying in state.

Very soon, within weeks really, of his death the Lenin Corner was instituted, which had actually indeed started before his death, during his illness. This is a direct counterpart to the icon corner. Every Russian home before had a corner in the home that had a shelf in which there had been icons displayed. Now there was a Lenin corner where there would be portraits of Lenin, the writings of Lenin. Clearly, this was meant to be a civil religion that would mobilize popular loyalty and devotion to the memory of the leader and to the values and to the regime that he embodied. And, therefore, it was supposed to translate to his heirs and his successors.

### **Did the "Cult of Lenin" make it easier for Stalin to solidify his power?**

I think the "Cult of Lenin" decidedly made things easier for Stalin, and Stalin contributed to the "Cult of Lenin," although he was not the main contributor. The most important determining factor of who was going to take over the reigns of the party leadership was going to be who would successfully portray themselves as Lenin's true followers. Who has now taken on Lenin's mantle? Who can pass on Lenin's legacy? "I can," said Trotsky. "I can," said Zinovyev. "I can," said Stalin. So many did. But Stalin was the most successful in this kind of showing himself as Lenin's true heir.

### **What was the reaction in Europe to the success of the Bolshevik Revolution?**

I think that there was a great deal of alarm throughout Europe that the

Bolshevik revolution appeared to have been successful. The big fear was that Bolshevism would spill over into other countries, especially since the European countries were so desperately poor and devastated by World War I. That is why in the middle of the 1920s, you have the so-called Dawes Plan, in which millions of American dollars were pumped into the European economies to make sure that those economic systems would be strong, particularly as a bulwark against the spread of Bolshevism.

### **What made Mikhail Gorbachev different from his predecessors?**

I believe that Mikhail Gorbachev was the first leader who was willing to trust the people. Stalin of course had been the most tyrannical and dictatorial of leaders. Khrushchev who followed him was somewhat interested actually in tapping popular initiative. But Gorbachev understood that one could no longer have an ossified bureaucratic system that just lorded over the Russian peasant who was tied to the collective or state farms, or the Russian consumer who had so little to buy in the stores. Gorbachev believed that finally you had to have a politics based on trust in the people's energy and the people's initiative and that the people had to be brought into a renewed kind of socialism.

### **Discuss the effects of glasnost.**

The most important and significant effects of glasnost were cultural. Stalin was now unmasked as the cruel tyrant that he had been, and there was now artistic freedom, there was now intellectual freedom. Censorship really ended by 1989 and for the first time many Soviet people learned about their history. They learned, for example, about the secret protocol and the Nazi-Soviet pact of 1939, in which Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union divided up parts of Poland and the Baltic states. That had always been kept secret from the populace. So, the Russian people were now able to understand how bad their history had been.

### **What were the people's reactions to glasnost?**

I think there were many people who felt enormously energized by glasnost. At the same time, I know that in the United States, Americans were much more excited by glasnost than Russians were. Americans felt all along that what the Soviet people had missed in all these decades of socialism was freedom, and now they had freedom, and now they should be happy, because the truth was all coming out.

Well it didn't work out that way. First of all, a lot of the truth was very ugly. And so instead of people just being thrilled that they could learn about the truth, suddenly what you had in Russia is the two halves of the population, as someone once said, "all those who had been in jail under Stalin and the other half, all those who had put them there."

So, there were tremendous tensions and tremendous angers that were coming out. And at the same time, there was a feeling of empowerment that many people had because they now understood that they could try to make their mark on how Russia would be and what the Soviet Union would be like. But there were a lot of ugly things that came out of the woodwork. There was a sudden rise in anti-Semitism, there was an ultra nationalism that came out, and of course there were all the nationalist

separatist movements that Gorbachev had not foreseen. And so you can't assume that when people were given freedom that only wonderful things would happen.

Plus very quickly, by about 1988-1989, I think the feeling of excitement and empowerment was replaced by fear for a number of reasons. There had been the Chernobyl meltdown in 1986 of the nuclear reactor, and as usual the populace had not been told of the extent of the damage but with glasnost they learned. There were many people who were terrified of eating their own food, terrified that they were going to be irradiated. Now they were being told about how their environment had been decimated by decades of Soviet rule, and there were many people who were just hopeless about the environment. They were terrified about the spread of AIDS. They were afraid of Gorbachev. There was a lot of anger at Gorbachev because it was felt that he was actually being dictatorial, even though he was much less dictatorial than his predecessors.

Once glasnost started people wanted more and more power, but Gorbachev was putting a reign on it, particularly in the Caucasus where he sent tanks in where there were popular uprisings.

So a tremendous amount of conflict and anxiety really gripped a lot of people. While we think that the lack of freedom had been the most important aspect of socialism, for many Soviet people, the most important aspect of socialism had been security. Before, they had in the Soviet Union a cradle to grave security. They had free medical care, of terrible quality, but free medical care nonetheless. Free education, low rents, subsidized foodstuffs. The price of bread had barely gone up from the 1950s until the later part of the 1980s, and suddenly as the system was breaking apart, all of that was changing. And a lot of people were very frightened and very angry at Mikhail Gorbachev.

### **Why has socialism largely failed?**

I think the problem with socialism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century was that the countries that went socialist were ones that were not at all prepared for it. Perhaps small homogeneous countries such as some of the Scandinavian countries, which have perhaps a form of socialism, have found that it works very well. But large agrarian countries such as Russia and China, or small agrarian countries such as Cuba that had no traditions of democracy, found that socialism very quickly became a dictatorship from above.

### **Is socialism an idea of the past?**

Do I think that socialism is an idea of the past? No. I think that as long as there are human beings, they will dream for more equitable ways of being. They will dream of a kind of social system that will give everybody what they need. But I think that the kind of dictatorial socialism with a planned economy and a heavy party bureaucracy will never be instituted anywhere again.