

It Is Time to Declare the Soviet Union Illegal

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In the small town where my dacha is located, the main street is called Soviet Army, and an iron statue of Lenin stands right in the middle of it. Although the children love to play around the statue, it is a terrible place for games. The children's parents, however, have another opinion. "Let the kids play around Grandfather Lenin," they say. "Who is he bothering? After all, he is a funny man."

There is nothing funny about the hundreds — perhaps thousands — of Lenin statues and memorial plaques with his profile still adorning Russia's cities, towns and villages. As soon as my eye catches a Lenin image, I turn away in disgust. I flinch every time I am on the metro and hear the words over the loud speaker: "Next stop: The Lenin Library." As a historian, I know all too well what crimes Lenin committed, how much blood was shed as a result of his direct orders, how many millions were killed or suffered from hunger and disease when Lenin and his comrades unleashed the Civil War and Red Terror.

Lenin's hatred for all religions resulted in endless violence against the Russian Orthodox Church and other faiths. After receiving millions of Deutsche marks from Germany, which helped fund the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, Lenin signed the shameful Treaty of Brest-Litovsk with Germany on March 3, 1918. No leader has done as much harm to Russia as Lenin. If there were no Lenin, there would have been no Stalin, Beria, Khrushchev, Brezhnev, Andropov or Gorbachev. Nor would there have been a NKVD or KGB. Without Lenin, there would never have been a Soviet Union, and Russia would have had a completely different fate. Although Russia would probably not have become a paradise on earth, it definitely would not have denigrated into the gulag hell that it became.

There is nothing funny about Lenin. He is evil.

Why, then, are there still so many Lenin statues and Lenin streets in so many Russian cities? It is not because of simple neglect or that nobody has the time or money to dismantle all of them. In fact, many actually have been restored since 1991.

Lenin was the father of the Soviet Union, but that country disintegrated in December 1991. Nonetheless, Lenin has remained Russia's leader — at least in the legal sense. This is due to President Boris Yeltsin's decision on Dec. 26, 1991, when the Russian Republic of the Soviet Union was declared to be the legal continuation of the Soviet Union. In his book "Presidential Marathon," published in 2000, Yeltsin wrote: "It was an absolutely competent, logical and legally sound step — particularly in respect to our foreign affairs, in which we are tied by an entire set of serious obligations." President Vladimir Putin supported Yeltsin's decision when he said in 2005 that the collapse of the Soviet Union was "the greatest geopolitical catastrophes of the 20th century. ... We preserved its largest part under the name of the Russian Federation."

On Dec. 26, 1991, Yeltsin could have chosen a different path for Russia's future — the legal succession of pre-Soviet Russia, which is a completely different legal concept from legal continuation. Legal succession would have laid the foundation for the de-communization of Russia. This would have allowed the country to preserve the old, "White" Russia that the Bolsheviks destroyed on Nov. 22, 1917, when they annulled all Russian laws, including those that protected the people's property and rights, and in its place created an entirely new government for the "workers and peasants." For five years after the Revolution in November 1917, the Reds and Whites remained in struggle for power. During this time, pre-Communist laws were observed in White Russia. But in October 1922, the last White army left Russian territory, and the Reds were the victors. On Dec. 30, 1922, the Soviet Union was established, and the Bolsheviks' illegal, criminal seizure of Russia was completed.

Russia's decision to adopt legal continuation of the Soviet Union is like Masha Petrova who, after she marries, becomes Masha Ivanova, but she still remains the same person. Similarly, if Lenin is the founder of the Soviet Union, and if Russia is the continuation of the Soviet Union, then everything is clear: Lenin remains the founder of modern-day Russia.

What about the "Old Russia" — the Russia that we lost in 1917? We haven't found it. In 2002, the Foreign Ministry celebrated its 200th anniversary, but everyone who participated in the celebrations thought that it was a bad joke. The country's current diplomats are not the heirs of pre-Bolshevik Russia — Prince Alexander Gorchakov or Serge Sazanov. They are the heirs

of former Soviet Foreign Ministers Leon Trotsky, Vyacheslav Molotov and Andrei Gromyko. In this sense, the FSB is more honest. In its 90th-anniversary materials, it made no mention of pre-Bolshevik Russia and boasted of its exclusively Soviet lineage: “90 years of the Cheka, NKVD, KGB and FSB.”

So we continue to live in a Soviet country. Today’s Communists are thrilled with this and happy to see their glorious leader in statue form. When they see a Lenin statue, they can cry with ecstasy, “Lenin lived, Lenin lives, Lenin will always live!”

But I and millions of Russians are far from ecstatic at the sights of Lenin. We are ashamed that Lenin is still alive. We must remember the millions of victims of Lenin, the churches he bombed, the defiled mosques and synagogues.

I want to live in a genuine Russia, one free of all the attributes of the Soviet Union — its lies and disdain for individual rights — and one without Lenin. I don’t want to live in an imitation Russia, whose only real claim to the pre-Bolshevik Russia is limited to its superficial government symbols — the tricolor flag and the double-headed eagle.

In 2000, Yeltsin, having looked back at the consequences of his decision on Dec. 26, 1991, to turn post-Soviet Russia into the legal succession of the Soviet Union, wrote in his book “Presidential Marathon”: “Now I think to myself, what kind of Russia would we be living in had we chosen another path, if we had revived the legal succession of pre-Soviet Russia — the Russia that the Bolsheviks destroyed in 1917. ... We could have lived according to completely different rules — not by the Soviet principles of class struggle ... but by laws and principles that respect individual rights. We wouldn’t have to start from scratch and build freedom of the press and parliament that already existed in Russia up until 1917. ... Most important, we, Russians, would have felt like citizens of a newfound motherland. ... It would have been a bold step to admit our historical mistakes and restore the country’s historical succession. Perhaps some day Russians will want to take that step.”

For the 10 years since Yeltsin wrote those words, Russians have lived in a Soviet Russia. But now, 20 years after the fall of the Soviet Union, a new generation has been born who never spent a day in Lenin’s Soviet Union. Therefore, it will be easier for this generation to build the new Russia that Yeltsin dreamed of. To make that dream come true, a good place to start would be to finally remove Lenin from the mausoleum and to remove all of the Lenins from their pedestals.

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