

pressed recently by former President Nixon, is that the "most difficult and potentially dangerous issue which brings the two nations into confrontation is the Soviet policy of supporting revolutionary movements against non-communist governments in the Third World."<sup>8</sup> President Reagan told the General Assembly on 24 October 1985 that "all of these conflicts share a common characteristic: they are the consequence of an ideology imposed from without, dividing nations and creating regimes that are, almost from the day they take power, at war with their own people. And in each case, Marxism-Leninism's war with the people becomes war with their neighbours."

The Soviet view rests on a doctrinal base, although it has long been flexible enough to accommodate the need for "peaceful co-existence", especially in the nuclear age. The central thesis implies that the USA, as the leading "imperialist" power, is bound to act in ways which lead to conflict and war. Fortunately, the "socialist camp" is now strong enough to frustrate an attack on the Warsaw Pact countries, and to deter nuclear war. The parallel view in the West is that the USSR "exports" revolution which, once arrived at its destination, acts solely in Soviet interests and is by definition a threat to other countries, especially to allies of the US. This Western belief also justifies the need for military intervention, if necessary. Those who support this view in the case of Nicaragua often ignore the dynamics of a relationship with the US which has helped to assure the very outcome which the Administration wants to prevent: an ever closer dependence on assistance from countries that can be identified as "revolutionary."

Each side thus perceives the world in terms which leave little place for complexity and ambiguity. Marxism-Leninism in practice may bear little relationship to theory (in China, for example) but it does provide a way of interpreting world politics. Western opinion is happily free of orthodox authority. There is nevertheless a climate of opinion which can be easily aroused by those who claim to know "the truth" about Soviet intentions. The image of "the enemy" can change rapidly, especially in the age of the television clip and summit diplomacy (a fact of which Gorbachev is better aware than were his predecessors). And yet there is a symmetry to Soviet and American variations on this theme which reveals a kind of mutual paranoia that is deeply embedded and unresponsive to rational argument.

One variation is about the internal sources of power in each country. The Soviet ideologue is convinced that Wall Street rules, not Capitol Hill, and that somewhere along that legendary street a small group of greedy men pull the strings to which the puppets in Washington or at General Dynamics

dance. It is a favourite subject for cartoonists. So is the image of the Kremlin in the West — a dark fortress (which of course, it is, although full of light as well) inhabited by a few look-alike figures, whose collective legitimacy rests, not on popular consent, but on military power which can only justify its existence by threatening to bring "communism" to the world. These caricatures of reality draw their power from a mixture of truth and fiction. The memories of those who lived in the time of Stalin feed the Western imagination, just as the Soviet fantasy recalls the muck-raking American journalism of the time of the "robber-barons."

A second variation is about the respective ideals of communism and capitalism. The official Soviet view is that capitalism perverts "democracy" (a term with many meanings) for its own ends of personal enrichment, wage slavery and racial discrimination. The American South, and its literary historians like Faulkner or Mark Twain, are favourite subjects for television journalism or academic study, as are the ghettos and slums of the Northern cities. There is no dismissing the wealth of the capitalist world, but it is said to be earned on the back of the workers and at the expense of gross injustice for the rest of the world. The common Western version of the Communist reality (sometimes reserved only for the Soviet Union) is much the same — a privileged élite to whom all is available, and a populace scrambling for the meagre and shoddy products of a system that cannot work because individuals are given no incentives to make it work. There is a little truth in both these views, but it is not easy to distinguish it from the cumulative evidence of a different reality.

To what extent do these views reflect the sentiments of ordinary people in both countries? In my experience, the Russian people harbour little or no ill-will towards Americans, nor do films or the print media generally incite them to do so. Rather it is the "ruling classes" or the US Administration which are blamed for such hostility as may exist. The political temperature can of course be raised or lowered in accordance with official wishes, in contrast to the cultural environment of North America where the public mood is more likely to be influenced by the whims of television and film producers. Thus a recent poll of American opinion found that 58% of Americans believe they are more patriotic than are the Russians, and that 46% think they care more about their children, opinions which can hardly be explained except by large doses of misinformation.

In a 1984 study of "Assumptions and Perceptions in Disarmament", the Swiss scholar Daniel Frei concludes that the kinds of views I have just described rest on fundamental beliefs which reflect a genuine diversity of interests. He expects the underlying political conflict to continue to prevent agreement