

The Delray Democrat

If Mikhail Gorbachev Had Had a Real Partner¹

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Shortly before Mikhail Gorbachev came to power, Richard Barnett (co-founder of the progressive think tank Institute for Policy Studies) debated Ronald Reagan's nominee for Assistant Secretary of State for Human Rights, the execrable and unqualified Ernest Lefever.

Like Florida's senior senator, the ridiculous Marco Rubio, Lefever played the "soft on communism" card, claiming that Barnett had heaped praise on the Soviet system while referring to the rights guaranteed by the American system as "meaningless."

Barnett responded, "You have misquoted me before, and I have corrected you, and yet you continue to misquote me." Lefever's neck seemed to disappear as Barnett went on to explain (as best I recall):

What I said is that Russia guarantees certain economic rights to its citizens – the right to a job, an education, and healthcare whereas America guarantees procedural rights, *which I hold very dear*, such as freedom of speech and religion and assembly, *but that ultimately one without the other is meaningless.*

Unfortunately, Gorbachev's "partner" in ending the Cold War was the barely sentient Ronald Reagan, a man who once claimed that if Medicare was enacted, "you and I are going to spend our sunset years telling our children and our children's children what it once was like in America when men were free."

Instead of a world in which the Soviet Union adopted our Bill of Rights while the United States adopted an economic Bill of Rights, both countries began dismantling the very rights that Barnett had admired. Gorbachev was succeeded by oligarchs and mafiosi who stripped Russians of their wealth and birthrights. On our side of the Atlantic, Reagan unleashed crony capitalists and replaced FDR's New Deal with the Raw Deal.

American workers have barely treaded water for decades while plutocrats and billionaires multiply like roaches. At the same time, the very personal and procedural rights admired not only by Barnett but by the rest of the world have come under attack.

Yet while Gorbachev spent the last three decades being reviled in Russia, a well-oiled Republican disinformation machine was transforming a mediocre president whose average approval rating was 53% into "St. Ronnie."

If only Gorbachev had arrived on the world stage several decades earlier than he did, he would

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have found his true partner in Franklin Delano Roosevelt. And if only FDR had lived more than 4 months after he proposed a "[Second Bill of Rights](#)" in a national address, Americans might today be enjoying the economic rights later cited by Barnett and currently available to citizens of most countries in Europe..