

Grand Delusions:

Open borders will destroy society

by Ira Mehlman

On the morning after Christmas in 1991, a failed experiment in society building came to a deserved end. Not with a long-feared nuclear confrontation, or even with a bloody revolution, but with a mere whimper the Soviet Union expired in its sleep of natural causes.

Communism failed because it was in essence tyrannical – tyrannical because it stood the whole structure of human society on its head. Under communism, the people were subservient to the state, rather than the other way around. The state commanded and the people obeyed, and if they didn't they were likely to find themselves in the gulag, or worse. Under the seventy-year failed experiment known as communism there were no “people,” only workers and servants of the state. And, though it never came to full fruition, communism promised ultimately a world without borders and without other distinctions.

At the dawn of the new century, there is a new utopianism that is raging across the planet, and within certain intellectual circles in this country – including some with close ties to the current White House. Globalism is the latest ideology that promises to be the cure for humanity's every ill. A basic tenet of globalism is that for every problem there is a market-based solution, if only it were free to operate without constraints.

As in the failed communist experiment, there are no people in the utopian world envisioned by the globalist Bolsheviks, only workers and consumers who serve the almighty economy. Like the world promised by Marx and Lenin, the utopia promised by radical globalists will have no borders or other distinctions.

The model of human-society-stood-on-its-head espoused by the fathers of communism ultimately gave way to the brutal tyranny of Stalinism, because the Russian people saw themselves as something more

than just workers and servants of the state. The promised utopia of a world completely controlled by market forces will inevitably result in a form of tyranny of its own, because it fails to grasp the essential reality that human beings are driven by more than their desire for consumer goods. We are a much more complex species, driven by many powerful and often contradictory impulses.

We cannot turn back the clock. The world has shrunk radically and it will inevitably have an impact on every aspect of life everywhere on earth. The challenge before us is how to maximize the benefits of global trade without destroying the fabric of societies and the social stability that make economic growth and prosperity possible.

Cracks in the European Model

Supporters of open borders and free trade as the cure-all for illegal immigration (and almost every other problem) invariably cite the European Union as their model. The creation of the European Union – from germination in 1957 to fruition in 1992 – was a gradual process that included most of the continent's industrial nations on the free side of the Iron Curtain. This thirty-five-year process took into account that integrating the economies of nations with significant cultural, political, and linguistic differences, not to mention disparities between incomes and wealth, would be a difficult and sensitive one. The potential impact of workers from relatively poorer nations like Greece and Spain, on wealthier ones like Germany and France was one of the chief reasons for the go-slow approach to full integration.

With the fall of the Iron Curtain, the process of integrating the newly liberated societies and economies of Eastern Europe was compressed into just a few years, as new nations rushed to become part of the unified European market. In addition, Europe is now giving serious consideration to the inclusion of Turkey, which not only is not geographically part of Europe but also is culturally and religiously not part of Europe.

As workers from the former Soviet-bloc nations

Ira Mehlman is media director with the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR).

have moved into the higher-wage countries of the original EU, and those countries in transition have become a conduit for economic migrants from much of Africa and Asia, public support in “old Europe” for a fully integrated continent has cooled considerably. In countries already uneasy with the growing influence of Islam in their midst, the prospect of Muslim Turkey joining the club is exacerbating public skepticism about the blessings of open borders. The resounding

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rejection of the European constitution by voters in France and the Netherlands is indicative of the chasm that exists between the elite and ordinary working folks about the wisdom of a Europe without internal borders.

To millions of ordinary working people in Europe’s immigrant-receiving countries, the promise that, in the long run, a borderless continent will generate sufficient economic prosperity to raise all boats, rings hollow. Far from benefiting Europe’s middle class, the free flow of labor has caused economic displacement and social upheaval. In France and the Netherlands, the two countries to reject the European constitution (the British like would do the same if it is ever brought before the voters), the social and cultural impact of recent immigration appears to have had a profound effect on the decision of voters. Mass immigration hasn’t made them more prosperous; it has just made their countries less French and Dutch. To the bureaucrats in Brussels, the loss of cultural and national identity may not mean much. But to real, live

citizens of France and Holland, it is meaningful in ways that the bean counters and the globalists cannot understand.

Failed Promises of NAFTA

If elimination of borders in Europe has been less than an unqualified success, the elimination of borders in the Western Hemisphere is a disaster waiting to happen. Though not on the scale of the integration of the EU, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) foreshadows the destruction of the middle class and the social upheaval that will inevitably result from a hemisphere, or perhaps even a world, without borders.

NAFTA has worked remarkably well for the elite in the U.S. and Mexico, but has been a resounding dud for the vast majority of workers in both countries. (The relationship between the U.S. and Canada has been less problematic, owing to the fact that the two nations enjoy roughly equivalent standards of living and have similar labor and environmental laws.) While productivity in Mexico surged by 50 percent between 1994 and 2001, manufacturing wages in that country fell by 11 percent (and, in real terms, earnings were lower than they were in 1981). According to the World Bank, 51 percent of Mexicans lived in poverty in 1994 when NAFTA went into effect. Four years later 58 percent of Mexicans lived below the poverty line, while 82 percent of those in rural areas could be classified as poor.

Under NAFTA, wages for workers in the *maquiladoras* have fallen, and jobs that left the US to take advantage of lower-wage Mexican labor are now leaving Mexico in pursuit of still lower-wage labor in China and other countries. Meanwhile, American agricultural exports to Mexico (often harvested by illegal Mexican migrants in the U.S.) have wrought havoc on small subsistence farmers in Mexico. Many of these displaced farmers have migrated to the cities, or have found their way across the border to the U.S.

On our side of the border, the results have not been any better. NAFTA was sold to American workers as a treaty that would allow millions of US workers who were willing to retrain themselves to move into higher-value-added jobs, while the migration of labor-intensive jobs to Mexico would provide economic sustenance and reduce the flow of Mexican workers headed north. Neither promise has been fulfilled.

The headline in the July 3, 2005, edition of *The New York Times*, “Profits, Not Jobs, in Silicon Valley,” is all too familiar to middle-class workers in the U.S. High tech, which was supposed to be the bright future of middle-class workers in the US, in on the rebound after some rough years. That ought to be good news, “unless, that is, you happen to want to work ... in Silicon Valley” observes the *Times*. Profits for the seven largest high-tech firms in Silicon Valley have increased by an eye-popping 500 percent in the last three years, notes the article. Over the same period, employment in Santa Clara County (where these companies are headquartered) declined from 787,200 to 767,600.

If NAFTA’s promise of better twenty-first-century jobs to replace the lost twentieth-century industrial jobs in the U.S. has produced disappointing results, the promise that it would stem the tide of illegal immigration to the U.S. has been utterly unfulfilled. Illegal immigration to the United States from Mexico has exploded since NAFTA went into effect. The Pew Hispanic Center estimates that since the implementation of NAFTA, more than seven million illegal aliens have settled in the U.S. Mexico accounts for 57 percent of those in the U.S. illegally, while all of Latin America combined accounts for 81 percent of the illegal immigrant population of the U.S. Moreover, the numbers of illegal aliens from Mexico are increasing, not decreasing, after more than a decade of free trade.

In time, of course, if we continue on the path we’re headed, migration from Mexico will abate, but for all the wrong reasons. Rather than being dissuaded from migrating because of growing prosperity in Mexico, as promised under NAFTA, people will eventually stop moving when the same poverty that grips the majority of workers in Mexico is replicated in the U.S. As such, enthusiasts who promote open borders as the ultimate solution to illegal immigration from Mexico will be sorely disappointed.

A Nation, Not an Economy

A just and moral society must be predicated on the realization that the economy and all other social institutions exist to serve the interests of the people, and not the other way around. Nations, as Thomas Jefferson wrote 229 years ago, derive “their powers from the consent of the governed.” In creating this nation, the founders of the United States affixed their

signatures to a historic document that stated, “We mutually pledge to each other our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor.”

That closing sentence of the Declaration of Independence remains the best definition of what it means to be a nation. We, the people, agree to work for the common good and, if necessary, to die for one another. In return, we have every reason to believe and expect that we will benefit from that arrangement. The

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social contract that has propelled this nation to greatness has never included a clause that suggests we are all interchangeable and replaceable with the rest of humanity. When every person on Earth (or even in our hemisphere) has an equal claim on residence and employment in America, our existence as a nation will cease.

As a nation, we should actively promote economic and political reform in Mexico and other nations in our hemisphere and beyond. At the same time, we must promote prosperity for those who form the backbone of this nation. However we choose to define ourselves as a nation, it must be something more than an amalgamation of workers, consumers, or even taxpayers, who happen to occupy a defined geographic area.

If the social bonds that hold the nation together are shattered, we will become slaves to destiny instead of masters of it. When people no longer believe that their nation and their society is loyal to them, social order will inevitably break down (and with it, ironically, the world’s economy itself).

Far from promoting liberty and prosperity, a world without borders will inevitably lead to conflict, misery, and chaos – in other words, tyranny.