

# THE HERITAGE LECTURES

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Glasnost': Genuine  
Change or Illusion?

*By Vladimir Bukovsky*



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**The Heritage Foundation**  
214 Massachusetts Avenue, N.E.  
Washington, D.C. 20002  
U.S.A.  
202/546-4400

# GLASNOST': GENUINE CHANGE OR ILLUSION?

by Vladimir Bukovsky

**JULIANA PILON:** My name is Juliana Pilon. I am a Senior Policy Analyst with The Heritage Foundation, and like our guest today, I was born behind the Iron Curtain. He is Vladimir Bukovsky, one of the greatest men alive today, and it is our privilege to have a man of his courage and modesty, his intensity and political acuteness join us. As you probably know, Vladimir Bukovsky spent twelve years in prisons, labor camps, and psychiatric hospitals. He was expelled from the university and physically attacked by the KGB after organizing readings of unpublished poets in Maiakovsky Square in Moscow.

Two years later, in 1963, he was sentenced without trial to indefinite detention in the prison hospital at Leningrad. From then on, he was perpetually in and out of prison, struggling to come to terms with his persecution, the threats against his family, continued attempts to trap and taint him, and severe physical deprivation of all kinds. Finally in December 1976, Vladimir Bukovsky, along with his mother, sister, and a nephew, was released to the West in exchange for the Chilean communist leader Luis Corvalan. He continues his studies in biology and his lifelong anticommunist activities.

**VLADIMIR BUKOVSKY:** Thank you, Juliana, for that impressive introduction. I am not sure I deserve it. I am very sure, however, that you all care about the recent news from the Soviet Union. It is very confusing to many people. Even some of our more experienced compatriots have lost touch, after hearing this campaign of *glasnost'*, or cultural openness, or whatever the current term might be. Indeed the signals are very contradictory. And it is mainly because so many people want to see changes in the Soviet Union.

A few dozen prisoners get released, and of course it is very pleasant, a very good thought for all of us, but it is important to remember that the main reason that they were released was to get the prisoners to maximize the public impression with immediate concessions. But if we really had a change of heart, because of the way the Soviet Union works, we would not release one by one the most prominent dissidents over the duration of a year, we would simply declare amnesty. And we would not demand that these prisoners sign a statement that they would not continue anti-Soviet activity.

**Legalizing Moonlighting.** We also hear now and then of Gorbachev speaking, the press tells me, of the necessity for radical economic reforms in the Soviet Union. It is, of course, very pleasant to hear. Unfortunately, though it remains on paper or in words, to date, there are no reforms in the Soviet economy. The only reform or law recorded dealt with so-called individual labor activity. And in practice and fact, this simply legalized the

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Vladimir Bukovsky is President of Resistance International. He now resides in Cambridge, England.

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There is another point, which I think very important as a criterion for trade. Gorbachev tells us right now that his intention is to decentralize the economy to the level of individual enterprises. Such enterprise will be self-sufficient, self-budgeted, and independent in its decisions. Let us take him at his word. Let him do that. And let the Soviets allow enterprises and trade amongst themselves. I do not have objections to American enterprises trading with Soviet enterprises and eliminating in the process the whole superstructure of the Soviet government. That would be what Lenin could not allow in 1922. It would mean destruction of the monopoly on foreign trade, and it would go directly to the people instead of to the government.

**Army of Communists.** There are many criteria which we simply have to buy. When we speak about politics, surely whatever is picked up on the things they are doing right now is only skin deep. What they should allow is alternative structures, noncontrolled structures, structures that are not controlled by the Communist Party to appear in the Soviet Union. Let there be publications and public institutions. These are the most important criteria for us at the moment. But if we speak about the real changes in the Soviet system, if the Soviet leaders are really interested in doing that, then of course we are speaking about ideology. Unless and until the Soviet Union reconsiders the main positions of communist ideology, challenges them openly, preferably in the party congress, and acknowledges that there is no historic struggle between two worlds and no class struggle raging anymore--unless and until they do that, the Soviet system will remain exactly as it is, because ideology is exactly the hard-core of the Soviet system, which does not allow it to go too far or too long. There is always a fallback position. There is a huge army of professional communists, professional revolutionaries drawing their salaries and privileges for spreading ideology and maintaining the purity. They are those who are responsible for bringing up generation after generation in the Soviet Union. With all these people whose vested interest is with the ideology there is no such thing as a trade.

You cannot expect any relaxation within the Soviet Union. It would be physically impossible. There cannot be a detente or peaceful coexistence with the West as long as the objective of the Soviet system as such is to bury the West or as long as they maintain that detente, as Brezhnev said in 1975, in no way rescinds or can rescind the laws of class struggle.

**Emigration Is Treason.** Equally there cannot be a peaceful coexistence within the Soviet Union between the population and the system as long as the people are drafted into a huge army of ideological warriors. Even in peacetime, an attempt to defect to the West for a civilian is regarded by law as high treason and equated with the defection of a soldier to the enemy lines during a war.

When the desire to emigrate is regarded as treason, as long as that remains and is imbued in the ideology, there can be no relaxation within the country or without. If they really want to turn a new page in history, as they say right now, they should start by cancelling the massive militarization of the Soviet society. They should close down the military patriotic education program, which is obligatory in every Soviet school, and which I can compare only with the training of the Hitler youth. That should be stopped first and foremost. And they should disclose the truth about the crimes of the regime in the past. Otherwise nobody can trust their intentions.

Consider just two examples. How can people trust their desire to encourage individual labor activity, as they call it, when the collectivization and murder of about ten million peasants is still not branded as a crime--is still not condemned by the ruling party. How can anybody be encouraged by any of their promises, if that is still an option before the people. How can anybody believe in so-called glasnost' if the Soviet occupation of Czechoslovakia in 1968 is still not regarded as an international crime. After all, the Prague Spring was just a genuine campaign of glasnost' in Czechoslovakia. If you look at all these facts, you understand that the change in the Soviet Union has to be much more fundamental in order to make it irreversible. As long as it is not, the West should not commit itself to anything irreversible in its Soviet relations.

