

Western moths drawn to Soviet flame

Excuse the melodrama, but a red cloud does seem to be sweeping across North America. I don't mean the tedious twaddle being dished out by that sententious TV soap opera, *Amerika*. Such nonsense would better have been titled *Red Yawn*, or *The Harlequin History of World War III*, written by Danielle Steel.

No, I am referring to the current euphoria over the Soviet Union, a giddiness among the media and literati that is producing paralysis of common sense and memory — or what Midge Decter calls “wishful ignorance.”

Watching the rising tide of adulation for Mikhail Gorbachev and his “new” Russia, gives me a sense of *deja vu* and some very bumpy feelings.

Take, for example, this week's love-in jamboree in Moscow. To this “Peace Conference” flocked a sizable number of pro-Soviet groupies, including Graham Greene, Pierre Trudeau, Yoko Ono and Norman Mailer; standard-bearers of the left like John Galbraith; and that charming fellow traveller, Peter Ustinov. There they sat in Moscow, sagely nodding agreement as the U.S. was denounced as a threat to world peace.

This kind of Soviet Chautauqua is familiar stuff to those over 40. Back in the 1930s and '50s, leftist western intellectuals flocked to Moscow to revel in the wisdom and goodness of Josef Stalin and Nikita Khrushchev. Let's not forget how such great western minds as Jean-Paul Sartre or Simone de Beauvoir pooh-poohed the mere suggestion that there were concentration camps in the USSR — even as late as 1960. Or how the liberal U.S. VP Henry Wallace, toured Siberia's death camps in the 1930s and came home lauding the “healthy environment” of



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the Soviet Gulag. Fools, as P.T. Barnum observed, are ever plentiful.

Keep also in mind that the west has greeted each new Soviet leader with fevered optimism and deep credulity bordering on evangelical mania. Remember when Khrushchev, or Leonid Brezhnev, or the jazz-loving Juri Andropov was going to turn the Soviet Union into a kindly and affectionate neighbor? What we are seeing with Mikhail Gorbachev is a function of this persistent western addiction for reckless wishful thinking.

It's what I call the “PX syndrome.” When I was in basic training, we recruits were treated like cattle and routinely abused by a snarling drill sergeant. For two grueling weeks we were not even allowed to go to the PX to buy a Coke. Then, the much-hated sergeant said, “Men, you've done well so I'm gonna let you go to the PX.”

Instantly, almost everyone said, “Gee, sarge's really not such a bad guy after all.” Stop beating someone and they think you're nice.

No wonder that western media types and literati are hopelessly clustering around the new-look Soviet leader like moths about a candle. He is warm and says all the right soothing words. Add to this swarm

western businessmen who suddenly scent the lure of deals. Will it be long before Jane Fonda is doing aerobics in Moscow or Canada's Catholic bishops are kowtowing to the New Rome?

Having given my warnings, let me as well repeat what I have lately written: There are important, historical changes under way in the USSR and China. The communist world is in a period of internal flux and ferment not seen since the 1920s. Its internal contradictions are forcing changes that may permanently alter the character of communist societies. Changes that could also have unpredictable, even dangerous results.

Another liberal like Alexander Dubeck might emerge at the head of any communist state — but so might another Stalin. The system that produced Stalin and gave him free reign is still intact.

So as we observe the fascinating and dramatic events now under way in the communist world, the password should be: “*Prudence — et encore de prudence.*” We have been so many times fooled and misled by events occurring within the closed societies of the East Bloc that caution is mandatory. Soviet and Chinese disinformation is powerful, effective and persistent. Recall when western liberals were convinced that Stalinism was next to godliness? What happened to all those media types and “experts” who used to so loudly adore Mao and his works?

Let's not break out into prickly heat over supposed Soviet “democratization” or “liberalization” until we can actually see behind the big puffs of colorful smoke now issuing out of the Kremlin. But let's also keep watching closely.