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To: The Globe and Mail Letter Editor,  
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Sir,

In "Zyuganov and the politics of envy" (Globe and Mail, 1 July 1996) Professor Aurel Braun has identified correctly the most important factor explaining why a number of countries have succumbed so easily to communism, but have been unable to achieve economic development easily.

The Russian October 10 Revolution intrigued many historians, and political and social scientists, as it did not follow the pattern predicted by Marx, Russia not being in its highest stage of capitalist development compared to Germany, for example. The factors identified as causes of its success – land for the peasants, peace for the soldiers, and bread for all – and the tactical genius of Lenin all contained elements of truth, but then after World War II communist success in many non-European countries called for satisfactory explanations and none was really found. Factors like colonialism, feudalism inequality, abject poverty, were put forward. But if they explained the easy success of communism in seizing power there, they could not explain why those countries were incapable of economic take-off afterwards.

Now, Professor Braun has put forward the thesis that societies with a culture in which envy predominates are the best candidates for a communist takeover. But communism, which systematically exploits envy, stops there. It can bring down weak governments, but it is incapable of building sound economics, precisely because envy is not the right factor for it. Envy can destroy. It cannot build. Only the desire to do as well as others, discipline, thrift, and the willingness to work hard and honestly to get there instead of giving in to the urge of pulling down those who are above one and seizing their properties can produce the desired result.

Professor Braun's psychological approach should serve as basis for a new approach to the study of communism and economic development, especially in the countries of the Third World.