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**VOICES OF THE VICTIMS  
NOTES TOWARDS A  
HISTORIOGRAPHY OF  
ANTI-COMMUNIST LITERATURE**

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# New Direction



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1

# INTRODUCTION

Today, 7 November 2017, 100 years have passed since communists seized power in Russia under the leadership of Vladimir Lenin. The Bolsheviks, as they were called in Russia, looked upon their takeover as only the first step to conquering the whole world and making it over according to the ideas of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. They almost succeeded. The pursuit by the communists of their dream became a nightmare for more than a billion people, their subjects and victims in Russia, China, Central and Eastern Europe, the Korean Peninsula, Indo-China and Cuba. It cost approximately 100 million lives, according to the *Black Book of Communism*, published in 1997.<sup>1</sup> The story of communism is one of the greatest tragedies of world history, but, strangely, a tragedy almost without any spectators. Hitler's national socialism is rightly seen as a horrible lapse into barbarism, criminal in nature, whereas the communism of Lenin, Stalin, Mao, Pol Pot and their comrades is often explained away as a well-meant experiment gone awfully wrong. But the record shows that communism is also criminal in nature. It is the denial of fundamental human values such as individual freedom, impersonal justice and respect for people regardless of their colour, creed, class, sex, lifestyles or views.

In this report, I give a brief summary of the books and ideas which I have found helpful in understanding this extraordinary force, which, like a ghost, haunted Europe for over a century. Perhaps it is not even a force spent: After all, the rulers of Russia and China seem unwilling to recognise the many victims of communism in their countries, and two real communist countries still exist, North Korea and Cuba. The origin of my report is that in 2014, Dr. Neela Winkelmann, Director of the Platform of European Memory and Conscience, asked me to make a list of the best books I knew about communism. She subsequently published the list

on the platform's website.<sup>2</sup> I could, however, only devote one or two sentences to each of the books. In this report, I publish a greatly expanded version of that list, made at the request of Naweed Khan of the Brussels think-tank New Direction. I tried not only to include works that are already well-known, but also books that have undeservedly fallen into oblivion. Also, I add a few words about the nature of communism and why Leninism, and after it Stalinism and Maoism, was a logical extension of Marxism rather than an aberration from it.

This report takes its lead from the Prague Declaration of June 2008, where the signatories—including Václav Havel, former President of the Czech Republic; Joachim Gauck, later President of Germany; Vytautas Landsbergis, former President of Lithuania; and French philosopher André Glucksmann—stated that societies neglecting the past would have no future. They called for the following:

1. Reaching an all-European understanding that both the Nazi and Communist totalitarian regimes, each to be judged by their own terrible merits, were destructive in their policies of systematically applying extreme forms of terror, suppressing all civic and human liberties, starting aggressive wars and, as an inseparable part of their ideologies, exterminating and deporting whole nations and groups of population; because of this, they should be considered the main disasters that blighted the 20th century,
2. Recognition that many crimes committed in the name of communism should be assessed as crimes against humanity, serving as a warning for future generations in the same way Nazi crimes were assessed by the Nuremberg Tribunal,

3. Formulation of a common approach regarding crimes of totalitarian regimes, *inter alia* communist regimes and raising a Europe-wide awareness of the communist crimes in order to clearly define a common attitude towards the crimes of the communist regimes.<sup>3</sup>

The European Parliament responded to the Prague Declaration by adopting a Resolution in April 2009, calling for greater access in member states to documents from the communist era and condemning the massive human rights violations committed by totalitarian regimes, adding the following:

“Parliament calls for the establishment of a Platform of European Memory and Conscience, which would provide support for networking and cooperation among national research institutes specialising in the subject of totalitarian history and for the creation of a pan-European documentation centre/memorial for the victims of all totalitarian regimes. MEPs want a strengthening of the existing relevant financial instruments with a view to providing support for the initiatives outlined above. The House also calls for the proclamation of 23 August as a Europe-wide Remembrance Day for the victims of all totalitarian and authoritarian regimes, to be commemorated with dignity and impartiality.<sup>4</sup>

The Platform of European Memory and Conscience was duly established in 2011. Having translated the *Black Book of Communism* into Icelandic in 2009 and written the history of the Icelandic communist movement in 2011, I have been participating in its efforts from early on.<sup>5</sup>

Some might argue that we should concentrate on more pressing issues than the communist past, such as curbing inflation or lowering the income tax. But we do not really have a choice: memory is an

inescapable part of our thought processes. We will always have to interpret the past in some way and learn some history. The question is only what kind of history it will be. This is not necessarily the same as the question of whose history it will be. Some anti-communists might expect us to write the history of the victims rather than the executioners. But perhaps the muse of history should be impartial, like the goddess of justice. The most important requirement should really be that we write a history where executioners are called executioners and victims are called victims. It is a different matter altogether what, if anything, we can learn from studying the past. While Hegel once stated that the only thing we learn from history is that we do not learn from history, Santayana observed that those who cannot learn from the past are condemned to repeat it.<sup>6</sup> We do not know which of the two philosophers is right, and perhaps they both are. But what we do know is that communism claimed around 100 million lives in the 20th century. At least some of us think that these victims should not be forgotten. Perhaps the only consolation we can offer them and their families is that historians will not keep silent about them. ‘When in the silence of abjection, no sound can be heard save that of the chains of the slave and the voice of the informer, when all tremble before the tyrant and it is as dangerous to incur his favour as to merit his displeasure, the historian appears entrusted with the vengeance of the people. Nero prospers in vain, for Tacitus has already been born within the Empire.’<sup>7</sup>

Reykjavik, 7 November 2017.  
Hannes H. Gissurarson.

1 Stéphane Courtois et al., *Le Livre noir de communisme* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1997).

2 Hannes H. Gissurarson, Virtual Library, <https://www.memoryandconscience.eu/library/>

3 Prague Declaration, 3 June 2008, <https://web.archive.org/web/20080929021343/http://www.praguedeclaration.org:80/>

4 European Parliament Resolution on European Conscience and Totalitarianism, 2 April 2009, <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+IM-PRESS+20090401IPR53245+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN>

5 Stéphane Courtois et al., *Svarbók kommunistans* (Reykjavik: University of Iceland Press, 2009). The translation was published in the memory of staunch anti-communist Gunnar A. Pálsson. Hannes H. Gissurarson, *Íslenskir kommúnistar 1918–1998* [Icelandic Communists 1918–1998] (Reykjavik: Almenna bókafélagid, 2011).

6 Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte* (1832), Einleitung. *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* (1832; London: G. Bell & Sons, 1914), Introduction, II, 2, p. 6. In German, Hegel said: ‘Was die Erfahrung aber und die Geschichte lehren, ist dieses, daß Völker und Regierungen niemals etwas aus der Geschichte gelernt und nach Lehren, die aus derselben zu ziehen gewesen wären, gehandelt haben.’ George Santayana, *The Life of Reason: or the Phases of Human Progress*, Vol. 1 (London: Constable, 1906), p. 284. He actually said: ‘Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.’

7 François de Chateaubriand, *Mercure de France* 4 July 1807. Cf. Stéphane Courtois, Introduction, *The Black Book of Communism* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 29–30.

2

## FROM PETROGRAD TO PYONGYANG

At the dawn of the 20th century, in August 1903 Russia's Marxist party, the Social Democratic Labour Party as it called itself, held its second congress in London. The Russian exiles split into two factions, radical Bolsheviks under Lenin's leadership and the more moderate Mensheviks. Lenin favoured a small, united, well-trained force which should unhesitatingly assume absolute power in the revolution he and other Marxists thought inevitable. At the congress, there was an interesting exchange of ideas between a delegate called Posadovsky (although his real name was Victor E. Mandelberg) and the veteran Marxist Georgi Plekhanov, regarded as the party's founding father. Posadovsky called for more frankness: „Must we subordinate our future policies to this or that fundamental democratic principle or principles, recognising them as absolute values; or must all democratic principles be subordinated exclusively to the exigencies of the party? I am quite definitively in favour of the latter. There are absolutely no democratic principles which we ought not to subordinate to the needs of our party.' Somebody cried out: 'And the sanctity of the person?' Posadovsky responded: 'Yes, that too! As a revolutionary party, seeking its final goal—the social revolution—we must be guided exclusively by considerations of what will help us to achieve this goal. We must look on democratic principles solely from the point of view of the needs of our party; if this or that claim does not suit us, we shall not allow it.' Plekhanov fully agreed with Posadovsky, quoting the old legal maxim, *'Salus populi suprema lex esto,'* The salvation of the people should be the supreme law. He added: 'Translated into the language of the revolutionary, this means that the success of the revolution is the highest law.'<sup>8</sup>

The distinguished liberal thinker Isaiah Berlin believes this was the first time such an unequivocal declaration was made in the history of European democracy.<sup>9</sup>

Certainly this seemed to become the guiding principle of the Russian Bolsheviks when they seized power in the capital, then called Petrograd, in 7 November 1917. Almost obsessed with the failure of the 1789 French Revolution, they immediately tried to extinguish all possible opposition to their revolutionary programme. In elections to a constituent assembly held two and a half weeks after their coup, the Bolsheviks only received ¼ of the votes. The rural-based Social Revolutionary Party received over 40% of the votes, the Constitutional Democrats (Cadets) 5% and the Mensheviks 3%. The Bolsheviks dissolved the assembly the day after it convened and ruled through 'Soviets' or workers' committees. Their government immediately established a secret police, the Cheka, and began executing 'class enemies' or sending them to prisons or concentration camps. All private companies were nationalised, and their former owners and other persons of authority that were still alive were defined as 'Former People' and denied almost all civil rights.<sup>10</sup> Thus, the nascent industrialisation of Russia was halted. Living standards declined dramatically.

In 1918 the Bolsheviks had the former tsar Nicholas II killed with all his family in a ghastly way. The Romanovs were rounded up in the basement of the house where they were being held, and shot. When it became clear that the children had survived the initial shooting, they were shot, bayoneted and clubbed to death. The bodies were stripped, mutilated and dumped into a mineshaft. Lenin tried to cover his tracks and pretended, implausibly, that the decision had been made locally.<sup>11</sup> From 1918 to 1920 the 'Red Army' of the Bolsheviks conducted a ferocious war against the 'White Army', organised by former tsarist generals. The Bolsheviks' tight control of the economy caused deprivation and discontent, even among



Lenin was an orthodox Marxist: Everything should be subordinated to the needs of the Revolution.

their original supporters. This led in spring 1921 to an uprising of soldiers and workers in the naval fortress Kronstadt, which was brutally suppressed by the Red Army. Probably, this was the closest the Bolsheviks came to being overthrown despite all their blunders in managing the economy, which included causing a famine in Southeast Russia in 1921–1922 which cost around 5 million lives. Lenin suffered a series of strokes and died in 1924. In the vicious power struggle breaking out after Lenin's illness and death, Joseph Stalin, the general secretary of the Soviet Communist Party, triumphed. His main rival, Lev Trotsky, who had been just as brutal as Stalin in the first years of the Bolshevik regime, was sent into exile. Trotsky soon saw his early prediction about Lenin's 'democratic centralism' (which he subsequently had supported) fulfilled: 'In the internal politics of the Party these methods lead,' Trotsky had written after the 1903 Congress, 'to the Party organisation "substituting" itself for the Party, the Central Committee substituting itself for the Party organisation, and finally the dictator substituting himself for the Central Committee.'<sup>12</sup>

Stalin started the first five-year plan in 1928, aiming at rapid industrialisation. A part of his programme was the collectivisation of agriculture, opposed by most farmers. The government responded to the opposition by starving to death many farmers and their families and deporting many others. It is estimated that in the Great Famine in Ukraine and Southern Russia in 1932–1933, around 6 million people lost their lives. When the centralisation of decisions did not produce the desired results, Stalin and the other Bolsheviks blamed it on sabotage and recklessness and had the presumed perpetrators shot or imprisoned. In the mid-1930s Stalin turned against his former allies in the struggle with Trotsky, had them arrested and held public trials of those among them who were ready to confess to all kinds of crimes, including not only cooperating with Trotsky to overthrow Stalin, but also, incredibly, seeking to reintroduce capitalism in Russia. The Revolution was devouring its children, as one of the French revolutionaries had said. But Stalin was not going to be a new Robespierre. He kept a close watch on his comrades with his feared secret police that conducted regular party purges. Meanwhile, millions

<sup>8</sup> Isaiah Berlin, *Political Ideas in the Twentieth Century, Four Essays on Liberty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 17 and Appendix 1.

<sup>9</sup> Berlin, *Four Essays on Liberty*, Appendix 1.

<sup>10</sup> The most recent research on Lenin is presented in Stéphane Courtois, *Lénine: l'inventeur du totalitarisme* [Lenin: the Inventor of Totalitarianism] (Paris: Perrin, 2017).

<sup>11</sup> Robert Service, *The Last of the Tsars: Nicholas II and the Russian Revolution* (London: Macmillan, 2017).

<sup>12</sup> Lev Trotsky, *Nashi Politicheskiye Zadachi*, II (Geneva: 1904), p. 54. English translation, *Our Political Tasks* (London: New Park Publications, 1979). Available online, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1904/tasks/ch03.htm>



The tsar, Nicholas II, and his family were brutally murdered in the summer of 1918, probably on an order from Lenin who however covered his tracks carefully.

of people toiled in labour camps, most of them for the sole offence of being suspected of not supporting Stalin.

As orthodox Marxists, Lenin, Trotsky, Stalin and the other Bolsheviks initially believed that it would only be a matter of time until the Russian Revolution would be replicated in other countries. They supported communist movements in other countries and established the Communist International, or Comintern, in 1919. Member parties had to accept the so-called 'Moscow Theses' adopted at the 1920 Comintern Congress, which called for military training of party members and for armed uprisings when the opportunity offered itself. The member parties slavishly had to follow policies formed in Moscow.<sup>13</sup> This was sometimes difficult, as these policies were abruptly changed from one time to another. In the early 1930s Stalin had defined social democrats or

'social fascists' as the main enemies. With the Nazi takeover in Germany and the rise of fascism elsewhere in Europe, fascists became the main enemies. But just as suddenly in August 1939, Stalin made the notorious Non-Aggression Pact with Hitler whereby the two dictators divided up between them Central and Eastern Europe. Stalin was to get Finland, the Baltic countries, Eastern Poland and Moldova, while Hitler got Western Poland. When the two dictators started implementing their deal and Hitler invaded Poland, the United Kingdom, backed by other Commonwealth countries, and France declared war on Germany. In 1940 Stalin had Trotsky murdered, thus confirming the bitter truth of Trotsky's prophetic remark: 'He seeks to strike not at the ideas of his opponent, but at his skull.'<sup>14</sup> For a little less than two years, Stalin and Hitler were allies, and communist parties all around the world were instructed to announce that there was no real difference between France and the United Kingdom on the one hand and Nazi Germany on the other hand. Stalin even handed over to Hitler some of the German communists that he had imprisoned in his purges.

It is a sobering thought that after the fall of France in 1940, there were only six functioning

<sup>14</sup> Pages from Trotsky's Journal, *Fourth International*, Vol. 2, No. 5 (June 1941), pp. 150–154.

<sup>13</sup> Jane Degras (ed.), *The Communist International, 1919–1943. Documents*, Vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956), p. 169–171. 'They are obliged everywhere to create a parallel illegal organization which at the decisive moment will help the party to do its duty to the revolution... Every party which wishes to join the Communist International is obliged to give unconditional support to any Soviet republic in its struggle against counter-revolutionary forces.' In Wikipedia, in a chapter on the Moscow Theses, the former requirement quoted is wrongly translated as 'They have the obligation of setting up a parallel organisational apparatus which, at the decisive moment, can assist the party to do its duty to the revolution.' [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Twenty-one\\_Conditions](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Twenty-one_Conditions) [accessed 7 November 2017]. The translator has omitted the crucial word 'illegal'. In the original German text the words are 'parallelen illegalen Organisationsapparat'.

democracies left in Europe: the United Kingdom, Ireland, Iceland, Sweden, Finland and Switzerland. But suddenly, in June 1941, upon the Nazi invasion of Russia, Western democracies found themselves in an alliance with Stalin, who in 1943 dissolved the Comintern as a gesture to his new allies. At the end of the war, Winston Churchill and Franklin D. Roosevelt felt that they had to accept the occupation of Central and Eastern Europe by Stalin's Red Army, against promises that the citizens of these countries would be able to decide on their future in free elections. However, communists in the region swiftly seized power, established one-party states with strict censorship and a secret police, and nationalised all major industries. An iron curtain had descended across Europe, from Stettin in the Baltics to Trieste near

the Adriatic, in Churchill's memorable phrase. In 1949, when Stalin celebrated his 70th birthday, the communists ruled almost half the world, because they had conquered China, the most populous country on earth, and North Korea. Their advance was, however, temporarily halted in Korea from 1950 to 1953.

Stalin did not soften with old age. He was preparing a persecution of Jews when he died in the spring of 1953. But it came as a surprise to the world when Nikita Khrushchev in a secret speech to a congress of the Soviet Communist Party in early 1956 admitted many of Stalin's misdeeds, such as executions of innocent people and mass deportations, carefully steering clear though of the artificial famines and labour camps.



Stalin had reason to smile when the Non-Aggression Pact between him and Hitler was signed in Moscow 23 August 1939. He got Finland, the Baltic Republics, Eastern Poland and Moldova.

Khrushchev chose to blame Stalin, and not Lenin, for the enormous sufferings of the Russian people. Meanwhile, in China Mao had established a terror regime even worse than that of Stalin. The communist victory in 1949 had led to a veritable bloodbath, and Mao's 'Great Leap Forward' in 1958 had resulted in the greatest man-made disaster of all times, a famine that cost the lives of approximately 45 million people. Temporarily weakened by the catastrophe, Mao bided his time and in 1966 launched the 'Cultural Revolution', another disaster, albeit not as costly in human lives as the Great Leap Forward. Under communism, millions of people were also kept in labour camps, the Laogai. Most Chinese breathed a barely disguised sigh of relief when the 'Red Emperor' passed away in 1976.

As Posadovsky and Plekhanov insisted in 1903, everything had to be subordinated to the needs of the party. While Stalin's successors took a softer approach than he in many ways, they invaded the two countries that they saw as likely to leave the communist camp: Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968. In 1975, when communists conquered all of Indo-China, this camp had reached its greatest extent.<sup>15</sup> In Cambodia intellectuals mostly educated in France established perhaps the cruellest communist regime that the world has ever seen, even if it only lasted four years. More than a quarter of the Cambodian population perished during this period. The communist rulers might have quarreled with one another, but they all had in common the fact that they denied their subjects basic human rights.

In the 1980s, Soviet communism began to disintegrate. The Soviet leader, Mikhail Gorbachev, knew that he was presiding over a stagnant or even declining economy and that something had to be done about it. In the United States and the United Kingdom, firm anti-communists had been elected as leaders, Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher, both of whom were charismatic and forceful. A Polish pope, Karol Wojtyła, made a significant impact in Central and Eastern Europe.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Even if communists for a while controlled both Afghanistan and Ethiopia, their control there was only temporary and in many ways limited by circumstances.

<sup>16</sup> John O'Sullivan, *The President, the Pope and the Prime Minister: Three Who Changed the World* (Washington DC: Regnery, 2006).

Gorbachev realised that his room for manoeuvring was limited. He cautiously allowed more freedom of expression, and when the nations of Central and Eastern Europe sensed the lack of will, and perhaps also powerlessness, in Moscow to intervene in their affairs, they rose up and claimed their independence back. In the course of a year, in 1989, communist rulers fell all over Central and Eastern Europe. After a failed coup by Soviet hardliners in 1991, the Soviet Union was dissolved and eleven independent countries emerged, including in Europe the three Baltic republics, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, as well as Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia.

In China the ruling communists reacted differently. They were at the same time more pragmatic and tougher than their Russian comrades. One of Mao's successors, Deng Xiaoping, famously quipped that it did not matter whether a cat was black or white, as long as it caught mice. The Chinese rulers introduced a free market in many sectors of the economy, but kept a tight grip on power. China is still a one-party state, but she is only nominally a communist or a totalitarian country. On the 100th anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution in November 2017, there were only two totalitarian communist countries left: Cuba seems cautiously to be moving towards some kind of capitalism, whereas North Korea remains resolutely totalitarian, appearing almost surreal to foreign observers. Both countries have in essence become family firms – of the Castro brothers in Cuba and the three Kims, grandfather, father and son, in North Korea.

## 3

## THE ROAD TO SERFDOM

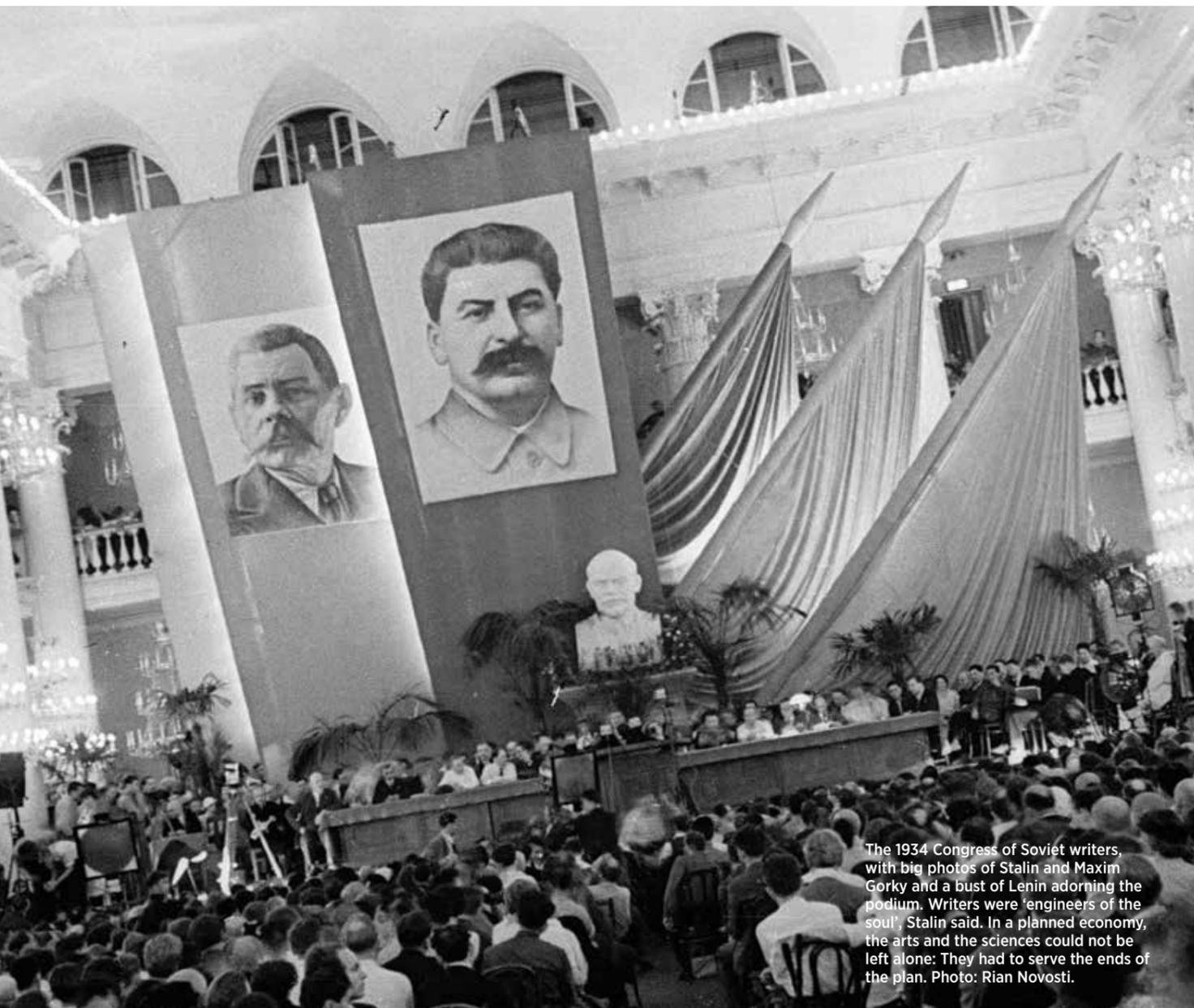
A brief summary of the history of international communism leads to an obvious question: What caused its spectacular failure? It did not only fail in Russia. It has failed everywhere, including in China, Central and Eastern Europe, Indo-China, Cuba and North Korea. To see its economic failure, it is enough to compare the economies of East and West Germany or of North and South Korea. To see its political failure, it is sufficient to recall that communism was nowhere freely adopted, and as soon as people in communist countries could dismiss their rulers, they did. During the communist era, many also voted with their feet, sometimes taking great risks in their attempts to escape, and many Cubans, of course, voted with their oars. The greatest failure of communism, however, was its enormous cost in terms of lives lost or destroyed. The failure was universal and, therefore, systemic rather than accidental. It did not derive from the countries in question, although obviously traditions differed widely: The tsar's rule in Russia was authoritarian, but not totalitarian. The Bolsheviks killed many more people in the course

of a few months than had been executed in the whole of the preceding century under the tsars. Neither did the utter failure of communism depend on the personalities involved, even though they certainly made a difference. Stalin and Mao, Pol Pot and Kim Il-sung may have added some personal obsessions, quirks and whims to the communist rule in their respective countries, but there would have been a reign of terror under Trotsky in Russia (as his command of the Red Army during the Civil War showed) or under Deng Xiaopeng in China (who participated in Mao's worst excesses after the communist victory in the Chinese Civil War). Anyway, if a part of the explanation was that Stalin and Mao, or Pol Pot and Kim Il-sung, were monsters, then a part of the question would immediately become what kind of a system it is that allows monsters to become absolute rulers of whole nations, and then we again would have to search for systemic rather than accidental explanations.

The heart of the matter is that the Marxist project – in which the leaders of all the communist countries



East German girls marching at the 1951 East Berlin World Festival of Youth and Students: Central Economic Planning requires One Party, One Leader, One Truth. Photo: Bundesarchiv.



The 1934 Congress of Soviet writers, with big photos of Stalin and Maxim Gorky and a bust of Lenin adorning the podium. Writers were 'engineers of the soul', Stalin said. In a planned economy, the arts and the sciences could not be left alone: They had to serve the ends of the plan. Photo: Rian Novosti.

firmly believed – required in the short-term terrorist measures in order to seize power and hold on to it and in the long-term the establishment of totalitarian control in order to maintain itself. Violence on a massive scale was an inevitable part of the project, precisely because it consisted in imposing upon mostly unwilling people a model of society without private property and free trade, the most effective ways yet developed to satisfy the material needs of people. Others would not have much of a quarrel with communists, if they had only been communists for themselves and not for others. For example, in Israel people can freely enter into collectives, the *kibbutzim*, where essentially they live in a communist society. More importantly, they can also leave those collectives. American philosopher Robert Nozick once

pointed out that the *kibbutzim* provides at least some idea of how many would choose communism if they were given the choice. It turns out that about 6% of people would do so.<sup>17</sup> Under capitalism, people can freely form workers' collectives and compete with private companies on the free market. Indeed in the 19th century, English philosopher John Stuart Mill thought that eventually communism would spread spontaneously around the world through competition because in such collectives workers would be much more satisfied and productive than in companies

17 Robert Nozick, *Who Would Choose Socialism? The Israeli Kibbutzim Provide the Acid Test for Voluntary Socialism*, *Reason*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (May 1978), pp. 22–23.

owned by capitalists.<sup>18</sup> But Lenin and the Bolsheviks, and for that matter also the Mensheviks (and social democrats in other countries), had no time for such voluntary communism chosen on an individual basis. They all wanted to seize power – Lenin in a conspiracy leading to a coup and the social democrats in free elections. They all then wanted to use this newly gained power to abolish private property and free trade, identified by Marx and Engels as the roots of evil, and to impose communism on society.

Marx and Engels were no humanitarians. They did not oppose violence. There is, as has often been observed, a lot of hatred, intolerance, prejudice and contempt of ordinary people in their writings. They believed in the 'survival of the fittest', but for them 'the fittest' were those nations on whom the Revolution could be imposed most easily. They were imbued with the same ideas as their disciples, Lenin, Stalin and Mao, and the two delegates to the 1903 Congress of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party, Posadovsky and Plekhanov. To them everything had to be subordinated to the needs of the Revolution. For example, Engels wrote that in the Habsburg Empire, only the Germans, the Poles and the Magyars could be regarded as progressive: 'All the other large and small nationalities and peoples are destined to perish before long in the revolutionary world storm.' Engels added: 'There is no country in Europe which does not have in some corner or other one or several ruined fragments of peoples, the remnant of a former population that was suppressed and held in bondage by the nation which later became the main vehicle of historical development.' He also said, ominously: 'The next world war will result in the disappearance from the face of the earth not only of reactionary classes and dynasties, but also of entire reactionary peoples. And that, too, is a step forward.'<sup>19</sup>

After the United States annexed huge chunks of Mexico after a war from 1846 to 1848, Engels found it rather fortunate that 'splendid California has been taken away from the lazy Mexicans'. Commenting again on the Habsburg Empire, he said that

18 John Stuart Mill, *Chapters on Socialism*, *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, Vol. V, ed. John M. Robson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1967 [1879]), pp. 703–756.

19 Friedrich Engels, *Der magyarische Kampf*, *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* 13 January 1849. Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, *Werke*, Vol. 6 (Berlin: Dietz, 1961), pp. 168, 172 and 176. English translation, <http://marxists.anu.edu.au/archive/marx/works/1849/01/13.htm>

“ the Germans and Magyars untied all these small, stunted and impotent little nations into a single big state and thereby enabled them to take part in a historical development from which, left to themselves, they would have remained completely aloof! Of course, matters of this kind cannot be accomplished without many a tender national blossom being forcibly broken. But in history nothing is achieved without violence and implacable ruthlessness.<sup>20</sup>

Engels also commented contemptuously on the 'lousy Balkan' nations under Ottoman rule: 'These wretched, ruined fragments of one-time nations, the Serbs, Bulgars, Greeks, and other robber bands, on behalf of which the liberal philistine waxes enthusiastic in the interests of Russia, are unwilling to grant each other the air they breathe, and feel obliged to cut each other's greedy throats.'<sup>21</sup>

Even if Marx was usually not quite as outspoken as his friend and benefactor Engels, he also preached revolutionary violence and the merciless survival of the fittest nations. He wrote, for example, that 'there is only one way in which the murderous death agonies of the old society and the bloody birth throes of the new society can be shortened, simplified and concentrated, and that way is through revolutionary terror.'<sup>22</sup> Echoing Engels, he referred to the European territories under Ottoman rule as having 'the misfortune to be inhabited by a conglomerate of different races and nationalities, of which it was hard to say which was the least fit for progress and civilisation'.<sup>23</sup> In a comment on Great Britain as a naval power, he wrote: 'Such is the redeeming feature of war; it puts a nation to the test. An exposure to the atmosphere reduces all mummies to instant dissolution so war passes supreme judgments upon

20 Friedrich Engels, *Der demokratische Panslawismus*, *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*, 15 February 1849. Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, *Werke*, Vol. 6 (Berlin: Dietz, 1961), pp. 273 and 278–279. English translation, <http://marxists.anu.edu.au/archive/marx/works/1849/02/15.htm>

21 Friedrich Engels to August Bebel 17 November 1885. Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, *Werke*, Vol. 36 (Berlin: Dietz, 1967), p. 391. Tr. by Bertram Wolfe. This letter is, for some reason, not published online at the Marxist Archive, where Engels' other letters to Bebel are to be found.

22 Karl Marx, *Sieg der Kontrerevolution zu Wien*, *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* 7 November 1848. Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, *Werke*, Vol. 6, p. 457. English translation, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/11/06.htm>

23 Karl Marx, *Britische Politik*. *British Politics*, *New York Daily Tribune* 7 April 1853. Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, *Werke*, Vol. 9 (Berlin: Dietz, 1960), p. 7. English translation, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/subject/russia/crimean-war.htm#01>

social organizations that have outlived their vitality.<sup>24</sup> These were not empty speculations. When push came to shove in the Paris commune after the 1871 defeat of France by Germany, Marx fully supported the terror the communards implemented in Paris while the French government temporarily resided in Versailles. 'But the execution by the Commune of the 64 hostages, with the Archbishop of Paris at their head!' He answered himself: 'The lives of the hostages have been forfeited over and over again by the continued shooting of prisoners on the part of the Versaillese.'<sup>25</sup> (Later Lenin would comment on the Paris commune: 'Lessons: Bourgeoisie will stop at nothing.')<sup>26</sup>

Marx and Engels also passed on to their disciples a lot of dogmatic certainty, which usually has as its corollary intolerance of other people's opinions, as it did in their case. They did not recognise that science is the pursuit and not the possession of truth. Their own conclusions clearly were not above criticism. One obvious problem with the theory is that the workers did not become poorer and poorer, as Marx and Engels had predicted. They did not sink 'below the conditions of existence' as they had proclaimed in the *Communist Manifesto*. Indeed, already in mid-20th century, workers in the United States had a lot more than their 'chains' to lose, including a house, car, refrigerator, vacuum cleaner, television set, washing machine and countless other conveniences, perhaps even shares in companies. What happened was that the rich became richer and the poor became richer, too. Indeed, with economic development, class divisions became weaker rather than stronger. Society did not split into a small group owning capital and a big one selling labour. Classes do exist, and it can be meaningful in many societies to speak of a ruling class that uses government power to further its own interest. But by dividing up society into two classes, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, Marx and Engels distorted Western society in the 19th century beyond

recognition. What is the most important source of income in modern society is human capital: expertise, training, and special skills and abilities residing in the individual. Moreover, in many Western countries pension funds own a large portion of capital.

There is some plausibility in Marx' historical materialism, if narrowly interpreted. While people use ideals to justify their actions, often they are in fact motivated by special interest. He who pays the piper calls the tune—even if the piper is under the illusion that he chooses the tune himself. It is interesting, however, that this approach has rarely been used to explain the relationship between Marx and Engels. Marx seemed to be unable to support himself and his family by holding a regular job. It was Engels who financially provided for Marx and his family. To what extent did Marx accommodate the views of his benefactor, such as his racial prejudices? And how are people supposed to behave if their personal interest is in conflict with their class interest? Marx took what can be a useful working hypothesis and transformed it into a general theory of society where the material entities and relationships are 'the base' upon which 'the superstructure' of ideas is built. Although Marx recognised some influence on the base by the superstructure, for him the base was much more fundamental than the superstructure. This is implausible as a simple thought experiment brings out. Consider two societies. One is well developed and affluent, but has its base totally destroyed in war. This could, for example, be West Germany in 1945. But 20 years later, with the help of the superstructure, it rebuilds itself. Ideas, including private property and free trade, matter. The other society had a decent material base and was relatively affluent, but then it was taken over by people with misconceived ideas. This could, for example, be Zimbabwe under Mugabe or Venezuela under Chavez. After 20 years or less, the base had been greatly eroded and almost destroyed, while the superstructure presumably stayed the same.<sup>27</sup>

Yet another problem with Marxism is that it does not really explain why revolution is inevitable. Marx and Engels held that under capitalism, capitalists exploited the working class. For the sake of argument, assume that this is correct. But why would the working class rise up against the capitalists and seize power? Exploitation is not a new phenomenon. One

possibility is that things will simply go on as they did before. Another possibility is fascism. Instead of becoming Marxists, could not a sizeable part of a possibly disgruntled and alienated working class embrace fascism? In other words, Marxism is not the only possible outcome of widespread discontent or chaos, as the rise of Mussolini and Hitler in the inter-war years shows. The Marxists were playing with fire when they assumed that 'the worse' the situation became, 'the better' it was because this would lead to a revolution. It did not have to be their revolution.

The Marxist theory of exploitation is also implausible, not least because it is inconsistent, as Austrian economist Eugen von Böhm-Bawark pointed out already in 1896.<sup>28</sup> If capitalists exploit workers by forcing down their wages and increasing their working

the cost is initial construction and electricity). But the problem is that this is not necessarily so: Profits in different sectors of the economy tend to be roughly equal. Marx noted the problem in the first volume of *Capital* and promised a solution in a following volume. When Engels published the third volume of *Capital* in 1894, the solution turned out to be simple: Competition in the market would regulate production in such a way that profits in different sectors of the economy would be equal. Böhm-Bawark rightly observed that this meant that Marx had abandoned his exploitation theory. The real problem was of course Marx's labour theory of value. As economists discovered around 1870 (and Marx should have known of it), value is determined by marginal utility, not by any factors of production. Old wine is more valuable than new wine, whereas new bread is more valuable than old bread.



Professor Friedrich A. Hayek, here teaching at the London School of Economics in 1948, argued that totalitarianism was inherent to communism. In order to achieve the ends of the central plan, the ends of individuals had to be modified so that they would be compatible with the plan. Photo: Getty Images.

hours, then it follows that labour-intensive production (for example a sweatshop where most of the cost consists of wages) is more profitable and produces more 'surplus value' than capital-intensive production (for example an aluminium factory where most of

Thus, there are fundamental theoretical flaws, inconsistencies and deficiencies in Marxist theory. There is nothing wrong, of course, in using theories to try and reform societies. All reforms presuppose theories of one kind or another. But usually they are tested and revised in the light of experience. The Marxists, on the contrary, insisted on using force to implement their programme, to seize power and to abolish private property and free trade. All property was to be held in common and all trade to go through government. But this meant that the Marxists removed almost all

24 Karl Marx, Eine neue Enthüllung in England [A New British Revelation], *New York Daily Tribune* 24 September 1855. Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, *Werke*, Vol. 11 (Berlin: Dietz, 1961), p. 522. The article is, for some reason, not published online at the Marxist Archive, but it can be found in English in Vol. 14 of Marx, Engels, *Collected Works* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2010), p. 516.

25 Karl Marx, Die Bürgerkrieg in Frankreich, IV [Civil War in France, pamphlet 1871], Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, *Werke*, Vol. 17 (Berlin: Dietz, 1962), p. 359. English translation, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1871/civil-war-france/ch06.htm>

26 Vladimir I. Lenin, Plan of a Lecture on the Commune, *Collected Works*, Vol. 8 (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1962), pp. 206–208. English translation, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1905/mar/00b.htm>

27 The examples are mine, but this and the following argument as well are from Karl Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, Vol. 2 (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1946).

28 Eugen von Böhm-Bawark, Zum Abschluß des Marxschen Systems, *Staatswissenschaftliche Arbeiten: Festgaben für Karl Kries*, ed. Otto von Boenigk (Berlin: Haering, 1896), pp. 87–205. An English translation is available online, <https://mises.org/system/tdf/Karl%20Marx%20and%20the%20Close%20of%20His%20System.pdf?file=1&type=document>

constraints on those who took power. They assumed total control over both the economy and society and did not have to deal with any opposition. As one of the Russian revolutionaries, Tomsy, sarcastically said in 1927: 'We allow other parties to exist. However, the fundamental principle that distinguishes us from the West is as follows: one party rules, and all the others are in jail!'<sup>29</sup> It was an old liberal criticism of socialism that freedom would become but an empty word if all material resources were in the hands of government. John Stuart Mill wrote, for example:

“ Every function superadded to those already exercised by the government, causes its influence over hopes and fears to be more widely diffused, and converts, more and more, the active and ambitious part of the public into hangers-on of the government, or of some party which aims at becoming the government. If the roads, the railways, the banks, the insurance offices, the great joint-stock companies, the universities, and the public charities, were all of them branches of the government; if, in addition, the municipal corporations and local boards, with all that now devolves on them, became departments of the central administration; if the employees of all these different enterprises were appointed and paid by the government, and looked to the government for every rise in life; not all the freedom of the press and popular constitution of the legislature would make this or any other country free otherwise than in name.<sup>30</sup>

Some Marxists saw the danger from the extreme centralisation of power Lenin and the other Bolsheviks envisaged. Rosa Luxemburg, responding to Lenin, emphasised that freedom was always the freedom of dissenters.<sup>31</sup> Trotsky, although no liberal, also pointed out that in a centrally planned economy, opposition to the planners was costly. 'In a country where the *sole employer* is the state, this means death by *slow starvation*. The old principle: who does not work shall not eat, has been replaced with a new one: who does not obey shall not eat.'<sup>32</sup>

To the old liberal argument that centralisation of power is dangerous to individual liberty, Anglo-Austrian economist Friedrich A. Hayek, the 1974 Nobel Laureate in Economics, has added a cogent argument. It is that if the communists abolish private property and free trade, then they have to direct the economy from above by some kind of central economic planning. Then they have to make countless decisions about production and consumption and try and fit those decisions into a coherent whole. But central economic planning requires a much wider consensus among individuals about ends than normally can be expected in a modern society. The communist planners, therefore, have two alternatives: to abandon central economic planning and leave most decisions to the individuals or to try and bring about this required consensus. Invariably, the communists took the second route. In order to produce this consensus, they had to try and simplify and change the ends that people pursued. This they could only achieve by prohibiting the free competition of ideas. They had to enlist the arts and the sciences in the service of the plan and to try and break the ties that existed between individuals in civil society. The totalitarianism which communists imposed upon the societies where they came to power, was, therefore, not a matter of choice, but a systemic necessity.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, central economic planning could never deliver what it promised to do, which was to outperform capitalism. The reason for this, Hayek contended, was that the planners could never avail themselves of all the knowledge that was dispersed over the economy and marshalled and utilised under capitalism through the price system. However big the computers of the planning commission were, they could never fully utilise special skills of individuals or the knowledge they had as a result of their situation in time and space.<sup>34</sup> But if planning cannot deliver the goods, especially in comparison with capitalism, then people will become restless and discontented. Communists, therefore, have to minimise the exposure of their subjects to capitalism and to limit their travels to other countries. In order to survive, communism needs to become totalitarian.

29 Courtois, Introduction, *Black Book of Communism*, p. 7.

30 J. S. Mill *on Liberty and other writings*, ed. Stefan Collini (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), Ch. V., p. 110.

31 Rosa Luxemburg, *Die russische Revolution. Eine kritische Würdigung* (Berlin: Gesellschaft und Erziehung, 1922), p. 109.

32 Lev Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed* (New York: Doubleday, Doran &

Co., 1937), Ch. 11, 2. Available online, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1936/revbet/ch11.htm>

33 Friedrich A. Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1944).

34 Also, Ludwig von Mises, *Die Gemeinwirtschaft* (Jena: Gustav Fischer, 1922). In English, *Socialism* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1936).

## BROKEN EGGS

Observers in the West could not claim ignorance about the disastrous effects of the Bolshevik Revolution on the Russian population. From the beginning, books, papers and newspaper articles were published about what was happening in the East.

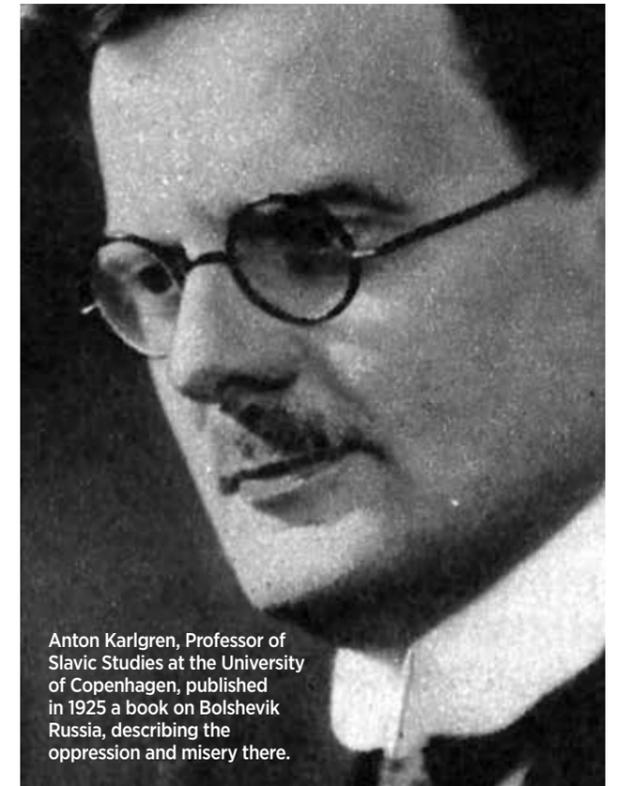
### Anton Karlgren BOLSHEVIST RUSSIA

(1925)

Swedish philologist Anton Karlgren was a pioneer in providing reliable information on Bolshevik Russia. Born in the town of Jönköping in 1882, Karlgren learned Russian and lived for a while in Russia. Having an outstanding ability to express himself clearly, he worked as a journalist and editor of leading Swedish daily *Dagens Nyheter*, before he became in 1923 professor of Slavic studies at the University of Copenhagen in Denmark. He was a radical liberal who welcomed the fall of the Romanovs but witnessed with dismay the tyranny which replaced them. In 1924 and 1925, he undertook two trips to Russia that resulted in a book in Swedish, which was soon translated into English, *Bolshevist Russia*.<sup>35</sup> Karlgren saw in the Soviet Union destruction without construction, a tiny party controlling a large society, an arrogant new class becoming the privileged rulers of the masses, peasants and workers.

Wistfully, Karlgren described the plight of the 'Former People', the remainder of the former upper and middle classes in Russia who had been deprived of almost all civil rights. 'The life of the former middle-class has become one great tragedy, of which the fate of every middle-class family forms just a fragment,' Karlgren wrote. He went to a small Russian town to visit old acquaintances, 'one of those thoroughly

35 Anton Karlgren, *Bolsjevikerernas Flyssland* (Stockholm: Bonnier, 1925); in Danish, *Bolsjevikerens Rusland* (København: Koppel, 1926); in Finnish, *Bolshevikien venäjä* (Pori: Satakunnan Kirjateollisuus, 1926); and in English, *Bolshevist Russia* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1927). The English edition of his book has just been republished (London: Routledge, 2017).



Anton Karlgren, Professor of Slavic Studies at the University of Copenhagen, published in 1925 a book on Bolshevik Russia, describing the oppression and misery there.

cultured, refined and lovable families in which the Russian intelligentsia so abounded.'<sup>36</sup> The father had been a doctor and he and his daughter had organised admirable relief work during a previous famine. Now the doctor and his wife were both dead. They had literally starved to death. The daughter had been working in a factory, but was dismissed because of her origin. The brother, an artist, barely survived with his family in a South Russian town, where he could sometimes find temporary work in the harbour as a dock-labourer.

The two main strengths of *Bolshevist Russia* are that Karlgren had access to Russian original documents, both newspapers and statistical reports, and that he himself had travelled around the country and observed what was happening. The Swedish communists, and even the Social Democrats, then

36 Anton Karlgren, *Bolshevist Russia*, p. 214.

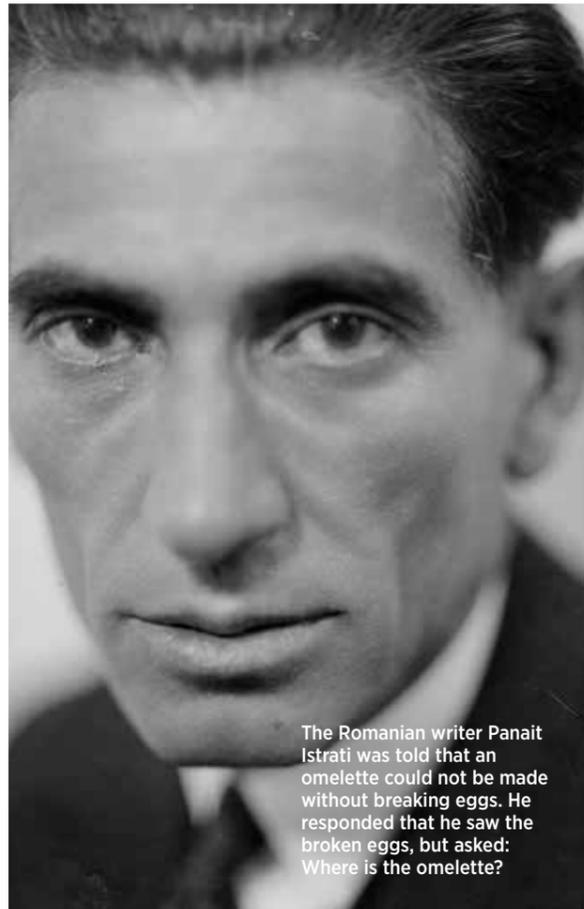
sympathetic to the Bolshevik project, however, protested loudly at his account,<sup>37</sup> and in the United States Professor John Dewey criticised Karlgren for focusing on present problems instead of describing the dynamic process towards a better society which was, Dewey believed, taking place in Soviet Russia, a common refrain in the next couple of decades.<sup>38</sup> Karlgren wrote more books on Soviet affairs, including a biography of Stalin in 1942, but they were not translated into English. He died in 1973.

### **Panaït Istrati** **THE CONFESSIONS OF A LOSER** (1929)

The Romanian writer Panaït Istrati was the first of many authors who contributed to what could be called 'the literature of disenchantment' about the Bolshevik project. Born in 1884, he was the son of a laundress in the Romanian city of Braila and a Greek smuggler. Brought up by his mother in desperate poverty, and taking on odd jobs to sustain himself, he had a strong urge to read and write and started publishing short stories in socialist magazines in his twenties. In the 1920s he made the acquaintance of two left-wing French writers, Romain Rolland and Henri Barbusse, who put much effort in promoting him in France. Writing in French, he gradually won recognition as a 'proletarian author' in the tradition of Maxim Gorky. In 1927 Istrati made his first trip to the Soviet Union as an ardent supporter of the now ten years-old Bolshevik Revolution. There he met Greek writer Nikos Kazantzakis. They became good friends, and Istrati went with him to Greece. After a while, he made a second trip to the Soviet Union in 1928-1929, travelling all over the country and meeting many men of letters. He now saw clearly that the Bolshevik regime was a cruel dictatorship, persecuting everybody who dared to think independently. First he somewhat naively protested in two letters in 1928 to secret police officers, and then when he returned to Western Europe, he wrote a critique of the Soviet régime, *The Confessions of a Loser*.<sup>39</sup> This meant,

however, that he lost the support of his former sponsors: While Rolland stayed aloof, Barbusse publicly attacked him. Communists cut off all ties with him. In 1935, Istrati died a broken man in Bucharest.

When a Soviet official in a discussion with Istrati invoked the old Russian saying that one could not make an omelette without breaking eggs, Istrati famously retorted: 'I can see the broken eggs, but where's this omelette of yours?'<sup>40</sup> With the passing of time, Istrati's question has become even more relevant, as a glance at the numbers reveals. It is, for example, true that the Soviet Union could boast of rapid economic growth from 1928 to 1940. But this did not lead to better living standards for ordinary citizens because it consisted mainly in the accumulation of capital, not least of all for military purposes. Thus, the needs of the ruling elite



The Romanian writer Panaït Istrati was told that an omelette could not be made without breaking eggs. He responded that he saw the broken eggs, but asked: Where is the omelette?

37 Per Emil Brusewitz, *Antibolsjevikerens Ryssland: en kritik av professor Anton Karlgréns bok 'Bolsjevikerens Ryssland'* (Stockholm: Seelig, 1926). Pamphlet, first published in the Socialist magazine *Tiden*.

38 John Dewey, *Impressions of Soviet Russia* (1929), *The Later Works of John Dewey 1927-1928, Essays, Reviews, Miscellany and 'Impressions of Soviet Russia'*, ed. Jo Ann Boydstone (Carbondale IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1984), p. 220.

39 The letters are reprinted in *Vers l'Autre Flamme. Après seize mois dans l'U.R.S.S.: Confession pour vaincus* [Towards the Other Flame. After

Sixteen Months in the Soviet Union: *The Confessions of a Loser*] (Paris: Rieder, 1929). In German, *Auf falscher Bahn. 16 Monate in Russland* (München: Piper, 1930). Another book about the Soviet Union, published under Istrati's name, was mostly written by his friend, Boris Souvarine, *La Russie nu* (Paris: Rieder, 1929); in German 1930, *Rußland nackt* (München: Piper, 1930); in English, *Russia Unveiled* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1931).

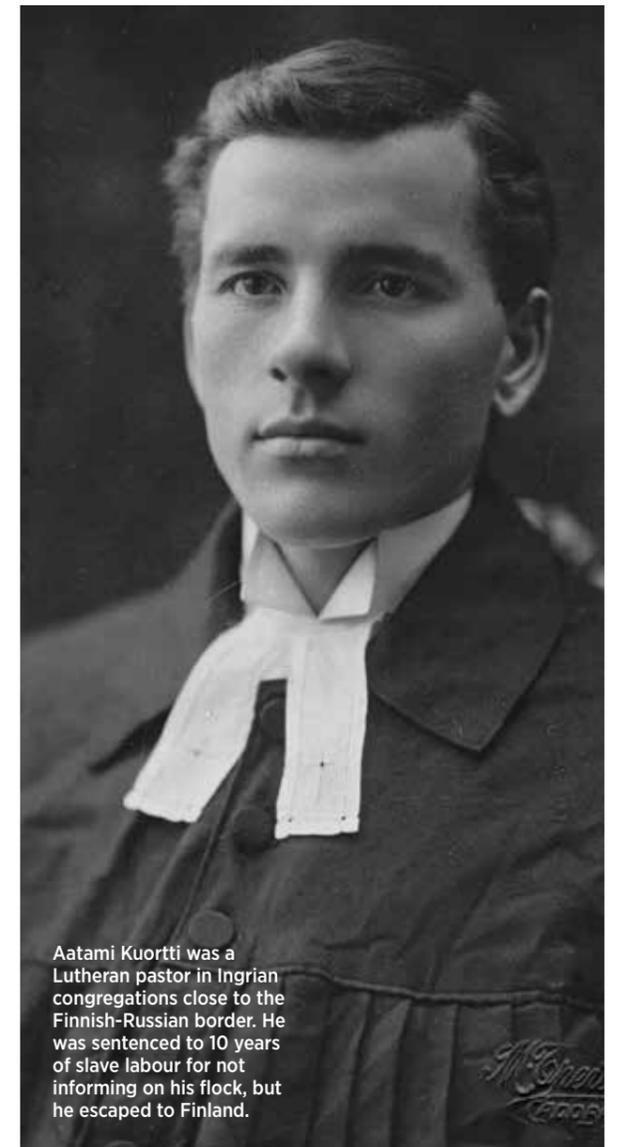
40 Victor Serge, *Memoirs of a Revolutionary* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2002), p. 278. Originally published in French, *Mémoires d'un révolutionnaire* (Paris: Seuil, 1951).

may have been satisfied, but not those of the general public. Be that as it may, in 1928 – 11 years after the Bolshevik takeover – GDP per capita in the Soviet Union was estimated to be \$1,370, and in 1940 it had increased to \$2,144. In 13 years it had in other words increased by \$774. In a comparable period in the history of the United States – 11 years after the Civil War – from 1876 to 1888, GDP per capita increased from \$2,570 to \$3,282, or in 13 years by \$712. This growth was accomplished without famines, purges, labour camps, mass deportations or mass executions. After all, people are different from eggs. One does not have to break people in order to make money. (Other periods in US history show even faster growth: For example, GDP per capita grew from \$3,314 in 1894 to \$5,079 in 1906, or by \$1,765 in thirteen years.) The final results of the Soviet experiment are also clear. In 1990, the last complete year of the Soviet Union, GDP per capita there was \$6,890, whereas in the same year it was \$23,201 in the United States, almost four times more.<sup>41</sup> In Talleyrand's cynical words, from an economic point of view the Bolshevik Revolution was even worse than a crime: It was a folly.

### **Aatami Kuortti** **SERVICE, SERVITUDE, ESCAPE** (1934)

The 1934 account of Soviet labour camps by Aatami Kuortti is almost unknown in the English-speaking world because it was written in Finnish and never translated into English, only into Swedish, Danish, Dutch and Icelandic. Nevertheless, it throws light not only on the brutal Bolshevik regime in Moscow, but also on the tragic fate of the Ingrians. Kuortti was born in 1903 in Korkankylä in Kupanitsa District (Gubanicy in Russian) in Southwest Ingria, an area located along the southern shore of the Gulf of Finland, from Lake Ladoga in the east to the Narva river in the west. The Ingrians speak a language closely related to Finnish. They went from Swedish to Russian rule in the 18th century, and St. Petersburg was promptly built in Ingria's centre. Despite massive Russian immigration, in the next two centuries the Ingrians tried hard to maintain their language and culture.

Kuortti trained as a Lutheran theologian, and in 1927 he was ordained pastor in three Ingrian parishes on the Finnish border: Lempaala, Vuole and Miikkulainen. The



Aatami Kuortti was a Lutheran pastor in Ingrian congregations close to the Finnish-Russian border. He was sentenced to 10 years of slave labour for not informing on his flock, but he escaped to Finland.

Soviet secret police watched him intently, frequently interrogating him and trying to force him into spying on the members of his congregations. When Kuortti refused, he was imprisoned and sentenced to death for counter-revolutionary activities, but the sentence was commuted to 10 years of hard labour. He was sent to a prison camp by Lake Magrino in Karelia, north of Ingria. In the summer of 1930, he managed to escape from the camp. After a walk in the Karelian forests for 12 days – when he was once briefly betrayed by local farmers and recaptured – he crossed the border into Finland. He served as a pastor there for the rest of his life, enjoying the pleasure of seeing the Soviet Union collapse in 1991 and his congregation being able to practise their religion again. However, most Ingrians had been deported to Siberia in the 1930s. While many individuals survived, the Ingrians as a people are now virtually extinct. Kuortti passed away in 1997.

41 All figures are in 1990 US dollars, from the Maddison-Project, <http://www.ggdc.net/maddison/maddison-project/home.htm>, 2013 version.

Kuortti's book, *Service, Servitude, Escape*, was first published in Finnish in 1934.<sup>42</sup> In a simple and sincere manner, without any embellishments or exaggerations, Kuortti told his sad tale. He described the unpleasant secret policemen who arrested and interrogated him and a cellmate in Leningrad (as the Bolsheviks now called St. Petersburg), 'Uncle' Aapro (so called because of his friendliness), who had been denounced as a practising Christian by his atheist son. He also gave an account of the Solovetsky Islands camp where he spent some time: This was the first Soviet labour camp. Kuortti's final destination was, however, the Lake Magrino labour camp where the inmates harvested timber in the surrounding forests. The guards were cruel, and if someone stepped out of line during the daily marches of the inmates between the camp and the forest, he was immediately shot. Some of the inmates were there only by chance. For example, one of the prisoners Kuortti met was a Finnish fisherman who had just gone a little too close to the Russian border on his boat. He was immediately arrested and sentenced to hard labour. The only holiday of the year was Labour Day, 1 May. In 1944, after Finland had been defeated by the Soviet Union in the so-called Continuation War, the Finnish Ministry of Justice ordered all copies of books critical of the Soviet Union removed from public libraries, including Kuortti's book. The ban was revoked in 1958.<sup>43</sup>

### Arne Strøm UNCLE, GIVE US BREAD (1936)

Danish poultry expert Arne Strøm was one of the very few eyewitnesses of the 1932–1933 Soviet famine able to tell his story abroad. Born in 1897, as a young man Strøm dreamt of becoming a writer. But in hope of a better life, he emigrated to Canada where he studied poultry. In the Great Depression

he returned to Denmark with his wife and their young son in pursuit of a job. Disillusioned with capitalism, in 1932 he got a job as a consultant at a large collective-poultry in Povorino in the district of Voronezh by the Don. He soon found out that he had got much more than he had bargained for. He had not realised that he would be paid in almost worthless roubles so that every day would become a struggle for him and his small family. Disease, vermin and filth seemed to be the lot of every living creature on the collective, workers and stock alike. The collective managers were indifferent, illustrating the old observation that what is everybody's business becomes nobody's business. Sufficient firewood and adequate clothes for the cold winter had not been provided, except for the communist managers. While the secret police left Strøm alone, people around him kept disappearing without explanation: for example two veterinarians disappeared one after the other. Worst of all, Strøm witnessed the catastrophic famine of 1932–1933, the consequence of Stalin's enforced collectivisation of agriculture and the government appropriation of almost all the farmers' harvest.

After 13 months, Strøm returned with his family to Denmark, publishing in 1934 a book in Danish about his disillusionment with the Soviet Union.<sup>44</sup> It sold quite well. While most of the Danish conservative and liberal press received it favourably, it was fiercely attacked by the communists. It was translated into English in 1936, *Uncle, Give Us Bread*, the title echoing the most common sentence the author had heard during his time in Russia. The book greatly impressed Winston Churchill.<sup>45</sup> Strøm had a keen eye for the grotesque and fantastic aspects of Soviet life, and he took real interest in the lives of the people he met. He published a few more books and died in 1968. *Uncle, Give Us Bread*, dismissed by many as an angry rant, in retrospect is a surprisingly accurate, fair and vivid description of Soviet life in the 1930s. In 2008 it was republished in Danish with a foreword by Professor Bent Jensen, a leading Danish expert on the Soviet Union.<sup>46</sup>

44 Arne Strøm, *Onkel, giv os brød* (København: Gyldendal, 1934); in English, Arne Strøm, *Uncle, Give Us Bread* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1936).

45 Randolph Spencer Churchill and Martin Gilbert, *Winston S. Churchill*, Vol. 5, Part 3 (Boston: Houghton & Mifflin, 1983), p. 108.

46 Arne Strøm, *Onkel, giv os brød* (København: Gyldendal, 2008).

### Ayn Rand WE THE LIVING (1936)

Best-selling author Ayn Rand was one of the most original and independent-minded intellectuals of the 20th century. Born in St. Petersburg (later Petrograd and still later Leningrad and now again St. Petersburg) in 1905, her real name was Alissa Rosenbaum. Her father was a relatively well-to-do independent pharmacist who lost everything in the Bolshevik Revolution. Young Alissa read history and philosophy at the University of Petrograd, but emigrated to the United States in 1926 and became a scriptwriter in Hollywood and a playwright, with her plays being performed on Broadway. She changed her name to Ayn Rand, and married the actor Frank O'Connor in 1929. The novel *We the Living*, set in the Soviet Union, was published by Macmillan in 1936 after many rejections by other publishers. Even at Macmillan, a communist reader of manuscripts campaigned vigorously, but ultimately unsuccessfully, against its publication. The book sold out in a few years, but was only reprinted in 1959. Without the knowledge of the author, a film was made after it in Italy in 1942. Rand published two other major novels with uncompromising individualism as their main theme, *The Fountainhead* in 1943 and *Atlas Shrugged* in 1957, both of which became bestsellers. A film was made after *The Fountainhead* in 1949. For most of her adult life, Rand lived in New York, passing away in 1982.<sup>47</sup> Her books keep selling well, and she still has a large following inspired by her celebration of creative individuals, capitalists and entrepreneurs.

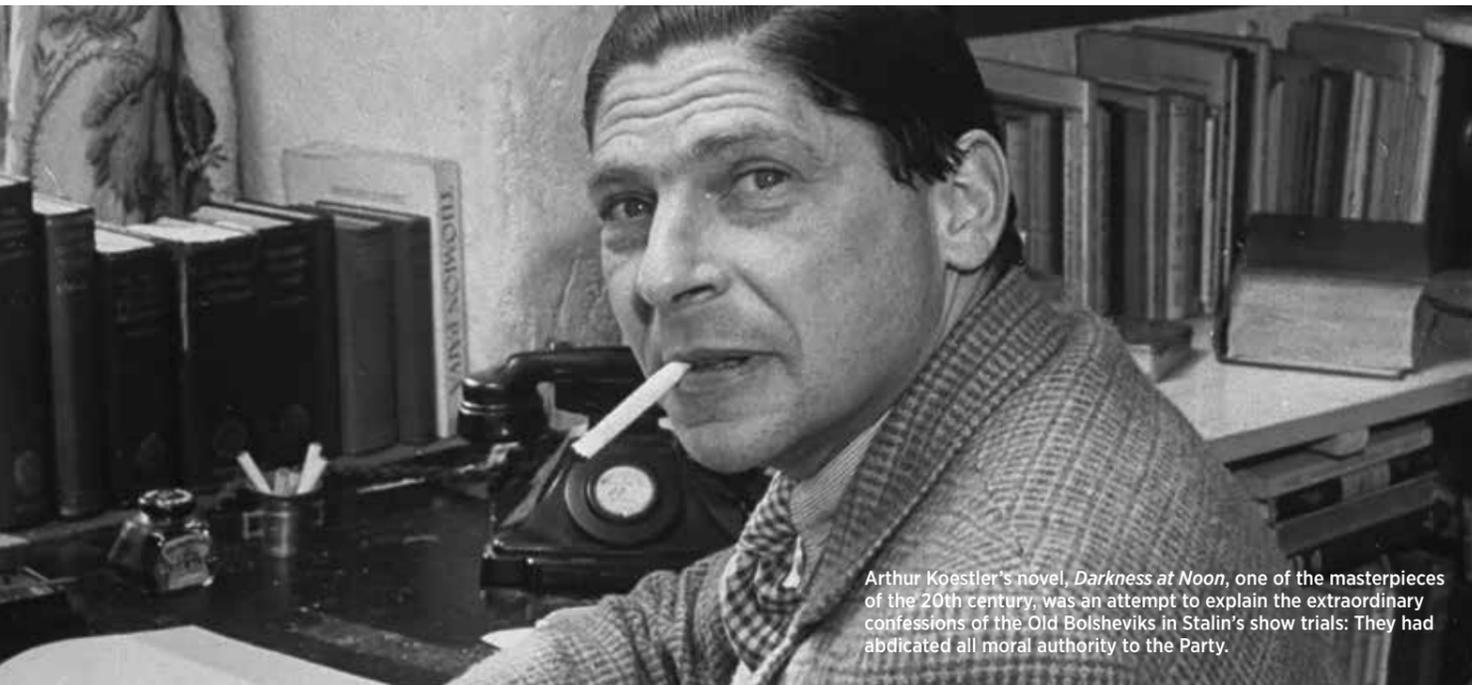
Rand has herself said that *We the Living* is as close as she would ever come to writing an autobiography.<sup>48</sup> The novel is about Kira Argounova, an independent and courageous girl studying engineering in Petrograd in Russia shortly after the Bolshevik Revolution. One of her friends at school is Andrei, a convinced communist, working for the secret police. By coincidence, she meets Leo, a charming, but somewhat cynical son of a pre-revolutionary admiral,

and she falls in love with him. The three of them meet different fates: Disillusioned by communism, Andrei commits suicide; corrupted by the Soviet system, Leo leaves; Kira tries to escape from the Soviet Union at the border with Latvia, and when she is just about to reach freedom, she is shot by a border guard and bleeds to death in the snow. In the novel Rand gives vivid glimpses of the dour and oppressive Soviet reality which she knew only too well from her years in Petrograd, although she later insisted that the novel is not as much about Soviet Russia as about dictatorship in general, about man against the state. Of Rand's novels, *We the Living* is the most traditional one, and has the most vibrant yet plausible characters. Early on in the novel Kira makes a prescient comment when listening to the Internationale at a meeting: 'When all this is over, when the traces of their republic are disinfected from history – what a glorious funeral march this will make!'<sup>49</sup>

### Arthur Koestler DARKNESS AT NOON (1940)

The old Chinese curse, may you live in interesting times, certainly seems to apply to Arthur Koestler. Born in 1905 into a Jewish family in Budapest, he grew up in relative affluence until the Great War of 1914–1918, when his father's business collapsed and the family temporarily had to move to Vienna, returning to Budapest only after the war. Koestler developed early on a lively interest in science and technology, enrolling in 1922 in Vienna's Polytechnic University. At university, he encountered and embraced Zionism, the view that it was hopeless for Jews to assimilate and that they ought to return to their ancient homeland of Israel, then called Palestine. In 1926 he went to Palestine, briefly working in a Jewish agricultural collective, a kibbutz, afterwards doing odd jobs and barely getting by. In 1927 he went to Berlin, where he worked for a while as a secretary to the controversial leader of right-wing Zionists, Zeev Jabotinsky. The same year Koestler got a job as a journalist at the Ullstein group of newspapers in Berlin, in 1931 becoming the science editor of one of its newspapers. The same year he joined the Communist Party of Germany. He was told to keep his membership a secret: he would be much more useful as an undercover agent. From 1932 to 1933 he travelled as a journalist in the Soviet Union, but when he returned to Western Europe, Hitler had taken power in Germany.

49 *We the Living*, pp. 56–57.



Arthur Koestler's novel, *Darkness at Noon*, one of the masterpieces of the 20th century, was an attempt to explain the extraordinary confessions of the Old Bolsheviks in Stalin's show trials: They had abdicated all moral authority to the Party.

Koestler went to Paris and worked for the next two years with Willi Münzenberg, the propaganda chief of the international communist movement, a left-wing Goebbels.

When the Spanish Civil War between Franco's Nationalists and the Republicans broke out in the summer of 1936, Koestler made a trip to the Nationalists' headquarter in Sevilla to gather information, but with credentials from a British newspaper. He discovered and exposed the extensive involvement of German Nazis and Italian fascists in the Nationalist war effort before barely escaping to France. He returned to Spain in 1937 as a war correspondent on Republican-held territory. He found himself in Málaga when it was captured by the Nationalists, and he was imprisoned and summarily sentenced to death. After a public outcry, however, he was released in a prisoners' exchange. Returning to Paris, he made his living in the next couple years by various kinds of writings. Witnessing how brutally the communists in Spain treated other left-wingers in the Republican camp and no longer denying to himself the misery he had seen in the Soviet Union, he became deeply disillusioned by communism. His loss of hope was only reinforced by Stalin's show trials in Moscow, the most notorious of which took place in the spring of 1938, of Nikolai Bukharin and other Old Bolsheviks.

Koestler resigned in 1938 from the Communist Party of Germany and instantly became a pariah in the international communist movement. He now started work on a novel about the Moscow show trials,

writing it out in German, while his girlfriend, Daphne Hardy, translated it into English piece by piece and chose a name for it, *Darkness at Noon*. When the war broke out in 1939, Koestler was interned by French authorities as an 'undesirable alien'. Meanwhile Hardy escaped with the manuscript of the novel to England and arranged for its publication. Again, pressure from Koestler's British friends resulted in his release. He went to England without an entry permit and was also interned there for a while. Indeed, he was languishing in prison when his book came out in early 1941. When released from British custody, Koestler immediately volunteered for military service. He was soon assigned to the Ministry of Information as a scriptwriter and travelled as a reporter to Palestina. He and his girlfriend Hardy amicably parted ways, and in 1945 he settled in Wales with Mamaine Paget. There, he became a good friend of Eric Blair, better known as George Orwell. They shared the same deep aversion to totalitarian manipulation of truth.

In the following years, Koestler became an outspoken figure in the international anti-communist movement. The French edition of *Darkness at Noon* was an overnight sensation, and in 1948 Koestler moved to France, where he mostly stayed for the next five years. He was for a while friendly with the existentialist couple Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir. A notorious womaniser, he once even took de Beauvoir to bed. He makes an appearance as Scriassine in her novel, *The Mandarins*. But his friendship with the two existentialists did not survive the Cold War

where Sartre and de Beauvoir, while not committed communists, had more sympathy for the Soviet Union than Western democracies. In France Koestler also became a friend of Albert Camus, who shared his anti-totalitarian feelings and became the 1957 Nobel Laureate in Literature. It did not affect their friendship when Camus had an affair with Koestler's wife, Mamaine. In 1953 Koestler moved to London, where he remained for the rest of his life. His interest drifted from politics to science and he wrote a series of books on the discovery process. He divorced his wife and married his secretary, Cynthia Jefferies, who was utterly devoted to him. When he was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease and leukaemia, he committed suicide in 1983. His wife chose to follow him.<sup>50</sup>

In 1998, Modern Library ranked *Darkness at Noon* as number eight in its list of best English-language novels of the 20th century. Professor John V. Fleming regards it as one of the four 'anti-communist manifestos' that defined the great struggle between freedom and totalitarianism in the past century, the other three being *Out of the Night* by Jan Valtin (Richard Krebs), *I Chose Freedom* by Victor Kravchenko and *Witness* by Whittaker Chambers.<sup>51</sup> Koestler's novel takes place in Moscow in 1938, even if the country and the city are not named. Rubashov, an Old Bolshevik, obviously to some extent based on Nikolai Bukharin, has been arrested. While in solitary confinement, he manages to establish contact with other prisoners by using a tap code. In his prison cell, he reflects on his life and is repeatedly interrogated. He has travelled all over the world in the service of the revolution and recalls the contrast between the idealism of its ordinary supporters – such as Little Loewy, a Belgian dock worker – and the ruthlessness of its Leninist leaders, including himself, who think nothing of sacrificing innocent lives for temporary advantages. His two interrogators are from different generations, Ivanov, an Old Bolshevik like himself, and Gletkin, a young and brutal Stalinist. Even if Rubashov and his interrogators all know that the charges against him are totally baseless, they also all know that he will be found guilty and shot. The question is only whether Rubashov goes along with a public trial or will be executed without it.

<sup>50</sup> Michael Scammell, *Koestler: The Literary and Political Odyssey of a Twentieth-Century Skeptic* (New York: Random House, 2009).

<sup>51</sup> John V. Fleming, *The Anti-Communist Manifestos: Four Books that Shaped the Cold War* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2009).

In the end, Rubashov accepts a public trial. The reason is not that he has been tortured, even if Gletkin had been rough on him, depriving him of sleep and interrogating him for long hours. Rubashov confesses because he is a revolutionary and has transferred all moral authority to the party and the revolution. If 'The One' who speaks in the name of the party and the revolution decides he is guilty, then he is guilty, however innocent he may be of the individual charges brought against him. Traditional morality is totally rejected by the revolutionaries. They cannot rely on the notions of right and wrong or true and false, only on what would be good for the cause and what would not. Rubashov makes the required public confession and is shot.<sup>52</sup> But the story is not over. Koestler believed himself that during the war he had lost the original German manuscript from which his girlfriend made the English translation, and the first German edition was a translation from the English edition. But in 2015 a copy of the original German manuscript was found in a Swiss library, amongst the papers of a Swiss publisher.<sup>53</sup>

### Jan Valtin **OUT OF THE NIGHT** (1941)

Jan Valtin's real name was Richard Krebs. Born in 1905, he became a sailor like his father, participating in the 1923 communist insurgency in Hamburg and joining the Communist Party of Germany. He was trained as a revolutionary at a party school in Leningrad and became a Comintern agent, going to China and then to the West Coast of the United States, where he ended up in prison for an assault, which he later claimed he had carried out on the orders of Comintern. When released in late 1929, he resumed his activities for Comintern, now working in a clandestine espionage and sabotage group directed by the sinister Ernst Wollweber, the future head of East German secret police. In between all his adventures, he found time to marry Hermine Stöver and have a son, Jan. Captured by the Nazis in 1933, he was sent to a prison camp

<sup>52</sup> Arthur Koestler, *Darkness at Noon* (London: Macmillan, 1940); in Swedish, *Natt klockan tolv på dagen* (Stockholm: Tiden, 1941); in French, *Le zéro e l'infini* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1945); in German, *Sonnenfinsternis* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1946); in Italian, *Buio a mezzogiorno* (Milano: Arnoldo Mondadori Editore, 1946); in Danish, *Mørke midt paa dagen* (København: Povl Branner, 1946); in Icelandic, *Myrkur um miðjan dag* (Reykjavik: Snaelandsutgafan, 1947); in Finnish, *Pimeää keskellä päivää* (Helsinki: Tammi, 1958); in Norwegian, *Mørke midt på dagen* (Oslo: Gyldendal, 1965). Many more editions exist.

<sup>53</sup> Michael Scammell, A Different 'Darkness at Noon', *New York Review of Books* 7 April 2016.

and mercilessly tortured. On the advice of German communists, now working underground, he pretended to have converted to national socialism. He was sent as a Gestapo agent to Denmark where Wollweber's group was operating, but he revealed everything to



Jan Valtin's name was Richard Krebs. His book, *Out of the Night*, a well-written mirror of the interwar years, was a bestseller in the United States.

his old comrades. They did not trust him, however, and he was put under house arrest and told that he had to go to the Soviet Union.

Realising that in the midst of Stalin's purges this probably meant his execution, Krebs escaped and was able to enter the United States in 1938, albeit illegally. He contacted old acquaintances who helped him find humble jobs to support himself and put him in touch with leading anti-communist journalists Eugene Lyons and Isaac Don Levine. They

realised the potential that Krebs' amazing adventures had as the subject matter of a book, and Levine helped Krebs edit it. When it came out in the beginning of 1941, with Jan Valtin as the author, it was a huge success. The Book of the Month Club made Valtin's autobiography – as it was presented – its February selection, in February and March *Life Magazine* published an unprecedented two-part article about it, and in March *Reader's Digest* printed a condensation. Communists in the United States and elsewhere were enraged at Krebs' exposure of their clandestine activities and mounted a campaign to discredit him and have him deported. In 1942 Krebs was arrested for having entered the country illegally, but he was soon released, whereupon he enlisted in the Army and gained US citizenship. In the United States he had married Abigail Harris. They had two sons, Conrad and Eric. They later divorced, and Krebs married Clara Medders. After the war he lived in relative obscurity.

His German wife had died in 1938, but he was able to locate their son Jan and bring him to America. Krebs suddenly died of pneumonia in 1951.<sup>54</sup>

Valtin's *Out of the Night* is in some ways as vivid a portrayal of the inter-war years in Central Europe as Zweig's *The World of Yesterday* is of the years before 1914 in the same region.<sup>55</sup> Valtin captures well the hectic atmosphere, the disillusionment, the breakdown of order, especially in Germany, the totalitarian threat hovering over the continent and the inhumanity of the Bolshevik and Nazi movements. Peruvian writer Mario Vargas Llosa, the 2010 Nobel Laureate in Literature, recalls that as a young man he found a copy of the Spanish translation in his uncle's house and that it kept him awake for many nights and gave him a violent jolt.<sup>56</sup> The truthfulness of the book has been a matter of debate ever since its publication: Is it an autobiography or a novel? John V. Fleming argues that it is 'morally true though often novelistic in detail'.<sup>57</sup> Krebs occasionally may have exaggerated somewhat, especially about his own importance and direct participation in events, but his account of events is, broadly speaking, confirmed by other sources.<sup>58</sup>

Given that Valtin's book sold over one million copies and is brimming with absorbing stories, it is surprising that it was never made into a film. One explanation was the influence of communists in Hollywood. Communist scriptwriter Dalton Trumbo once boasted that he and his comrades were able to stop the production of films out of 'untrue and reactionary' books like *Out of the Night* by Jan Valtin and another 'anti-communist manifesto', *I Chose Freedom* by Victor Kravchenko.<sup>59</sup>

54 Ernst von Waldenfels, *Der Spion, der aus Deutschland kam. Das geheime Leben des Seemanns Richard Krebs* (Berlin: Aufbau, 2002).

55 Stefan Zweig, *Die Welt von Gestern: Erinnerungen eines Europäers* (Stockholm: Bermann-Fischer Verlag AB, 1942).

56 Mario Vargas Llosa, *A Fish in the Water* (London: Faber & Faber, 1995), p. 183.

57 John V. Fleming, *The Anti-Communist Manifestos*, p. 117.

58 For example, Krebs identified Danish labour leader Richard Jensen as a Comintern agent. Jensen angrily denounced Krebs as a Gestapo agent in a pamphlet, *Frem i lyset* [Into the Light] (København, Prior, 1946). But the evidence shows that Jensen was indeed Comintern's man in Denmark, as he later admitted himself. Richard Jensen, *En omtumlet tilværelse* [A Turbulent Life] (København: Fremad, 1957). In a Norwegian doctoral dissertation, *Wollweber-organisasjonen i Norge* [The Wollweber Ring in Norway] (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1997), Lars Borgersrud points out that Krebs' accounts of his trips to Norway are 'broadly speaking correct' according to other sources (note 6 on p. 76), even if Borgersrud is very critical of Krebs.

59 John V. Fleming, *The Anti-Communist Manifestos*, p. 159.

## DREAMS AS NIGHTMARES

A favourite pastime of discontented dreamers has long been to write books about the perfect society, or utopia (the word means no place).

But others have written dystopias, or books about how the dream of a perfect society can become a nightmare.

**Yevgeny Zamyatin**

**WE**

(1924)

Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We* can claim to be the first anti-communist dystopia. The author was born in a small town near Moscow in 1884, the son of a Russian Orthodox priest and schoolmaster and a musician. He studied naval engineering and became a communist. He was sentenced to internal exile in Siberia, but he escaped and was able to conclude his studies in Finland. He was once again sentenced to internal exile, but only for two years, whereupon he worked as a naval engineer in Russia and England, writing novels in his spare time. After the fall of the Romanovs in 1917, Zamyatin returned to Russia and witnessed Lenin's takeover. While he initially supported the Bolsheviks, he became increasingly critical of them, not least because of their attempt to control artistic expression. 'True literature can only exist,' he wrote, 'when it is created, not by diligent and reliable officials, but by madmen, hermits, heretics, dreamers, rebels and skeptics.' The initial draft of *We* dates from 1919, but the novel was the first work to be banned by the Soviet censorship bureau in 1921. Undaunted, Zamyatin had the manuscript smuggled out of the country, and an English translation was published in New York in 1924.<sup>60</sup> To the exasperation of Soviet

authorities, Russian emigrés in the West published the original in 1929.

Zamyatin's novel had a clear impact on Aldous Huxley and George Orwell (who reviewed it),<sup>61</sup> and probably also on Ayn Rand (although the similarities between *We* and Rand's *Anthem* may also be explained by the fact that they both lived through the first years of the Bolshevik regime). His book has enjoyed a revival in mainly post-communist countries where it was formerly banned. The author himself found it increasingly difficult to live in the hostile and stifling atmosphere of the Soviet Union, and, through the intervention of Maxim Gorky and to the surprise of many, Stalin allowed him to emigrate with his wife to Paris, where he died in obscurity and poverty in 1937.

Zamyatin's novel is set in the future. It is written in the form of notes jotted down by a mathematician from the 'United States'. He does not have a name, just a number, D-503. Everybody lives in glass houses so that they can be watched by the almighty State. He meets a girl, I-330, who flirts with him. He finds himself changing. When he goes to a doctor complaining that he has insomnia and dreams and is seeing shadows, the doctor is quick to diagnose him: "'Yes, it is too bad. Apparently a soul has formed in you.'" D-503 is stunned: A soul? That strange, ancient word that was forgotten long ago? "Is it...v-very dangerous?" he stutters. "Incurable," the doctor answers.<sup>62</sup> He and the girl discover a world beyond the green wall surrounding their place, inhabited by hairy strange people wearing furs. D-503 undergoes an operation that removes all emotions from his brain. Whereas he betrays I-330, she does not break under torture. Parts of the wall have collapsed, birds are returning to the city, a coming uprising is suggested.

means an exhaustive list. Other editions exist in English, Russian and other languages.

61 George Orwell, Review of 'WE' by E. I. Zamyatin, *Tribune* 4 January 1946.

62 Zamyatin, *We*, pp. 84–85.

## Ayn Rand ANTHEM

(1938)

Ayn Rand, like Yevgeny Zamyatin, witnessed the Bolshevik Revolution in its initial stages and, therefore, perhaps, saw more clearly than many the tendencies inherent in it. Her short novel, *Anthem*, like Zamyatin's *We*, takes these tendencies to their logical conclusion where the individual is presumed to be nothing and the State everything.<sup>63</sup> It is written in the form of notes by a man, Equality 7-2521, who does not have a name or, apparently, a separate identity because he always refers to himself as 'we' and to others in the plural as well. In his city, everything is controlled and children are not brought up by their parents, but by the authorities. As a young man Equality had to accept the decision of the 'Council of Vocations' that he should be a street sweeper rather than a scholar, as was his aspiration. He finds a hidden tunnel that is from the 'Unmentionable Times' of the distant past, and he sneaks away as often as possible to conduct scientific experiments there and to write in his journal.

Although Equality does not fully recognise what is happening, he falls in love with a woman, Liberty 5-3000, and she seems to reciprocate his feelings. In the tunnel, he rediscovers electricity and tries to take this invention to the authorities, but they immediately demand his punishment for disrupting the plans of the Department of Candles, which is in charge of providing light. Equality escapes to the forest outside the city. Liberty joins him there after a while. They find a house from the 'Unmentionable Times' in the forest. By reading books in the house, they rediscover words for individuality. Equality starts to call himself Prometheus, after the man who stole fire from the gods, and the girl goes by the name of Gaea, after the Greek goddess who was the mother of everybody. Gaea becomes pregnant, and they decide to have a life in the forest devoted to themselves and not to others. They regain their egos. Thus, *Anthem* is really about the irrepressibility of individuality and hope in the midst of despair.

63 Ayn Rand, *Anthem* (London: Cassell, 1938); in Spanish, *Vivir!* (Barcelona: Luis de Caralt S.A., 1946); in Norwegian, *Høysang* (Oslo: Midas, 1984); in Swedish, *Lovsång* (Stockholm: Egoisten förlag, 1996); in French, *Hymne* (Paris: Rive droite éditions, 2006); in Danish, *Hymne* (København: Copenhagen Institute, 2006).



Ayn Rand wrote about a similar theme as Yevgeny Zamyatin: The complete denial under collectivism of individuality and choice. She applauded entrepreneurs and capitalists.

## George Orwell NINETEEN EIGHTY-FOUR

(1948)

'There are books of the same chemical composition as dynamite,' Yevgeny Zamyatin once observed. 'The difference lies only in the fact that one stick of dynamite explodes once, but one book explodes thousands of times.'<sup>64</sup> This applies to Zamyatin's own dystopia, *We*, but even more so to George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty Four*, widely recognised as one of the most brilliant and powerful novels of the 20th century. The author's real name was Eric Blair. He was born in British India in 1903, the son of a civil servant. Attending prestigious Eton College on a scholarship, he did not have the means to go on to university, so he sought a job as a policeman in Burma, at the time a British colony. He decided, however, in 1927 to leave his job and become a writer. He spent the next couple of years in London and Paris and then for a while lived with his parents in Suffolk while working as a teacher and bookshop attendant. He gradually gained recognition as a writer under the name 'George Orwell' and married Eileen O'Shaughnessy. In late 1936 he decided to volunteer for the Republican army in the Spanish Civil War. Previously sympathetic to the communists, he turned against them when he witnessed their purge of anarchists in Barcelona in May 1937 and their distortions of what he knew to be true. Soon thereafter, Orwell was seriously wounded and had to return to England.

Orwell found little interest in left-wing circles for his story of communist oppression on the Republican side in the Spanish Civil War, and his book about the war, *Homage to Catalonia*, did not sell well. He, however, became a widely read commentator and columnist for *Tribune* in England and *Partisan Review* in the United States, while becoming increasingly critical of Stalinism. During the Second World War, he worked for the BBC and wrote *Animal Farm*, his allegory, or perhaps satire, about the Bolshevik Revolution. The animals decide to take over Manor Farm, changing its name to Animal Farm. But the pigs soon assume the leadership, and a big and ruthless pig, Napoleon, becomes a brutal dictator changing the name again to Manor Farm, where 'All animals are equal but some animals are more equal

64 Quoted by Peter Rudy, Introduction, Zamyatin, *We*, p. xi.

than others.' Orwell had the manuscript ready in early 1944. But his publisher, Victor Gollancz, did not want to publish the book because it would offend Britain's Soviet ally. Faber & Faber considered the manuscript, but its literary consultant, the poet T. S. Eliot, advised against publication, arguing – as an elitist – that since the pigs were the most intelligent animals, perhaps what was needed 'was not more communism but more public-spirited pigs'.<sup>65</sup> Jonathan Cape decided to publish the book, but then suddenly that decision was reversed on the authority of an official at the British Ministry of Information. It was later discovered that this official, Peter Smollett (whose real name was Hans Peter Smolka), was a Soviet agent.<sup>66</sup> Finally in 1945 Secker & Warburg published *Animal Farm*, which became a huge success and is generally regarded as a modern masterpiece.



George Orwell (Eric Blair) wrote a parable about the failure of the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia and then a novel about a totalitarian society. He realised what communism was about when he was fighting in the Spanish Civil War. Image: Gunnar Karlsson.

65 John Rodden and John Rossi, *The Cambridge Introduction to George Orwell* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 78.

66 Rodden and Rossi, *The Cambridge Introduction to George Orwell*, p. 77.

Now financially secure, Orwell could devote the following years to writing his most ambitious novel, the dystopian *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. The name came simply from reversing the last two numbers of its year of completion, 1948. It is set in Airstrip One, formerly Great Britain, a province of Oceania. A tyranny is in place and is ruled by the mysterious 'Big Brother'. The population is divided into the inner circle of the Party, the outer circle and the 'proles', or uneducated workers. The chief protagonist, Winston Smith, is a member of the outer circle of the Party and works for the Ministry of Truth. His job is to rewrite historical articles in accordance with the Party's changing versions of the past. (His first name is chosen to remind people of Britain's traditions, embodied in Winston Churchill.) Secretly, Smith is against the Party. He has a love affair with the like-minded Julia. He also has a friend, O'Brien, who pretends to be also against the Party. But O'Brien is in fact working for the Ministry of Love, which is in charge of suppressing dissent. He arrests Smith and subjects him to various forms of torture. Finally, Smith succumbs to O'Brien and betrays Julia. The story ends with him loving Big Brother.

The obvious inspiration for the totalitarian state in Orwell's novel is the Soviet Union under Stalin, where people were not only 'liquidated', but also became unmentionable and were even retouched out of photographs. There was a bitter truth behind the old joke that under capitalism, the future is uncertain, but under communism, the past was always changing. 'Thoughtcrimes' had their parallel in the Soviet practice of imprisoning and even executing people not for what they had done, but for what they were likely to do. 'Doublethink' could be traced to the communist dialectic of holding two contrary opinions: sometimes, for example, the social democrats were attacked as 'social fascists', at other times they were invited to form 'popular fronts' with the communists; one day, the fascists were declared to be the chief enemies, another day there was almost no difference to be seen between them and ordinary democrats. The Orwellian nightmare was when the ruler was able not only to control people's activities, but also their minds by distorting or even erasing their memories and constraining their language. Another source for Orwell's concerns about the enforced distortion of truth and the disappearance of objectivity was undoubtedly his experience in the Spanish Civil War, where he saw the communists asserting obvious falsehoods, such

as that the idea that anarchists were really fascists. As Orwell said once to his friend Arthur Koestler: 'History stopped in 1936.' Koestler nodded in silent agreement.<sup>67</sup> They had both witnessed totalitarian propaganda in Spain.<sup>68</sup>

It has often been pointed out that in writing *Nineteen Eighty-Four* Orwell was influenced by Koestler's *Darkness at Noon*. Also the many similarities between Zamyatin's dystopia, *We*, and Orwell's novel have been listed, while it has been recalled that Orwell in 1946 reviewed Zamyatin's book.<sup>69</sup> But it is ignored by some literary pundits, especially on the left, that two years earlier, in 1944, Orwell reviewed Friedrich A. Hayek's *Road to Serfdom* and found himself in agreement with the negative part of Hayek's thesis about the dynamic process in which noble intentions may be transformed into deplorable, even catastrophic, results.<sup>70</sup> It is true that Orwell was sceptical about the positive part of Hayek's thesis, that free trade and private property were a part of the solution rather than of the problem. But this may have been because he did not realise the enormous creative powers of democratic capitalism. The advances in technology brought about by the discovery process of the free market have made it more difficult rather than more easy to control individuals in the way Orwell feared: These advances have enabled individuals and their organisations to bypass government and to reach out to one another, exchanging ideas and trading. They have facilitated 'horizontal' rather than 'vertical' interactions. In *Nineteen Eighty-Four* Orwell was much more pessimistic than Zamyatin in *We* or Rand in *Anthem*: Whereas both Zamyatin and Rand describe the rediscovery of individuality and faintly suggest a future rebellion, Orwell's protagonist renounces his individuality and ends up loving Big Brother. Orwell's worries about Big Brother watching people are certainly not unfounded, but democratic capitalism has made it possible to watch potential big brothers and to elude them.

67 George Orwell, Looking Back on the Spanish Civil War, *New Road* 5 March 1943 (written in 1942).

68 Most books on the Spanish Civil War are written by left-wing historians, refuting the old saying that the victors always write the history. A reliable and well-documented book on the subject is Stanley Payne, *The Spanish Civil War, the Soviet Union, and Communism 1931-1939* (New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 2004).

69 George Orwell, Review of 'WE' by E. I. Zamyatin, *Tribune* 4 January 1946.

70 George Orwell, Review of *The Road to Serfdom*, *Observer* 9 April 1944. (The review is also about a book by a pro-Soviet Member of Parliament.)

## COLD WAR TESTIMONIES

The Cold War started almost immediately after the Second World War when the leaders of Western democracies realised that Stalin was breaking his promises about Central and Eastern Europe and could not be trusted. There was also a Cold War on the literary front, producing many interesting works.

### Victor Kravchenko I CHOSE FREEDOM (1946)

Victor Andreevich Kravchenko was born in 1905 into a Ukrainian family in Ekaterinoslav, later Dnipropetrovsk and now Dnipro. As he describes in his autobiography, *I Chose Freedom*, his father was a revolutionary, albeit not a communist, being for a while imprisoned by the tsarist government. Twelve years old when the Bolsheviks seized power, Kravchenko became an engineer specialising in metallurgy and in 1929 was accepted into the Communist Party. In the 1930s, he

worked in the steel mills of the Donbass region of Ukraine, where he witnessed collectivisation being imposed on the farmers of his native land, resulting in mass famine. He became a senior manager in various factories. During Stalin's purges, although he was watched by Stalin's secret police and occasionally interrogated, he managed to hide his slowly growing disillusion with the Soviet regime and avoid arrest. When Hitler broke the Non-Aggression Pact that he had made with Stalin in August 1939 and invaded the Soviet Union in June 1941, Kravchenko was a captain in the Soviet Army. After the United States joined the war in December 1941, the Soviet Union became the recipient of massive military and material aid under the so-called Lend-Lease Act. Kravchenko was sufficiently trusted to be posted in 1943 at the Soviet Purchasing Commission in Washington, D.C., where in the spring of 1944, he asked for political asylum. After some hesitation and pressure from the Soviet Union to extradite him, the US authorities granted his request.



Victor Kravchenko (far left) fought back when French communists tried to destroy his reputation. In 1949, he won a libel case against a French communist magazine. The whole world watched the trial. Photo: Getty Images.

Kravchenko's book on his experiences in the Soviet Union was published in the US in late 1946, and soon in many other languages.<sup>71</sup> From his vantage point as a senior factory manager, he offered vivid glimpses of Soviet daily life, on shortages, the tight and exhausting surveillance by the secret police, the constant fear, the sudden disappearance of friends and pervasive double-talk. The centralisation of decision-making stifled initiative and hindered mutual adjustments. For example, when Kravchenko was managing a factory in Kemerovo, he desperately needed bricks. At the same time, two complete brickyards, belonging to another commissariat, stood empty in the city. Kravchenko never succeeded in utilising them. Again, whereas he needed accommodation for his workers, blocks of flats stood empty on the outskirts of the city. Work on them had been abandoned for some reason. Kravchenko had the money to buy the houses, and the organisation that originally built them was willing to sell, but somehow he was never able to break through the bureaucratic entanglements. This was 'business under the planlessness which is euphemistically called planned economy', as he put it.<sup>72</sup>

Kravchenko's book is, however, by no means a dry economic treatise. It is full of Dostoyevskian dramas. Katya was a little girl from the countryside, whose parents had disappeared in Stalin's collectivisation of agriculture. She was wandering around in the bitterly cold Ukrainian winter, and Kravchenko's mother could not resist taking her into the home where she told her story to the shocked family.<sup>73</sup> Clavdia, a beautiful, charming but sad woman, came from a wealthy and prominent family. Her parents were killed by the Bolsheviks while their property was confiscated, and Clavdia became one of the 'Former People', almost without any rights, despised, outlawed, living with her aunt in one

room in their former mansion. Her only way out of her predicament was to marry a physically unattractive but good-natured university professor, one of Kravchenko's teachers.<sup>74</sup> Eliena who dated Kravchenko for a while in Dnepropetrovsk, harboured a great secret. She was a well-educated and attractive woman whom the secret police wanted to use as an informer, not least on all the foreigners who were working in the city. Eliena's husband was arrested and sent to a prison camp. When Eliena managed to visit him, he had become a shadow of his former self. She relented, became an informer for the secret police, and her husband was released.<sup>75</sup>

Kravchenko was himself a fighter. When his book was published in French, it was an overnight sensation. The communists attacked it in their cultural magazine, *Les Lettres Françaises*, alleging that Kravchenko was a dim-witted drunkard whose book had been written by American secret service agents. When Kravchenko sued for libel, the Soviets produced his first wife, Ziniada Gorlova, who testified against him in Paris. However, Kravchenko was able to turn the trial into an investigation of the Soviet labour camps. He presented many witnesses who had been inmates in the camps, including Margarete Buber-Neumann, who had first been imprisoned by Stalin and then by Hitler. Kravchenko won the case and subsequently wrote a book about the trial, *I Chose Justice*.<sup>76</sup> In the Soviet Union his relatives and friends were hunted down and either executed or imprisoned. In the US Kravchenko started a relationship with an American woman, Cynthia Kuser, and they had two sons, Anthony and Andrew. With his first wife, Zinaida, he had had a son, Valentin. But Kravchenko was never able completely to adjust to American life. Feeling lonely and isolated, in 1966 he committed suicide. His son Anthony died early, but Andrew and Valentin were reunited in 1992 after the collapse of the Soviet Union.<sup>77</sup> In 2008 Andrew Kravchenko produced a documentary film about his father.

74 Ibid., pp. 71–73.

75 Ibid., pp. 148–166.

76 Victor Kravchenko, *I Chose Justice* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1950).

77 Gary Kern, *The Kravchenko Case: One Man's War on Stalin* (New York: Enigma, 2007).

71 Victor Kravchenko, *I Chose Freedom* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1946); in German, *Ich wählte die Freiheit* (Zürich: Thomas, 1947); in Spanish, *Yo elegí la libertad* (Buenos Aires: Edicitorial Guillermo Kraft 1947); in French, *J'ai choisi la liberté!* (Paris: Editions Self, 1947); in Swedish, *Jeg valde friheten* (Stockholm: Natur & Kultur, 1947); in Danish, *Jeg valgte friheden* (København: Prior, 1947); in Norwegian, *Jeg valgte friheten* (Bergen: Grieg, 1947); in Italian, *Ho scelto la libertà* (Milano: Longanesi, 1948); in Portuguese, *Escolhi a liberdade* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora a Noite 1948); in Icelandic, *Eg kaus frelsid* (Seydisfjörður: Prentsmidja Austurlands, 1951).

72 Kravchenko, *I Chose Freedom*, p. 328.

73 Ibid., pp. 87–90.

## Ants Oras BALTIC ECLIPSE (1948)

Few people were as qualified to write about the tragic fate of the three small Baltic republics, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, as Professor Ants Oras. Born in 1900, his original name was Hans Gottfried, but in the surge of Estonian nationalism in early 20th century, he changed it to Ants Oras. He was only 17 when Estonia proclaimed her independence in 1918, and he joined the militia which successfully resisted the invasion of the Soviet Red Army. Subsequently he studied literature at the universities of Tartu, Leipzig and Oxford and eventually became a professor of English literature at his alma mater, Tartu University. Translating Virgil, Shakespeare, Goethe, Pushkin and other classical writers into Estonian, he also wrote himself several books on literature. In 1943 he and his wife, Livia Lüüs, fled on a boat from Estonia, then occupied by the Nazis, to Sweden. He worked briefly for the US Embassy in Stockholm and then moved to Oxford, where he found a job as a librarian. In 1949 Oras became a professor of English literature at the University of Florida in Gainesville. He died in 1986.

Oras' book, *Baltic Eclipse*, was published in English in 1948.<sup>78</sup> It is a thoughtful and moving testament to Estonia and the other two Baltic republics, which despite many challenges flourished as independent countries in the inter-war period. In August 1939, however, Hitler and Stalin made their Non-Aggression Pact, secretly dividing up Central and Eastern Europe between themselves. Stalin got the Baltic countries. He forced them to accept Soviet military bases, and in June 1940 the Red Army occupied all three of them, installing communist puppet governments and holding sham elections, after which the three countries were forced to join the Soviet Union. Oras personally knew many of the former Estonian leaders and also some of the communists replacing them, and he vividly portrays them in his book. With sorrow and anguish, he described the politicisation and corruption of Estonian academic life and the general attack by

78 Ants Oras, *Baltic Eclipse* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1948); in Swedish, *Slagskugga över Baltikum* (Stockholm: Aldus/Bonniers, 1949); in Norwegian, *Mørke over Baltikum* (Oslo: Høvik Forlag, 1949); in Icelandic, *Orlaganott yfir Eystrasaltslöndum* (Reykjavik: Almenna bókafélagid, 1955); in Finnish, *Viron kohtalonvuodet* (Jyväskylä: Gummerus, 1958).



Ants Oras was Professor of English Literature at the University of Tartu before the 1940 Soviet occupation of Estonia. He wrote a deeply-felt and readable book about his experiences, *Baltic Eclipse*. Photo: University of Florida Coral Gables.

the communists on civil society, their attempt to destroy all spontaneous social ties and traditions. The most tragic event was, however, the brutal and unexpected mass deportation of leading Estonians with their families in June 1941, more than 10,000 people in total. Similar deportations took place in the other two Baltic countries at the same time. A year after Oras published his book, in March 1949, a second mass deportation took place from Estonia and the other Baltic countries, aimed at breaking down the resistance of farmers to collectivisation of agriculture. In Estonia alone more than 20,000 people were deported. Alas, Oras did not live to see Estonia and the two other Baltic republics regain their independence in 1991.

## Arthur Koestler and others THE GOD THAT FAILED

(1950)

One of the most eloquent books written against communism in the Cold War was the 1949 collection of six essays or confessions, three by former communists, three by former fellow travellers, entitled *The God that Failed*. The idea for the book came out of a heated exchange between Koestler and his friend Richard Crossman, a prominent member of the British Labour Party. 'You hate our Cassandra cries and resent us as allies', Koestler had exclaimed, 'but when all is said, we ex-communists are the only people on your side who know what it's all about.'<sup>79</sup> Subsequently, Crossman agreed to edit the volume.

The three communists were Arthur Koestler, Ignazio Silone and Richard Wright. In his contribution, Koestler describes the almost mystical sense of superiority that he felt when he became a communist, akin to a religious conversion: everything cleared up and the world suddenly became intelligible. 'The new light seems to pour from all directions across the skull; the whole universe falls into pattern like the stray pieces of a jigsaw puzzle assembled by magic at one stroke. There is now an answer to every question, doubts and conflicts are a matter of the tortured past – a past already remote, when one had lived in dismal ignorance in the tasteless, colourless world of those who don't know.'<sup>80</sup> He recalls his trip to Ukraine in 1932 where he witnessed first-hand the famine brought about by Stalin's collectivisation of Soviet agriculture, although he chose to ignore it at the time, and his belated rejection of communism after much reflection and agony. What he had learned in the process was that 'man is a reality, mankind an abstraction; that men cannot be treated as units in operations of political arithmetic because they behave like the symbols for zero and the infinite, which dislocate all mathematical operations; that the end justifies the means only within very narrow limits; that ethics is not a function of social utility, and charity not a petty-bourgeois sentiment but the gravitational force which keeps civilization in its orbit.'<sup>81</sup>

<sup>79</sup> *The God that Failed*, ed. Richard Crossman (London: Hamilton, 1950), pp. 2–3.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 68.

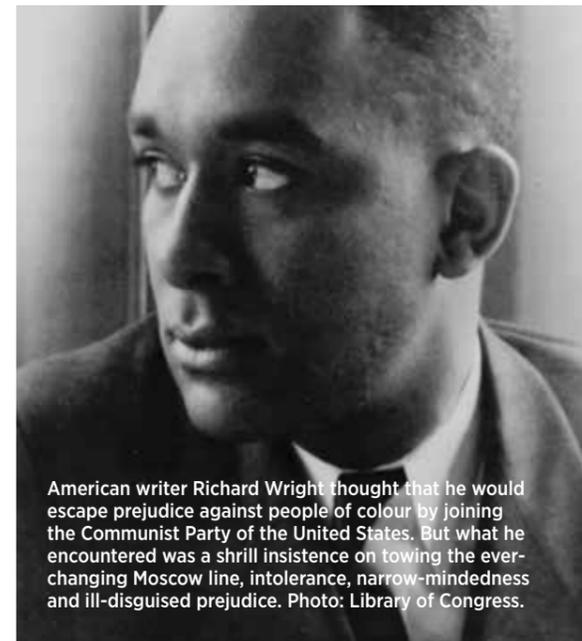


Italian writer Ignazio Silone, one of the leaders of the Communist Party of Italy, spent some time in Moscow. The cynicism and slavish obedience to Stalin he encountered there dismayed him and contributed to his later anti-communism. Photo: Library of Congress.

Italian writer Ignazio Silone (whose real name was Secondino Tranquilli) was in the 1920s a leading member of the Communist Party of Italy. He often attended Comintern meetings in Moscow. At one meeting a Russian delegate suggested to some British communists that their party branches should pretend to accept a certain rule and then simply go on to break it. 'But that would be a lie,' one of the British communists innocently responded. Silone commented: 'Loud laughter greeted this ingenuous objection, frank, cordial, interminable laughter, the like of which the gloomy offices of the Communist International had perhaps never heard before. The joke quickly spread all over Moscow, for the Englishman's entertaining and incredible reply was telephoned at once to Stalin and to the most important offices of State, provoking new waves of mirth everywhere.'<sup>82</sup> At another Comintern meeting a motion was proposed to condemn Stalin's rival, Lev Trotsky, for writing an essay on the Chinese Revolution. Silone was met with indignation when he said he could not vote on the motion unless he could read the essay.<sup>83</sup> These incidents and many

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 104.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 106–112.



American writer Richard Wright thought that he would escape prejudice against people of colour by joining the Communist Party of the United States. But what he encountered was a shrill insistence on towing the ever-changing Moscow line, intolerance, narrow-mindedness and ill-disguised prejudice. Photo: Library of Congress.

more led Silone to become more and more critical of the intolerant Kremlin hardliners and finally he was expelled from the Party while an exile from Fascist Italy in Switzerland.

American writer Richard Wright, the descendant of African-American slaves, had responded to racism by joining the Communist Party of the United States. But he discovered that racism was no less rampant amongst the communists than generally in American society. Fiercely independent, he also resented the tendency of his comrades to try and control his thoughts and writings.

The three fellow travellers had also a lot to say. French writer André Gide – who had in 1947 won the Nobel Prize in Literature – recalled his disappointing visit to the Soviet Union in 1936. Unlike most other 'political pilgrims', he perceived the oppression and misery of the country. 'Although the long-heralded Dictatorship of the Proletariat has not materialized, there is nevertheless dictatorship of one kind – dictatorship of the Soviet bureaucracy.'<sup>84</sup>

American journalist Louis Fischer, a descendant of Russian Jews, long had been fascinated by the country of his forefathers. But as a correspondent in Moscow for *New York Post*, he witnessed Stalin's show trials, which sowed doubts in his mind about the ultimate desirability, or even

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 184.

feasibility, of the Bolshevik project. He recalled the Kronstadt uprising of 1921, which was ferociously suppressed by the Bolsheviks and said that every ex-communist had his or her 'Kronstadt', a defining moment of reckoning. For Fischer this moment was the 1939 Non-Aggression Pact between Hitler and Stalin. He also slowly began to realise that Bolshevism was not the way out because it was itself the biggest agglomeration of power over man. 'The Kremlin holds its citizens in subjugation not only by police-and-prison power but also by the greater power inherent in the ownership and operation of every economic enterprise in the nation.'<sup>85</sup>

British poet Stephen Spender described how his opposition to capitalism led him to support communism, however half-heartedly. But he ultimately turned away from communism because of its 'double-thinking', intellectual dishonesty, self-righteousness and intolerance, which he witnessed first-hand in Spain during the Civil War. He reached the same conclusion as Fischer, that under communism 'too much power is concentrated in the hands of too few people. These few people are so protected from criticism of their conduct on any except Party lines, that neither they themselves, nor anyone else is protected from their worst human qualities: savagery, vindictiveness, envy, greed and lust for power.'<sup>86</sup>



US journalist Louis Fischer wrote that all ex-communists had their 'Kronstadt', the defining moment when they realised that they had served an illusion, and not a harmless one. Photo: Library of Congress.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 226.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 269.



Margarete Buber-Neumann was first Stalin's prisoner in a labour camp in Kazakhstan. Then she was handed over to Hitler, spending time in Ravensbrück. After the War, she became a staunch anti-communist. Photo: Deutsches Nationalarchiv.

### **Margarete Buber-Neumann** **UNDER TWO DICTATORS** (1949)

Margarete Buber-Neumann was one of the most effective and impressive witnesses in the 1949 Kravchenko trial in Paris. She had quite a story to tell. Born in Potsdam in 1901, she was for a while the daughter-in-law of philosopher Martin Buber, but she later lived in an unmarried union with communist leader Heinz Neumann. Her sister Babette was in a union with another leading communist, Willi Münzenberg, the aforementioned propaganda chief of the international communist movement. After the Nazi takeover in Germany, Margarete and Heinz Neumann moved to Moscow where they worked for Comintern and lived in Hotel Lux. In April 1937 Neumann was arrested and, unbeknownst to his wife, in November 1937 he was condemned to death and immediately executed. Margarete was arrested in June 1938 under a law that allowed for the imprisonment of the 'wives of enemies of the people'. She was sentenced to five years in a labour camp and sent to Karaganda in Kazakhstan, where prisoners worked under appalling conditions.

On 23 August 1939, Stalin and Hitler made their Non-Aggression Pact, dividing up Central and Eastern Europe between them. Stalin got Finland, the Baltic republics and the eastern part of Poland, while Hitler got Poland's western part. In September Hitler attacked Poland from the west, and two weeks later Stalin did the same from the east. The next two years saw close cooperation between the two dictators. An instance of this cooperation was in February 1940, when Stalin gathered together German communists in his prisons and labour camps and handed them over to Hitler. One of these prisoners was Margarete Buber-Neumann, who spent the next five years in the Nazi concentration camp Ravensbrück. After the 1945 Nazi defeat, Buber-Neumann lived for a while in Sweden, publishing her book on her experiences in the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany, *Under Two Dictators*, in Swedish in 1948 and in English in 1949.<sup>87</sup> She did

<sup>87</sup> Margarete Buber-Neumann, *Fänge hos Hitler och Stalin* (Stockholm: Natur och kultur, 1948); in German, *Als Gefangene bei Stalin und Hitler. Eine Welt im Dunkel* (München: Verlag der Zwölf, 1949); in English, *Under Two Dictators* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1949); in French, *Déportée en Sibérie* (Paris: Ed. du Seuil, 1949), the first part of her memoir, the second part only appearing in French in 1988. The book was translated into many other languages, such as Danish, *Fange hos Stalin og Hitler* (København:

not only testify in the Kravchenko trial, but she also testified in a similar trial in 1950 when anti-slavery activist David Rousset sued the same magazine, *Les Lettres Françaises*, for libel and won. Buber-Neumann moved to West Germany, became a staunch anti-communist and published many more books, herself serving as a symbol of the common criminality of national socialism and communism. She only learned about her husband's fate in 1960. Buber-Neumann passed away in November 1989, only a few days before the Berlin Wall fell.

### **Elinor Lipper** **ELEVEN YEARS IN** **SOVIET PRISON CAMPS** (1950)

Elinor Lipper was another woman who survived to tell her story about the Soviet labour camps. Born in Brussels in 1912, she came from a family of well-to-do German Jews. In the Great War the family moved to the neutral Netherlands. In 1931 Elinor started studying medicine in Germany, first in Freiburg and then in Berlin. She became a communist activist, and after the Nazi takeover, she fled to Switzerland where she had relatives. For the next few years she worked on clandestine projects for the Comintern,

which arranged her marriage to a Swiss communist, Konrad Vetterli, in 1935 so she could get a Swiss passport. She and her partner, Wilhelm Dannemann, went to the Soviet Union in 1937, where they called themselves Viktor and Ruth Zander and stayed at the Hotel Lux. The couple had only been in Moscow for two months when in July 1937 they were arrested and accused of 'counter-revolutionary activities'. Elinor spent more than a year in Moscow prisons before she was sentenced to five years of hard labour. She was sent to Magadan in Northern Siberia, where she spent more than seven years, surviving the harsh conditions because, as a former medical student, she found a job as a nurse. In 1946 she was transferred to a camp in Kazakhstan, where she bore a daughter. In 1947 she was transferred to another camp in Brest-Litovsk, where the Soviets, believing that she was a German citizen, were going to release her to Germany.

Swiss authorities pressed the Soviets hard to release Swiss citizens from prison camps, and when they received information about Elinor Lipper, they requested her release, which finally took place in June 1948. Subsequently she wrote her book, which came out in German in Switzerland in early 1950, in English in the United Kingdom in the same year



Elinor Lipper soon after she was released after eleven years in Stalin's labour camps. Photo: Schweizerisches Sozialarchiv.



Elinor Lipper when she was touring the United States, discussing communism.

Schonberg, 1956); Italian, *Prigioniera di Stalin e Hitler* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1994); and Icelandic, *Konur í einraedisklom* (Reykjavik: Isafold, 1954).

and in the United States a year later.<sup>88</sup> Its concluding words were: 'The events I describe are the daily experiences of thousands of people in the Soviet Union. They are the findings of an involuntary expedition into an unknown land: the land of Soviet prisoners, of the guiltless damned. From that region I have brought back with me the silence of the Siberian graveyards, the deathly silence of those who have frozen, starved or been beaten to death. This book is an attempt to make that silence speak.'

The book sold well and was in June 1950 condensed in *Reader's Digest*. In late 1950, Elinor Lipper went to Paris and testified, as did Margarete Buber-Neumann, in a trial on labour camps in the Soviet Union, which anti-slavery activist David Rousset started by suing the communist magazine *Les Lettres Françaises* for libel. She participated in a few more anti-communist events and went on a lecture tour of the United States from 1951 to 1952, but then she disappeared completely from the public scene, giving rise to speculations that the communists might have kidnapped or even assassinated her.<sup>89</sup> But in fact she had married a French doctor who served in Madagascar, and she moved there with him. Later she returned to Switzerland, lived a quiet life as a translator and editor and passed away in 2008, 96 years old.<sup>90</sup>

One chapter in Lipper's book arose particular interest in the United States. It was about the 1944 visit by then US Vice President Henry A. Wallace to the prison camps in Magadan. The United States and the Soviet Union were allies in the fight against Nazi Germany and Japan, and Wallace, much more left-wing than his party in general, was well-disposed to Stalin and the Soviets. The Soviet secret police staged an elaborate show in the camps and their vicinity, temporarily razing the watchtowers surrounding the camps, locking up prisoners in their barracks, filling shops with goods (hastily removed as soon as the vice president had

88 Elinor Lipper, *Elf Jahre in Sowjetischen Gefängnissen und Lagern* (Zürich: Europa Verlag, 1950); in the U.K., *Eleven Years in Soviet Prison Camps* (London: World Affairs Book Club, 1950); in the US, *Eleven Years in Soviet Prison Camps* (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1951).

89 Donald T. and Agnieszka Critchlow, *Enemies of the State. Personal Stories from the Gulag* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2002), pp. 17 and 20. The source of the kidnapping story seems to be Marvin Liebman, *Coming Out Conservative: An Autobiography* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1992), p. 89.

90 This account is based on my research in Swiss archives, presented in a forthcoming paper on Elinor Lipper.

passed by), and calling upon pretty office girls to play swineherd girls in piggeries shown to the vice president, a former Secretary of Agriculture. The commander of the camps, Ivan Nikishov, a secret police officer known for cruelty and callousness, changed into civilian clothes and charmed Wallace with his enthusiasm for gold mining. After an extract of Lipper's chapter on Wallace's visit was published in *New York Post*, Wallace wrote to the newspaper claiming that he had not known such labour camps existed. This prompted philosopher Martin Gardner to write to the newspaper, pointing out that at least six books on the labour camps had been published before Wallace undertook his trip.<sup>91</sup>

### *El campesino* **LIFE AND DEATH IN THE SOVIET UNION** (1952)

Perhaps some victims of communism survived by accident rather than solely by their own resources. This can hardly be said about Valentín González. Born in 1904 in Extremadura, one of the poorest regions of Spain, he became a communist as a young man, gained fame as a tough guerrilla fighter and was one of the Republican generals in the 1936–1939 Civil War in Spain. He went by the name El campesino, the peasant. He became famous enough to make an appearance in Hemingway's celebrated novel, *For Whom the Bell Tolls*: 'He was a brave, tough man; no braver in the world. But God, how he talked too much. And when he was excited he would say anything no matter what the consequences of his indiscretion. And those consequences were many already. He was a wonderful Brigade Commander though in a situation where it looked as though everything was lost. He never knew when everything was lost and if it was, he would fight out of it.'<sup>92</sup>

Hemingway's words, uttered in 1940, were prophetic. After the Republican defeat in the Civil War, El campesino went with many other Spanish communists to the Soviet Union, where he was initially welcomed as a war hero. He married a Russian general's daughter, Ariadna Dzhan, and they had a daughter, Victoria. But soon the argumentative El campesino

91 Martin Gardner, *The Whys of a Philosophical Scrivener* (New York: Quill, 1983), pp. 153–4.

92 Ernest Hemingway, *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1940), Ch. 18.



Valentín González, El campesino (far right, with beard), here reviewing Republican troops in 1937 with Prime Minister Negrín, President Azaña and General Miaja, was the most famous communist general during the Spanish Civil War. It was a sensation when he wrote about his later imprisonment in Stalin's labour camps and his adventurous escape to Iran after a powerful earthquake devastated much of Soviet Central Asia in October 1948. Photo: Roger Violet, Getty Images.

was kicked out of the military school in which he had been enrolled and sent to work in the Moscow Underground System. In 1944 El campesino fled from the Soviet Union with two of his fellow countrymen. They managed to reach Iran, but they were captured there by the Soviet secret police and sent back to the Soviet Union, where El campesino was sentenced to three years in the infamous Vorkuta labour camp in Siberia. After an accident in 1947, he was sent to Samarkand. On the way he made another attempt to escape and was again captured and sentenced to two more years of hard labour. This was later increased to 10 years. But fortune favours the brave: El campesino was at a prison camp in Ashkabad 6 October 1948 when a powerful earthquake occurred, destroying most of the camp, including files on prisoners. He used the opportunity to remind the camp managers that he had served his two years' sentence, conveniently omitting information about his additional sentence. He was released and again he managed to get to Iran. His escape became legendary. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn mentions it, for example, in his *Gulag Archipelago*.<sup>93</sup>

93 Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago 1918–1956: An*

From Teheran El campesino went to Paris, where in late 1950 he testified in the same libel case against the communist magazine *Les Lettres Françaises* as Margarete Buber-Neumann and Elinor Lipper. Julián Gorkin, a former Trotskyite from Spain who had become an ardent anti-communist, helped El campesino to write an account of his time in the Soviet Union with graphic descriptions of the torture which he endured in Soviet prisons and of the harsh conditions in the labour camps. The book was published in French in 1950 and in English in 1952.<sup>94</sup> For those who had any memories of the Spanish Civil War, it was a sensation with revelations about, or rather exposures of, other Spanish communists, such as the uncompromising Stalinist La Pasionaria. Remaining Franco's implacable enemy, El campesino lived thereafter in France and Italy and only returned to Spain in 1977, two years after Franco's death. Then he discovered that his Spanish wife and their three children, whom he had thought dead, had all survived the Civil War. He remarried his wife, Juana Rodríguez, but passed away in 1983.

### *Arved Viirlaid* **GRAVES WITHOUT CROSSES** (1952)

For centuries, Estonia had been preyed upon by powerful and merciless neighbours, Germans from the West and Russians from the East, the small Baltic country only attaining independence in 1918. But in their 1939 Non-Aggression Pact, Stalin and Hitler, dividing up Central and Eastern Europe, had decided that Stalin would get Estonia. Stalin almost immediately demanded military bases in Estonia, and in the summer of 1940 the Red Army occupied the country, forcing her to join the Soviet Union. Only eighteen years old at the time, Arved Viirlaid, an aspiring poet and farmer's son from a small village in Northern Estonia, witnessed at first hand the attempt by the communists to destroy Estonian civil society. In the summer of 1941, Hitler broke the

*Experiment in Literary Investigation*, Vol. III (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), p. 186.

94 In French, *La vie et la mort en U.R.S.S.* (Paris: Les Iles d'Or, Plon, 1950); in Spanish, *La vida y muerte en la URSS* (Buenos Aires: Bell, 1951); in German, *Die große Illusion* (Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1951); in the US, *El Campesino: Life and Death in the Soviet Union* (New York: Putnam, 1952); and in the U.K., *Listen Comrades: Life and Death in the Soviet Union* (London: Heinemann, 1952). The book was even published in Icelandic, *El campesino — Bondinn* (Reykjavik: Studlaberg, 1952).



Estonian poet Arved Viirlaid fought against the Soviet Red Army, both as a 'Forest Brother' in Estonia and as a volunteer in the Finnish Army. His powerful and poignant novel, *Graves without Crosses*, was banned in Estonia during the Soviet occupation while Viirlaid's name was unmentionable.

territory, the so-called Continuation War. Viirlaid and other Estonian volunteers in the Finnish Army – called in Estonia 'the Finnish boys' – formed a regiment which fought against the Red Army on the Karelian front until Finland sued for peace in 1944. The Estonian volunteers, including Viirlaid, then were sent back to their country, where they fought against the Soviets who had invaded Estonia again.<sup>95</sup> But after only a month Viirlaid escaped through Sweden to England where he supported himself by various manual jobs. In 1953, he moved to Canada where he worked for a printing press. He lived to see his country regain her sovereignty in 1991 and died in 2015, 93 years old. Viirlaid devoted his life to describing the tragic fate of his country. Perhaps a little-known fact may illustrate her fate. Estonia and Denmark are almost identical in size (Estonia 45,000 and Denmark 44,000 square kilometres) and have a similar climate, type of terrain and natural resources. But in 2017, Denmark had a population of 5.7 million, whereas that of Estonia was only 1.3 million.

In exile Arved Viirlaid published several volumes of poetry, but also many novels of which the best known and most widely-translated is about the Forest Brothers, *Graves Without Crosses*, published in Estonian in 1952. It has been translated into many languages and was published in English in 1972, with a Foreword by former Canadian Prime Minister John F. Diefenbaker.<sup>96</sup> The author drew heavily on his own experiences. The chief protagonist, Taavi Raudoja, returns in 1944 to his village from fighting in Finland. He tries in vain to hide from the victorious Soviets and is captured and put into prison. The prisoners hear on 8 May 1945 that Germany has surrendered. 'Red peace. This is the most terrible thing that could come.'<sup>97</sup> An old cellmate tells him what he should say if he ever

95 While the regiment of the 'Finnish boys' fought alongside the Germans in Estonia, they were not full members of the SS, and later they, like some other Baltic military units, were judged by the Nuremberg Military Tribunal not to be criminal in the sense of belonging to the SS.

96 Arved Viirlaid, *Ristideta hauad* (Lund: Eesti Kirjanike Kooperatiiv, 1952); in Latvian, *Kapi bez krustiem* (Minneapolis: Tilta Apgads, 1956); in Swedish, *Gravar utan kors* (Stockholm: Andromeda, 1959); in French, *Tombeaux sans croix* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1962); in Spanish, *Tumbas sin cruz* (Barcelona: Caralt, 1966); in Finnish, *Ristittömät haudat* (Hämeenlinna: Karisto, 1968); in English, *Graves without Crosses* (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin, 1972); in Lithuanian, *Kapai be kryžiu* (Kaunas: Šviesa, 1996); and in Russian and Chinese (in Taiwan).

97 Viirlaid, *Graves without Crosses*, p. 181.

got out: 'Tell them that even the stones cry here.'<sup>98</sup> Taavi's captors use torture to try and force him to reveal the identities and whereabouts of other 'Finnish boys'. Almost miraculously, he manages to escape and becomes a Forest Brother. Separately, the Soviets have also captured his pregnant wife and their son. In prison, his wife, Ilme, gives birth to a girl. The son is held hostage, whereas the mother and daughter are released in order to entrap Taavi. On the long and arduous way to the village, the infant dies. Because of her sufferings, Ilme becomes deranged, trying to talk Taavi into giving himself up in the hope her son will be released. After brutal battles with Soviet forces, Taavi decides to try and reach the free world, leaving his wife and son behind. Witnessing all the suffering of his people and other victims of communism, he asks himself: "Cannot these nameless thousands, tens of thousands, millions of innocent people really redeem the world?"<sup>99</sup>

Viirlaid's work is really a documentary novel where the plot may be invented, but the details are true, offering "some insight into partisan warfare in Estonia", as historian Tõnu Parming puts it.<sup>100</sup> It is a powerful story of hard choices, betrayal, heroism and hope against hope.

### Whittaker Chambers WITNESS (1952)

John V. Fleming, as previously noted, regards four books as having been of special importance in the intellectual battle against communism, Koestler's *Darkness at Noon*, Valtin's *Out of the Night*, Kravchenko's *I Chose Freedom* and *Witness* by Whittaker Chambers. Born in 1901, Chambers attended Columbia College of Columbia University and joined the Communist Party of the United States in 1925. He worked as a writer and translator and became a Soviet agent and Comintern courier. He was controlled by GRU, the intelligence agency of the Red Army. Many members of his communist cell, carefully hiding their real political affiliation, became prominent in the Roosevelt administration, including Alger Hiss at the Department of State.

98 Ibid., p. 188.

99 Ibid., p. 428.

100 Foreword to Mart Laar, *War in the Woods: Estonia's Struggle for Survival, 1944–1956* (Washington DC: Compass Press, 1992), p. xiv.

During Stalin's purges Chambers gradually lost faith in communism, ignoring orders to go to Moscow, and, in 1938, he broke with his former comrades and took his family into temporary hiding. He was married to the artist Esther Shemitz, and they had two children. In 1939 Chambers joined the staff of *Time* magazine where he had a successful career as a writer and editor. Chambers became a friend of anti-communist journalist Isaac Don Levine, and after Stalin made the Non-Aggression Pact with Hitler in August 1939, Levine convinced him that he had to warn US authorities against the pervasive infiltration of communists in the administration. The two of them had a private meeting with Assistant Secretary of State Adolf A. Berle, who duly notified the White House and the FBI. Nothing was, however, done until another communist agent, Elizabeth Bentley, defected in 1945 and corroborated much of Chambers' information.

In 1948, Chambers was called to testify before a committee of the US House of Representatives where he named Hiss and several other members of his underground communist cell. Hiss, however, strenuously denied all his charges and even claimed that he had never met him. When confronted with Chambers, he said that he had known him under another name. Chambers was able to produce evidence supporting his testimony, and Hiss was convicted for perjury and sentenced to prison. The dramatic confrontation between Chambers and Hiss divided public opinion in the United States, with many left-wing intellectuals unable to accept Chambers' account despite the evidence. He resigned from his job at *Time* and wrote his book, *Witness*, about his reckoning with communism. Published in 1952, it became a bestseller and an inspiration for American anti-communists, including writer William F. Buckley and later President Ronald Reagan.<sup>101</sup> In eloquent and sometimes thunderous prose, Chambers portrayed the struggle of Western democracy against communism as the struggle of good against evil. To him, communism was nothing new. 'It is, in fact, man's second oldest faith. Its promise was whispered in the first days of the Creation under the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil: "Ye shall be as gods." It is the great alternative faith of mankind. Like all great faiths, its force derives from a simple vision. Other ages have had great visions. They have always been different

101 Whittaker Chambers, *Witness* (New York: Random House, 1952).

Non-Aggression Pact, invaded the Soviet Union and the newly occupied Baltic countries. Viirlaid joined the 'Forest Brothers' who helped drive the Soviet oppressors out of Estonia. But he did not want to serve under the Germans and in 1943 went to Finland, joining the Finnish army. Not only are Finns and Estonians neighbours: they also speak languages that are closely related and mutually intelligible.

Having been defeated by the Soviets in early 1940 after a heroic defence in the brief Winter War, in the summer of 1941 the Finns had declared war on the Soviets with the aim of regaining lost



Norwegian fisherman Otto Larsen (right) spent eight years in Stalin's labour camps without ever knowing what he had done wrong. Here he is with journalist Haavard Haavardsholm who helped him write his autobiography. Photo: Arbeiderbevegelsens Arkiv.

versions of the same vision: the vision of God and man's relationship to God. The Communist vision is the vision of Man without God.<sup>102</sup>

From 1957 to 1959 Chambers worked as a senior editor at Buckley's *National Review*. In 1959 he and his wife travelled to Europe, where they visited Arthur Koestler at his Alpbach summerhouse in the Austrian Alps, with Margarete Buber-Neumann also present. Chambers died of a heart attack in 1961. The Hiss-Chambers controversy lived on, however. In 1978, historian Allen Weinstein, later the Archivist of the United States, published *Perjury: The Hiss-Chambers Case*, where he argued that Chambers indeed had told the truth about the underground communist cell of which he and Hiss both were members.<sup>103</sup> In 1995, the so-called Venona documents, originating in decrypted cables from Soviet sources, provided further evidence for Chambers' account of the deep penetration of Soviet agents and spies, including Hiss (ALES in the cables), into the US public administration.<sup>104</sup> Koestler's judgement on Chambers seems fair, that he was 'one of the most outstanding, most maligned and most sincere' of men.<sup>105</sup>

<sup>102</sup> Chambers, *Witness*, p. 9.

<sup>103</sup> Allen Weinstein, *Perjury: The Hiss-Chambers Case* (New York: Knopf, 1978). Weinstein brought out a second edition in 1997, with further evidence.

<sup>104</sup> John Earl Haynes and Harvey Klehr, *Venona: Decoding Soviet Espionage in America* (New Haven NH: Yale University Press, 1999).

<sup>105</sup> Letter from Koestler to André Malraux 28 April 1953. Koestler Archives at University of Edinburgh.

### Otto Larsen **NIGHTMARE OF THE INNOCENTS** (1955)

Even the normally peaceful Scandinavian countries had their share of Gulag inmates. Born in 1912, Otto Larsen came from a family of hardy, poor fishermen in Finnmark, the northernmost part of Norway, bordering on Russia in the east and Finland in the south. He became a communist, and when the Germans occupied Norway, he and his friends decided to escape by boat to the Soviet Union. In September 1940 they arrived in Murmansk. The Soviets asked Larsen to return to Norway and spy on the German occupation forces, which he did. He discovered in June 1941 that the Germans were about to attack the Soviet Union and hurried with that information to Murmansk. Subsequently he joined the Red Army and was for a while trained in warfare and then sent with two of his fellow countrymen, Emil Isaksen and Ragnvald Mikkelsen, back to Norway where they were to continue spying on the Germans, hiding on a remote island in Finnmark. But their radio transmitter did not work, and they were not picked up on the pre-designated day. They, therefore, in September 1943 decided to flee to Sweden, where they were interned and interrogated, freely divulging information about their activities in Norway. After the war the three of them returned to Norway, but they decided to go to Murmansk to collect the fishing boats they had left behind there. Upon arriving in Murmansk, they were immediately imprisoned. Larsen and Isaksen were

sentenced to 10 years of hard labour and Mikkelsen to 8 for revealing Soviet state secrets while being interrogated during their internment in Sweden.

The three Norwegians were sent to labour camps in different parts of Russia, where they suffered various hardships. Mikkelsen was shot trying to escape. Larsen succeeded in establishing contact with the Norwegian Embassy in Moscow, and through diplomatic pressure from Norway after Stalin's death, he was released in the autumn of 1953. In Norway, his return caused much embarrassment for Norwegian communists. The Social Democrats, bitterly fighting the communists in the labour movement and elsewhere, welcomed him, however, and a journalist from the Social Democratic press, Haavard Haavardsholm, was assigned to the task of helping Larsen to write a book about his experiences. It was published in Norwegian in 1954, and in English a year later, *Nightmare of the Innocents*, with recommendations from British Labour Leader Clement Attlee and philosopher Bertrand Russell.<sup>106</sup> Larsen also went on a lecture tour around Norway debating the communists. His simple, straightforward manner and transparent honesty, even innocence, won him many supporters. But his health had suffered greatly from his years in Stalin's slave camps, and he passed away in 1956, only 44 years old.

As in many other recollections of the Gulag, some of the most telling stories in Larsen's book are of other inmates. Ivan was a young man who had fought on the Leningrad front and also gone on missions to Finland. He had received eight medals for bravery. He had no idea why he was in prison. A young guy from Moscow was accused of having read foreign propaganda. He could hardly read or write. Maria, a pretty young girl, had been an interpreter at the American Mission in Murmansk. She and a young American fell in love and planned to marry. When he left the Soviet Union, she applied for permission to go to the United States in order to marry him. She was arrested and sentenced to eight years of hard labour. Larsen also met several Russian seamen who had been to other countries during the war. If they made casual remarks such as that living standards

<sup>106</sup> Otto Larsen, *Jeg var en Sovjetspion* [I was a Soviet Spy] (Oslo: Cappelen, 1954); in English, *Nightmare of the Innocents* (London: Andrew Melrose, 1955); in Icelandic, *Nytsamur Sakleysingi* [A Useful Innocent] (Reykjavik: Almenna bókafélagid, 1956).

of workers seemed to be pretty decent in capitalist countries or that ordinary Americans were quite well dressed, they were denounced and sentenced to 10 to 15 years of hard labour.

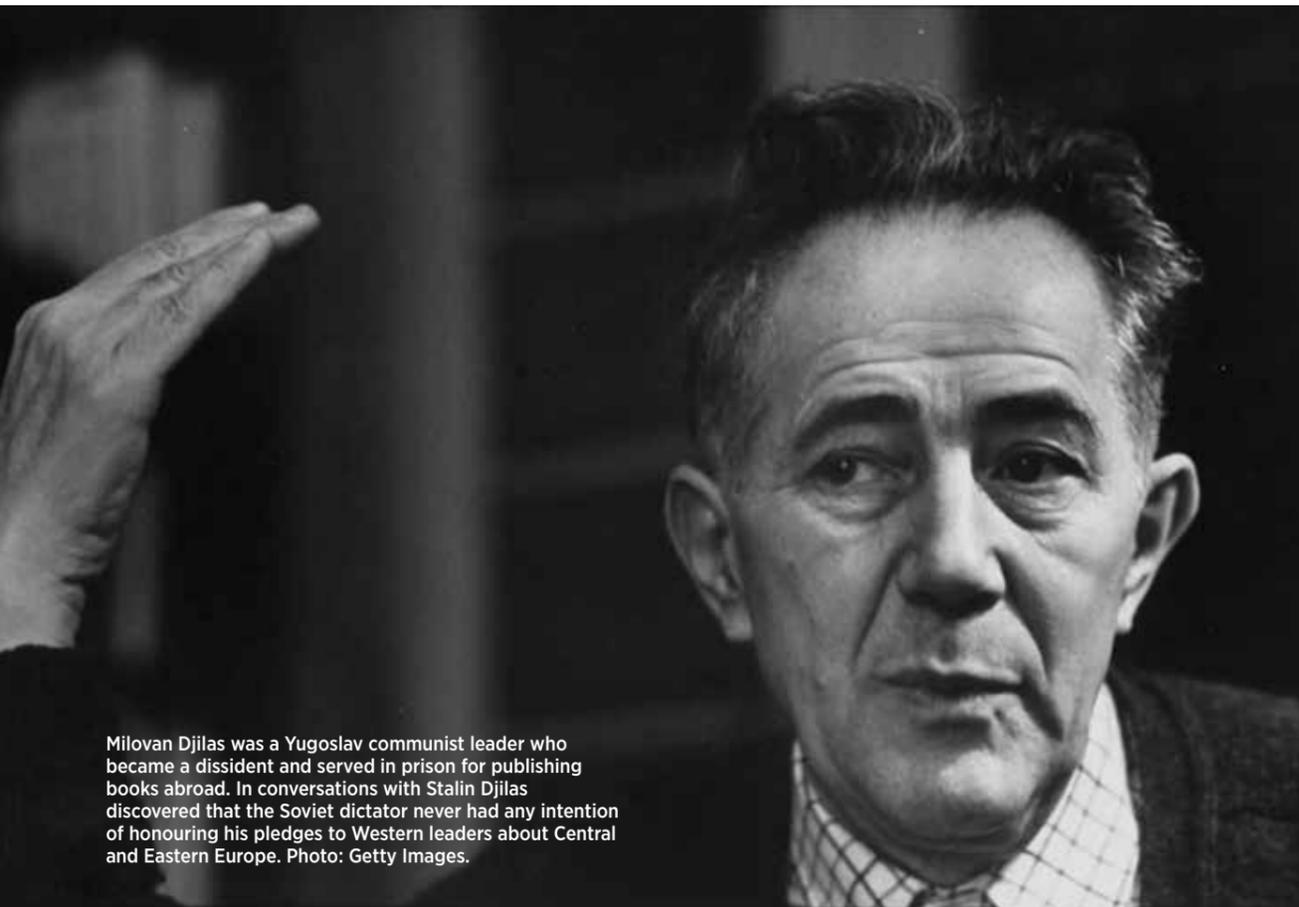
### Milovan Djilas **THE NEW CLASS** (1957)

Milovan Djilas is different from most other victims of communism mentioned here in that the latter usually wrote their books after they had been in prison, but Djilas was sent to prison because of his writings. Born in Montenegro, then an independent kingdom, in 1911, he saw his country merged with Serbia and some parts of the collapsed Habsburg empire into Yugoslavia after the First World War. He joined the Communist Party of Yugoslavia as a university student in 1932, and he was in prison in his native country from 1933 to 1936. He fought as a partisan against the Germans in the Second World War and, as a leading Yugoslav communist, had a few conversations with Stalin during and after the War. In communist Yugoslavia he held several important positions until 1954, when he started to argue for a democratic, multi-party system. Then he was dismissed from all political functions, and in 1956 he was arrested after having publicly supported the Hungarian uprising. He was sentenced to three years in prison.

Before his arrest Djilas had smuggled the manuscript of *The New Class: An Analysis of the Communist System* to the United States, where the book was published in 1957.<sup>107</sup> It led to an additional prison sentence of seven years. He was released in 1961 but arrested again in 1962 for publishing abroad another book, *Conversations with Stalin*.<sup>108</sup> In the book Djilas recalled how frank Stalin had been with him about his intention to impose communism on Central and Eastern Europe after the war, contrary to what he had promised his allies. Djilas was sentenced to another five years in prison, but he was released after four years in 1966. He spent the rest of his life as a writer and dissident in Yugoslavia, whose breakup he lamented. He died in Belgrade in 1995.

<sup>107</sup> Milovan Djilas: *The New Class: An Analysis of the Communist System* (New York: Praeger, 1957).

<sup>108</sup> Milovan Djilas, *Conversations with Stalin* (London: Rupert Hart David, 1962).



Milovan Djilas was a Yugoslav communist leader who became a dissident and served in prison for publishing books abroad. In conversations with Stalin Djilas discovered that the Soviet dictator never had any intention of honouring his pledges to Western leaders about Central and Eastern Europe. Photo: Getty Images.

In the *New Class* Djilas pointed out that Marx had predicted revolutions in the most developed capitalist countries as an inevitable outcome of their development, whereas in reality the Marxist revolutions occurred in relatively backward countries, such as Russia and Yugoslavia. Like Marx, Lenin also struggled to foresee what would happen to communism. In a speech to a group of Swiss socialist youth in January 2017, he said: 'We, the older generation, perhaps will not live to see the decisive battles of the approaching revolution. But, I can, it seems to me, express with extreme confidence the hope that the youth, who work in the wonderful socialist movement of Switzerland and of the whole world, will have the good fortune not only to fight but also to emerge victorious in the approaching revolution of the proletariat.'<sup>109</sup>

In his book Djilas developed a theme which was already apparent in the early work on the Soviet Union by Professor Anton Karlgren, *Bolshevist Russia*: that the communists had not abolished the

class system but replaced the old ruling class with themselves. They had bestowed upon themselves the privileges that the aristocracy had enjoyed. 'The new class obtains its power, privileges, ideology, and its customs from one specific form of ownership – collective ownership – which the class administers and distributes in the name of the nation and society.'<sup>110</sup> Echoing economists Ludwig von Mises and Friedrich A. Hayek, but probably without having read their works, Djilas observed that the communist planned economy might be the most wasteful economy in the history of human society because it could not count any real costs.<sup>111</sup> Much of what Djilas said was not new, and some of it may seem dated. But what made *The New Class* such a sensation was that it was written by a former communist leader – someone who had been respectively a hounded partisan, a vice president of a people's republic and a prisoner, a man whose honesty and sincerity could not be doubted.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., p. 45.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., pp. 118–119.

<sup>109</sup> Djilas, *The New Class*, p. 33.

## THE CHINESE HORROR

For many Western observers, Russia might seem distant, but then China was much more mysterious. Therefore, the Chinese communists were even more successful than their Russian counterparts in misleading people abroad about developments in their country, the mass executions after their takeover, Mao's Great Famine and the terror of the Cultural Revolution.

### *Nien Cheng* **LIFE AND DEATH IN SHANGHAI** (1987)

Nien Cheng was born in 1915, the daughter of an affluent landowner. She was able to go abroad for her university education, graduating from the London School of Economics. In London she met her husband, Kang-chi Cheng, and converted to Christianity. Kang worked in the Chinese Foreign Ministry and, after the communist victory in the Civil War, as a manager for Shell in Shanghai. When he died in 1957, Cheng became a consultant to the company. She lived with her daughter, actress Meiping, in a spacious house in the city filled with antique furniture. But this was not to last. In 1966 Mao started his 'Cultural Revolution'. Because of her Western ties and comfortable lifestyle, Cheng was an obvious target. Red Guards invaded her house, smashed her furniture, destroyed her paintings and burned her books. She was first placed under house arrest and then spent six years in solitary confinement. In endless interrogations the fanatical Red Guards tried to break her. But she did not bend. She quoted Mao's often ambiguous sayings back to her captors and insisted that she had done nothing wrong, even if she had worked for Shell. She was finally released in 1973, as the Cultural Revolution was coming to an end. Cheng was told that her daughter had committed suicide, but she found out that she had actually been beaten to death by a Red Guard when she refused to denounce her mother. She even managed to identify her daughter's killer and have him indicted. In 1980 she was allowed to travel abroad, and she never returned, settling first in Ottawa and then in Washington DC, where she passed away in 2009.

Cheng's book about her ordeal, *Life and Death in Shanghai*, was written in English. It is highly readable and became an instant bestseller after it was published. One of its strengths is the broad perspective of the author who was middle-aged when her real troubles during the Cultural Revolution started and had received a good education in the West and in China. She was able to write about China for Western readers. On the plane leaving China, a polite stewardess asked her: 'Will you have a bloody Mary or a screwdriver?' Cheng was startled. It took her a while to realise that bloody Mary was merely a drink and that a screwdriver in this case was not for tightening or loosening screws.<sup>112</sup> Her book is at the same time depressing and uplifting. The brutality of the Red Guards, the sheer insanity of the Cultural Revolution and the tragic end of many of its victims are described in harrowing detail, but at the same time the reader finds it heartening to know of a person who maintained her dignity through it all. Unlike many others, Cheng survived to tell her story, and she told it well. Many books have been written about the Cultural Revolution, and hers is one of the best. Needless to say it is banned in China. But behind this well-spoken, elegant, yet indomitable lady, we see only the distant, grey silhouettes of the many nameless individuals who either lost their lives or languished for decades in prisons and labour camps and from whom we have never heard.

### *Jung Chang* **WILD SWANS** (1991)

'Numbers do not bleed; people do,' Arthur Koestler once observed. Personal stories offer a special insight into communism. One of the most moving stories of life under communism is that of Jung Chang. She was born in 1952 in Yibin in Sichuan province, the daughter of two Communist Party of China officials. Joining the Red Guards at 14, she left after a short period. Her parents, however, were victims of Mao's

<sup>112</sup> Nien Cheng, *Life and Death in Shanghai* (New York: Grove Press, 1987), p. 537.



Chinese writer Jung Chang and her family were victims of the Cultural Revolution. In *Wild Swans* and in the monumental biography of Mao she wrote with her husband Jon Halliday, she exposed the extreme cruelty of the Chinese communist régime and the callousness of both its leaders and cadres. Photo: Wirasathya Darmaja, Asia Times.

Cultural Revolution. They were publicly humiliated and imprisoned, and their lives destroyed. During the Cultural Revolution, Chang spent years as a peasant, steelworker and electrician, but when universities started to function again, she started studying English, and eventually, after Mao's death in 1976, she was allowed to continue her studies in the West, passing her doctorate in linguistics at the University of York in 1982. She married an Irish historian, Jon Halliday, and they settled in London. In 1991 she published *Wild Swans*, which became an international bestseller.

*Wild Swans: Three Daughters of China* is the story of three generations of women: Chang's grandmother, her mother and herself. Yu-fang came from a poor family and became the concubine of a warlord, by whom she had a daughter, Bao Qin. On his deathbed, the warlord unexpectedly freed her. She married a much older doctor and together they brought up her daughter in Manchuria. Qin was only 15 when she

became a communist. In the party she met Wang Yu, a high-ranking officer. They married and moved to Yu's hometown Yibin, where they brought up five children. One of them was the storyteller, Jung Chang. In her book she describes in vivid detail her brief spell as a Red Guard and the persecution of her parents, especially her father, during Mao's Cultural Revolution, which ultimately left him deranged. She also describes her own intellectual development: 'I was extremely curious about the alternatives to the kind of life I had been leading, and my friends and I exchanged rumors and scraps of information we dug from official publications. I was struck less by the West's technological developments and high living standards than by the absence of political witch-hunts, the lack of consuming suspicion, the dignity of the individual, and the incredible amount of liberty. To me, the ultimate proof of freedom in the West was that there seemed to be so many people there attacking the West and praising China.'<sup>113</sup> Chang's book is still banned in mainland China, although the author has been able to visit her relatives there.

### *Jung Chang and Jon Halliday* **MAO – THE UNKNOWN STORY**

(2005)

After the publication of *Wild Swans*, Jung Chang and her husband Jon Halliday devoted a decade to writing the biography of Mao Tse-tung. They interviewed hundreds of people, including two former US Presidents and some former top Chinese officials, as well as some of Mao's former servants. They explored newly opened archives in Russia, China and other countries, even Albania, besides using a lot of recently available writings of Mao's contemporaries. In their book Mao is revealed as a monster with almost no redeeming human features. The opening sentences set the tone for the whole work: 'Mo Tse-tung, who for decades held absolute power over the lives of one-quarter of the world's population, was responsible for well over 70 million deaths in peacetime, more than any other twentieth-century leader.'<sup>114</sup> Half of these victims perished in the Great Famine of 1958–62, which was brought about by Mao's disastrous 'Great Leap Forward'. Indeed in 1957 Mao had said to his stunned Soviet comrades: 'We are prepared to

<sup>113</sup> Jung Chang, *Wild Swans: Three Daughters of China* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991), p. 493.

<sup>114</sup> Jung Chang and Jon Halliday, *Mao—The Untold Story* (London: Vintage Books, 2007), p. 3.

sacrifice 300 million Chinese for the victory of the world revolution.'<sup>115</sup>

The authors painstakingly refute many claims about Mao's personal valour. He was not one of the original founders of the Communist Party of China. He was not really selected by his comrades to lead the party, but rather he was chosen by Moscow, which mostly financed it. (It was also partly financed for a while by the opium-growing and trading industry.)<sup>116</sup> During the celebrated Long March of 1934–1936 when the Chinese communists fled from their bases in the south to relative safety in northeast China, Mao did little walking. 'On the march, I was lying in a litter,' Chang and Halliday quote Mao as saying decades later. 'So what did I do? I read. I read a lot.'<sup>117</sup> The communists could undertake the Long March because their chief adversary, nationalist leader Chiang Kai-shek, held off: He wanted the communists to weaken the power of local warlords so that he could deal more easily with those warlords later; moreover, Chiang's son was held hostage in Moscow. Again Mao and his acolytes produced vastly exaggerated accounts of their heroic deeds: For example, a famous battle on Luding Bridge over Dadu River never seems to have taken place.<sup>118</sup>

The book sheds new light on many major events. Two of them are the communist victory in the Chinese Civil War and the origins of the Korean War. It seems that after the Second World War, the Chinese communists, isolated and embattled in Manchuria, were on the verge of losing the Civil War against the nationalists under Chiang Kai-shek. But when the Americans imposed a ceasefire, the communists were able to break out of their isolation, assisted by the Soviets. It also seems that Mao encouraged Kim Il-sung, the North Korean dictator, to start the Korean War by invading South Korea. Mao thought that the West would not have the stamina to fight a long war. He wanted 'to spend several years consuming several 100,000 American lives'.<sup>119</sup> The authors also demonstrate Mao's callousness and personal pettiness. He agreed with Lenin that the worse things were, the better they would be for the revolutionaries. 'People say that poverty is bad, but in fact poverty is good. The poorer the people are, the

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., p. 535.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., p. 337.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., p. 170.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., p. 188.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., p. 439.

more revolutionary they are. It is dreadful to imagine a time when everyone will be rich.'<sup>120</sup> He treated his wives cruelly and took no interest in his children. When Liu Shao-chi, who had replaced Mao as president of China, was imprisoned and tortured, Mao enjoyed reading reports about the torture of him. For a long time Mao refused to allow his ever-loyal ally Zhou En-lai, the premier, to undergo treatment for cancer, apparently because he wanted Zhou to die before himself.<sup>121</sup>

The book was well received and became a bestseller, like Jung Chang's previous book. The criticisms of it mainly came from academics who presented themselves as specialists in Chinese studies. But they were mainly quibbling about minor issues. Should the Chinese Communist Party be regarded as having been founded in 1920 or in 1921? Was there only a minor skirmish or a full-blown battle on the Luding Bridge over Dadu River in 1935? Did Mao speak standard Chinese with a strong accent, or a variant of his local dialect?<sup>122</sup> The main point is that Chang and Halliday showed Mao to be a merciless mass murderer, responsible for the death of probably 70 million people. The two authors were certainly hostile to him, just as most biographers of Hitler and Stalin were hostile to them. It is rare to find historians call for a 'more balanced and nuanced' portrait of Hitler. Chang and Halliday sided with the victims, not with the executioner. But an interesting question is whether Mao should be regarded as the heir of the cruellest emperors of Chinese history, a modern Qin Shi, or rather as an orthodox Marxist-Leninist, the Chinese counterpart to Pol Pot or Kim Il-sung. The violence Mao committed certainly was on a much vaster scale than that of the old emperors; it seems to be a consequence of the Marxist-Leninist project, the destruction of old traditions and rules and the creation of a new man. Unsurprisingly, *Mao: The Unknown Story* is banned in China.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., p. 428.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., pp. 718–712.

<sup>122</sup> Gregor Benton and Lin Chun (eds.), *Was Mao Really a Monster? The academic response to Chang and Halliday's Mao: The Unknown Story* (London: Routledge, 2010). Note a certain arrogance in the book title: The authors took it upon themselves to speak in the name of the whole academy.

**Frank Dikötter**  
**THE CHINESE TRILOGY**

(2010–2016)

One of the most important works on communism surely has to be Frank Dikötter's trilogy on Maoist China.<sup>123</sup> The author, a professor of humanities at the University of Hong Kong, has done extensive research in Chinese local archives and writes lucid, accessible prose with a keen eye for the telling detail. The first volume, *The Tragedy of Liberation*, deals with the Chinese Civil War of 1945–1949 and the first eight years of communist rule until 1957. Dikötter shows that this era was much more violent than most Western observers or commentators had envisaged. The Civil War was merciless, but after the communist victory, a bloodbath followed, with perhaps two million people executed. Dikötter points out that most of them were supposed to be 'landowners', but that in many Chinese villages there were no big landowners, only peasants. 'The countryside echoed to the crack of the executioner's bullet, as real and imaginary enemies were forced to kneel on makeshift platforms and executed from behind the assembled villagers.'<sup>124</sup> Mao and his henchmen had only ruled China for a year when they sent hundreds of thousands of Chinese soldiers to fight against the UN forces, led by the US, in the Korean War. Sometimes life imitates art. George Orwell had in his 1949 novel written about 'Hate Weeks'. In his book Dikötter describes 'hate meetings' that took place all over China during the Korean War, where the aim was to whip up hatred of the Americans.<sup>125</sup> Another Orwellian feature of the Chinese society the communists sought to build was that people had not only to obey Big Brother, but also to proclaim their love for him. 'We know, of course, that there is no freedom of speech,' a Chinese philosopher, Hu Shi, commented. 'But few people realise that there is no freedom of silence, either.'<sup>126</sup>

The second part of Dikötter's trilogy, *Mao's Great Famine*, is even more tragic. The author opens with a sweeping statement: 'Between 1958 and 1962, China descended into hell. Mao Zedong, Chairman of the

Chinese Communist Party, threw his country into a frenzy with the Great Leap Forward.'<sup>127</sup> Dikötter points out that unlike the disasters that took place under Adolf Hitler and Joseph Stalin, the true dimensions of what happened during the Great Leap Forward remain little known. He substantiates his unequivocal conclusion with well over a thousand archival documents, collected all over China, including confidential reports from the secret police, detailed minutes of top party meetings, confessions of leaders responsible for the deaths of millions of people and inquiries compiled by special teams. In their biography of Mao, Jung Chang and Jon Halliday estimate the death toll of the Great Famine to be around 35 million, but Dikötter convincingly argues that 'at least 45 million people died unnecessarily between 1958 and 1962.'<sup>128</sup> He rejects the common view that these deaths were the unintended consequence of ill-conceived and poorly executed economic programmes. On the contrary, he says, coercion, terror and systematic violence were the foundation of the catastrophe that was the Great Leap Forward. The excesses were unbelievable. When a boy stole a handful of grain in a village in Hunan, the local party boss forced his father to bury his son alive. The father died of grief a few days later.<sup>129</sup> This was but one drop in a sea of sorrow.

The third part of the trilogy, *The Cultural Revolution*, on the period from 1962 to 1976, is not only about chaos, but also about violence that abounded. Dikötter argues that the Cultural Revolution was both an attempt to create a socialist world free of revisionism and vengeful plotting by Mao against real and imagined enemies. Discredited by the failure of the Great Leap Forward, Mao could not rely on the party machine, so he turned to young radical students, encouraging them to cleanse the country of reactionary thinking. From 1966 to 1967 China erupted. Hunters became prey: top communists such as Liu Shao-chi and Deng Xiaoping, who relentlessly had persecuted perceived 'counter-revolutionaries', now found themselves being persecuted. In 1967 the army stepped in to impose some kind of order, sending 17 million Red Guards to the countryside. Slowly, in the next few years, the Cultural Revolution petered out, having destroyed countless lives, not to mention property and cultural artefacts. Of special interest, however, is Dikötter's

123 Published by Bloomsbury in London, they are *Mao's Great Famine: The History of China's Most Devastating Catastrophe, 1958-1962* (2010); *The Tragedy of Liberation: A History of the Chinese Revolution, 1945-1957* (2013); *The Cultural Revolution: A People's History, 1962-1976* (2016).

124 Dikötter, *The Tragedy of Liberation*, p. 92.

125 Ibid., p. 137.

126 Ibid., p. 185.

127 Dikötter, *Mao's Great Famine*, p. ix.

128 Ibid., p. x.

129 Ibid., p. 248.



Dutch historian Frank Dikötter, Professor at the University of Hong Kong, has done extensive research in newly accessible local Chinese archives and discovered that Mao's Great Famine of 1958–62 was much worse than previously believed: It probably claimed 45 million lives. In his trilogy about the Chinese communist régime under Mao Dikötter also describes the bloodbath which took place after the 1949 communist victory in the Chinese Civil War and the merciless persecution of independent scholars and teachers during the Cultural Revolution. Photo: Gary Doak, Alamy.

discussion of the 'silent revolution' starting at the end of the Cultural Revolution: the gradual movement in rural areas away from central planning to some kind of free enterprise, as in some places cadres had to tolerate that farmers carved out private plots from communes and sold their products on the black market. This was capitalism by stealth.

In the late 1970s onwards, the Communist Party of China adopted capitalism in some parts of the economy, although it firmly retained its grip on power and maintained government ownerships of some important sectors. Predictably, the main consequence of these market-orientated reforms was rapid, indeed spectacular, economic growth. But it should not be forgotten that the economy of mainland China is only one of four Chinese economies in the world, the other three being those of Taiwan, Singapore and Hong Kong. Ignazio Silone once observed: 'Revolutions, like trees, are recognised by the fruits they bear.'<sup>130</sup> In the mid-20th century, all four Chinese economies were desperately poor. But the economic performance of

these three countries far surpasses that of mainland China. In 2016 GDP per capita was 55,200 USD in Singapore, 46,100 in Hong Kong, 24,900 in Taiwan and 9,400 in China.<sup>131</sup> Crucially, the three other Chinese economies were not subjected to the same costly and painful process, with the loss of perhaps 70 million lives, as mainland China.<sup>132</sup> All three are also much freer than mainland China. Of course, Dikötter's books are banned in China.

131 Current prices. *World Economic Outlook* (Washington DC: IMF, October 2017) <http://www.imf.org/external/datamapper/NGDPDPC@WEO/OEMDC/ADVEC/WEOWORLD>

132 The political and economic structures of Singapore and Hong Kong, both former British colonies, can perhaps be seen as being derived from the Glorious Revolution of 1688, whereas Taiwan was heavily influenced by the United States, which in turn was built on the American Revolution of 1776.

130 Courtois, Introduction, *The Black Book of Communism*, p. 2.

## EXPOSING THE BIG LIE

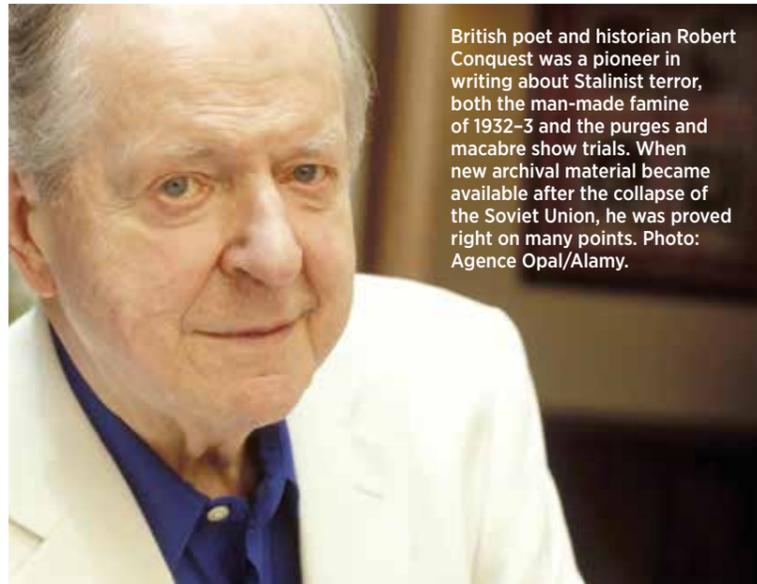
In the long and horrible saga of international communism, there were not only many victims who described their own sufferings, but also witnesses to the truth, historians and writers who dared to break the silence and expose the oppressors.

### Robert Conquest THE GREAT TERROR

(1968)

One of the pioneers in research and writings on Stalinism, Robert Conquest was also a gifted poet. A long-time research fellow at the Hoover Institution at Stanford University, he was born in 1915 and died in 2015. Briefly a member of the Communist Party of Britain, he broke with it over its support of the Non-Aggression Pact between Hitler and Stalin and its subsequent opposition to British participation in the Second World War (until, of course, Hitler invaded Russia). From 1948 to 1956 he worked for the Information Research Department of the Foreign Office, where George Orwell, before his untimely death, assisted him in identifying possible communist threats to Great Britain and the West. Conquest's *Great Terror* was the first comprehensive study of Stalin's purges of 1934–1939.<sup>133</sup> Conquest spoke Russian and based the book on information that had become available in the Soviet Union after 'destalinisation', accounts by Soviet emigrés and exiles, and official Soviet documents. He moved the focus somewhat away from the relatively few Old Bolsheviks who made public confessions, such as Zinoviev, Kamenev and Bukharin, although he describes in fascinating detail their trials. Instead he concentrated on the general impact of the purges, arguing that they had led to the death of 15–20 million people. He was also critical of prominent Westerners who supported Stalin and at least partly endorsed his show trials, such as Bertolt Brecht, Walter Duranty, Jean-Paul Sartre and Ambassador Joseph Davies.

<sup>133</sup> Robert Conquest, *The Great Terror: Stalin's Purge of the Thirties* (London: Macmillan, 1968).



British poet and historian Robert Conquest was a pioneer in writing about Stalinist terror, both the man-made famine of 1932–3 and the purges and macabre show trials. When new archival material became available after the collapse of the Soviet Union, he was proved right on many points. Photo: Agence Opal/Alamy.

When *The Great Terror* first came out, Conquest was accused of being too hostile to Stalin and the Soviet Union and of reading too much into his sources. But when access was gained to some Russian archives during Gorbachev's 'Glasnost' (openness) initiative, he was roundly vindicated, as Polish poet Czeslaw Milosz, the Nobel Laureate in Literature in 1980, observed.<sup>134</sup> Conquest wrote several other books on the Soviet Union. *Lenin* was a short and readable work on the Bolshevik leader, published in the series Fontana Modern Masters. *Kolyma: The Arctic Death Camps* was about the notorious labour camps in Northern Siberia, where both Elinor Lipper and Valentín González spent time. *The Harvest of Sorrow: Soviet Collectivisation and the Terror-Famine* came out in 1986.<sup>135</sup> Conquest supported the view that the Great Ukrainian Famine was deliberately inflicted by the Kremlin masters on the Ukrainians. Conquest, who has been called 'a Solzhenitsyn before Solzhenitsyn', is undoubtedly one of the greatest historians of the 20th century.

<sup>134</sup> Czeslaw Milosz, 'The Poet Who Was Right', *National Review*, 17 August 1992.

<sup>135</sup> *Lenin* (London: Fontana/Collins, 1972); *Kolyma: The Arctic Death Camps* (London: Macmillan, 1978); *The Harvest of Sorrow: Soviet Collectivisation and the Terror-Famine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

### David Caute THE FELLOW TRAVELLERS—A POSTSCRIPT TO THE ENLIGHTENMENT

(1973)

In *The God that Failed*, three essays were written by former communists and three by former 'fellow travellers', as friends of the Soviet Union and other communist countries were often called. David Caute, sometime Fellow of All Souls College at Oxford University, devoted a whole study to the latter group, *The Fellow Travellers: A Postscript to the Enlightenment*.<sup>136</sup> He regarded fellow travellers as people who shared a commitment to communism, but at a distance, not only geographical, but also emotional and intellectual. They were for the Soviet Union, but they did not want to live there. They supported the same causes as the communists in their respective countries, but (mostly) they were not registered members of communist parties. Caute observed that some of them were oblique chauvinists; they thought that the Russians or the Chinese could suffer because they were made for suffering, but that 'more civilised' nations (although they did not say so openly) could take a more comfortable road to a good society. Some of the best-known fellow travellers were Romain Rolland, George Bernard Shaw, Harold Laski, Jean-Paul Sartre, Theodore Dreiser, Hewlett Johnson and Sidney and Beatrice Webb.

Caute provided a useful survey of his chosen field. He documented well the extraordinary reluctance of fellow travellers to recognise communism in practice for what it was. The only thing, for example, Sidney and Beatrice Webb had to say about the Great Famine which swept Ukraine from 1932 to 1933 as a result of collectivisation of agriculture was, 'There are ends more important than additional food supplies for immediate consumption.'<sup>137</sup> Caute commented that the Webbs were excellent examples of the type which prefers mankind to people. In his book Caute gave many examples of how fascinated fellow travellers were with power and violence. He demonstrated that plenty of evidence for the misery and oppression in the communist countries was available to them. But why did they suspend

<sup>136</sup> David Caute, *The Fellow Travellers: A Postscript to the Enlightenment* (London: Macmillan, 1973).

<sup>137</sup> Sidney and Beatrice Webb, *Soviet Communist: A New Civilisation*, Vol. 2 (London: Longmans, Green & Co, 1935), p. 655.

their critical faculties? What explains their irrational behaviour? Caute's answer was paradoxical, but plausible. The explanation was precisely their extreme rationalism. The fellow travellers were elitists. They were children of the Enlightenment. They wanted reason to rule. They believed in the firm guidance of people of superior intelligence, in which group they counted themselves. They aspired to be Platonic guards. They thought that they knew better than others in which direction to travel, with the communists to a society of collective rather than private ownership. They certainly deceived others, but they also deceived themselves.

### Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn THE GULAG ARCHIPELAGO, 1918–1956

(1973–1978)

Probably no Soviet writer has had a similar impact in the West as Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, even if many books previously had been published about the labour camps, scattered all over the Soviet Union like islands of an archipelago. Two contributing factors were that Solzhenitsyn, the 1970 Nobel Laureate in Literature, was himself a powerful and passionate writer and that in the late 1960s even the left-wing in the West could no longer deny the existence of the labour camps. Also the public could not but admire Solzhenitsyn's personal bravery. Born in Southern Russia in 1918, Solzhenitsyn was brought up by his widowed mother. Solzhenitsyn's maternal grandfather had owned a large estate in Kuban that had been turned into a collective farm, and his struggling mother had to hide the fact that her late husband had been an officer in the Russian Imperial Army of Cossacks. With a university degree in mathematics and being a loyal communist, Solzhenitsyn served as a battery commander in the Second World War and was twice decorated. But in early 1945 he was arrested for rather innocuous remarks about Stalin in a private letter to a friend, and he was sentenced to eight years of hard labour. He was released from a camp in Kazakhstan in 1953, but he had to stay there in internal exile for the next three years. By then he had become a staunch anti-communist. A mathematics teacher during the day, he used the nights to write. In 1960 he submitted a short novel about life in the labour camps to a literary magazine, *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*. With the approval of Nikita Khrushchev, it was published in the magazine, causing a minor

sensation in the Soviet Union where the existence of labour camps had hardly ever been mentioned.<sup>138</sup> Enraptured, poetess Anna Akhmatova called Solzhenitsyn 'a bearer of light'.<sup>139</sup>

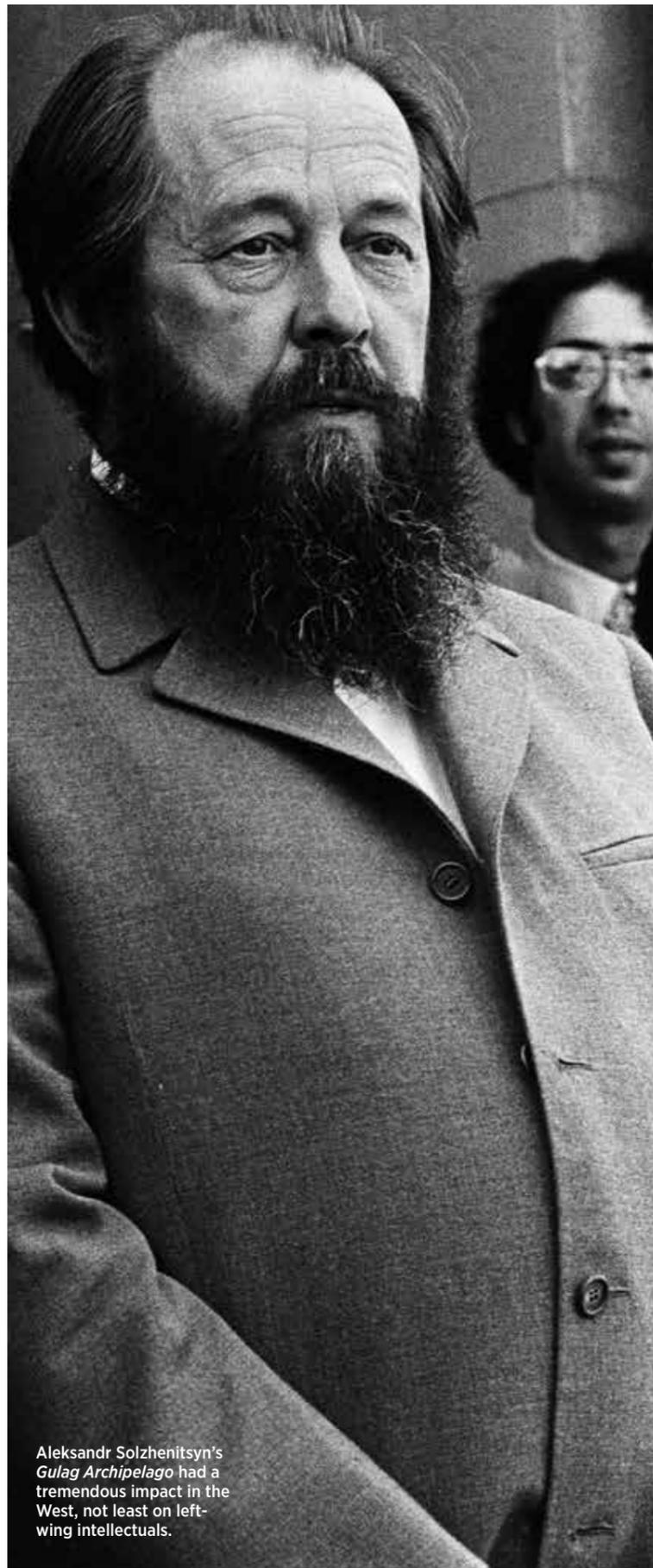
In the 1960s, as Stalinism to some extent revived in the Soviet Union, Solzhenitsyn found himself isolated and intently watched by the secret police and even persecuted. Once the secret police tried to poison him. Nevertheless, he continued working on the history of the labour camps, having the manuscript smuggled out of the country. To the irritation of Soviet authorities, he received the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1970, and after the first volume of the *Gulag Archipelago* appeared in the West in 1973, he was thrown out of the country and deprived of his citizenship. He spent the next two decades mostly in the United States with his wife Natalia and their three sons, returning to Russia in 1994 after the collapse of the Soviet Union. While living in the United States, he criticised the lack of will to contain communist aggression shown by the defeat in Vietnam. The elderly men in the Kremlin were laughing contemptuously at the Americans, he said. 'But members of the US antiwar movement wound up being involved in the betrayal of Far Eastern nations, in a genocide and in the suffering today imposed on 30 million people there. Do those convinced pacifists hear the moans coming from there?'<sup>140</sup> For Russia he favoured decentralisation on the lines of Swiss cantons. He categorically rejected the notion that the Bolshevik terror regime could be derived from, or explained in terms of, Russian traditions, pointing out that 894 people were executed in Tsarist Russia in the period between 1826 and 1906, whereas the Bolshevik secret police, the Cheka, executed at least 8,389 people in the course of a year and a half, from the beginning of 1918 to mid-1919.<sup>141</sup> Solzhenitsyn died in 2008. He was, with Ronald Reagan and Friedrich A. Hayek, one of the three honorary fellows of the Hoover Institution at Stanford University.

138 Alexander Solzhenitsyn, *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* (New York: Dutton, 1963).

139 Solomon Volkov, *The Magical Chorus* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008), p. 219.

140 Ronald Berman (ed.), *Solzhenitsyn at Harvard* (Washington DC: Ethics and Public Policy Center, 1980), p. 14.

141 Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago*, Vol. 1, Ch. 8 (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), p. 301.



Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago* had a tremendous impact in the West, not least on left-wing intellectuals.

*The Gulag Archipelago*, in three volumes, is an extraordinary achievement. Written in difficult circumstances and with limited access to archives, it is based on hundreds of interviews and stories Solzhenitsyn had collected, the scant written material available to him and, of course, his own experiences. This was all brought together into a massive and coherent piece of work, wider in scope and more detailed than any previous account of the labour camps. In the Soviet Union, copies were furtively passed from one person to another, usually allowing each reader no more than 24 hours to go through them. The book was only published in Solzhenitsyn's homeland in 1989. In France, where public discourse had long been dominated by left-wing intellectuals, Solzhenitsyn's book made a particularly strong impact. Prominent political writers who called themselves the 'New Philosophers' renounced Marxism and were subsequently called 'Solzhenitsyn's children'.<sup>142</sup> Even if most prominent communists were never brought to justice formally, unlike the Nazi leaders, Solzhenitsyn tried them in the court of history. As he wrote: 'In keeping silent about evil, in burying it so deep within us that no sign of it appears on the surface, we are implanting it, and it will rise up a thousand fold in the future. When we neither punish nor reproach evildoers, we are not simply protecting their trivial old age, we are thereby ripping the foundations of justice from beneath new generations.'<sup>143</sup>

### Paul Hollander POLITICAL PILGRIMS (1981)

In his *Political Pilgrims: Travels of Western Intellectuals to the Soviet Union, China and Cuba 1928-1979*, Professor Paul Hollander treated some of the same themes as David Caute in *Fellow Travellers*, but with a narrower focus. His book is about the extraordinary trips many Western intellectuals made in the 20th century to communist countries, returning with tales of plenty where there was destitution, and freedom where there was oppression.<sup>144</sup> Indeed the travelogues were the

142 This was the name of a documentary film about them, directed by Michael Rubbo (1979). The New Philosophers included André Glucksmann and Bernard-Henri Lévy.

143 Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago*, Vol. 1, Ch. 4, p. 178.

144 Paul Hollander, *Political Pilgrims: Travels of Western Intellectuals to the Soviet Union, China, and Cuba* (Oxford: Oxford University Press,

most enthusiastic when the terror was at its worst, in Stalin's Russia and Mao's China. Hollander's book is a comprehensive, pitiless, yet balanced, examination of those modern intellectual follies. In a chapter on the 'techniques of hospitality', the author offers an almost tragicomic analysis of the way in which the communist hosts of those intellectuals systematically misled them and reinforced their delusions. One example of this has already been mentioned and is also discussed by Hollander – US Vice President Henry Wallace's carefully orchestrated 1944 visit to a Siberian labour camp. But the most effective way of deceiving those intellectuals, as the communists well knew, was to flatter and tempt them, not least with generous book advances, sometimes for books which were either never written or not published.

Hollander's explanations for the intellectual follies he describes were not too different from those previously offered by David Caute. The political pilgrims resented the fact that they were not taken very seriously in their own societies in spite of what they believed to be their own cleverness. Their uncritical admiration for communist countries was an indirect expression of their extreme hostility to their own societies, which they saw as decadent, overly materialistic and even sybaritic. Many of them were also driven by utopian fantasies, dreaming of making the world over in the course of a few years. But most importantly, Hollander argued, they were in pursuit of a secular religion, a substitute for the certainties of times gone. They were looking for a Holy Land. 'Political ideologies offer alternatives' to traditional religion, Hollander wrote, 'but their implementation in the domestic context has proved difficult. By contrast, distant countries provide examples of the apparent implementation of the political beliefs attractive to many Western intellectuals.'<sup>145</sup>

Like almost everybody else in the world, Hollander does not speak Icelandic, so he could not include Iceland's only Nobel Laureate in Literature, Halldor K. Laxness, in his survey. Indeed, the Icelandic writer was a typical political pilgrim. Returning to Iceland in 1929 after a failed attempt to become a Hollywood scriptwriter, Laxness was very hostile

1981).

145 Ibid., p. 39.

to democratic capitalism. While he did not join the Communist Party of Iceland, he wanted to visit the Soviet Union, and with the help of the propaganda chief of the international communist movement, Willi Münzenberg, he managed to get an invitation in the autumn of 1932. He travelled mostly in Ukraine. Afterwards, he spoke in glowing terms about the success of the great social experiment that was being conducted in the Soviet Union and wrote a rather uninspired travelogue, *Going to the East*.<sup>146</sup> When the leading conservative daily in Iceland, *Morgunblaðid*, published reports about the famine in Ukraine, he vehemently protested. 'It was a wonderful famine. Everywhere I went, I saw progress.'<sup>147</sup> In 1937 Laxness started again to angle for an invitation to the Soviet Union, and after a frustrating wait he received it late in 1937. He was in Moscow in December 1937 attending an election rally in the Bolshoi Theatre where Stalin spoke, and then he went to Caucasus, where he enjoyed the hospitality of Lavrentiy Beria, the party leader in Caucasus at the time and soon to become Stalin's chief of the secret police. Returning in early spring to Moscow, he got a ticket to the Bukharin trial. After the trial, probably about the same time as Bukharin and his comrades were being shot in the basement of Lubyanka Prison, he had dinner with a German girl, Vera Hertzsch, who had been the girlfriend of an Icelander training as a revolutionary in Moscow. Hertzsch and the Icelander had had a daughter who was one year's old at the time. The very night when Laxness was dining with her, he witnessed her arrest.

Returning to Iceland, Laxness did not mention this incident to anyone and published his second travelogue, *The Russian Adventure*, in the autumn of 1938.<sup>148</sup> There he eloquently described the rapid progress he had seen since he had last been in the Soviet Union six years earlier, also giving an account of the Bukharin trial. He described Bukharin unsympathetically: 'A small, stooped, bald bookworm, with the bearings of a schoolteacher, somewhat Mephistophelian in the sharpness of his features, a pointed nose,

clipped ears, crescentic eyebrows, a Napoleonic beard, with his theories as an extension of his gnawing teeth.'<sup>149</sup> *The Russian Adventure* was quite influential in Iceland and, after being translated into Danish, also in Denmark.<sup>150</sup> But 25 years later, Laxness published a book about his experiences in the inter-war years, *A Poet's Time*, where he admitted that he had not told the truth about his two visits to the Soviet Union, although he said that he had lied to himself as much as to others. In this third book, he finally told the story of Vera Hertzsch's arrest.

### Stéphane Courtois and others **THE BLACK BOOK OF COMMUNISM** (1997)

On the occasion of the 80th anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution in 1997, and with access to hitherto unavailable archives in the former Soviet Union, a group of French scholars under the leadership of Professor Stéphane Courtois decided to make an attempt to catalogue and analyse the crimes of communism, including genocides, extrajudicial executions, mass deportations and artificial famines. They produced a hefty tome of 858 pages. In his introduction, Courtois tried to estimate how many people lost their lives as a result of communism:

- **65 million in China,**
- **20 million in the Soviet Union,**
- **2 million in Cambodia,**
- **2 million in North Korea,**
- **1.7 million in Ethiopia,**
- **1.5 million in Afghanistan,**
- **1 million in Eastern Europe,**
- **1 million in Vietnam,**
- **150,000 in Latin America,**

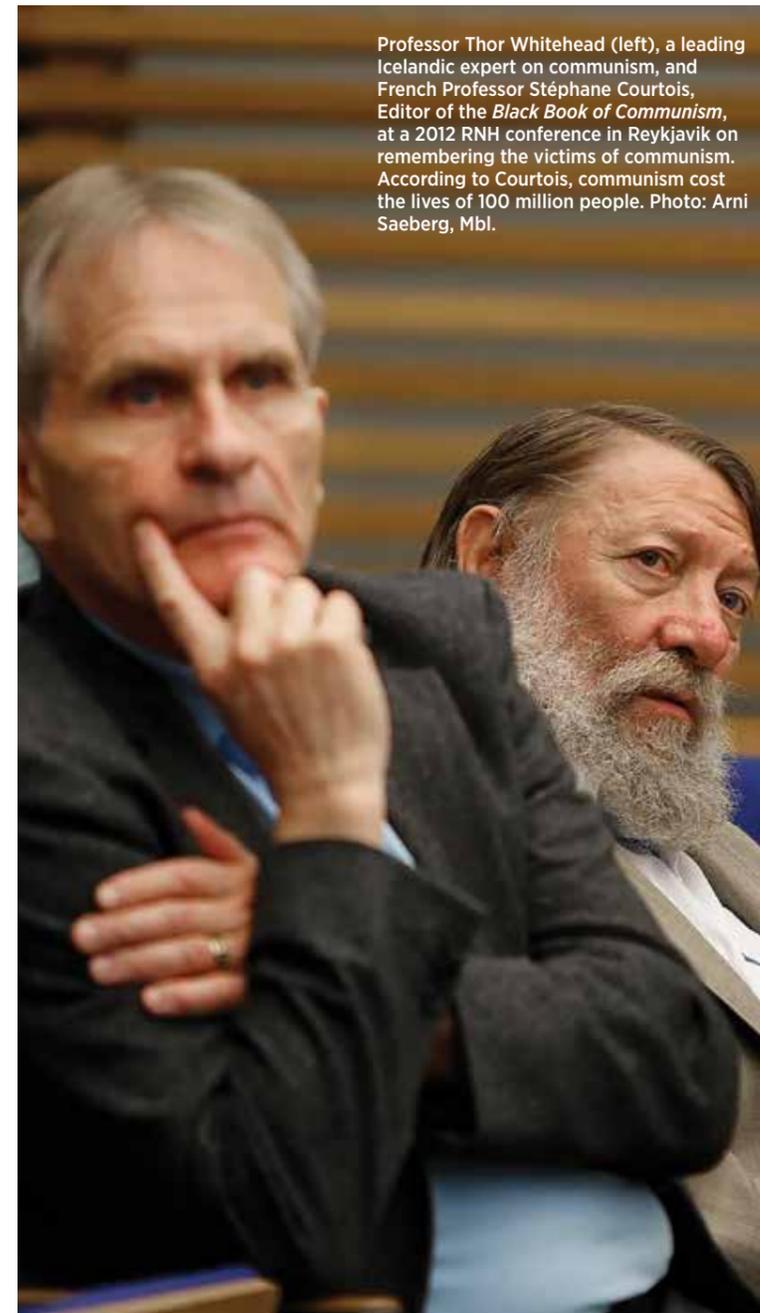
146 Halldor K. Laxness, *I austurvegi* [Going to the East] (Reykjavik: Sovetvinafelagid, 1932).

147 Halldor K. Laxness, *Russland ur lofti* [Russia from the Air], *Sovetvinurinn*, Vol. 2, No. 5 (1934), pp. 4–5.

148 Halldor K. Laxness, *Gerska aefintyrid* [The Russian Adventure] (Reykjavik: Heimskringla, 1938).

149 Laxness, *Gerska aefintyrid*, pp. 79–80.

150 Halldor K. Laxness, *Det russiske Æventyr* (København: Monde, 1939); Bent Jensen, *Stalinismens fascination og danske venstreintellektuelle* [The Fascination of Stalinism and Danish Left-wing Intellectuals] (København: Gyldendal, 1984).



Professor Thor Whitehead (left), a leading Icelandic expert on communism, and French Professor Stéphane Courtois, Editor of the *Black Book of Communism*, at a 2012 RNH conference in Reykjavik on remembering the victims of communism. According to Courtois, communism cost the lives of 100 million people. Photo: Arni Saeberg, Mbl.

- **10,000 as a result of communist organisations and opposition communist parties.**

From the beginning, *The Black Book of Communism* generated controversy. Some argued that Courtois was obsessed with 'counting corpses', while disputing some of his numbers. Others, including some of his co-authors, took issue with his discussion of the similarities between communism and national socialism. He had written: 'The genocide of a "class" may well be tantamount to the genocide of a "race" – the deliberate starvation of a child of a Ukrainian kulak as a result of the famine caused by Stalin's regime "is equal to" the starvation of a Jewish child in

the Warsaw ghetto as a result of the famine caused by the Nazi regime.'<sup>151</sup> Courtois plausibly responded that it was important in its own right to try and find out the death toll of communism and the similarities as well as the differences between these two kinds of totalitarianism. The enormity of Nazi crimes – not only against Jews, but also against the handicapped, gypsies and other groups – was not being trivialised by recalling that communism also claimed its victims. Courtois also convincingly argued that the crimes of communism met the same criteria as the crimes for which the Nazis were convicted under the law of nations at Nuremberg.

The longest and on the whole most informative part of the *Black Book of Communism* is on the Soviet Union by Nicolas Werth, who draws heavily on documents from Soviet archives. It is really a book in its own right, 235 pages, aptly named 'A State Against its People'. Werth shows that the terror did not start with Stalin. On the contrary, Lenin was heavily involved with setting up the secret police, organising slave camps and suppressing all real or imaginary opposition. Speaking at a workers' assembly shortly after the Bolshevik coup, he said: 'For as long as we fail to treat speculators the way they deserve – with a bullet in the head – we will not get anywhere at all.'<sup>152</sup> In August 1918 Lenin sent a telegram to the Penza Soviet, where he told it that the 'kulaks' or independent farmers had to be crushed mercilessly. 'You must make an example of these people. (1) Hang (I mean hang publicly, so that people can see it) at least 100 kulaks, rich bastards, and known bloodsuckers. (2) Publish their names. (3) Seize all their grain. (4) Single out the hostages per my instructions in yesterday's telegramme.'<sup>153</sup> While the contribution by Jean-Louis Margolin on Chinese communism, 'A Long March into Night' has to some extents been superseded by the books of Jung Chang, Jon Halliday and Frank Dikötter, it is a useful and clearly written summary of what was in the 1990s known about the Chinese terror regime. Other communist crimes described in the *Black Book of Communism* include atrocities in the Spanish Civil War, something approaching genocide in Cambodia and massive oppression in Eastern Europe.

151 Courtois, Introduction, *The Black Book of Communism*, p. 9.

152 Nicolas Werth, A State Against its People, *The Black Book of Communism*, p. 59.

153 Ibid., p. 72.

### Anne Applebaum GULAG: A HISTORY

(2003)

As Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's great book, *The Gulag Archipelago*, was mostly written in the 1960s, the author could not make use of the archives or testimonies that suddenly became available after the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union. American historian Anne Applebaum, a former editor of *The Economist* and *The Spectator* and former member of the editorial board of the *Washington Post*, provided a new history of the Gulag in 2003.<sup>154</sup> In addition to interviewing Gulag survivors and former guards, the author, fluent in Russian and Polish, studied archives in Russia and other Central and Eastern Europe countries. Her book is a succinct and readable summary of present knowledge about the labour camps. She points out that they were set up almost as soon as the Bolsheviks took power, but that they gained a new significance when Stalin adopted his first five-year plan in 1929. The dictator wanted to speed up the industrialisation of the Soviet Union and to utilise the vast resources of Northern and Eastern Russia. The system reached its apex in the early 1950s before Stalin's death. The number of inhabitants in this 'archipelago' hovered around two million in any given year, and in total, Applebaum reckons, around 18 million people were kept there.

The whole idea of slave camps was misconceived, as any well-trained economist – at least in the Austrian tradition of Ludwig von Mises and Friedrich A. Hayek – would have been able to tell Stalin. By treating labour as essentially free, the information provided by the price mechanism became distorted. People had little if any incentive to reveal and develop their real talents. This was a system of enormous waste, apart from the immense misery it inflicted on the unfortunate inmates. Stalin's henchmen realised this and started to dismantle the system immediately after his death, although a few labour camps were maintained almost until the collapse of the Soviet Union. Many would find Applebaum's discussion of escape and rebellion in the slave camps of particular interest. While escape was very difficult, though in rare cases and against all odds it did happen (as the successful aforementioned escapes both of Aatami Kuortti and Valentín González showed). Rebellions

also took place – the most serious ones after Stalin's death. Even if they were all suppressed with brute force, the unrest worried the Kremlin masters and contributed to their decision to break up the system. On a personal note Applebaum points out that the crimes of communism are now as well-known as those of national socialism, and she goes on to wonder why it is treated more leniently: Few would dream of trying to sell T-shirts with images of Hitler, whereas items with images of communist leaders are found in shops all around the world without hardly anyone raising an eyebrow. German philosopher Martin Heidegger is universally condemned for his support of the Nazis. French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre has not suffered in the least from his support of Stalinism.

### Anne Applebaum IRON CURTAIN

(2012)

Anne Applebaum went on to write another highly informative and indeed absorbing book on communism, *Iron Curtain: The Crushing of Eastern Europe 1944–1956*.<sup>155</sup> It is, as the title suggests, about the communist takeover of Central and Eastern European countries after the Second World War under the big shadow of the Soviet Red Army. (In some of those countries, people do not like to have the term 'Eastern Europe' applied to them. Hungarians and Czechs consider themselves, for example, to be in Central Europe.) Although the term 'iron curtain' was already in use, it was Winston Churchill who introduced it about the state of affairs in Europe after the war in his famous Fulton address of 1946: 'From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic, an iron curtain has descended across the Continent. Behind that line lie all the capitals of the ancient states of Central and Eastern Europe. Warsaw, Berlin, Prague, Vienna, Budapest, Belgrade, Bucharest and Sofia.'<sup>156</sup> Applebaum plausibly argues that the communist takeover of these countries was not a result of provocations by the United States, but rather an implementation of communist ideology. Stalin was never going to honour the promises he gave his allies that the nations under the occupation of the Red Army would themselves decide on their future.

<sup>155</sup> Anne Applebaum, *Iron Curtain: The Crushing of Eastern Europe 1944–1956* (London: Allen Lane, 2012).

<sup>156</sup> Ibid., p. xxi.



American historian and journalist Anne Applebaum uses newly available material to document her two celebrated works on communism, *Gulag*, about Stalin's labour camps, and *Iron Curtain*, about the communist conquest of Central and Eastern Europe after the Second World War. Photo from Applebaum's archive.

Perhaps the ultimate irony of the Second World War took place in Poland. The United Kingdom, backed by other British Commonwealth countries, and France declared war on the Nazis because they had invaded the west of Poland in the beginning of September 1940, as they were obliged to do under treaties with Poland. But when Stalin, Hitler's ally since the 1939 Non-Aggression Pact, ordered the Red Army to invade Eastern Poland in mid-September 1940, the United Kingdom and France did not declare war on the Soviets. Again, a war that was at least nominally started over Poland ended in the country being handed over to the Soviets, who installed a puppet government there, where the long-time Minister of Defence, Soviet General Konstantin Rokossovsky, could barely speak Polish. Applebaum tells a common joke about him. 'Why did Rokossovsky become a marshal of the Polish army?' The answer was: 'Because it's cheaper to dress one Russian in a Polish uniform than to dress the whole Polish army

in Russian uniform.'<sup>157</sup> The Poles just exchanged one occupation force for another. But they paid a heavy toll, as Applebaum observes: 'The Polish Institute of National Memory estimates that there were some 5.5 million wartime deaths in the country, of which about 3 million were Jews. In total, some 20 percent of the Polish population, one in five people, did not survive.'<sup>158</sup>

Applebaum vividly describes the orgy of violence taking place in Central and Eastern Europe in the last months of the war, such as mass rapes by Red Army soldiers and the massive deportations and expulsions of people after the war, including 10 million German-speaking people who were thrown out of Poland and Czechoslovakia. She also analyses the tactics of communists as they took power in the occupied countries. Initially they moved cautiously. They were in no haste to form new governments themselves. Instead they insisted on taking command of the interior ministries and on controlling the broadcasting services. Then, slowly, they used their strategic positions to intimidate leaders of other parties and to finally drive them out, either to prison or exile. Their plan became clear. It was to impose totalitarianism on their newly acquired territories: a prescribed ideology, rule by one party alone, a secret police ready to use terror, a monopoly on information and a planned economy. Having suppressed their political enemies and then their allies, they turned on their comrades. Carefully planned show trials took place in both Hungary and Czechoslovakia in 1949 and 1950. With sympathy and sensitivity Applebaum discusses the agonising moral choices ordinary, decent people faced under the long winter of oppression. But even if the communists tried to eradicate civil society and the spirit of individuality in Central and Eastern Europe, they did not succeed. While the uprisings in Berlin in 1953, in Budapest in 1956 and in Prague in 1968 were brutally suppressed, as soon as these nations saw the chance in 1989, they overthrew the communists. They never came to love Big Brother.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid., p. 447.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

## LESSONS FOR THE 21st CENTURY

The executioner always kills twice, the second time through silence, Elie Wiesel once remarked.<sup>159</sup> What almost all the labour camp memoirs discussed here have in common, is that when their authors were released, remaining prisoners begged them to tell the world about their plight. Then, the other victims said, they felt that they had not suffered in vain. Totalitarian rulers always try to hide their misdeeds and to enforce silence about them. The Nazis did not succeed because they lost a war, and those of their leaders who were still alive were led before the Nuremberg tribunal, where evidence was presented about their horrible crimes and misdeeds. They were found guilty of war crimes, crimes against humanity and crimes against peace. In the short-term, however, the communists succeeded to a surprising extent. Stalin and Mao especially were certainly guilty of war crimes, crimes against humanity and crimes against peace. Whereas everybody loudly and justly condemns the Nazis for their evil deeds, there are only a few scattered voices reminding the world of the crimes of communism – otherwise a silence reigns about them. Countless are, however, the mass graves in former communist countries upon which innocent visitors have accidentally stumbled. It is the moral duty of those journalists and historians who write about totalitarian states to break the silence, to show the memory of the victims the respect they deserve and to call an executioner an executioner and a victim a victim.

This is easier said than done. There is a strong left-wing bias in the academy, especially in departments of humanities and social theory, to which I can attest after being a professor of politics at the University of Iceland for 30 years. Two incidents in which I was involved may serve as examples. In 2009, after I had translated *The Black Book of Communism* into Icelandic and had it published by the University of Iceland Press, I sent it to the Icelandic journal of

history, *Saga* (History), to be reviewed. I received a polite note of thanks from the editor, a woman by the name of Sigrun Palsdottir, saying that the journal followed the policy of not reviewing translations. I found this somewhat odd because two years earlier, when an Icelandic translation of *Mao: The Unknown Story* by Jung Chang and Jon Halliday came out, *Saga* printed a long and very critical review about that book written by someone who had studied philosophy in China on a grant from the Chinese government. The author soon afterwards was hired as Director of the University of Iceland's Confucius Centre, funded by the Chinese government.<sup>160</sup> The author more or less repeated charges hurled at the book by some academics upon its publication.<sup>161</sup> I wrote a brief note protesting against some errors and distortions in this article, but Palsdottir refused to publish it in the journal.<sup>162</sup> While the left-wing intellectuals controlling the Icelandic journal of history could not enforce silence on these subjects in Iceland, a free society, they could, and did, in their own little corner.<sup>163</sup>

It is even more serious when this strong left-wing bias is expressed in textbooks, which may provide the only systematic information about the past that some people will ever get. Examples can be found in many European countries, I am sure, but I will mention only two from my own tiny country. In a widely-used introduction to modern world history by two socialist historians, the Soviet occupation of the Baltic countries in 1940 is briefly noted, but without using the word 'occupation'. The textbook reads, 'The Soviet Union had moved its furthest front to the West

<sup>160</sup> These Confucius centres or institutes are not only funded by the Chinese government, but they are indirectly controlled by it: An institution called Hanban screens Chinese instructors. US Universities Urged to Shut Confucius Institutes, *Times Higher Education* 2 May 2017.

<sup>161</sup> They were mostly, or even wholly, from the academics who later published an aforementioned collection of papers, *Was Mao Really a Monster?*

<sup>162</sup> It was later published in another journal, with an extract in English. Hannes H. Gissurarson, Villt sagnfraedi eda spillt? *Thjodmal*, Vol. 10, No. 3 (2014), pp. 32–44.

<sup>163</sup> Palsdottir's husband, left-wing writer Bragi Olafsson, later wrote an unflattering play about me, performed at Iceland's National Theatre.



Historians, including authors of textbooks, cannot ignore the fact that for the first two years of the Second World War, Stalin and Hitler were allies. Here Stalin's Foreign Minister Molotov meets with Hitler in Berlin 12 November 1940. Between them is the interpreter, Gustav Hilger. Photo: Library of Congress.

when it seized the Eastern Part of Poland. In 1940, the three Baltic states, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, were annexed to the Soviet Union as member republics, and the same year Romania had to cede Bessarabia to the Soviet Union.<sup>164</sup> The two authors also mention the independence movements in the Baltic countries: 'Increased freedom of speech however woke up old nationalism in many Soviet republics. The nationalist movement was strongest in the three Baltic countries, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, but it was also present elsewhere. Finally the Baltic countries declared their independence and seceded from the Soviet Union as they had actually the right to do according to the constitution. After this other republics followed the same path.'<sup>165</sup> Probably people in the Baltic countries would take comfort in the observation that their countries always had had a constitutional right to secede from the Soviet Union; of course they might then ask themselves why they did not have the alertness to use that right before 1991.

Another and more egregious example from the same textbook is about collectivisation of Soviet agriculture: 'When Stalin had gained absolute power in 1928, he initiated comprehensive industrialisation on the basis of so-called five year plans, and, at the same

<sup>164</sup> Gunnar Karlsson and Sigurdur Ragnarsson, *Nyir timar. Saga Islands og umheimsins fra lokum 18. aldar til arthusundamota* [Modern Times. The History of Iceland and the World from the End of 18th Century and to the New Millennium] (Reykjavik: Mal og menning, 2006), p. 246. The translations from Icelandic are mine.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid., p. 292.

time, collectivisation of agriculture. The policy of collectivisation was implemented *against the wishes of many farmers*, and this had an adverse effect on agricultural production. Industrial production grew however rapidly, until in 1940 the Soviet Union had become the second largest industrial power in the world. This achievement was widely noted, as the Great Depression was at its worst.<sup>166</sup> The authors do not even mention the Great Famine which cost the lives of six million people, even if, writing in 2006, they had full access to information about it. Neither do they devote one single word to the mass deportations that were used to force farmers into collectives. Elsewhere in the book, they spend no less than ten lines on criticising Senator Joseph McCarthy's campaign in the 1950s against communists in the US federal administration—a campaign in which no life was lost.<sup>167</sup>

Based on this study, six recommendations directed at European governments, political parties, business companies, organisations and interested individuals could be made:

1. The imbalance in academic discourse can only be reduced by well-funded independent institutions and organisations that pursue a clear agenda of promoting understanding of issues systematically

<sup>166</sup> Ibid., p. 227. My italics.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid., p. 268.

neglected, bypassed or ignored by left-wing intellectuals, dominant in universities. Such institutions and organisations can hire well-educated, productive intellectuals who, because of their views and despite their qualifications, are denied employment by universities and other academic institutions. This ‘counter-intelligentsia’ will always be small, but it can be quite influential. Keeping alive the memory of victims of communism will probably never be a major concern of any big institute, but it could be an important and not-too-expensive part of its operations. The outstanding example is the Hoover Institution at Stanford University (where I have been a Visiting Scholar several times), but smaller and more narrowly focused organisations or institutions include Memorial in Russia, unfortunately often harassed or intimidated by local authorities; the Platform of European Memory and Conscience, set up after the call for such an organisation in the 2009 Declaration of the European Parliament; and the Polish Institute of National Remembrance. In the United States the Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation was authorised after a unanimous act of Congress in 1993. The Heritage Foundation of Washington D.C., also devotes some resources to promoting deeper understanding of communism.

2. Textbooks in schools have to be fair and balanced, which means that communism and national socialism must be recognised as totalitarian creeds that are criminal in practice, albeit different in many ways. Students should learn about the Nazi Holocaust, but they should also learn about the savage treatment of ‘Former People’ after the Bolshevik Revolution; the persecution by the Soviet secret police of imaginary, potential and real dissidents; the Great Ukrainian Famine of 1932–1933; Stalin’s purges, slave camps and mass deportations of peoples; the bloodbath following the 1949 communist victory in the Chinese Civil War; Mao’s Great Famine from 1958 to 1962; the destruction of people’s lives and their property in the Cultural Revolution; and the unspeakable horrors under communist rule in Cambodia from 1975 to 1979. Similar considerations apply, of course, to the media. Stalin, Mao and Pol Pot should be treated in the same way as Hitler. The fact should not be obscured, or ignored, that Stalin and Hitler started the Second World with their Non-Aggression Pact signed in Moscow on

23 August 1939, which divided up Central and Eastern Europe between them, Hitler taking the first step to implement the Pact by invading Poland. Stalin and Hitler were allies, however uneasy, for almost two years until Hitler suddenly invaded Russia in June 1941.

3. Memorials and museums dedicated to the victims of communism should be set up and maintained. The Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation in 2007 put up a statue of the ‘Goddess of Democracy’, modelled on that which Chinese dissidents erected in Tiananmen Square in Beijing in 1989. It is dedicated to the more than 100 million victims of communism. At the dedication ceremony President George W. Bush said: ‘We’ll never know the names of all who perished, but at this sacred place, communism’s unknown victims will be consecrated to history and remembered forever. We dedicate this memorial because we have an obligation to those who died, to acknowledge their lives and honor their memory.’<sup>168</sup> The Platform of European Memory and Conscience is preparing a Pan-European Memorial for the Victims of Totalitarianism to be set up in Brussels. The magnificent museum of the 1944 Warsaw Uprising may serve as an effective way of creating awareness of the sufferings and sacrifices of the Polish people. Many museums have also been set up about communist oppression, for example the Stasi Museum in Berlin and other major cities of East Germany; the Museum of Occupations in Tallinn, Estonia; the House of Terror in Budapest, Hungary; the Occupation Museum in Riga, Latvia; the Museum of Genocide Victims in Vilnius, Lithuania; and the Holodomor Victims’ Memorial in Kiev, Ukraine.
4. Honours bestowed on known mass murderers and their accomplices should be cancelled or revoked. It is no more proper to display statues of Lenin or Stalin in public places than of Hitler, Goebbels, Goering or Himmler. This has to a large extent been achieved in Central and Eastern Europe, even in Russia. It must be gratifying to many, for example, that St. Petersburg has regained its original name and is no longer called Leningrad. But at the same time it is sad to hear Immanuel Kant’s hometown Königsberg still being called Kaliningrad, after the

168 US: Bush Dedicates Memorial to Victims of Communism, *Radio Free Europe* 13 June 2007. <https://www.rferl.org/a/1077100.html>

Stalinist Mikhail Kalinin. Ukraine has passed a law by which communist names of cities, town, villages, squares or streets should be replaced. Therefore, Victor Kravchenko’s birthplace, which was called Ekaterinoslav and later renamed Dnipropetrovsk after the river Dnepr and the communist leader Petrovsky, is now called Dnipro. In the United States there has been much discussion on whether or not to revoke the Pulitzer Prize that the Moscow correspondent of *New York Times*, Walter Duranty, received in 1932 for his reports about Stalin’s first five-year plan. Duranty knew about the Great Famine, which resulted from the collectivisation of agriculture in Ukraine and Southern Russia, but denied it. The Pulitzer Prize Board twice reviewed the matter, but it decided not to revoke the prize.

5. Conferences, seminars and workshops regularly have to be held, not only in memory of the many victims of communism, but also to disclose new findings about its history. The access scholars got to archives in Russia and the former communist countries and even to local archives in China have yielded lots of information and confirmed and even strengthened the idea of communism emerging from works such as *Out of the Night* by Valtin, *I Chose Freedom* by Kravchenko, *The Great Terror* by Conquest and *The Gulag Archipelago* by Solzhenitsyn. However, many archives are still closed, especially in China. To discuss ‘100 Years of Communism’, the Platform of European Memory and Conscience will hold a conference in Paris on the 8th and 9th of November 2017, in cooperation with Stéphane Courtois. In addition to Courtois, speakers include French historian Antoine Arjakovsky, Estonian-Finnish author Sofi Oksanen and Russian historian Nikita Petrov of Memorial. In Washington D.C., the Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation, in cooperation with the Hoover Institution, will hold a conference from the 7th to the 9th of November, where the speakers include Paul Hollander, Frank Dikötter, former Soviet dissident and now Israeli politician Natan Sharansky, former Lithuanian dissident and later President of Lithuania Vytautas Landsbergis, US political scientist Harvey Klehr, former President of the Czech Republic Václav Klaus and British historian Niall Ferguson. The small institute in Iceland, of which I am the academic director, has also held conferences in memory of the victims of communism, where speakers have included Stéphane Courtois, author of *Stasiland*

Anna Funder and North Korean refugee and author of *In Order to Live* Yeonmi Park.<sup>169</sup>

6. The literature on totalitarianism, which has briefly been surveyed in this paper, has to become available online and in print. Young people browsing in libraries or on the internet and preparing papers for their classes cannot be expected to know much in advance about communism or the Cold War. A generation or two have emerged since the Berlin Wall fell 29 years ago. The people who were then young are now becoming grandmothers and grandfathers. Interested readers of this report could at least try to make sure that the books discussed here are available in public libraries. One example of a possible programme with the aim of facilitating access to literature on totalitarianism is provided by RNH, the Icelandic Centre for Innovation and Economic Growth, in cooperation with AB, the Icelandic Public Book Club. It is the republication online and in print of important books about totalitarianism. In 2015 AB published three books in this series, *Articles on Communism* by Bertrand Russell, *Women in Stalin’s Slave Camps* by Elinor Lipper and Aino Kuusinen and *Out of the Night* by Jan Valtin. In 2016 AB published five books in the series, Khrushchev’s secret speech about Stalin, *El Campesino: Life and Death in the Soviet Union* by Valentín González, *Baltic Eclipse* by Ants Oras, *Estonia under Soviet Imperialism* by Andres Küng and *Service, Servitude, Escape* by Aatami Kuortti. In 2017 AB published three books in the series, *I Chose Freedom* by Victor Kravchenko, *Soviet Myth and Reality* by Arthur Koestler and *Nightmare of the Innocents* by Otto Larsen. The books that eventually will be republished also include *The God that Failed* by Arthur Koestler and others, *Darkness at Noon* by Koestler, *The Hungarian Uprising* by Erik Rostbøll, *Prisoner of Stalin and Hitler* by Margarete Buber-Neumann and *The New Class* by Milovan Djilas. I introduce all the books in the series and write endnotes trying to put individuals, institutions and events into an historical context.

The voices of the victims have to be heard. Hopefully some will listen to them and learn the lesson: Never again!

169 Anna Funder, *Stasiland: Stories from Behind the Berlin Wall* (London: Granta, 2003); Yeonmi Park, *In Order to Live: A North Korean Girl’s Journey to Freedom* (New York: Penguin Press, 2015).





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