

THE AGE OF COMMUNISM LIVES

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THE BODIES DEMAND ACCOUNTING, APOLOGY, AND REPENTANCE. WE LIVE IN AN ERA OF APPALLING BAD FAITH.

It was twenty-five years ago, but it feels like yesterday. When seeing the images of the fall of the Berlin Wall, I cried with joy, took out my best bottle of French wine, left the television on, and listened to Beethoven's Ninth over and over and over. If you didn't live through it, know that there was nothing like it. What we need to be reminded of, however, are the stakes and what *didn't* happen in the wake of the fall.

In addition to the tyranny, the torture, and the assault upon the human spirit, the slaughtered victims of communism were not the thousands of the Inquisition, not the thousands of Americans lynched, not even the six million dead from Nazi extermination. The best scholarship yields numbers that the soul must try to comprehend: scores and scores and scores of millions of individual human bodies, which is what makes the work of Lee Edwards in keeping alive in our minds the victims of communism so morally essential, so morally vital.

Alexander Yakovlev, Gorbachev's right hand man, who examined the archives for the last Soviet leader and who came away a deeply changed and heroic man, let us know that 60 million were slain in the Soviet Union alone. The Chinese author Jung Chang, who had access to scores of Mao Zedong's collaborators and to the detailed Russian and local archives, reached the figure of 70 million Chinese lives snuffed out by Mao's deliberate choices. If we count those dead of starvation from the communist ability and desire to experiment with human interaction in agriculture—20 million to 40 million in three years—we may add scores of millions more.

The communist Khmer Rouge under Pol Pot, who was educated in France and taught his politics by French communist intellectuals, butchered one-fifth to one-fourth of the entire Cambodian population. That would be as if an American regime had murdered some 50 to 70 million of its people. In each and every

communist regime, countless people were shot and died by deliberate exposure, starved and murdered in work camps and prisons meant to extract every last fiber of labor before they die. No cause ever in the history of all mankind has produced more slaughtered innocents and more orphans than communism. It was a system of production that surpassed all others in turning out the dead.

What should one have expected after the fall of the Berlin wall? What didn't occur? Where were the celebrations and the accountings? Where was the recognition of the ineffable value of a truly limited government? Our schools, universities and media do not teach our children any differently now about the human consequences of liberty, of voluntary economic societies, and of limited government in the real world. Our children do not know in any domain what happened under communism. Those who depend on our media and our films do not know. We live without self-belief and without any moral understanding of the extraordinary place of America, of its values, of its liberty, and of those leaders who won the Cold War for the dignity and the benefit of humankind.

What might a sane and moral individual have expected? An anti-communist epiphany, a festival of celebration, a flowering of comparative scholarship, a full accounting of the communist reality—political, economic, moral, ecological, social and cultural—a revision of curriculum, a recognition of the ineffable value of those ideals for which we paid the fullest price? Where did any of this occur? Imagine if World War II had ended in a stalemate with a European Nazi empire from the Urals to the English Channel soon to be armed with nuclear weapons and in mortal contest with the United States in a peace kept only by deterrence. Would progressive children have sung, “All we are saying is give peace a chance” beneath symbols of unilateral disarmament? Would our intellectuals have mocked the phrase “evil empire”? What were the differences? Deaths? Camps? The desolation of the flesh and of the spirit? Solzhenitsyn had it exactly right about the Soviets, “No other regime on earth could compare with it either in the number of those it had done to death, in heartiness, in the range of its ambitions, in its thoroughgoing and unmitigated totalitarianism—no, not even the regime of its pupil, Hitler” (from the *Gulag Archipelago*). What would the celebration have been like if after two generations the *swastika* at last had fallen in place of the hammer and the sickle?

After all that we know, do our historians today teach their students any differently about the human consequences of free markets and the rule of law in a world of comparative phenomena? How breathtaking that we do not have an intellectual, moral and, above all, historical accounting of who was right and who was wrong, and why, in their analyses of communism. We live in an era of appalling bad faith. “You put private property ahead of people” remains a powerful anathema, as if in the light of all those lessons, private property were not absolutely essential to the well-being, dignity, liberty and lives of human beings in society, and as if profits were not the measure of the satisfaction of other people’s wants and desires. Indeed, it is precisely to avoid the revitalization of the principles of a voluntary society, limited government, and individual responsibility and liberty that our teachers, professors, information media, and filmmakers ignore the comparative inquiry that our time so urgently demands.

The communist holocaust, like the Nazi, should have brought forth a flowering of Western art, witness, sympathy, and an ocean of tears, and then a celebration at its downfall. Instead, it has called forth a glacier of indifference. Kids who in the 1960s hung portraits of Lenin, Mao, and Che on their college walls—the moral equivalent of having hung portraits of Hitler, Goebbels, or Horst Wessel in one’s dorm—came to teach our children about the moral superiority of their generation. Every historical textbook lingers on the crimes of Nazism—rightly so—seeks their root causes, draws a lesson from them, and everybody knows the number six million. By contrast, the same textbooks remain silent about the catastrophe of communism, everywhere it held or holds power. Ask any college freshman—try it if you don’t believe me— how many died under Stalin’s regime and they will answer even now, “Thousands? Tens of thousands?” It is the equivalent of believing that Hitler killed hundreds of Jews.

The scandal of such ignorance derives from an intellectual culture’s willful blindness to the catastrophe of its relative sympathies. Most of Europe has outlawed the neo-Nazis, but the French Communist Party from 1999 to 2002 was part of a ruling government. One may not fly the *swastika*, but one may hoist the hammer and sickle at official events. The denial of Hitler’s dead or the minimization of the Jewish Holocaust is literally a crime in most of Europe. The denial or minimization of communist crimes is an intellectual and political art

form, and the fast track to a successful academic career. “Anti-fascist” is a term of honor; “anti-communist” is a term of ridicule and abuse.

THE COMMUNIST HOLOCAUST ... HAS CALLED FORTH A GLACIER OF INDIFFERENCE.

As we meet, the Social Democratic Party and the anti-Euro party in Germany are negotiating to enter into a government in Thuringia that will be ruled by Die Linke, the heirs of the East German Communist Party, because no one remembers and, above all, no one teaches the lessons. For at least a generation, intellectual contempt for liberal society has been at the core of the humanities and the soft social sciences. This has accelerated, not changed, since the fall of the Berlin Wall, and as for the *mea culpas*, we await them in vain.

When Eisenhower heard that the German residents of a nearby town didn't know about a death camp whose stench would have reached their nostrils, he marched them, well-dressed—it's dramatic footage—through the rotting corpses and made them look at and help dispose of the dead. The mayor of Saxe-Gotha and his wife hanged themselves on their return.

We lack Eisenhower's authority. Milan Kundera stated the moral reality with clarity: “What about those with good intentions?” he asked. “When Oedipus realized that he himself was the cause of their suffering,” he answered, “he put out his eyes and wandered blind away from Thebes—unable to stand the sight of the misfortunes he had wrought by not knowing.” Let the apologists for communism acknowledge the dead, bury the dead, and atone for the dead; otherwise, let them be forgiven only when they have put out their eyes and wandered blind away from Thebes. And let Western intellectuals learn the words of the poem *Requiem*, written during the Stalinist terror by Anna Akhmatova, the greatest Russian poet of the 20th century, “I will remember them always and everywhere. I will never forget them no matter what comes.”

The bodies demand accounting, apology, and repentance. Without such things, the age of communism lives. Without such things, there remains a Berlin Wall, of the mind and spirit, that has not fallen.

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