



## **Editor's Introduction: The Distinctive Features of Repression in Communist States**

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### **I: Objectives and Criteria for Source Selection**

The political violence and repression produced by Communist systems in the twentieth century was one of the most consequential and destructive phenomena of history.<sup>1</sup> Yet relatively little is known about them, especially in comparison with the Holocaust, the other major chapter in political violence of our times (and all history). The collapse of Soviet communism has made no significant difference to this state of affairs.<sup>2</sup>

Arthur Waldron wrote:

The twentieth century was remarkable not only for the number and scale of the atrocities it witnessed but also for the slowness with which these frightful events were recognized for what they were, let alone condemned. Of these crimes, which began with the mass murders by Lenin and Stalin . . . and continued through the Nazi Holocaust and the democides in China and Cambodia, only the Nazi horror is regularly acknowledged and truly well known.<sup>3</sup>

While there is a vast literature on the Holocaust (as well as photographic documentation, surviving physical evidence, memorials, and museums), and while it has justifiably stimulated a huge and continued outpouring of research, moral outrage, and soul searching, the mass murders and other atrocities committed in the Soviet Union under (and after) Stalin have inspired little corresponding concern and interest.<sup>4</sup> It is not because there is insufficient information about these matters.<sup>5</sup> (A further indication of this limited interest has been the extremely modest review attention given to Alexander Yakovlev's impas-



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sioned indictment of Soviet repression, *A Century of Violence in Soviet Russia*, published in 2002.)

Even less is known about repression in the other Communist states (with the possible exception of Cambodia under Pol Pot), and no definitive Western social scientific or historical studies are available on these topics. It is hard to escape the conclusion that, as one writer recently noted, “communism . . . is the deadliest fantasy in human history, and even Americans, for all our struggles against it, have not yet looked it full in the face.”<sup>6</sup> For different reasons, in the former Soviet Union too there has been a reluctance to confront the past.<sup>7</sup> Given these circumstances, this volume is a new attempt to draw attention to and document these matters.

There are various ways to approach the subject. Statistics could be presented about those killed, imprisoned, deported, and otherwise brutalized in the different Communist states. Official policies and statements regarding the struggle against “the enemies” of these states could be described at length. Archival materials, when available, can be mined for data and information.

Instead, I have chosen here to illuminate repression in Communist states through the recollected personal experiences of the surviving victims.<sup>8</sup> There are several reasons for taking this approach. In the first place, these personal accounts are readily available (and have been for a long time); secondly, many of them are not merely of documentary value but also of considerable literary merit. Thirdly, the personal experiences and the qualitative specifics of victimization provide a superior way to grasp the human costs and consequences of these historical events and processes. Such experiences, when clearly articulated and eloquently recalled, tend to be more informative and memorable than quantitative data and scholarly analysis—though of course the latter too are vital for a full understanding of the phenomenon.<sup>9</sup>

The experiences related in the selections to follow include arrest, interrogation, trials, transportation to the place of detention, varieties of physical mistreatment, life in the prisons and camps, various types of labor, circumstances of death, and impressions of the social, psychological, and demographic characteristics of the victim groups and those in charge of them.

These memoirs (even in excerpted form) help the reader to form a vivid picture of the dimensions and human consequences of the political repression engaged in by Communist states. These accounts are also timeless repositories of the processes of suffering, coping with injustice, and adjusting to hopelessness, as well as reflections of human bonding and solidarity, of the relationship between the powerless and the powerful, and the insoluble problem of facing death, especially when it is violent and unnatural.

The amount and types of repression here considered preclude comprehensive treatment in this volume. The use of excerpts is a compromise and cannot be a substitute for reading the entire works from which they are drawn; on the other hand, few readers, even if in search of painful enlightenment on

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the subject, can be expected to locate, sample, and read the vast literature that is available. Limiting the collection to one volume, even if substantial, is thus a necessary practical compromise; many volumes of such materials could be assembled in search of comprehensiveness and to do justice to the subject matter.

More specifically, this anthology seeks to accomplish the following:

(1) to make available for the general public as well as for specialists a substantial comparative historical sampling of the experiences and facts of political victimization in Communist states. No such collection or sourcebook exists at the present time;

(2) to bring together in one volume personal (autobiographical) and historical as well as social scientific information (as provided in this introduction) about these events and policies and the institutions created to carry them out;

(3) to narrow the gap between information and analysis that is available about the political violence perpetrated by Nazi and Communist regimes and thereby make it possible to compare, and better understand, the two major political outrages of our century;<sup>10</sup>

(4) to stimulate research about the political violence that occurred within different Communist systems, extinct and surviving—an especially compelling task since it is difficult to identify a single American scholar specializing in Communist political violence, either as a comparative endeavor or as one focused on a particular Communist system. Robert Conquest is the only exception: see his pioneering studies of political violence in the Soviet Union, such as *The Great Terror*, *The Soviet Deportation of Nationalities*, *Kolyma: Arctic Death Camps*, and *The Harvest of Sorrow*. Anne Applebaum has joined him of late in this endeavor.

(5) to honor the memory of the tens of millions who, in different parts of the world, suffered and perished in the past century as a result of both the intended and the unintended consequences of the pursuit of power and political utopia by Communist political systems. As Martin Malia puts it, “at a time . . . when historical writing is turning increasingly to retrospective affirmative action, to fulfilling our ‘duty of remembrance’ to all the oppressed of the past,” there should be room for compassion for these victims of inhumanity as well.<sup>11</sup>

But of all the reasons for this undertaking, the desire to fill a gap—both moral and informational—may be the most compelling. The Western awareness of repression in Communist states remains very limited, even in this post-Communist era when new sources of information have become abundant. Much information was also available before the collapse of Soviet communism (as the dates of publication borne by many selections in this volume indicate), but it attracted little attention and led to little sustained reflection regarding the moral, historical, and political significance of these matters.<sup>12</sup>

Treating Communist mass murders as comparable to the Holocaust need not cast doubt on the uniqueness of the latter. Nonetheless, when close to one hundred million people die in order to achieve certain political ends, a new

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threshold in political violence is crossed that stimulates comparison with the other mass murders of our times.<sup>13</sup>

There are good reasons why relatively little has been learned in the West about Communist political repression. These systems not only withheld information about their policies and institutions of repression but sometimes went to great length to misinform and deceive international public opinion about them. The Soviet Union, China, Cuba, Nicaragua, and Vietnam (and possibly other Communist states as well) created atypical, model penal institutions for the benefit of visiting delegations from abroad, facilities in which inmates (mostly nonpolitical criminals) were treated humanely and their rehabilitation was the ostensible goal.<sup>14</sup>

One such project was described and praised at length in a volume produced by Soviet writers (thirty-four of them, including Maxim Gorky, Vera Inber, V. Kataev, Alexei Tolstoy, and M. Zoshchenko). It was the building of the Belomor canal—carried out by forced laborers without the benefit of any machinery. Gorky in particular “toured concentration camps and admired their educational value.” He visited the Belomor project in the company of Yagoda (head of the political police) and congratulated him for its splendid educational accomplishments.<sup>15</sup> Amabel Williams-Ellis, author of the introduction to the American edition of the book on the Belomor Canal, called it a “tale of the accomplishment of a ticklish engineering job . . . by tens of thousands of enemies of the State . . . guarded . . . by only thirty-seven GPU officers. . . . [O]ne of the most exciting stories that has ever appeared in print.”<sup>16</sup>

In support of this official denial and concealment, the once famous Alexei Stakhanov, originally a “simple” coal miner (after whom a mass movement to increase production was named in the Soviet Union), sent an indignant letter to the British socialist publication *Tribune* to rebut allegations about the Soviet penal system and especially its characteristic feature, forced labor. He was specifically indignant about David J. Dallin and Boris I. Nicolaevsky’s *Forced Labor in the Soviet Union* (1948), the first study of this subject. Stakhanov (or whoever composed the letter to which his name was appended) wrote in the inimitable style of self-righteousness and injured innocence peculiar to the Soviet propaganda of the times: “You can hardly imagine what indignation and disgust such vile and utterly false tales about our country arouse in a man like myself, who has devoted and is devoting all his efforts to serve his country.” The authors he denigrated had “published a disgusting book piled high with all sorts of monstrous fabrications about the Soviet Union.”<sup>17</sup>

Withholding or suppressing information about Communist human rights violations was not limited to Communist states. Victor Serge (a former Russian Communist and émigré) found it difficult in the 1940s to publish his memoirs in the United States because they were critical of the Soviet system. And in the 1970s, reported Shirley Hazzard at the time, “the embargo imposed upon Solzhenitsyn’s writings in his native land has been . . . reproduced on the

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international territory of the United Nations, . . . which banned the sale of his *Gulag Archipelago* from bookshops on United Nations premises."<sup>18</sup>

The defectors' and refugees' accounts of Soviet repression and the camp system were often publicly questioned by Western supporters of Communist states—and sometimes not only by such sympathizers. The best-known (although now forgotten) case was that of Victor Kravchenko, a Soviet government official who defected to the United States after World War II and wrote two books about his experiences in the Soviet Union. The latter included information acquired in the course of his career as manager of various industrial enterprises located near labor camps, some of which enterprises used convict labor. Kravchenko was subjected to especially vicious attacks in France by local Communists and Soviet officials. He was also regarded with undisguised contempt in the United States by numerous liberal journalists and intellectuals.<sup>19</sup>

In the 1970s Noam Chomsky scornfully dismissed "the tales of Communist atrocities" that had been related by Cambodian refugees.<sup>20</sup> In a similar spirit, J. Arch Getty deplored the use of defectors' accounts in historical research.<sup>21</sup> More recently, Nicholas Kristof, a correspondent for the *New York Times*, cautioned against taking at face value the uncorroborated reports of former inmates of North Korean camps who had managed to escape from that country during the famines of the mid-1990s.<sup>22</sup>

By contrast, few (if any) questions were raised about the reliability or authenticity of the reports of the survivors of Nazi concentration camps,<sup>23</sup> nor has it been suggested that the personal accounts of the victims of racial discrimination (in this or other countries) are to be approached with reservations given their subjective nature.

The enormous literature describing Communist repression made it difficult to decide which authors to choose and which parts of their volumes to excerpt here. The following considerations were paramount:

(1) representativeness; I intended to provide readings by eyewitnesses from as many Communist states as possible, preferably every one of them, in order to document that while the instances of repression here examined are best known in the Soviet setting—thanks largely to Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn—they were not confined to it but rather existed in every Communist state, though not always simultaneously.

(2) I sought writings that would shed light on different aspects of political violence and coercion, e.g., procedures of arrest, extraction of confessions, and conditions of life in prisons and labor camps, as well as excerpts informative about both victims and victimizers;

(3) I also sought selections that would illuminate the nature of repression in different periods and among less-known victim groups and settings (e.g., Albania, North Korea, Romania, Yugoslavia).

(4) The identity and literary reputation of the authors was also taken into account; other things being equal I was inclined to select writings by major,

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recognized figures familiar to at least some Western readers. The quality of the writings played an important part in my decision regardless of the author's renown.

Reading these accounts may prove difficult for some readers, as they graphically illustrate and remind us of the unfathomable and distressing capacity of human beings to inflict pain and suffering on one another, often cheerfully and enthusiastically, some times vindictively, more often matter-of-factly and indifferently.

Contemplating the matters detailed in this volume also provides an opportunity to reconsider the concept of evil, which is especially appropriate since, as Lance Morrow has written,

In enlightened political conversation, the word "evil" had been disreputable for a long time—and still is, to a large extent, despite 9/11. The word "evil," in many minds, still smacks of an atavistic, superstitious simplism, of a fundamentalist mindset. . . .

The secular, educated, cosmopolitan instinct . . . tends to shun the word "evil" and, as an optimist and creature of the Enlightenment, approaches the world's horrors as individual problems that can be solved. . . .<sup>24</sup>

It is always one's hope that information leads to better understanding, and that the latter may influence political attitudes and behavior. To search for meaning even—or especially—in the most horrendous and bewildering events and atrocities appears to be a deeply rooted human impulse: we are instinctively reluctant to believe that such events hold no meaning or provide no lessons.

### **II: The Question of Moral Equivalence**

Unlike Nazi Germany, Communist states did not attempt to eradicate, in a premeditated, systematic, and mechanized fashion, any particular ethnic group or class of people. This policy was nonetheless compatible with the systematic mistreatment of particular ethnic groups suspected of disloyalty. Major examples include the Soviet treatment of Baltic and Caucasian ethnic groups and the so-called Volga Germans and the Chinese treatment of Tibetans.<sup>25</sup> There is a second important difference: Communist regimes, unlike the Nazis, did not seek to murder children.

Communist systems did not invest any single, identifiable group with an omnipotent evil that required its total eradication, nor did they fixate obsessively on any one group, as did the Nazis. The victims of Communist systems came from a wide variety of groups; no particular ethnic, religious, social, or political affiliation and no particular background conferred immunity—this

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was the major and highly distinctive characteristic of the Communists' policies of victimization. Anybody could be designated as "the enemy" and treated accordingly, including former supporters, functionaries, and leaders.<sup>25</sup> It does not follow, however, that victimization was random, but rather that the criteria for being assigned to the "enemy" category varied over time and among different systems.

There was another morally significant difference between the Nazi and Communist approach to liquidating undesirable groups. In theory, if not often in practice, in the Communist states it was sometimes possible to escape an undesirable social-political designation by demonstrating loyalty to the system; under the Nazis, racial-ethnic categories conferred an immutable condition and inescapable death sentence to the members of such groups.<sup>26</sup>

Richard Pipes summed up the differences as follows:

The Russians murdered even more people than the Germans, and they murdered their own, but they did it without the mechanical precision, the rational calculation of the Germans who "harvested" human hair and gold fillings. Nor were they proud of their murders. I have never seen a photograph of a Soviet atrocity. . . . [T]he Germans took countless photographs of theirs.<sup>27</sup>

The Nazi mass murders were further distinguished from all other cases of actual or attempted genocide and massive political violence by taking place in what used to be considered the civilized heart of Europe; they were initiated, planned, and carried out by members of a nation that used to be seen as torch-bearer of the highest Western cultural traditions and ideals, the descendants of Goethe, Heine, Schiller, Thomas Mann, Kant, Bach, Beethoven, Brahms, and other giants of German and European culture.

The settings of Communist political violence were for the most part countries with large illiterate populations and autocratic traditions, nations either completely isolated from Western cultural influences (as China was for centuries) or harboring a highly ambivalent attitude toward them (as Russia had).

The similarities between the two types of mass murder are also noteworthy, the most significant being their association with the pursuit of some kind of utopia. As Alan Ryan observes, "What is common to all Communist states . . . is the perversion of utopia." Eric Weitz writes, "The movements and regimes discussed . . . promised to create utopia in the here and now. . . . In their overarching drive to found utopia [they] . . . sought to create the 'new man' and the 'new woman.'" In Michael Ignatieff's view, "The danger of genocide lies in its promise to create a world without enemies. . . . [G]enocide [is] a crime in service of a utopia, a world without discord, enmity, suspicion, free of the enemy without or the enemy within. . . . [T]his utopia is the core of the genocidal intention. . . ."<sup>28</sup>

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Nazi and Communist mass murders also have in common a cleansing, purifying intention and aspect. As Lance Morrow puts it, "The Nazis justified their extermination as necessities of racial purification. . . . Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge justified its slaughters on the ground of cultural/ideological purification. . . . [E]vil so often justifies itself as a necessary purification. . . ."

He could have added the Soviet "purges," which sought to cleanse society of the many alleged enemies of the system.

The quest for purification and utopia are also linked: ". . . much evil emanates from the discrepancy between the daydream of a golden age and the disappointments of the present. It is one of the great lessons of evil that it flourishes in the subjective self-righteousness and grievance of a highly developed victim culture," writes Morrow. "Evil portrays itself, almost without exception, as injured innocence, fighting back." Aggressors typically define themselves as the injured party.<sup>29</sup>

The Nazis derived their sense of victimhood from the Versailles Treaty, the Soviet Union from being abused and encircled by capitalist countries, China from the experiences of colonial exploitation, Castro's Cuba from American domination, etc., etc. In a similar spirit, George Steiner writes that

messianic socialism. Even where it proclaims itself to be atheist, the socialism of Marx, of Trotsky, of Ernst Bloch, is directly rooted in messianic eschatology. Nothing is more religious, nothing is closer to the ecstatic rage for justice in the prophets, than the socialist vision of the destruction of the bourgeois Gomorrah and the creation of a new, clean city for man.

As for the Chinese variant, "Mao . . . had a vision, a utopian dream of the total transformation of China . . . 'Even as his policies caused the death of millions, Mao never entirely lost his belief in the . . . possibility of redemption.'" Explicitly comparing Mao to Hitler, Ian Buruma further argues that "the carnage arose from a similar kind of quasi-artistic impulse, an aesthetic vision based on pseudoscience. . . . Anything standing between the vision and the artist had to be eliminated."<sup>30</sup> The Nazi utopia rested on the propagation and supremacy of the racially pure and the elimination or subordination of the racially inferior.

More generally speaking—and again, for both the Nazi and the Communist systems—Charles Simic writes,

Never before have so many classes of human beings been regarded as having no intrinsic value and therefore having no right to exist. These ambitious programs for depopulating the planet of some national, ethnic, racial or religious group would have been impossible without the accompanying idea that bloodshed



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was permissible for the sake of some version of future happiness.<sup>31</sup>

This was also the case in Cambodia under Pol Pot, whose methods of coercion, violence, and establishing guilt generously borrowed not only from the Moscow Trials and Chinese campaigns of “reeducation” but even from the Spanish Inquisition and the eighteenth-century French Revolutionary terror. There are further striking similarities between the Cambodian and Nazi concerns with secrecy.<sup>32</sup>

Most recently, the fusion of mass murder (albeit on a smaller scale) with religious-utopian impulses has been demonstrated by those Islamic suicide bombers and pilots who have eagerly destroyed themselves and others in pursuit of individual salvation and what they consider to be social-political redemption and justice.

There is a shared and profound irrationality in all these policies and actions designed to eliminate their perceived enemies in the expectation that such slaughters will pave the way to superior social-political arrangements (or in the case of Islamic fanatics, to individual salvation and otherworldly rewards).

The determination to provide the necessary resources for these endeavors even under conditions of great scarcity testifies to the unwavering irrationality of these commitments. A well-known example is the Nazis’ diverting (in 1943–44) railroad cars from military use to transport Jews to the gas chambers when such rolling stock was badly needed in the faltering war effort. But it is not well known that “in 1943 and 1944, in the middle of the war, Stalin diverted thousands of trucks and hundreds of thousands of soldiers serving in the special NKVD troops from the front . . . in order to deport various peoples living in the Caucasus.” Earlier in the war, “when the Red Army was retreating on all fronts [in 1941] and losing tens of thousands every day . . . Beria diverted more than 14,000 men from the NKVD for this operation [the deportation of German speaking minorities]. . . .”<sup>33</sup>

It is another important similarity between Nazi and Communist mass murders that in both cases victimization was often based not on actions or behavior but on belonging to certain categories or groups that automatically conferred an “enemy” designation. In the Nazi case these categories were primarily racial, in the Communist they were mostly related to social status, class, or kinship.

Both systems treated ordinary criminals far better than those assigned to the political-enemy categories. The persecution of homosexuals was another policy shared by Nazi, Soviet, Cuban, and Chinese penal systems. Lesser but not insignificant similarities include the numbering of prisoners (instead of using names), but the Nazi practice of tattooing numbers into the skin was far more brutal than merely affixing the numbers clothing, as was the practice in Communist camps.

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There is also a similarity in the theoretical and putatively scientific legitimizations of Nazi and Communist political violence: both served a vision of history, one defined by racial theories in the case of the Nazis, and “scientific socialism” in the case of Communist states.

Chronologically, the Soviet camps preceded the Nazis’ and in some ways might have provided a model for the latter. Rudolf Hess, the commander of Auschwitz, wrote:

The Reich security Head Office issued to the commandants [of camps] a full collection of reports concerning the Russian concentration camps. These described in great detail the conditions in, and organization of, the Russian camps. . . . Great emphasis was placed on the fact that the Russians, by their massive employment of forced labor, had destroyed whole peoples.<sup>34</sup>

Elena Bonner believed that “there was an amazing resemblance between the two punitive bureaucracies—the SS and the NKVD—both in how they were above the law and how their officials were selected.”<sup>35</sup>

There are also points of similarity in the mistreatment associated with the interrogation of political prisoners. A former inmate of Soviet prisons and labor camps wrote, “I have met people who went through both Hitler’s interrogation and ours. They stated that there must have been an exchange of experience, for the methods were very similar.”<sup>36</sup> However, those interrogated by the Nazis were not forced to sign fabricated confessions, as were many in the Communist states. It also appears that, for the most part, Nazi camp guards were more brutal and sadistic than their Communist counterparts.

### III: The Attention Gap and Selectivity in Moral Concerns

It is not entirely clear why some historical outrages and atrocities become the focus of public concern and indignation—as well as scholarly attention and research—while others remain largely overlooked, barely known, or forgotten. The mass murders (including the use of chemical weapons against civilians) committed in Iraq under Saddam Hussein, for example, inspired relatively little indignation and concern in Western countries. Paul Berman writes:

In the twentieth century, crimes on the highest scale took place in the open, yet somehow, through the alchemies of political ideology, the crimes were rendered invisible. . . . This has been Iraq’s experience precisely. Saddam launched his slaughters twenty-five years ago, and in Western countries everyone knew, yet most people managed not to see and no one ever succeeded in organizing a truly mass protest.

A truly large and powerful protest movement took to the streets

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all over the Western world only in February 2003—and this was not to denounce the terrible dictatorship but to prevent an invasion from overthrowing the terrible dictatorship.<sup>37</sup>

Another notable example, this one from the more distant past, is the case of the Chinese civilians massacred by the Japanese military in Nanking in 1937.<sup>38</sup> The reasons for overlooking this exceptionally repugnant episode of modern history may also shed some light on the limited attention Communist atrocities have received in the Western world.

The “rape of Nanking” was probably ignored in part because of the cultural remoteness of the setting (it took place in China rather than in Europe) and the apparent lack of ideological motivation on the part of the perpetrators. The massacres were seen as a by-product of war (making them seem more “normal”), and no particular segment of the population was singled out on racial, ethnic, or political grounds. At the same time, this was not just an instance of victorious troops getting out of hand: “it was not a temporary lapse of military discipline since it lasted for seven weeks,” points out one historian, and it was conducted in public with no attempt to hide it.<sup>39</sup>

The Japanese biological and germ warfare experiments (including vivisection of mostly Chinese prisoners of war) likewise attracted little attention, although an estimated 200,000 Chinese prisoners were killed in field experiments. In the course of these studies prisoners were locked “inside a pressure chamber to see how much the body can withstand before the eyes pop from their sockets. . . .” On other occasions, writes Nicholas Kristof,

Victims were taken to a proving ground . . . where they were tied to stakes and bombarded with test weapons to see how effective the new technologies were. Planes sprayed the zone with a plague culture or dropped bombs with plague-infested fleas to see how many people would die.<sup>40</sup>

Another mass murder committed by the Japanese and described as “one of World War II’s least publicized atrocities” took place in the Indonesian province of what is now called West Kalimantan. It “could legitimately be described as ‘genocidal’ in that whole sectors of society seemed to be picked out for execution,” wrote Barbara Crosette. “[U]p to 20,000 people may have been put to death by firing squad or the sword. . . . Among them . . . scholars, doctors, former government officials, business leaders—anyone who might one day have opposed Japanese rule.”<sup>41</sup>

Until very recently there has been little soul-searching in Japan concerning these massacres (or, for that matter, the others carried out by Japanese forces during World War II); they have been altogether denied or their magnitude disputed.

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A contrasting example of a mass killing of civilians in war that did generate lasting moral indignation was the U.S.'s dropping of two atomic bombs on Japan in 1945. These bombings have not only become the focus of worldwide public attention but also the source of enduring soul-searching in the Western world (especially in the United States), although the number of their combined victims (140,000 in Hiroshima and 78,000 in Nagasaki)<sup>42</sup> was eclipsed by those of Nanking, where the casualties are estimated at between 260,000 and 350,000. (Comparable numbers of civilians were also killed in the conventional aerial bombardment of German cities during World War II, and this without provoking moral concern in the West.) The victims of the American atomic bombs arguably met their deaths faster, and under less painful conditions, than did the Chinese civilians of Nanking. Moreover, defensible military considerations also played a part in the decision to use atomic bombs; the invasion of Japan by U.S. military forces could have cost more lives, Japanese as well as American, than did the bombing.

Another largely forgotten catastrophic chain of events claimed hundreds of thousands of victims in Ethiopia in the 1980s (an Ethiopian author has called it "the Ethiopian holocaust"). It combined governmental coercion and economic mismanagement inspired partly by Marxist doctrine and partly by a desire to bring the population under more thorough political control. The forcible resettlement, collectivization, and disruption of agricultural production resulted in famine, as had similar policies pursued in the former Soviet Union in the early 1930s.<sup>43</sup>

The treatment of civilians in Afghanistan by the Soviet armed forces and the Afghan political police (the KHAD) offers another example of large-scale atrocities (these from the 1970s and '80s) that have resulted in little but inattention and moral indifference among the Western public. As one of the reports on these events summed it up:

Just about every conceivable human rights violation is occurring in Afghanistan and on an enormous scale. The crimes of indiscriminate warfare are combined with the worst excesses of unbridled state-sanctioned violence against civilians. The ruthless savagery in the countryside is matched by the subjection of a terrorized urban population to arbitrary arrest, torture, imprisonment and execution.<sup>44</sup>

These acts of violence against the civilian population were sparked by anti-Soviet guerilla activities, but Soviet troops made few distinctions between armed guerillas and unarmed civilians they suspected of supporting them; they killed civilians as retribution for guerilla attacks.<sup>45</sup> Soviet soldiers taken prisoner by the guerillas recounted the atrocities they witnessed or participated in:

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"If one of ours was killed or wounded, we would kill women, children and old people as revenge. We killed everything, even the animals. . . ."

Once they [Soviet soldiers] entered a village where only old men and women with children were left. . . . The lieutenant ordered his platoon to herd all these women, children and old men together into one room and throw in hand grenades. . . .<sup>46</sup>

It is important to stress that "the [r]epression was not simply a response to resistance . . . it preceded, and indeed helped to inspire, the revolt." As in other Communist states, criteria unrelated to actual behavior but supposedly suggestive of hostile predisposition were sufficient:

Reasons for suspicion can be quite diverse: past friendship with an American Peace Corps volunteer, possession of an opposition leaflet, having relatives suspected of opposition, or being named by a paid spy or a prisoner under torture. In June 1983 a group of handicapped teenage boys who had been cared for by a French priest were arrested and interrogated under torture about their alleged work for French intelligence.<sup>47</sup>

Muslim clerics and liberal, westernized intellectuals alike were hunted down with particular fervor.<sup>48</sup> Torture was widely used:

The methods of torture are . . . beatings, death threats, pulling out of hair and fingernails, near-drownings, sleep deprivation, strangling, and most common . . . electric shocks. The electric shock equipment has been upgraded since the Soviet invasion. . . . Several sources tell of a new equipment introduced in 1984, such as the [electric] chair that was used to torture an eighteen year old who had distributed anti-Soviet leaflets. . . .<sup>49</sup>

According to another source, "the most commonly reported methods of torture are sleep deprivation, prolonged beatings and electric shocks . . . sometimes intensified by dousing the prisoner with water."<sup>50</sup> Among the more unusual forms of pressure brought to bear on the detainees was showing them the badly tortured corpses of other prisoners and torturing others in front of them.<sup>51</sup> Burying prisoners alive was also widely reported.<sup>52</sup> Notwithstanding these unusually brutal tactics, the Western condemnation of the Soviet Union was muted.

The atrocities committed by Soviet troops in Eastern Europe and especially East Germany during and in the aftermath of World War II were likewise overlooked, and to this date few people in the West are aware of them.

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The mistreatment of civilians in these countries took three major forms: 1) the widespread raping of women; 2) large-scale authorized looting; 3) the killing of civilians who attempted to interfere with the above activities.

These Soviet policies were reflected in the remarks of Stalin recorded by Milovan Djilas. Even in Yugoslavia, which was an ally of the Soviet Union and had been occupied by Germany, such atrocities occurred. The Yugoslav Communist leaders visiting Moscow raised the issue with Stalin, tactfully pointing to the *political damage* done by such behavior, rather than to its morally problematic nature. Stalin was not impressed: "And such an army [the Soviet one] was insulted . . . by Djilas. . . Can't he understand it if a soldier who has crossed thousands of kilometers through blood and fire and death has fun with a woman or takes some trifle?"<sup>53</sup>

Djilas also wrote:

Soon after my return from Moscow, I heard . . . of a far more significant example of Stalin's "understanding" attitude toward the sins of Red Army personnel. Namely, while crossing East Prussia, Soviet soldiers, especially tank units, pounded and regularly killed all German civilian refugees—women and children. Stalin was informed of this and asked what should be done. He replied: "We lecture our soldiers too much; let them have some initiative."<sup>54</sup>

Stalin displayed a similar attitude when the problem of rape and plunder in East Germany was brought to his attention by East German Communist leaders: "Stalin replied with an old Russian proverb: 'In every family there is a black sheep.' He said nothing more. When one of us tried to put the matter more seriously . . . he was interrupted by Stalin: 'I will not allow anyone to drag the reputation of the Red Army in the mud.' That was the end of the conversation."<sup>55</sup> Thus, for Stalin mass rapes were but "fun," vast sprees of looting simply "taking some trifles," and the mass killing of civilians nothing but a display of "initiative."<sup>56</sup>

It is not surprising that the most serious acts of violence were inflicted on the people of East Germany, given the German attack on the Soviet Union in World War II and the brutal treatment of the Soviet population by German troops. The behavior of the Soviet troops reflected a confluence of spontaneous personal feeling and official policy. Soviet propaganda encouraged the troops to act brutally, as for example the "road signs [which] urged Soviet soldiers to hurt the Germans: 'Soldier you are in Germany, take revenge on the Hitlerites.'" Moreover, writes Norman Naimark, "throughout the Soviet press, the idea was widespread that the Germans—women on the homefront included—would have to 'pay' for their evil deeds."<sup>57</sup> Official connivance was reflected in the persistence of these incidents "at least until the beginning of

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1947.<sup>58</sup> The scope of these atrocities was huge, with estimates of rape victims ranging from hundreds of thousands to two million.<sup>59</sup> As Naimark puts it:

It was not atypical for Soviet troops to rape every female over the age of twelve or thirteen in a village, killing many in the process; to pillage homes for food, alcohol and loot; and leave the village in flames. The reports of women subjected to gang rapes . . . are far too numerous to be considered isolated incidents. Lev Kopelev, then a captain in the Soviet Army, tried to stop a group of rampaging soldiers and was accused of having engaged in "bourgeois humanism."<sup>60</sup>

Soviet policy toward its own troops was no less brutal: in World War II surrender was treated as treason and punished accordingly; military tribunals sentenced to death the astonishing number of 157,000 soldiers; "most of the condemned," writes Alexander Yakovlev, "had escaped from prisoner of war camps or broken out of encirclement."<sup>61</sup>

Soviet atrocities against civilians were also widespread in Hungary during and after World War II. According to one estimate, approximately 10 percent of all women in Hungary were raped by Soviet soldiers.<sup>62</sup>

The repression that followed the Communist victory in South Vietnam is another example of large-scale political violence in recent times that received little attention in the Western world and especially the United States. More than one million Vietnamese sought escape (the so-called boat people) *after the war ended*. In other words, it was not the hardships of war but Communist rule they fled; hundreds of thousands of those who remained were imprisoned in various types of "reeducation" camps, and probably hundreds of thousands were executed.<sup>63</sup>

Another more recent and persisting case of public indifference toward what one writer has called "arguably the greatest humanitarian catastrophe of our lifetime"<sup>64</sup> has been the civil war and associated instances of repression in the Sudan, which have reportedly claimed at least two million lives and created more than twice that many refugees. The victims have been the southerners (who are different in religion and ethnicity) and the victimizers a radical Islamic regime in the north.

Finally, the widespread "hacking off hands and feet of ordinary people" by a rebel group in Sierra Leone in 1999 was another unique atrocity that generated little attention or moral indignation in Western countries.<sup>65</sup>

These examples make clear that the public (and scholarly) responses to the great historical outrages of our times are not necessarily proportional either to the number of victims or the quality of the suffering inflicted. The adverse reaction to the American use of atomic weapons against Japan (a reaction that has actually intensified over time) was probably conditioned by an aversion

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toward the military use of advanced technology, and possibly also by the circumstance that annihilation was inflicted by a Western nation upon a non-Western one. A diffuse, collective sense of guilt and a distaste toward modern technology among large portions of American (and Western) intellectuals, opinion-makers, and the educated public help to explain these sentiments. Similar attitudes contributed to the vehement criticism of U.S. bombing in Vietnam by huge planes flying at high altitudes, as if such ways of inflicting damage were inherently more repugnant than the use of small arms, land mines, or poisoned bamboo sticks, methods favored by the Vietcong.

The primary example of this asymmetry in public reaction pertains to Western attitudes toward Nazism and the various Communist states and the atrocities perpetrated by each. By contrast, Tzvetan Todorov argues: "Communism . . . lasted longer . . . spread more widely, to almost every continent . . . and it killed an even greater number of people. It is also more important to condemn it from our present perspective: it has a greater power to confuse and seduce. . . . But there is an obvious imbalance in the way the two regimes are . . . described. The Nazi regime is universally abhorred . . . whereas Communism (in France in its Trotskyist variant) still enjoys wide respect. Antifascism is obligatory, whereas anti-Communism remains suspect. . . . In contemporary France and Germany Holocaust denial is an offense punishable by law, whereas denying Communist crimes—indeed praising the ideology that commanded them—remains perfectly legitimate." Anne Applebaum recalls Western tourists eagerly decking themselves out in the paraphernalia of the defunct Soviet system that is sold on the streets of Prague and Moscow, all of whom "would be sickened by the thought of wearing a swastika" but think nothing of "wearing the hammer and sickle on a T-shirt." She also notes that nobody in Hollywood has chosen to make a movie about Soviet concentration camps, while many have been made about those of the Nazis and Japanese. And while pro-Nazi sympathies inflicted serious damage on the reputation of some Western intellectuals, Jean Paul Sartre (and many others like him) did not experience comparable damage to their reputations on account of their support for Communist systems, including that of Stalin. As Applebaum concludes, "to many people the crimes of Stalin [and one may add, those of Mao, Pol Pot, Castro, Ho Chi Minh etc.] do not inspire the same visceral reaction as do the crimes of Hitler." A large part of the reason for these discrepant attitudes was that "to condemn the Soviet Union too thoroughly would be to condemn a part of what some of the Western left once held dear as well."<sup>66</sup> Or as Tony Judt put it: "To many Western European intellectuals communism was a failed variant of a common progressive heritage."<sup>67</sup>

Alain Besançon has asked with good reason: ". . . how is it that today the two systems are treated so unequally in historical memory, to the point when one of them, Soviet communism, though a still-recent presence on the world scene, has already been all but forgotten?"<sup>68</sup>



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None of this discussion implies that there was anything questionable or irrational about the profound and durable moral abhorrence the Holocaust inspired. Rather, I am simply suggesting that the Communist atrocities are as deserving of moral attention and condemnation as are the Nazi ones. As Alain de Benoist writes:

The victims of communism do not cancel out the victims of Nazism anymore than the victims of Nazism cancel out the victims of communism. . . . [T]he crimes of one regime cannot be used to justify or diminish the importance of the crimes perpetrated by the other. . . .<sup>69</sup>

Another notable example of the asymmetrical reactions we are discussing is found in a theoretical examination of what one author called “sanctioned massacres . . . directed at groups that have not themselves threatened or engaged in hostile action against the perpetrators of the violence.” In this text, juxtaposed to an ample discussion of the Nazi mass murders and American atrocities in Vietnam is but one brief, perfunctory reference to Soviet mass murders (“the liquidation of the kulaks and the great purges in the Soviet Union”), alongside others committed in this century in Indonesia, Biafra, Burundi, etc. There is not a single reference to any source dealing with Soviet or other Communist mass murders.<sup>70</sup> Professor Kelman’s apparent unfamiliarity with Communist mass violence leads him to believe that “sanctioned massacres” in those systems are “entirely outside of the realm of moral discourse,” since they don’t have a defensive justification. In fact Communist governments vastly extended the notion of self-defense and obliterated the line between actual and potential threats to their rule: people were persecuted and killed not for their actual but for their *potentially* threatening behavior. Kelman’s unfamiliarity with Communist mass murders severely restricts the scope of his generalizations.

A further illustration of these attitudes appears in a symposium on the work of Stanley Milgram, the social psychologist famous for his experiments illustrating obedience to authority. Not one of the fourteen contributors entertains the idea that his experiments might have some applicability or relevance to the highly organized political violence of Communist systems.<sup>71</sup>

Similarly revealing is a 1987 program on public television (titled “The Faces of the Enemy” and produced by Sam Keen, a California psychologist) that purported to explore the connections between political propaganda and the dehumanization of various groups. While the program examined the attitudes, atrocities, and propaganda associated with Nazis, right-wingers, and the U.S. military in Vietnam, there was no reference whatsoever to the mass murders of Stalin, Mao, or Pol Pot, or the Communist propaganda associated with these atrocities.<sup>72</sup>

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This inattention or selectivity is all the more remarkable since the number of victims of Communist systems significantly exceeds those of Nazism.<sup>73</sup> These systems were in power for a much longer time than were the Nazis and controlled much larger populations.

The discrepancy in reaction to the Nazi and Communist horrors is even more striking if one considers the responses to the combined mass murders (and other forms of victimization) committed in Communist states other than the Soviet Union, such as China, Cuba, Ethiopia, North Korea, Vietnam, and others. The mass murders in Vietnam, in fact, provoked perhaps the least public indignation or moral outrage, with the exception of Cambodia. The latter, not quite incidentally, came to attract attention and moral indignation only after the system was overthrown (and thereby delegitimated) by another Communist state, Vietnam. The Vietnamese government eagerly publicized the Cambodian horrors: coming as it did from a Communist source, the information appeared more credible to many Western intellectuals and opinion makers than it was when provided by the refugees, as the views of Chomsky (cited earlier) illustrate.<sup>74</sup> Prior to the war with Vietnam, pro-Pol Pot apologies like this one, from Malcolm Caldwell, were more typical:

The new Government [of Pol Pot] fighting for its survival against all this counter-revolutionary activity had to deal swiftly and sternly with every instance of sabotage and subversion. Undoubtedly this was a bloody process that may well have entailed some excesses and mistakes. But without revolutionary violence against the enemy, the revolution itself would have been crushed in its infancy.<sup>75</sup>

This has been the classic apology for every instance of Communist political violence ever since the Russian Revolution of 1917.

Chomsky was the most famous and voluble Western sympathizer with the government of Pol Pot. He self-assuredly disputed the higher and far more accurate estimates of the number of Pol Pot's victims and scornfully dismissed the refugees' accounts. Nonetheless, his intellectual and moral reputations have suffered little. As Martin Malia has written: "The status of 'ex-Communist' [in Chomsky's case, 'ex-apologist'] carries with it no stigma, even when unaccompanied by any expression of regret. Past contact with Nazism, however, no matter how marginal or remote, confers an indelible stain."<sup>76</sup>

Malia proposes several explanations for what he calls "the dual perception" of Nazism and communism. In the first place there was the World War II alliance of the Western powers and the Soviet Union against Nazism, which muted potential criticism of the Soviet system. Secondly,

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the defeat (in World War II) cut Nazism down in the prime of its iniquity, thereby eternally fixing its memory in full horror. By contrast communism, at the peak of *its* iniquity, was rewarded with an epic victory (in World War II)—thereby gaining a half-century to . . . half-repent of Stalin and even . . . to attempt giving the system a “human face.” These contrasting endgames thus bared all Nazism’s secrets fifty years ago while we are only beginning to explore Soviet archives, and those of East Asia and Cuba remain sealed.<sup>77</sup>

An obvious source of the different moral judgments of Nazism and communism is the reluctance—or refusal, as the case may be—to recognize that there were significant structural and attitudinal similarities between the Nazi and the Soviet (and, by extension, other Communist) systems. For the same reason (often unacknowledged), in the 1960s the concept of totalitarianism came under criticism from many Western scholars and intellectuals because it provided a conceptual bridge, and suggested a moral equivalence, between Nazi and Communist systems.

This is the place to recall Edward Shils’s little known inventory of the similarities between the beliefs and attitudes of the authoritarian supporters of the Nazi and Soviet systems. On the extreme Right (as specified by the study of the authoritarian personality), we find:

- (1) Extreme hostility towards “outgroups” . . .
- (2) Extreme submissiveness towards “ingroups.”
- (3) Establishment of sharp boundaries between the group one is a member of and other groups.
- (4) The tendency to categorize persons with respect to certain qualities. . . .
- (5) . . . a vision of the world as a realm of conflict.
- (6) Disdain for purely theoretical . . . activities.
- (7) A repugnance for the expression of sentiments. . . .
- (8) Belief that oneself and one’s group can survive only by the manipulation of others.
- (9) The ideal of a conflictless, wholly harmonious society. . . .

As for what Shils called the Bolshevik outlook, we see:

- (1) The demand for complete and unqualified loyalty to the party.
- (2) The insistence on the necessary conflict of interest between the working class of which the party is the leader and all other . . . classes. . . .

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- (3) The continuous application of the criteria of party interests in judging every person and situation. . . .
- (4) A stress on the class characteristics of individuals. . . .
- (5) The belief that all history is the history of class conflicts.
- (6) The denial of the existence of pure truth. . . .
- (7) The belief that the expression of sentiment is an expression of weakness. . . .
- (8) The belief in the ubiquitousness of the influence of "Wall Street" . . . "Big Banks" . . . "200 families," etc., and their masked control. . . .
- (9) The ideal of the classless society . . . without conflict. . . .<sup>78</sup>

In all probability, the most important and emotive reason for the divergence in moral judgments examined here is that Communist systems were associated with the idealistic and universalistic ideology of Marxism, whereas no ideology of comparable respectability was utilized by the Nazi regime. But as Tzvetan Todorov argued, "Much has been made of the seemingly unbridgeable ideological abyss separating the two systems, yet as soon as one begins to look not at abstract ideological pronouncements but at the ideologies that can be deduced from actions, the gap narrows." Todorov also wrote,

Communism seeks the happiness of humanity but only once the 'bad guys' have been separated out of it, and that is what Nazism envisaged too. How is it possible to believe in the universal validity of the doctrine when it asserts that it is based on struggle, violence, permanent revolution, hatred, dictatorship and war? It justifies itself on the grounds that the proletariat is the majority and bourgeoisie the minority—but that already takes us a long way away from universal ideals. . . .

We must . . . stress that the renunciation of universalism is no less characteristic of Communism, which professes universal ideals, than it is of Nazism, which . . . openly declares its own particularism. . . . In practice Communism was as 'particularist' as Nazism since it explicitly asserted that its stated ideal did not extend to the whole of humanity. . . . The only real difference is that in one case the division of humanity is 'horizontal,' based on national frontiers, and in the other it is 'vertical,' between different layers of a society: national and racial war for Nazism, and class war for Communism.<sup>79</sup>

Benoist further explicates this point:

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Stalin's crimes were the result of the perversion of communism, which was "an ideal of human liberation," while Hitler's crimes followed directly from his ideology. . . . [C]ommunism betrayed its promises, Nazi practices followed directly from its doctrine. . . . [T]he practices of Soviet communism constituted . . . "a misguided application of a sound ideology." . . .<sup>80</sup>

This was a belief apparently shared by Eric Hobsbawm, who was unembarrassed to admit that even if he had known in 1934 that "millions of people were dying in the Soviet experiment" he would not have renounced it, because "the chance of a new world being born in great suffering would still have been worth backing," even if it had required the sacrifice of fifteen or twenty million.<sup>81</sup> Hobsbawm (like Chomsky) continues to enjoy an excellent moral and intellectual reputation in Western academic circles. His quotation above illustrates and corroborates Malia's observation about those fearful of "shut[ting] the door on utopia," those who "in this unjust world cannot abandon hope for an absolute end to inequality. . . ."<sup>82</sup>

Hobsbawm and kindred spirits have focused on the morality of intentions, on what François Furet calls "the founding promise" that protected the reputation of the movements and systems built upon it.<sup>83</sup> But Milovan Djilas (more closely acquainted with these matters than Hobsbawm and most Western intellectuals) pointed out that

communism brims over with humanistic injunctions touching on brotherhood, solidarity, equality and so on. But . . . the humanitarian elements as a rule have no significance beyond legitimizing stern methods. . . . Communism's humanistic elements nourish the illusion that they themselves will become a reality once the final goal . . . is reached.<sup>84</sup>

Joseph Brodsky (a Soviet exile and Noble prize-winning poet) believes that the Western refusal to fully acknowledge "Soviet reality" (i.e., the enormity of repression) is a matter of "mental self preservation. . . . [A] mental fence was constructed especially by the Western left. It was mostly among the intellectuals."<sup>85</sup>

The difference in the West's moral judgments of Nazism and communism is also linked to the distinction made between "extermination practiced to achieve a political objective, no matter how perverse [the Communist case] and extermination as an end itself [the Nazi policy]."<sup>86</sup> This distinction, however, may become blurred when one considers that the extermination of the Jews, while an end in itself, was for the Nazis a precondition for creating a better, purified world. In short, it was also an idealistic goal, however perverted and irrational. Benoist has also pointed out that

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no regime has ever seen the massacres it engaged in as an “end in itself.” . . . Both the utopia of a classless society and of pure race required the elimination of those presumed to be obstacles to the realization of a “grandiose” project, impediments to the realization of a radically better society. In both cases, the ideology (racial or class struggle) led to a bad principle: the exclusion of whole categories (“inferior” races or “harmful” classes) composed of people whose only crime was to belong to one of these categories.<sup>87</sup>

Ian Buruma also raises a relevant, thought-provoking question:

[I]s it categorically different to murder people because of their class than because of their race? There is a distinction to be sure: Hitler wanted to kill every Jewish man, woman or child. Mao still believed that at least some reactionaries could be redeemed through “reeducation.” And yet when one thinks that Mao’s victims included the children and even grandchildren of class enemies, persecuted simply because of their background, the difference may not disappear entirely but surely becomes less categorical.<sup>88</sup>

Some East European dissidents have in fact argued that “mass murder in the name of a noble ideal is more *perverse* than in the name of a base one. The Nazis, after all, never claimed to be virtuous. The Communists, by contrast, trumpeting their humanism, hoodwinked millions around the world for decades.”<sup>89</sup>

At last, as I have argued elsewhere,<sup>90</sup> the repellent “moral distinction” the Nazi mass murders have achieved is closely linked to their highly premeditated, efficient, and technologically advanced character.<sup>91</sup> A much higher *proportion* of inmates survived the Gulag and similar establishments in various Communist states than did their counterparts in the Nazi camps. The Gulag and similar institutions in Communist states were not designed for extermination, although they accomplished this through the high mortality rates that resulted from their living and working conditions. To be sure, substantial numbers in Communist states were also executed (by shooting) or eliminated by famines, which were either the result of deliberate government policy (as in the Ukraine) or of the unanticipated consequences of policies such as the collectivization of agriculture, population transfers, and the assignment of agricultural workers to tasks such as the collection of scrap metal: famines caused by these policies occurred in the Soviet Union, Ethiopia, and China, respectively.

The large number of victims deliberately killed has been confirmed by the post-Soviet discoveries of numerous mass burial sites, among them the Kuropaty

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graves. As Robert Conquest notes, “the revisionist estimates for the whole USSR could be tucked into a single corner of this one gravesite. . . .”<sup>92</sup>

The secretiveness of Communist systems made the gathering of information on these matters difficult and at times impossible—a circumstance that partially explains why Communist atrocities generated disproportionately less moral indignation. Nonetheless, none of these systems was completely successful in concealing *all* such information. Much was revealed in individual accounts smuggled out, or by those who managed to escape. Considerable information of this type accumulated over the decades, despite the efforts of Communist governments. Following their collapse much more has become available.

The least known among the remaining Communist states is North Korea, rated by Freedom House “as ‘the worst of the worst’ in terms of political rights and civil liberties.” As Christopher Hitchens (who managed to visit) puts it, North Korea “might easily be described as the world’s prototype Stalinist state . . . where individual life is *absolutely pointless*, and where everything that is not absolutely compulsory is absolutely forbidden.”<sup>93</sup> Because of the famine of the mid-1990s, which produced thousands of refugees, new information about the specifics of North Korean repression has begun finally to emerge.<sup>94</sup> It is emblematic of longstanding Western attitudes that a reporter from the *New York Times* expressed the type of misgivings about these refugee reports that Chomsky voiced two decades ago about the accounts of Cambodian refugees, and still earlier skeptics expressed about Soviet refugee accounts. Nicholas D. Kristof wrote:

Mrs. Li and other defectors portray the North Korean camps as unremittingly savage but it is difficult to know how accurate this portrait is. North Korea is sealed off from the rest of the world and virtually all of those who claim any contact with the prison system are defectors. . . . Thus it is impossible to know if the defectors are describing what they really endured or what South Korean intelligence officials told them to recount.<sup>95</sup>

Mr. Kristof evidently forgot or never learned that refugee reports of Communist repression proved to be accurate in virtually all cases over a long period of time. *The Aquariums of Pyongyang* (excerpted in this volume) certainly substantiates the claims of the North Korean defectors and suggests that the North Korean Gulag has been among the most inhumane.

It is possible that the limited Western attention paid to Communist atrocities and their victims may in part be explained by the fact that a large proportion of them did not die as a result of execution. On the other hand, as Tony Judt has pointed out, “These mass murders were not the accidental by-product of misguided policies but the outcome of willful, sometimes genocidal cal-

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culcation and intent. . . . Mass murder . . . was not an unintended consequence but part of the project from the start."<sup>96</sup>

It remains debatable what precise moral distinctions should be attached to the fact that in the Nazi extermination camps people died as a result of highly purposeful, mechanized ways of killing, whereas in the Soviet (and other Communist) systems most deaths resulted—over a far longer period of time—from the impossibility of surviving long sentences in the labor camps. It may well be argued that the deliberate, programmatic extermination of entire groups is more repugnant than a death toll attained in a less purposeful manner, for example, from harsh living conditions and forced labor. It is not easy to decide which was worse: years of starvation, ill health, and hard labor in the camps or prisons culminating in death, or a quick end in the gas chambers or in front of the firing squads.

It is hard to know—as far as the Communist camps were concerned—what carried more weight in the minds of those who designed them: the desire to provide a large pool of cheap labor for important construction projects or the intention to gradually eliminate perceived enemies. An early victim of Soviet repression believed that physical elimination was the goal:

I gathered from the candid statements of the Chekhists that the GPU has now no need to make a regular practice of mass shootings, because more humane measures—slow murder from starvation, work beyond the prisoner's strength, and "medical help"—are perfectly adequate substitutes.

As to rehabilitation:

The leaders of the Communist Party declare that the Northern Camps for Special Purposes are something in the nature of a reformatory. The punishments administered in these establishments, they would have the world to believe, are intended to make the prisoners mend their ways and become useful citizens.

...

In reality, the camp punishments, like the camp medical arrangements, are based upon no other calculation than that of sending the largest possible number of prisoners . . . to "the other side."<sup>97</sup>

V. T. Shalamov, a major chronicler and inmate of the Gulag (quoted by Roy Medvedev), wrote:

[I]t took twenty to thirty days to turn a healthy man into a wreck. Working in the camp mine sixteen hours a day, without any



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days off, with systematic starvation, ragged clothes, sleeping in a torn tent at sixty below zero, did the job. Beating by the foremen, by the ringleaders of the thieves, by the guards, speeded up the process.

While, according to Roy Medvedev, the mining camps were the most lethal, after 1937 “the corrective labor camps were turned into hard-labor camps, calculated not so much to correct as to destroy the prisoners. . . . [T]he regime of most Kolyma and northern camps was deliberately calculated to destroy people.”<sup>98</sup> Avraham Shifrin pointed out that some of the camps were “death camps,” in the sense that “prisoners, forced to work under dangerously unhealthy conditions . . . face virtually certain death.” They included uranium mines, uranium enrichment plants, and military nuclear plants, among others.<sup>99</sup>

All in all, the moral differences and similarities between Nazi and Soviet death camps may be summed up in the words of Irving Louis Horowitz:

[O]f the two systemic horrors of the century, the Communist regimes hold a measurable edge over fascist regimes in their life-taking propensities. . .

. . . those for whom the technology of death remains central may . . . prefer to think of the Nazis as worse offenders, whereas those for whom an elaborate prison system forever enshrined as the Gulag by Solzhenitsyn will see Communists as worse offenders.<sup>100</sup>

## **IV: Characteristics of Repression in Communist States**

### **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND IDEOLOGICAL ROOTS**

Communist systems existed in areas of diverse historical and cultural traditions inhabited by different ethnic groups. As time went by these systems became more differentiated in their policies, including the degree of repression they engaged in. Nonetheless, it is possible to make certain generalizations about them (see note 1) and the type of political repression they perpetuated.

These systems ranged in size and population from Albania to China, in longevity from the Soviet Union (seventy-four years) to Sandinista Nicaragua (ten years), in economic development and level of urbanization from Czechoslovakia and East Germany to Ethiopia and Angola. Most of these systems could also be described—at least in their origins—as “revolutionary.”<sup>101</sup> Of such systems it has been observed:



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What is strikingly similar about the twenty-two cases of contemporary revolutions . . . is not their structural origins, but the common values and shared behavior of their leaders. . . . [S]uccessful revolutionaries, once in control . . . proved to have had remarkably similar ideas about how to remake their societies. . . . The shared intellectual culture of contemporary revolutions centered on a commitment to “socialism.”<sup>102</sup>

Communist political violence ebbed and flowed, surged and diminished over time. There are identifiable high points (as for example the 1930s in the Soviet Union and the 1960s in China) and long periods of routine, less life-threatening policies of repression. But the common ideological foundations of Communist systems shaped their policies of repression, which centered on the crucial—theoretical as well as practical—distinction between supporters and opponents. As Igal Halfin wrote:

Far from dispensing with the division of human souls into good and evil, Communism endowed this tradition with the status of a thoroughly scientific observation. The Communist conceptual architectonics was full of black-and-white oppositions: proletariat versus bourgeoisie, revolution versus counterrevolution, progress versus reaction. . . .<sup>103</sup>

Another widely shared philosophical premise was that “the leaders of the Communist Party, unfettered by a ‘bourgeois’ legal code or a capricious judicial system, were fully entitled to punish enemies of the state. They were empowered to do so because of their privileged relationship to historical laws.”<sup>104</sup>

The common heritage of the Marxist-Leninist worldview also enabled the rulers and planners of repression to think in abstract, impersonal categories and overlook the specific, empirical consequences of their policies for particular groups and individuals. Simon Leys observed (in the Chinese context):

[T]he Communists always believed that mankind mattered more than man. In the eyes of the party leaders individual lives were merely a raw material in abundant supply—cheap, disposable and easily replaceable. Therefore . . . they came to consider that the exercise of terror was synonymous with the exercise of power.<sup>105</sup>

The political police forces (or “state security” organs) Communist states developed to perform these tasks were larger, more powerful, and more highly differentiated than regular police forces charged with ordinary crime control and prevention. They had similar organizational structures because the first Communist state, the Soviet Union, was the model for such forces and pro-

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vided assistance in establishing them. Police and military officers attended Soviet training schools; Soviet advisers assisted their East European counterparts in the preparation of the post–World War II show trials. The East German state security arm (the Stasi) came to play a prominent role in Third World Communist systems. As a former high-ranking Vietnamese Communist functionary wrote, “the state of our security forces owes a lot to the East German Stasi and the Soviet KGB. These two organizations trained our cadres in various specialized subjects and exchanged experience about methods of detection and investigation. . . . [T]he Cong [the Vietnamese political police] became just as overmanned as the armed forces.”<sup>106</sup>

All Communist penal systems made a sharp distinction between political and nonpolitical crimes and criminals. In every one of them the latter were treated better and were often given, informally, power over the political prisoners. The authorities considered political criminals a much greater threat than ordinary criminals, who were not accused of calling into question the nature of the system or of trying to undermine it. Sometimes those classified as political criminals were also accused of common, nonpolitical crimes, including, in the Soviet case, “hooliganism.” The purpose of such accusations was either to obscure the political origins of the persecution of particular individuals (especially if they were known in the West) or to complete their moral discreditation.

In at least four Communist states—the Soviet Union, Cuba, China, and Romania—those accused of political crimes were sometimes simultaneously classified as suffering from some mental illness and thus were detained in special psychiatric institutions. The most widely practiced and best known was the Soviet detention of outspoken dissidents in psychiatric hospitals,<sup>107</sup> but in China, too, according to recent reports, there is “a secretive system of psychiatric hospitals around the country that are affiliated with local public security bureaus [the Chinese political police]. . . .” In one instance, a Chinese dissident was held for seven years in such a hospital for unfurling a protest banner in Tiananmen Square in 1992.<sup>108</sup> Spurious attributions of mental illness in Communist systems are probably made for two reasons. One is to make the system appear more humane and less punitive; the other, more sinister and totalitarian in its implications, is the belief that questioning and criticizing the system *itself* amounted to a kind of mental disease.

It is among the remarkable paradoxes of history that Communist systems claimed the lives of vast numbers of their citizens in spite of the ideologically derived expectation that they would be far less repressive than both their historical predecessors and contemporary non-Communist societies. This expectation rested on the belief that Communist governments would enjoy unparalleled popular support and social legitimacy, that they would be veritable embodiments of consensus and harmony and therefore would have little need to

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resort to force in dealing with their citizens. As Engels wrote (and as Lenin quoted approvingly):

Society, thus far based upon class antagonism, had need of the state. . . for the purpose of forcibly keeping the exploited classes in the condition of oppression. . . . [But] when at last it [the state] becomes the real representative of the whole of society, it renders itself unnecessary. As soon as there is no longer any social class to be held in subjection . . . nothing more remains to be repressed, and a special force, the state is no longer necessary. The first act by virtue of which the state really constitutes itself the representative of the whole of society—the taking possession of the means of production in the name of society—this is at the same time, its last independent act as a state. State interference in social relations becomes, in one domain after another, superfluous and then withers away of itself. . . .<sup>109</sup>

This presumption of unfolding social harmony was at the heart of the optimistic assessments of the future of the state as an agency of coercion; the same presumption also served as the theoretical basis for establishing a one-party system that would be adequate to represent all interests in a society that had banished major divisions and conflicts. In more recent times, even in Communist Ethiopia, which rapidly embraced overt terror, “the Revolution began with a famous slogan and song: ‘Without blood, without blood. . . .’”<sup>110</sup>

Admittedly, the use of force was not expected to disappear at once but gradually—hence the expression, “the withering away of the state.” This anticipation was predicated on the elimination of social contradictions, “antagonisms” associated with the conflict-ridden, exploitative class societies of the past; in the new socialist system there was going to be little conflict requiring massive state regulation and little discontent to be repressed (and this applied not only to political conflicts but also to antisocial or criminal behavior, which was expected to disappear since its root causes, exploitation and inequality, were to be eliminated).

The remaining opponents of the new society were expected to be a mere handful—a notion rooted in Marx’s mistaken idea that a fundamental polarization of capitalist societies was destined to take place, leading to a huge increase in the size of the exploited masses and a decline in the number of the exploiters. After the revolution the few former exploiters that remained were to be annihilated as a class (though in practice, many of them were annihilated as individuals as well) and deprived of the means to cause trouble for the new government. In other words, the new system was supposed to rest on such overwhelming popular support that it would require little coercion to maintain itself. Lenin wrote:

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What class must the proletariat suppress? Naturally only [!] the exploiting class, i.e. the bourgeoisie. The toilers need a state only to suppress the resistance of the exploiters. . . . [Whereas] the exploiting classes need political rule in order to maintain exploitation . . . [t]he exploited classes need political rule in order completely to abolish all exploitation, i.e. in the interests of the vast majority of the people, and against the insignificant minority consisting of the modern slaveowners—the landlords and capitalists.

Lenin (before the October Revolution) was also exceedingly and unrealistically optimistic about the prospects for the elimination of bureaucracy (the mainstay of coercion and organized political violence in this century): “since the majority of the people *itself* suppresses its oppressors a ‘special force’ for suppression is *no longer necessary*.” He also wrote that

the suppression of the minority of exploiters by the majority of wage slaves of *yesterday* is comparatively so easy, simple and natural a task that it will entail far less bloodshed than the suppression of the risings of slaves, serfs or wage slaves and it will cost mankind far less. . . . The exploiters are naturally unable to suppress the people without a highly complex machine for performing this task: but the *people* can suppress the exploiters even with a very simple “machine,” almost without a machine, without a special apparatus. . . .<sup>111</sup>

These were extraordinarily groundless beliefs and anticipations, and Lenin himself rapidly abandoned them after his seizure of power. Thus, for example, in 1922 he demanded the arrest and execution of a “very large number” of residents of the small town of Shuya because they had opposed the confiscation of consecrated articles from local churches. Lenin wrote: “Now it is the time to teach these people such a lesson that for decades to come they will not dare to even think of such opposition.”<sup>112</sup>

Indeed, it quickly became apparent that none of the predictions cited above were correct: conditions in the Soviet Union (and in the other Communist states to emerge later) were far from conducive to the shrinking of bureaucracy and the restrained use of coercion by the party-state. On the contrary, Communist states created coercive agencies of unprecedented size and complexity, agencies that came to be charged not merely with tracking down and punishing those suspected of political unreliability (manifest, potential, or imaginary), but also with overseeing vast construction projects utilizing the labor of those arrested.

The major reason for these developments was that the popular support

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that had been anticipated quickly evaporated—or, arguably, never existed; the programs and policies of the Soviet Communist Party (and those of most other Communist states) did not elicit the wholehearted support of the majority. In fact, these policies—the collectivization of agriculture, for example—stimulated increasing opposition. At every step of the way people had to be pushed, prodded, and coerced along the path of rapid, state-controlled industrialization and political regimentation.

Secondly, Communist governments placed a high premium on total conformity, which could not be achieved by persuasion but only by intimidation. The political culture of the party was therefore one of intolerance and dogmatism; means were unflinchingly subordinated to ends that could not be questioned.

By the early 1930s the resistance to collectivization and the purges (in the USSR) called for a new justification of intensified repression already institutionalized, on a smaller scale, under Lenin. The new theory of political conflict promulgated by Stalin claimed that it was the very successes of socialism which called forth the vicious resistance of the enemy (sometimes called the cornered enemy). This resistance called for stern measures. Even if it was only the resistance of a minority, it remained, or could become, especially dangerous, and it sought to undermine the new system. Stalin said:

We must smash and throw out the rotten theory that with each forward movement we make, the class struggle will die down more and more, that in proportion to our successes the class enemy will become more and more domesticated.

This is not only a rotten theory but a dangerous theory, for it lulls our people to sleep, leads them into a trap and makes it possible for the class enemy to rally for the struggle against Soviet power.

On the contrary, the more we move forward, the more success we have, then the more wrathful become the remnants of the beaten exploiter classes. . . . [T]he more mischief they do the Soviet state, the more they grasp the most desperate means of struggle as the last resort of the doomed.<sup>113</sup>

This became the official theoretical justification of the waves of terror unleashed during the 1930s.

The isolation of the Soviet Union contributed to its besieged mentality: it was plausible to claim, as Soviet leaders repeatedly did, that internal enemies were conspiring with those abroad. “Conspiracies” were integral parts of the widely publicized show trials and essential for justifying the mass terror. Conspiracy themes were also incorporated into routine accusations against the anonymous victims of the terror. “Who recruited you?” was a standard ques-

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tion in countless interrogations. The “organs of the state security” (Cheka, NKVD, GPU, MVD, KGB, etc.) were in effect counter-conspiracies seeking to uncover and smash those of the enemy. In all this, there was an element of psychological projection: “totalitarian regimes see other regimes [and one may add, groups and individuals as well] as being as ruthless, duplicitous as themselves, and they act accordingly. . . .”<sup>114</sup>

It is important to note that although the repression inflicted by Communist states had not been anticipated in the theoretical blueprints, these policies nonetheless had idealistic roots: they were by-products of the urgent desire to reshape societies (and human beings) and to remove all obstacles from, and opposition to, this endeavor. As Solzhenitsyn wrote:

To do evil a human being must first of all believe that what he is doing is good. . . . The imagination and the spiritual strength of Shakespeare’s evildoers stopped short at a dozen corpses. Because they had no *ideology*.

Ideology—that is what gives evildoing its long-sought justification and gives the evildoer the necessary steadfastness and determination. That is the social theory which helps to make his acts seem good instead of bad in his own and other’s eyes. . . .

That is how the agents of the Inquisition fortified their wills: by invoking Christianity; the conquerors of foreign lands by extolling the grandeur of their Motherland; the colonizers by civilization, the Nazis, by race; and the Jacobins (early and late) by equality, brotherhood and the happiness of future generations.<sup>115</sup>

More recently, Alexander Yakovlev, former member of the highest Soviet political elite (in charge of ideology and propaganda under Gorbachev), has come to the conclusion that the roots of Soviet political violence could be discerned in the Marxist-Leninist ideological legacy and inspiration: “Fundamentally, the responsibility for the genocide . . . that took place in Russia and the entire Soviet Union rests on the ideology of Bolshevism.”<sup>116</sup> He does not believe that the mass killings could be ascribed to a siege mentality, the backwardness of Russia, or Stalin’s personality. He writes:

Marxists who sincerely believed that the revolution was the locomotive of history and violence was its midwife could no longer doubt the truth of Marxism once they had taken up arms. . . .

. . . [B]elief in the inevitability of the coming Communist world served to justify the numerous and senseless victims of the class struggle. . . .

The idea that one should not fear creating victims in the course of serving the cause of progress, that the revolutionary

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spirit of the proletarian masses must be preserved at any cost is very characteristic of Marx. . . .

Moral criteria are simply not appropriate under the conditions of a revolutionary coup d'état; they are "revoked" by the brutality and directness of class warfare. . . . This special "class" morality . . . leads to indulgence of any actions. . . . Its justification comes from the special vision of the historical path of development, its final goals for the full renaissance of humanity.

Yakovlev repeatedly stressed the idealistic underpinnings of Communist political violence:

Dostoevsky's Grand Inquisitor speaks of love for humanity. But complete contempt for an actual individual flows from this love.

...

. . . [A]ll of this was committed under the guise of concern about humankind, but with complete disregard for the specific individual. Terror is the way of remaking human material in the name of the future. . . .

Marx finally shed the discussion about humanity and love. . . . He no longer spoke of moral justice. . . . All this grew into the conviction that everything that corresponded to the interests of the revolution and communism was moral. That is the morality with which hostages were executed . . . concentration camps were built, and entire peoples forcibly relocated. . . .

Can everything be justified in the name of progress? And is it really progress? What gives one group of people the right to sentence to death civil society, or popular custom centuries in the making?<sup>17</sup>

Yakovlev's reflections reaffirm the distinctive feature of Communist political violence: its idealistic origin and intent—that is to say, in its origins, at any rate, it was violence with a higher purpose. By contrast, much historic violence, including recent outbreaks of ethnic hostility, have little or no idealistic justification. The Nazis, the Turks, the Hutus, the Serbs, and others (engaged respectively in slaughtering Jews, Armenians, Tutsis, and Albanians) had no interest in "remaking human material in the name of the future"—they just wished to get rid of those belonging to groups considered different, threatening, competing, or inferior, although sometimes even these types of violence were colored by the conviction that a better world would be created after the inferior or poisonous group was removed. But most intergroup (ethnic) violence is based on a visceral, taken-for-granted group hostility aggravated by



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competition for some important and scarce resource, usually land. In Rwanda, Bosnia, Kosovo, the Sudan, Cyprus, Sri Lanka, and Israel (and Palestine), groups have sought greater control over their lives while other groups have sought to prevent them from achieving this goal. Schemes for improving human nature, or a desire for major social transformation and utopian social arrangements, play a negligible part in these conflicts and massacres.

Communist political violence flowed from a utopian vision of the future, from the great goals pursued, and from the intolerance the service of these ideals inspired, as well as from an intense attachment to power. The means had to be subordinated to historically unparalleled ends that required extraordinary measures. In a nutshell, this is the part played by ideology or belief in the repression Communist states employed.

The future orientation of the revolutionaries and their successors helped to resolve or reduce the tension between ends and means: the Bolsheviks did not “consider the chance of attaining certain goals to be lessened by the . . . protracted and large-scale use of means which [were] . . . at extreme variance to them. . . .”<sup>118</sup> The accomplishments unfolding in the future were going to outweigh and cleanse the questionable means employed in their pursuit—this was the unshakeable conviction of generations of Communist leaders and revolutionaries in the Soviet Union and other Communist states. The committed revolutionary steeled himself in the face of the pain and suffering his policies caused. Lenin said that “there are no . . . serious battles without field hospitals near the battlefields. It is altogether unforgivable to permit oneself to be frightened or unnerved by field hospital scenes. If you are afraid of the wolves, don’t go into the forest.”<sup>119</sup> This was an attitude Edward Ochab, a Polish functionary, shared:

I became . . . a professional revolutionary. I read Lenin’s *What Is To Be Done* . . . where Lenin maintains that the socialist revolution needs “professional revolutionary” cadres . . . who would be prepared to spend months crawling along sewers and would be in charge . . . of organizing the masses. That was when I said to myself: that’s me.<sup>120</sup>

Self-discipline, mastery of personal feelings, and commitment to the cause made it possible to transcend reservations or revulsion about the means used. Again, as Leites put it:

The Bolshevik must eschew free-floating empathy. . . . Bolshevism shares the feeling expressed by a character in Dostoevsky’s *A Raw Youth*: “It doesn’t matter if one has to pass through filth to get there as long as the goal is magnificent. It will all be washed off, it will all be smoothed away afterward.”<sup>121</sup>

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Leites also wrote that “Bolshevik doctrine rejects the virtue of empathy with and pity for all human beings. . . . The awareness of distress of others would reduce one’s capacity to perform those acts which would ultimately abolish it.”<sup>122</sup> This might be called the surgeon’s view of pain; he must remain indifferent to the bodily sensations of the patient in order to heal him. Thus, in the political struggle, “instead of feeling guilty about the sufferings which one imposes on others . . . one attempts to feel self-righteous about directly and actively imposing suffering on others—for the sake of the future abolition of suffering.”<sup>123</sup>

Hence the political violence of Communist systems was instrumental rather than expressive or passionate, not the kind that would satisfy some personal instinct or impulse, although occasionally and illicitly it might have done so.<sup>124</sup>

The use of violent means was also made easier by perceiving them as both defensive and revolutionary. Trotsky wrote:

The man who repudiates terrorism in principle—i.e., repudiates measures of suppression and intimidation toward determined and armed counter-revolution, must reject all idea of political supremacy of the working class and its revolutionary dictatorship. The man who repudiates the dictatorship of the proletariat repudiates the Socialist revolution. . . .

Earlier, Trotsky pointed out that the dictatorship of the proletariat is a necessity because no agreement is possible with the bourgeoisie: “only force can be the deciding factor.”<sup>125</sup>

Leites grasped with great clarity the mentality required by impersonal, deliberate, ideologically motivated mass murder, the willingness to “dirty one’s hands.” Still, there remained, in all probability, a lingering awareness of the dissonance between ends and means.<sup>126</sup> This awareness helps to explain the secretiveness surrounding much of the political violence in most Communist systems, and probably the Nazi secretiveness as well.

The uninhibited use of political violence and coercion also followed from the paternalism of professional revolutionaries (subsequently transformed into functionaries) who believed that they were acting on behalf of, and in the interest of, the masses, while in fact they were sharply separated from them. The deep class cleavages in Russia (and in other similarly or even more backward Communist countries) bolstered this elitism.

Even Stalin’s extraordinary power-hunger and vindictiveness toward his real or imagined enemies is in part explained by his conviction that he was a chosen instrument of history, the executor of great and lofty goals bequeathed by both Marxist-Leninist theory and Russian history. Similar beliefs doubtless also motivated Mao, Castro, Kim Il Sung, Ho Chi Minh, and other Communist leaders. These convictions did not inspire restraint or attention to proper procedure.

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Despite the controversies that have surrounded it since the late 1960s, it is the theory of totalitarianism which best explains the principal characteristics of Communist political violence and coercion. The latter were inseparable from the unconstrained exercise of power, from the urge to dissolve distinctions between the public and private realm (by completely subordinating the latter to the former), and from the attempted politicization of every aspect of life. Because political meaning was attached to virtually everything citizens did, political crime and deviance became defined very broadly, leading to the mistreatment of vast numbers of people, most of whom had not the slightest interest in politics and were not inclined to question let alone endanger the power of the party-state.

Communist leaders were (at least in the beginning) inspired by ideas promising secular redemption; they possessed enormous concentrated power unchecked by any institutional arrangement, countervailing social force, or tradition.<sup>127</sup> At the same time, in all probability the personalities of the supreme leaders also played a part in the forms political violence took. Stalin, Mao,<sup>128</sup> Castro, Mengistu (of Ethiopia),<sup>129</sup> and Mathias Rakosi (of Hungary) were exceptionally ruthless, deceitful, and vindictive individuals who attached little value to individual human lives. They each had the proven capacity to turn on or betray their closest collaborators, friends (if any they could be said to have), or comrades in arms if they were suspected of the slightest disagreement or diminished loyalty.

### SCOPE AND SCALE

Possibly the most distinctive characteristic of Communist political repression was its vast scope. Tens of millions of people were affected; thousands of penal establishments were created.<sup>130</sup> The large numbers of the imprisoned resulted from the systems' preventative or prophylactic intent, from the notion of "objective crime," and from the assumption that "prisoners were guilty of something because they had been accused, and subhuman because they had been arrested."<sup>131</sup>

The authorities typically sought to identify certain attributes of various groups that were supposed to be conducive to political misbehavior as defined by the rulers.<sup>132</sup> Repressive measures were aimed not merely at those who were actually opposed to the system and did something to show this opposition, but more often at all those "guilty" of the *potential* for opposition, that is, of "objective crimes."<sup>133</sup> In Cambodia "the hunt for internal enemies" rested on the belief that "[i]nsidious 'bourgeois' ideas, preferences and attitudes were . . . buried in everybody's consciousness." A former associate of Pol Pot recalled: "[Pol Pot] saw enemies as rotten flesh, as swollen flesh. Enemies surrounding. Enemies in front, enemies behind, enemies to the north . . . to the south . . . to the west . . . to the east . . . enemies coming from all nine directions, closing in, leaving no space for breath."<sup>134</sup>

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The official belief that huge numbers were susceptible to some questionable political disposition prompted, in the Soviet Union during the “Great Terror,” the organs of repression to establish quotas to be met, that is to say, certain numbers of people to be arrested.<sup>135</sup>

The Marxist-Leninist background of the leaders and designers of the Communist system of repression greatly contributed to its vast sweep: these were individuals used to thinking in large, impersonal social and political categories; individual behavior and guilt was irrelevant once the person was classified as belonging to a class or group of people designated as actually or potentially hostile to the system.

A witness to the implementation of these policies, Jerzy Glikzman, wrote:

The arm of the Soviet punitive apparatus endeavors to reach not only all real offenders but also the probable and doubtful ones, and even—as a measure of social prophylaxis—the potential ones. . . .

In order to avoid risks attendant on exonerating dubious cases they adopted . . . the system of elimination of all potential deviators. . . . The definition of a “socially dangerous act” is very broad. . . . The articles of the code devoted to “counter-revolutionary” crimes are formulated in an especially comprehensive way so as to include . . . even actions tending toward “weakening” of the power of the government (Article 58).<sup>136</sup>

These systems sought merely not to restrain or annihilate their actual enemies but to destroy even the potential for resistance and dissent. The founder of the Soviet political police, Felix Dzerzhinsky, expressed this idea succinctly and explicitly: “We are terrorizing the enemies of the Soviet government so as to suppress crime in embryo.”<sup>137</sup> Political attitudes were inferred from socioeconomic and sometimes ethnic characteristics, as well as from kinship ties and social connections, rather than from behavior or utterances of opinion.

In the Soviet Union, “arrestworthy categories” included former members of the party, old Bolsheviks, former political convicts (under the Tsar), army officers, transport workers, technicians, various industrial or agricultural specialists, and people with ties to foreigners.<sup>138</sup> Potential enemies, or those deemed “socially dangerous,” were also described as “anyone whose social group contained the prefix ‘ex-’ . . . ex-kulaks, ex-criminals, ex-tsarist civil servants, ex-members of the Menshevik Part, ex-Socialist Revolutionaries, and so on.”<sup>139</sup> In the same period, “anyone who had any contacts outside the country . . . who owned a radio transmitter, collected stamps or spoke Esperanto stood a very good chance of being accused of espionage.”<sup>140</sup> Grounds for prosecution were also based on categories such as “anti-Soviet element, active member of the Church, member of a religious sect, rebel—anyone who in the past was in any

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way involved in anti-Soviet uprisings, anyone with contacts abroad."<sup>141</sup> At the construction sites of the Danube–Black Sea Canal in Romania there were “prisoners from every walk of life: members of the professional classes rubbed shoulders with dispossessed farmers, Orthodox priests with Zionist leaders, Yugoslavs from the Banat with Saxons from Transylvania. . . .”<sup>142</sup>

Collective responsibility was vastly expanded. *Pravda*, the official newspaper of the Soviet Communist Party, wrote in 1934:

Individual members of his family are also responsible for the acts of traitors. In the case of escape or flight across the border of a person in military service, all mature members of his family, if they are implicated in aiding the criminal, or knew of his intentions and did not report them to the authorities, the punishment is imprisonment from five to ten years with confiscation of all their property.

The other members of the family of the traitor and all his dependents at the time he committed treason are subject to disfranchisement and exile to some remote regions in Siberia for five years. . . . One cannot be a neutral observer where the interests of the country or the workers and peasants are concerned. This is a terrible crime: this is complicity in the crime.<sup>143</sup>

Half a century later in Communist Vietnam similar principles prevailed: the “main basis for deporting people to the camps was the set of administrative categories. . . . Anyone who fell into the wrong categories—in effect, anyone the Communists feared or suspected, however groundlessly—was ipso facto classified as deportable.”<sup>144</sup> More peculiarly, the Vietnamese authorities suspected those who wore glasses: “determining who was an enemy . . . was often so arbitrary that simply by wearing glasses one could be persecuted as an intellectual or a ‘bourgeois elitist.’”<sup>145</sup> The persecution (on similar grounds) of those who wore glasses in Cambodia under Pol Pot was more widespread and better known.<sup>146</sup>

In Communist China, “Mao’s enemy list expanded from ‘landlords, buroaucratic-capitalists and imperialist agents’ in the 1920s to ‘(former) landlords, rich peasants, reactionaries, bad characters, rightists,’ in the 1950s, and again to ‘(former) landlords, rich peasants, reactionaries, bad characters, rightists, traitors, enemy agents and capitalist-roaders’ during the Cultural Revolution.”<sup>147</sup>

The 1957 decision establishing Chinese labor reeducation camps (as distinct from the already existing labor reform camps) specified in equally broad terms the characteristics of the inmates, as for example “those who do not engage in proper employment . . . [and] behave like hooligans . . .,” “counter-revolutionaries and antisocialist reactionaries . . . people who interfere with

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public order. . . who. . . do not obey work assignment . . . who . . . make trouble and interfere with public order. . . ”<sup>148</sup> In Cambodia,

the Khmer Rouge began to murder all those who fit into certain social and political categories.

. . . Those who were regarded as corrupted by their education, class or employment—civil servants, doctors, lawyers, soldiers and teachers were identified and eliminated. . . . The killing of soldiers’ wives and children is also alleged to have occurred frequently. A Khmer Rouge slogan advanced the maxim that “Their line must be annihilated down to the last survivor.”<sup>149</sup>

Moreover, “for the Khmer Rouge, as for the Chinese Communists, some social groups were criminal by nature, and this criminality was seen as transmittable from husband to wife, as well as an inherited trait.” It was estimated by a student of the Cambodian genocide that 82 percent of the officers in the former army, 51 percent of all “intellectuals” (a term rather broadly used by the Khmer Rouge), and 41 percent of all residents of Phnom Penh perished.<sup>150</sup>

In North Korea, “immediate family members as well as distant relatives are also punished as political criminals because they are considered guilty by association.”<sup>151</sup> Somewhat unusually, in North Korea the handicapped too have suffered discrimination and social exclusion, have not been allowed to live in the capital and have been exiled to various remote locations.<sup>152</sup> In Pol Pot’s Cambodia, “people with handicaps were simply treated as shirkers and executed.”<sup>153</sup>

These broad definitions of political enemies and the policies based upon such definitions were rooted in the mentality of Communist leaders and the political culture they created. This outlook can be traced to the conspiratorial tradition of the founders of the Soviet Union, which exaggerated the power and malevolence of political adversaries; those who used to conspire against the Tsarist government could not help continuing to conspire against those whom they designated as *their enemies* after they seized power. But unlike the Nazis, who were obsessed with the conspiracy of a particular group (the Jews), Communist leaders were prepared to feel mortally threatened by a wide and changing constellation of enemies whose only common feature was a projected potential for nonconformity or resistance. These attitudes were not confined to the Soviet leaders and functionaries.

Communist policies of repression further rested upon an exceptionally intense attachment to power and apprehension about the possibility of losing it. In the Soviet case, the civil war (in the early 1920s) and subsequent isolation from the rest of the world made these attitudes more plausible: in contrast to the early expectations of Lenin and Trotsky, the October Revolution failed to

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spark uprisings in the West, and consequently the hoped-for Western influences on—and help for—the Russian revolution didn't materialize.<sup>154</sup>

Trotsky (following his break with Stalin) associated the repressiveness of the Soviet system with its progressive bureaucratization. The latter, at least in part, was a response to material scarcities. He wrote:

When there is enough goods in a store, the purchasers can come whenever they want to. When there is little goods, the purchasers are compelled to stand in line. When the lines are very long, it is necessary to appoint a policeman to keep order. Such is the starting point of the power of the Soviet bureaucracy.

More generally Trotsky regarded the rise of bureaucracy as a reflection of “sharp antagonisms” that had to be regulated and repressed. He also observed, “Bureaucracy and social harmony are inversely proportional to each other.”<sup>155</sup>

Other Communist states, too, had similar historical experiences of isolation and civil war, notably China and Cambodia. The Cuban regime, emerging from a guerilla war, also had reason to feel threatened by the United States and has led a partially isolated existence. The isolation of North Korea and North Vietnam was largely self-imposed. (During the 1980s and 1990s, Vietnam, like China, opened up economically.)

The Communist regimes in Eastern Europe were well protected by the Soviet armed forces from any external or internal threat until the late 1980s.<sup>156</sup> The conspiratorial view of the world they entertained was part of a political culture that had been transplanted from the Soviet Union. Because of their manifest dependence on Soviet forces, East European Communist leaders were especially aware of their shaky legitimacy.

Arguably, the insecure and therefore all the more intense attachment to power of the Communist rulers was rooted in the fundamental illegitimacy of their systems—these rulers knew or sensed that their power was not the result of popular mandate (except perhaps initially in Cuba and China), and they never considered submitting their rule to electoral endorsement or legitimization.

The famines that several Communist states experienced (notably the Soviet Union, China, and Ethiopia) added millions to their victims. These events were largely results of government policy, not “acts of God.” In parts of the Soviet Union food supplies were deliberately withheld from the peasants, or else they were not allowed to move to areas better supplied.<sup>157</sup> According to Alexander Orlov, a former high ranking NKVD official, “this terrible disaster was caused not by uncontrollable elements of nature, but by the stupidity and willfulness of a dictator unable to foresee the consequences of his actions and indifferent to human suffering.”<sup>158</sup>

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In Ethiopia, the forcible resettlement of peasants associated with collectivization directly contributed to the onset of famine, insofar as, as in the Soviet Union, these collective farms were highly unproductive and inefficient. These measures were not *intended* to kill but nonetheless caused the death of millions. Neither the Ethiopian regime, nor the Soviet, nor the Chinese, was concerned with the human costs of these policies.<sup>159</sup>

In China, the huge famine of the late 1950s resulted from the bizarre policy of pressuring peasants to collect and melt scrap metal at the expense of performing agricultural work; this was intended to be a part of “the Great Leap Forward.” Instances of cannibalism were unique by-products of that famine (this recurred later during the Cultural Revolution).<sup>160</sup>

The scope and scale of repression in Communist states were also related to these states’ widespread reliance on denunciation, or on the use of informers to ferret out disloyalty. Communist systems encouraged their citizens to inform on one another and to place loyalty to the party-state above loyalty to family or friends. In China, denunciation boxes on the street (complete with forms) were available to make denunciation convenient.<sup>161</sup> In Cuba, denunciation was made easier

by providing a special form which can be filled out by CDR [Committee for the Defense of the Revolution] activists. . . . On one side, the form records the opinion that a person may have expressed on a political subject. On the other side, it records such data as the person’s age and profession; where the opinion was expressed; whether the person is considered a revolutionary, disaffected, or this is unknown; whether the listeners approved, disapproved, were indifferent and so forth.<sup>162</sup>

The Committees for the Defense of the Revolution (CDR) in Cuba were “an all-purpose institution for repression” that shouldered the task of informing on fellow citizens and was concerned with every aspect of their lives: work, housing, immigration, applications to university and trade school, and all other matters in which the observation of citizens’ political reliability played an important part.<sup>163</sup> Similar tasks were performed in China by the neighborhood, street, and district committees.<sup>164</sup> In Cambodia, “all that was required for an arrest was a total of three denunciations as a ‘CIA Agent.’ . . .”<sup>165</sup>

In the Soviet Union, twelve-year-old Pavel Morozov, who informed on his own family, was made into a role model and national hero. In East Germany (a country of seventeen million), the Stasi created an exceptionally large network of full- and part-time informers (95,000 full-time and 160,000 part-time, according to one source). The Gestapo, supervising a nation of over sixty million, had half as many full-time agents.<sup>166</sup>





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Communist states made wide use of informers for several reasons. One was to maximize information about dissent or political deviance; political systems on the lookout for conspiracies needed conspiratorial methods to counter them. Secondly, the knowledge that informers might lurk everywhere had a powerful, intimidating impact on the population; it was part of the system of social control. The widespread presence of informers discouraged people from sharing criticism of or expressing their dissatisfaction with the authorities, which in turn increased the stability of these systems. Thirdly, all those providing this type of information (even on a part-time basis) became implicated in the system; this was a form of political participation totalitarian systems appreciated.

The collection of such information by ordinary citizens was a form of civic duty that also helped to establish their own political credentials and prove their loyalty, especially during periods of terror, when anybody could be accused of disloyalty.

Given the belief in the ubiquitousness of the enemy and the readiness to define every accident as sabotage, it was official policy not to ignore or dismiss denunciations, however outlandish or implausible. This, too, swelled the numbers who became accused of and punished for political crimes they did not commit. Reliance on denunciation was particularly helpful when the political police had quotas of arrest to fulfill, as in the Soviet Union during the 1930s.

### **CONTROL OVER POPULATION MOVEMENTS**

Tight control of population movements both within the country and especially across international borders was a key characteristic of Communist states. These controls took various forms. The internal passport was one major device; it had to be carried by every adult and shown to the police on request. It contained information about one's residence. To change one's residence required registering with the police. Certain areas were off limits: border areas, capitals, those with military installations. In China under Mao, food rations were tied to residence and were not available if people moved without official permission.

Regular passports for travel abroad were not generally available and were issued only under exceptional circumstances; following a trip abroad, these passports usually had to be surrendered. Ordinary citizens could not aspire to take trips to non-Communist countries, although such policies changed over time in some of the countries here discussed. More typically, delegations or groups made such trips, and the members of these groups were carefully screened and supervised by police agents or informants. In Eastern Europe in the 1970s and '80s, it became easier to visit neighboring countries that also belonged to the "Socialist Commonwealth." Since the 1980s, travel from China to Western countries has also become much easier.

Control over population movements was accomplished not only by admin-

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istrative measures regulating and minimizing legal travel; unauthorized border crossings were prevented by what came to be known in Europe as the Iron Curtain, the complex of obstacles (including mine fields), fortifications, and observation posts that was created along much of the boundary of the Soviet empire, including the East European countries under Soviet control.<sup>167</sup> Best known of these installations was the Berlin Wall. These countries also maintained large, special border-police forces.

The forcible removal and resettlement of populations was another method by which Communist states asserted and consolidated their rule: ethnic groups or those judged unreliable on the basis of class and political criteria were often resettled or exiled en masse, in both Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, to more inaccessible areas that they were not allowed to leave.<sup>168</sup> Exile often followed release from jail or labor camp. In Cambodia, entire cities were emptied and their inhabitants moved to the countryside in an effort to remold urban populations by immersing them in rural life and agricultural labor. In China during the Cultural Revolution, millions of urban residents, white-collar workers, students, and party officials judged to be in need of political character reform were sent to villages to learn from the peasants and to become better socialist citizens by performing manual labor. In Ethiopia, resettlement was associated with the collectivization of agriculture, but it also served to extend the authorities' political control. Cuba, while at times permitting large numbers of its citizens to depart legally and occasionally exiling prominent dissidents, also has maintained tight controls, which has led to the recurring attempts of refugees to reach the United States on the most rudimentary flotation devices. Most remarkably, in 1969 one Cuban escaped by hiding in the landing gear of a plane that flew to Spain.<sup>169</sup>

Communist policies to prevent, minimize, and carefully regulate movements across international boundaries were prompted by several motives. The most important, in all probability, was the fear of symbolic ideological repudiation: to have citizens leave what were supposed to be the historically most advanced and just societies was intolerable and inadmissible for those in power. Just as people were not allowed to choose among competing political parties in elections, they were not allowed "to vote with their feet" either. Those who managed to escape or were exiled were subjected to extensive vilification. Defectors from the Soviet Union were sometimes kidnapped from abroad or assassinated.<sup>170</sup>

The second reason for investing vast human and material resources in order to prevent escape was that not only would escape discredit the system at home, but abroad as well, since the escapees often made public the sources of their unhappiness with the system and the conditions they had left behind. The dramatic and dangerous circumstances under which some of the escapes took place reflected the despair these regimes generated.<sup>171</sup> The numbers involved were substantial, running into the millions.<sup>172</sup>

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Thirdly, these regimes sought to prevent the loss of productive and highly skilled strata of the population.<sup>173</sup> Such a drain was most pronounced in the case of East Germany and was ended with the building of the Berlin Wall in 1961 and other fortifications erected along the border with West Germany.

At last, these regimes, which drastically curtailed or eliminated personal and group freedoms, could not afford to allow the freedom of movement to survive. The freedom to leave one's country represents a fundamental freedom of choice, and its availability or unavailability has great bearing on the citizen's attitude toward the political system under which he lives. Adjustment and acceptance of the status quo are more readily forthcoming when all alternatives, including departure, have been foreclosed.

All Communist states considered illegal border crossing, or its attempt, a serious crime. In the Soviet Union it was classified as treason. "Flight abroad or refusal to return from abroad to the USSR" was listed, alongside treason and espionage, as an "especially dangerous crime against the state."<sup>174</sup>

Border controls (and the associated restrictions on internal travel and legal emigration) were an integral part of the system of political control and are arguably a key characteristic of all totalitarian regimes, Communist and otherwise. "Closed societies" must not only literally close themselves off from subversive influences from abroad, but must also deny their people the most subversive alternative of removing themselves from the society altogether.

### THE ENEMY: DEHUMANIZATION AND DEMONIZATION

In the twentieth century politically motivated mass murders came to require elaborate explanation and justification; contemporary sensibilities, perhaps even moral progress of a sort, demand that a good case be made for large-scale extermination: "in order to perform genocide the perpetrator has always had to first organize a campaign that redefined the victim group as worthless, outside the web of human obligations, a threat to other people, immoral sinners and/or subhuman."<sup>175</sup> Such dehumanization in our time has been readily embraced by a variety of different political ideologies, movements, and systems.

In Communist states the preoccupation with the enemy had a second source. Given the commitment to create a "new man," the superior socialist human being, the eradication of his opposite—the enemy—was a step all the more logical and urgent. There was a compelling reciprocal relationship between creating the new man and destroying the old.

An obsessive preoccupation with the enemy—especially an internal or domestic one—characterizes all totalitarian systems. Tzvetan Todorov observed: "Totalitarian doctrines always divide humanity into two groups of unequal worth. . . . [U]nder them all men do not have the same rights. . . . A class enemy in one case, a race enemy in the other . . . against whom a war of extermination is justified."<sup>176</sup>

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Communist systems were not content with punishing and exterminating their perceived enemies; campaigns of repression were preceded and accompanied by lengthy campaigns of dehumanization and demonization performed by the propaganda apparatus. These campaigns were embedded in official ideology. Eduard Shevardnadze wrote: "Tanks and machine guns may only be employed as arguments within the appropriate ideological frame. . . . [T]he executioner has always been preceded by the inquisitor, the axe and block foreshadowed by the dogmas of faith."<sup>177</sup>

These campaigns took two major forms. One required that some individuals of political importance be singled out and subjected to intensive public denunciation, usually in conjunction with their arrest, trial, and sentencing, as in the case of the defendants in the Moscow Trials of the 1930s. Secondly, more general propaganda campaigns were directed at "the enemy" identified not as specific individuals but as certain social-political groups—e.g., "kulaks," Trotskyites, Titoists, or "capitalist-roaders." These campaigns were coupled with demands on the population to be vigilant, that is to say, to be ready to denounce, unmask, and expose the enemy.

In China, during the early years of the regime as well as during the Cultural Revolution, denunciation and mistreatment of the enemy were often compressed: landowners were simultaneously denounced, tried, and executed in proceedings that took place before mass audiences. During the Cultural Revolution, similar techniques were used with an even stronger emphasis on various forms of public humiliation, followed by punishment.

Central to these efforts was the mythic image of the enemy, the incarnation of unmitigated political evil. Virtually any individual or group could be placed into this category, depending on the historical-political circumstances and their interpretation by the leaders in power.

Both political propaganda and the arts, regimented under the auspices of "socialist realism," were used to acquaint the population with the character and types of the enemy and to dehumanize him.<sup>178</sup> Implicit in these portrayals was the justification and demand for merciless punishment. In an early Soviet novel of Ilia Ehrenburg, the so-called positive hero "signed these things [death sentences] many times and with confidence. It was simple: he weeded the gigantic garden, pulling out various weeds."<sup>179</sup> In Communist Hungary, a critic of an aspiring socialist-realist novel complained that "the characters whose role was to personify the Tito regime, although contemptible, are not sufficiently hateful. . . ." Another critic, the cultural commissar of the period, Joseph Revai (also known as the Hungarian Zhdanov), criticized the novelist Tibor Dery because he "does not unmask the enemy, he discovers some positive human traits even in the unequivocally negative characters."<sup>180</sup>

During the 1930s Moscow Trials, the prosecutors provided authoritative specifications and elaborations of the traits of the enemy. These statements became the model for corresponding prosecutorial disquisitions in Eastern Eu-

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rope after World War II and inspired the propaganda apparatuses in these countries in their politically correct portrayals of the enemy.

The speeches of the most notorious Soviet prosecutor exude and exemplify the dehumanizing and demonizing intent of this strategy. Thus spoke Andrei Vyshinski in 1938 at the trial of what was called “The Anti-Soviet Trotskyite Center”:

With every day and every hour that passed, as the Court investigation . . . proceeded, it brought to light ever more of the horrors of the chain of shameful, unparalleled, monstrous crimes committed by the accused . . . heinous deeds before which the base deeds of the most inveterate, vile, unbridled and despicable criminals fade. . . . [W]hat trial . . . can compare with the present trial in the monstrosity, brazenness and cynicism of the crimes committed by these gentlemen? . . .

It is a gang of bandits, robbers, forgers, diversionists, spies and murderers in the literal sense of the word! . . . These people have lost all shame. . . .

. . . [They] conspired to commit the blackest treason . . . sold their native land for thirty pieces of silver. . . . these Trotskyite Judases. . . . Nobody has mastered the art of cynical double-dealing to such a degree as they have. . . . [T]hese [are] the most unprincipled and degraded people. . . .<sup>181</sup>

Not accidentally, the prosecutor’s presentation closely paralleled the corresponding characterization of the accused found in the iconic *History of the Communist (Bolshevik) Party of the Soviet Union*, which referred to the defendants as “the monsters of the Bucharinite-Trotskyite Gang” and also described them as “crawling, sneaking snakes . . . a more dangerous enemy, more to be hated than any before.”<sup>182</sup> The imagery was further developed by Vyshinski, who commented on the “reptile cold-bloodedness” and the “brutal claws and ferocious fangs” of the defendants.<sup>183</sup>

Bukharin, who fell victim to the purveyors of these images, was a product of the same political culture. He declared “after the execution of his old party comrades Zinoviev and Kamanev . . . ‘I am so happy that they have been shot like dogs.’”<sup>184</sup> Needless to say, this remark preceded his own arrest and trial.

A Hungarian journalist covering the trial of Laszlo Rajk and his “accomplices” (the Hungarian equivalent of the Moscow Trials) wrote in the official newspaper of the Hungarian Communist Party:

Is there any word which can capture the nature of the monsters who wanted to enslave us anew? Is there such a hatred that could make them feel even a . . . fraction of the . . . torture, suffering,



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misery and death they prepared once more for the people. . . . Never before has the fist of the people struck upon more detestable vermin. . . . [I]t is painful to breathe the same air with them—but it will not last much longer.<sup>185</sup>

Another Hungarian writer urged his fellow writers to “portray the monster [Rajk] so that future generations can also feel revulsion.” His own contribution to the enlightenment of these generations included the following:

Slowly it becomes clear that we are not facing here a human being, neither an animal—whose instinct is straightforward—but a third type of creature, the enemy of the working-class, the agent of the bourgeoisie . . . a product of the imperialist-capitalist system . . . the vilest creature that ever existed.<sup>186</sup>

Pol Pot, for his part, compared his enemies to “microbes” that had infiltrated the body of the party and had to be eradicated.<sup>187</sup>

These characterizations of the “enemy” conform precisely to Aldous Huxley’s definition of dehumanizing propaganda: “All propaganda directed against an opposing group has but one aim: to substitute diabolical abstractions for concrete persons. The propagandist’s purpose is to make one set of people to forget that certain other sets of people are human.”<sup>188</sup>

Political expediency and hate-mongering were not the sole reasons for these vilifications. The political culture and ideological traditions of Communist states supported an apocalyptic, irrational image of the enemy that was genuinely threatening, not unlike the Nazi conviction that the Jews were an incipient, mortal threat. Although Marxism-Leninism rejects the role of accident in history and human suffering, despite its historical-economic determinism it dwells on and stresses the culpability and malevolence of particular groups (classes) and individuals. Whenever Communist systems and their rulers felt threatened—and they often did—their aggressiveness intensified:

[I]t is not rational cost-benefit analysis, but emotional impulse . . . that precipitates aggression. . . . The sense of moral virtue, with which all these regimes are imbued, especially in their early decades in power, gives psychological comfort to, and reinforces the emotional impulses of the regime leaders.<sup>189</sup>

Even conflicts between Communist states, such as Cambodia and Vietnam,

were considered by the participants not as reasonable disagreements of interest between states led by political comrades, but Manichean life-and-death struggles against “international re-

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actionaries” and “agents of imperialism.” . . . Marxist-Leninist regimes seem to share a view of conflict in history not as the outcome of “impersonal historical forces” as Marx would have it, but rather as the outcome of deliberate conspiracy. . . .<sup>190</sup>

Also of interest here (especially in light of the similarity with Nazi notions of the enemy) is that “references to cleanliness and purification dominated Khmer Rouge rhetoric . . . [and] the belief in internal conspiracies . . . drove the Cambodian holocaust.”<sup>191</sup> The same applies to the Soviet waves of arrest and mass murder in the 1930s and to aspects of the Chinese Cultural Revolution.

In most Communist regimes, and especially Cambodia, China, and the Soviet Union under Stalin, the failure of economic policies intensified irrational, conspiratorial scapegoating and punitiveness. In these societies the enemy was always said to be responsible for such difficulties; the enemy’s role was almost invariably hidden and disguised and had therefore to be unmasked and ferreted out—and it was all the more to be hated for representing a hidden menace.

In Pol Pot’s Cambodia, hatred of the mythical enemy was incorporated into the Khmer Rouge anthem:

Bright red Blood which covers towns and plains  
Of Kampuchea, our Motherland,  
Sublime Blood of workers and peasants,  
Sublime Blood of revolutionary men and women fighters!  
The Blood changing into unrelenting hatred.<sup>192</sup>

The confluence of ideology and paranoia—and the associated preoccupation with control, domination, and demonized images of the enemy—are among the distinctive attributes of political violence in Communist states.

### **PUBLICITY AND SECRECY**

Communist states sought to balance publicity and secrecy in their policies of repression. Publicized repression was useful for intimidation and to impress on citizens the power of the party-state; secretiveness, on the other hand, made the exercise of unchecked power smoother and lent a certain unpredictability to repression that also helped to terrorize the populace. Furthermore, secretiveness was part of a conspiratorial political culture in which all major political decisions were made in private. Information was knowledge; depriving people of information was an exercise of power; it was dangerous to allow the enemy to know of one’s plans.

The secretiveness surrounding the treatment of political prisoners was part of a broader political pattern that included the vast expansion of official secrets in Communist countries. There was a prohibition against taking photo-

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graphs not only of military installations but of industrial ones as well: bridges, railroad stations, radio towers, etc. Recruits in the Soviet army were not supposed to tell their families where they were garrisoned or what food they ate, let alone any aspect of their training. (Presumably, similar policies prevailed in other Communist armies.) Information or data about industrial or agricultural production were official secrets, too. Secretiveness was linked to the concept and attitude of “vigilance” that party members and all good citizens were to display in guarding the secrets. Mikhail Heller, a Soviet émigré historian, wrote:

Everything in the Soviet Union is secret, from the plans of arms factories to the personal lives of Party leaders, from the size of the army or the number of people in prison to last year's *Pravda* and books by Solzhenitsyn. A permit is needed to enter all institutions and a special pass is needed for access to library books in the “closed fund.” . . . Party members are brought together at closed Party meetings and the Central Committee informs the rank and file members . . . of the Party's activity in sealed letters. . . .<sup>193</sup>

The amount and kind of publicity given to the punishment of the enemy varied among different Communist states. In the Soviet Union the punishment of prominent political criminals was given much publicity, as in the show trials of the 1930s, but ordinary trials (or quasi-judicial procedures leading to sentencing) in the vast majority of cases were held in secret: no relatives, no press, no defense attorneys, and no publicity was permitted. Millions of anonymous victims were dispatched secretly in these proceedings to camps or the prison cellars or secluded forest clearings used for mass shootings (as in the famous case of the Polish officers killed in the Katyn Forest in April 1940). Large numbers of mass graves in such locations have been found since the collapse of the Soviet Union.<sup>194</sup> There were no public executions in the Soviet Union, except during the civil war.

Nocturnal arrests were typical in the USSR and in the East European Communist states. These were designed not solely for secrecy but also to demoralize those arrested: to be awakened in the middle of the night to face a house search and arrest left victims helpless and bewildered. Those arrested were usually transported in unmarked cars, while more numerous prisoners were put in trucks that gave no hint of their function; sometimes they were disguised as delivery vans with the labels “bread” or “meat.” One prisoner reported being transported in a van that bore on its side the advertisement “drink Soviet champagne,” with a picture of the bottle. In Afghanistan during the Soviet occupation, the corpses of political prisoners were sometimes put in “trucks . . . painted with flowers or pictures of children so the villagers would not know what was in them. . . .”<sup>195</sup>



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By contrast, in China during the Cultural Revolution and during the first years of solidifying Communist rule public executions and humiliations were common,<sup>196</sup> especially when the countryside was cleansed of “class enemies,” mostly landlords. These executions by shooting were preceded by public trials that included few judicial niceties. In later years, victims were drawn from a wider cross-section of the population. During the Cultural Revolution those with higher education were singled out.

In Ethiopia during its own “Red Terror” in 1978, “bullet ridden bodies were left in the streets [of Addis Ababa, the capital] or publicly exhibited to . . . intimidate rival factions.”<sup>197</sup> In Cuba in the early days of the Castro regime, public trials were held “in a carnival-like atmosphere.”<sup>198</sup>

Much of the Communist political violence was didactic and therefore in tension with the requirements of secrecy. Punishment for political misbehavior had to be publicized in order to deter and to demonstrate the power of the authorities (especially in exacting false confessions) and to teach the public particular political-ideological lessons. For example, it was alleged that the old Bolsheviks (in the Soviet Union) camouflaged themselves as party loyalists, while in fact they were agents of hostile powers from the beginning of their political careers; Trotskyism supposedly led to conspiring against the system and to alliances with the USSR’s foreign enemies; the nationalistic deviation of Tito culminated in cooperation with the CIA or the Vatican; Rajk and Slansky (the major Hungarian and Czech victims of the show trials respectively) were Tito’s lackeys; and so on.

The public trial and sentencing of the designated enemies of the state and party provided an important opportunity for clarifying for the masses which crimes or types of political deviance deserved severe retribution; these occasions also helped to inform the population about the personal and social characteristics of the “enemy.”

The pursuit of secrecy, as well as other considerations discussed below, often led to locating places of detention and especially forced labor in remote, inaccessible areas. Many of these locations were generally unknown until de-Stalinization in the USSR and corresponding changes in other Communist states. Relatives rarely got permission to visit. It was easier to find such remote areas in the former Soviet Union and China than in more densely populated Eastern Europe or Cuba; the latter sited one of its major penal colonies on an island called Isle of Youth.<sup>199</sup> In the Soviet Union, camps were primarily located in Siberia, in or near the Arctic Circle, and the Soviet Far East.<sup>200</sup> Chinese camps too were located in remote and inhospitable areas such as “the semi-desert zones of northern Manchuria, Inner Mongolia, Tibet, Xinjiang, and above all Qinghai, which was a genuine penal province, the Chinese equivalent of the Russian Kolyma, with a climate that was scorching in the summer and freezing in the winter.”<sup>201</sup>

Security was another consideration dictating these locations; it was diffi-

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cult if not altogether impossible to escape from these camps, to survive and reach human settlements. The location of these camps was also determined by the economic purposes they served, such as opening up distant areas where free labor was scarce and difficult to attract. In these areas inmates cut timber and built roads, canals, hydroelectric plants, and assorted industrial plants; they also mined coal, uranium, and precious metals.

The relationship between secretiveness and the desire to intimidate remained somewhat problematic. Unless people knew how their fellow citizens were treated and mistreated they could not be properly intimidated. In most Communist states the specifics were kept secret but the general outlines of the systems of repression were easy to grasp: individuals were arrested in large numbers and for unknown reasons and disappeared to unknown destinations. At any rate, this was the case in the Soviet Union. In China, political violence to this day is less concealed; nonpolitical criminals are often executed in public, and such executions are sometimes televised.

### **CONFESSION, SHOW TRIALS, AND INSTITUTIONALIZED BRUTALITY**

A prominent characteristic of Communist "judicial" proceedings was the centrality of confession as the main and often single proof of the alleged crimes. This was true for the widely publicized show trials as well as in the cases of the anonymous millions dispatched to the camps, who were convicted on the basis of standardized, thematic, signed confessions.

The widely publicized confessions of well-known political figures were integral to the didactic purpose of the trials: the confession was supposed to reveal and prove the evil personified by the perpetrators while simultaneously demonstrating the power of the state that extracted them. The confession also illustrated some larger political theme or conveyed a particular message. Bertold Brecht, the German Communist writer, well understood this principle, having observed in connection with the Moscow trials, "It is necessary to bring to light behind the deeds of the accused a political concept that can credibly be attributed to them and that has led them into the swamps of common criminality. . . ."<sup>202</sup>

The confessions of well-known figures were also designed to discredit the accused not only politically but also morally. In addition, confessions were relied upon because as a rule they were the only "proof" of the alleged crimes and were easy to obtain under heavy physical pressure and deprivation. Confession could also be used to implicate others and to uncover and ferret out alleged and imaginary conspiracies.

In the Soviet Union as of 1937, torture was officially acknowledged as a legitimate means to important ends. According to an official document, the Central Committee of the party deemed

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methods of physical pressure in NKVD practice permissible from 1937 on. . . . [A]ll bourgeois intelligence services use methods of physical influence against representatives of the socialist proletariat. . . . The question arises as to why the socialist intelligence service should be more humanitarian against the mad agents of the bourgeoisie, against the deadly enemies of the working class and the collective farm workers.<sup>203</sup>

In addition to sleep deprivation and beatings, another simple method favored in the Soviet Union to extract confession was to make the prisoner stand. Walter Krivitsky, a high-ranking defector from the military intelligence service (GRU), wrote: "I knew personally one prisoner who was kept standing during his examinations, with brief interruptions, for a total of fifty-five hours under glaring and blinding lights. This was perhaps the commonest form of the third degree."<sup>204</sup> Another method reportedly ordered by Yagoda (head of the political police at the time) to soften up Zinoviev and Kamenev was to overheat their cells in the summer.<sup>205</sup>

In Hungary, operatives of the AVH (political police) were given lectures by a physician on "investigatory practices" that sanctioned and explained beating without causing death.<sup>206</sup>

Confession was an integral part of "thought reform" in China both in formal criminal proceedings and on the occasions when group pressure was informally applied to prisoners during so-called "struggling" sessions.<sup>207</sup> For example, during the "Four Clean Ups" campaign in 1964, "inmates [were] directed to confess whether they were clean or unclean in regard to the following four questions . . . : satisfaction with their sentences, thoughts of escaping, participation in any secret oppositional cliques within the camp, and behavior after their release."<sup>208</sup> In Mao's China the confession was seen by the authorities both as a tool of reeducation or character reform and as a weapon in the struggle against privacy. In Cambodia, too, political guilt was established entirely by confession, and the procedures used bore close resemblance to the Soviet model.<sup>209</sup> In Albania, interrogators used tapes "with voices of members of his [the detainee's] family pretending they had all been arrested and tortured. Listening to the screams many prisoners broke down completely . . . and told the Communists anything they wanted to hear."<sup>210</sup>

Since few confessions were made voluntarily of hideous crimes not committed, physical and psychological pressure—torture—played an important part in their extraction. A partial exception to this generalization was the qualified willingness of some high-ranking defendants—motivated by a residual loyalty to the cause and the party—to cooperate in the Soviet and other show trials. Such ideologically induced cooperation is the central theme of Arthur Koestler's novel *Darkness at Noon*. In the 1949 Hungarian show trial of Laszlo Rajk, similar arguments were used to persuade Rajk to confess his treacherous activities.<sup>211</sup>

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Aside from sleep and food deprivation and beatings, methods ranged from verbal denunciation to solitary confinement in small spaces to threats of violence against members of the family of the accused and sometimes to more elaborate physical torture. Roy Medvedev wrote:

NKVD personnel were specially trained to be capable of carrying out any order, even the most criminal. The special brigades of torturers . . . usually included students from the NKVD schools. . . . They were taken to torture chambers as medical students are to dissection laboratories. . . .

Medvedev believed that many of the guards were “sadists,” while others were motivated by “the fear of becoming prisoners themselves” unless they performed their duties zealously and brutally. There was “a terrible selection [process], sifting out some officials, leaving the worst.”<sup>212</sup>

Torture designed to extract confession is to be distinguished from the generally brutal treatment of prisoners. Such mistreatment included overwork, harsh living conditions, inadequate food, deprivations of medical care and proper clothing, punitive solitary confinement (in unheated and often cramped cells, as a rule), and occasional beatings.

In Romania, prisoners were subjected to “ferocious discipline” and

punished for the slightest deviation from prison rules. . . . Transgressors were flogged . . . or placed into solitary confinement in a cell without windows. . . . A feature of incarceration was the permanent sensation of hunger.

. . . Physical torture during interrogations by the Securitate [the Romanian political police] was common. An internal report of the Ministry of Interior noted that at the notorious Danube Black Sea Canal construction camps “many prisoners were beaten . . . with iron bars, shovels, spades and whips. . . . Prisoners were put naked or skimpily dressed in isolation cells in winter . . . punished by making them stand in frozen water. . . . Prisoners were tied by the hands and exposed naked in the summer to be bitten by mosquitos.”<sup>213</sup>

The Cuban mistreatment of political prisoners is among the least known in the West, even the United States, even though it was especially cruel. The guards apparently engaged in brutalities with relish and many seemed sadistic. As Carlos Alberto Montaner wrote, “Cuba needs a patient Solzhenitsyn to recount the history of the Caribbean Archipelago.”<sup>214</sup> It was a fairly common practice for the guards to “prod and jab” prisoners with bayonets, to beat them with “rubber hose covered iron bars” and “woven electrical cables,” to keep

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them in their cells naked over long periods of time (months), to pour urine and excrement on them (from the ceilings of cages made of chain-link), to poke them from above with what was called “the Ho-Chi Minh pole” in order to prevent them from sleeping, and to prohibit them from wearing shirts while working in mosquito-infested swamps.<sup>215</sup> These activities were unrelated to efforts to make the prisoners confess. Another more unusual feature of Cuban repression was the vindictive mistreatment of political prisoners who refused to undergo political reeducation or “rehabilitation.”<sup>216</sup>

Torture and gratuitous cruelty in Cambodia was, according to one author,

more widespread than in any other Communist regime. . . . [T]o save bullets, and also to satisfy the sadistic instincts of executioners, shooting was not the most common means of execution. . . . [O]nly 29% of the victims died that way. . . . 53% . . . died from blows to the head, inflicted with iron bars, pick-ax handles or agricultural implements; 6% were hanged or asphyxiated with plastic bags; and 5% had their throats slit.<sup>217</sup>

Electric shock (as a means of torture) was favored in Cambodia (notwithstanding the antitechnological bent of its rulers), while “forcing prisoners to eat excrement” appears to have been a Cambodian specialty, as it is not encountered elsewhere in the relevant literature.<sup>218</sup>

In Cambodia, such types of mistreatment, among others, could be inflicted for an unusually wide variety of behavioral reasons (in addition to the predetermined political criteria that had nothing to do with behavior but with classification): “People suffered beatings and executions, mock and real, because they stole vegetables, roots or crabs from fields; hoarded rice; visited family members; or had sex outside marriage.”<sup>219</sup>

In China under Mao,

“watching television” meant being forced to hold one’s head over a bucket of excrement; . . . “looking in the mirror” is placing a tube of toothpaste between one’s forehead and the wall without letting it drop for hours on end and “doing the airplane”—a form of torture devised during the Cultural Revolution—involves arms suspended at forty-five degree angles to the shoulder blades. The use of electric cattle prods or truncheons to discipline prisoners is commonplace and well documented by Asia Watch, [and] Amnesty International. . . . Among guards or warders contests are sometimes held to find out who can fit a pair of handcuffs on a prisoner the tightest.<sup>220</sup>

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In China, more than in any other Communist state, public humiliation of “the enemy” was widespread, especially during the “Cultural Revolution.” These “enemies” were paraded on the street with signs hanging from their necks specifying their crimes; they had to wear “dunce caps” and stand for hours with bowed heads in front of abusive crowds, listening to their denunciations. Public confessions were extracted.<sup>221</sup> Such public shaming was a Chinese specialty.

As for North Korea, in addition to the wide range of brutalities detailed in *Aquariums of Pyongyang* (including occasional public executions), one scientist, recently defected, “told the BBC that he used experimental chemical weapons on political prisoners, taking notes as they died in agony. Such experiments were apparently used to determine how much gas would be necessary to annihilate the city of Seoul.”<sup>222</sup>

### REPRESSION AND THE ECONOMY

The integration of coercive economic institutions and policies was a central characteristic of Communist systems. As Anne Applebaum puts it: “a society allegedly inspired by Marx and Marxism had taken the commodification of labor to new heights.”<sup>223</sup> The majority of those arrested and sentenced were sent to forced or “corrective” labor camps located near various construction projects. Many of the most acclaimed construction projects in these countries were built with such convict labor, as for example the Belomor or White Sea–Baltic canal in the USSR; the road to Lhasa (Tibet) from China proper; the Danube–Black Sea Canal in Romania; the first nuclear research institute in Hungary; etc.<sup>224</sup> Prisoners in Czechoslovakia worked in uranium mines. In China, inmates worked in “mining, farming, manufacturing, quarrying, forestry, [and] railway construction,” among other projects.<sup>225</sup> The Chinese use of such labor was more efficient and wide-ranging than was the Soviet, and unlike other Communist states China exported many products of forced labor to Western countries. The products of forced labor in China included

coal, matches, trucks, toothpaste, cosmetics, livestock, vegetables, sugar cane, bricks, flashlights, batteries, shoes, gypsum, tea, knitted goods, nylon socks, wine grapes, prawns, industrial chemicals, bed sheets, glass, lead, cement, paper, opium poppies, auto parts, plastics, crop sprayers, liquor, mercury, tractors, pottery and porcelain, rubber, fans, leather and furs, asbestos, gunny-sacks, milk products, firefighting equipment, motorcycles, gloves, embroidery, diesel engines and even the “launch plate” for one of China’s early intercontinental missiles.<sup>226</sup>

There were many reasons for the widespread use of convict labor. One was the low level of technology: human beings were more readily available than

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machinery; there was an abundant supply of them, especially in the USSR and China. Communist governments made especially good use of prisoners on labor-intensive projects in remote areas involving considerable physical hardship.

The best-known embodiment of these policies, thanks to Solzhenitsyn, was the Soviet Gulag, an abbreviation of the administrative authority controlling the labor camps. The magnitude of this system is revealed in the book of Shifrin (referred to earlier) based on information supplied by former inmates, which includes maps showing the location of these establishments, four of which are reproduced following this introduction. Harry Wu, another former inmate, listed 990 such camps in China, and this is estimated to represent only between one-sixth and one-fourth of the total number.<sup>227</sup>

Using forced labor for large economic projects was cheap, since no attempts were made to make working conditions humane or to prolong the lives of workers. It was, moreover, a labor force that could be easily and quickly mobilized and replenished and sent to remote projects for which it was difficult to recruit free workers. Located for the most part in inaccessible areas, these camps also removed those defined as politically unreliable from the proximity of population centers. Often the inmates who had served their sentences remained confined to the area where the camp was located. The camps were also favored because the high mortality rates diminished the number of alleged enemies. To what degree this was a calculated policy or merely a welcome by-product of the system of labor camps remains to be determined.

### **“REHABILITATION” AND “THOUGHT REFORM”**

In the early days of the various Communist states it was an article of the official faith that work was therapeutic and the best device for rehabilitation and redemption. All Communist political systems, and in particular the first among them, the Soviet, initially proposed ambitious schemes aimed at the rehabilitation of all criminals, including sometimes even political wrongdoers. Felix Dzerzhinsky (the first head of the Soviet political police) called the forced labor camps “schools of labor.” It was supposed to be possible even for hardened criminals (especially those not guilty of political offenses) to gain readmittance to the community of good citizens if they proved themselves through hard work. Posted at the entrance of numerous Soviet labor camps was the slogan “Honest labor: the road home,”<sup>228</sup> reminiscent of the better-known signs at the gates of Nazi concentration camps which promised that “work will set you free.” At a prison entrance in Cuba a large poster declared: “When these bars are no longer necessary, the Revolution will have triumphed—Fidel Castro.” Vietnamese labor camps were adorned with the ironic assurance of Ho Chi Minh: “Nothing is more precious than independence and liberty.”<sup>229</sup>

Maxim Gorky, the famous Soviet writer, visited the first labor camps in the Solovki islands (located near the Arctic circle) in order to chronicle their great reformatory achievements. His observations included: “For the first time I saw

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horse and cow stables kept in a state of such cleanliness that the sharp stench emanating from such places cannot be detected at all. . . . The rough lyricism of these islands . . . awakens a longing to work more rapidly and fervently towards creating a new reality. . . ." As another observer pointed out, "Under Gorky's pen life in the concentration camp could be the cause of envy on the part of inhabitants of the ordinary Soviet reality on the other side of the barbed wire." Gorky wrote in the visitors' book (which had been specially made for his visit):

I am not in a state of mind to express my impressions in just a few words. I would not want . . . to permit myself banal praise of the remarkable energy of people who, while remaining vigilant and tireless sentinels of the Revolution, are able at the same time to be remarkably bold creators of culture.<sup>230</sup>

Presumably these people were the guards.

The Soviet writers who were sent in 1933 on a "fact-finding mission" to the construction site of the Belomor canal also found guards devoted to the well-being and political-ideological transformation of their prisoners, as well as inmates seeking to refashion themselves "on the anvil of unremitting work." They concluded that from "the unruly human material . . . the Bolshevik genius is able to construct the most homogeneous harmonious, just and happy society on earth."<sup>231</sup> This was also the message of Nicholas Pogodin's play *The Aristocrats*, which dealt with the successful efforts of the NKVD personnel to rehabilitate both ordinary and political prisoners during the construction of the same canal. The play portrayed Commandant Gromov, who "resemble[d] a kindly, good-hearted pedagogue. His understanding for the prisoners placed in his charge is boundless. He treats them like a clever and attentive father. . . . [H]is main task is to find the proper way of reaching the soul of every individual."<sup>232</sup>

Imprisonment thus combined punishment, work, and political education. In the Soviet case, efforts at rehabilitation became increasingly a formality, while in China under Mao "thought reform" was pursued avidly. Similar attempts were also made in Vietnam.<sup>233</sup>

As time went by, the distinction between political and nonpolitical offenders hardened (especially in the USSR), and the rehabilitation of the former was taken off the agenda. Even the policies of rehabilitation of ordinary criminals were gradually abandoned and replaced by a harsh, punitive orientation. These changes originated in the shifting theoretical premises regarding individual responsibility. Initially, the Soviet authorities maintained the conventional Marxist position that crime and other forms of antisocial behavior were responses to exploitation, inequality, and the brutalized social relations that prevailed in capitalist societies permeated by the profit motive.<sup>234</sup>

By the early 1930s the major socioeconomic transformations were completed in the Soviet Union—most importantly, the private ownership of the



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means of production had been abolished—which in theory should have put an end to the conditions supposedly breeding antisocial attitudes and behavior. Since this failed to happen, Soviet ideologues invented the concept of “survivals”: bad behavior was now blamed not on capitalist institutions or social relations (they had, after all, been abolished) but on their lingering after-effects. How long these “survivals” were going to pollute the minds and behavior of Soviet citizens was not made clear. A Soviet official said in 1966: “It would be a mistake to think that the very fact of living in the land of the Soviets, in the conditions of socialist reality, presupposes a Communist worldview in a young person.”<sup>235</sup> Marx’s proposition about existence determining consciousness no longer applied in Soviet society. Soviet penologists and political authorities reached the conclusion that individuals misbehaving in an established socialist system were to be held responsible and could no longer be regarded as products of society responding to inexorable social forces. Punishment conceived of as a matter of social justice and as a deterrent was fully restored.

There was no explicit discussion of how these principles applied to political as distinct from nonpolitical criminals; Soviet official discourse had almost from the beginning suggested that the behavior of political criminals was not socially determined; they were fully responsible for their abominable crimes and deserved stern punishment. In a thoroughly un-Marxist fashion, the Soviet and other Communist systems maintained what amounted to the position that there was evil in human nature as far as political criminals or class enemies were concerned, and this evil had little to do with the social environment. It had to be eradicated without mercy.

While attempts to rehabilitate or reeducate political wrongdoers faded over time, especially in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, work—that is, “corrective labor”—remained officially defined as the instrument of therapeutic rehabilitation for both political and nonpolitical offenders. In reality there was little or no political education in Soviet prisons and labor camps,<sup>236</sup> and few attempts were made to mobilize group pressure among prisoners in the service of political-ideological reeducation, such as the practice of “struggling” in China. The struggle session was defined by one who had experienced it as

a peculiarly Chinese invention combining intimidation, humiliation and sheer exhasustion . . . an intellectual gang-beating of one man by many . . . in which the victim has no defense. . . . [T]he technique . . . was a thing of utter simplicity: a fierce and pitiless crescendo of screams demanding that the victim confess. . . .<sup>237</sup>

In Communist China, Vietnam, and Cuba, political reeducation, or thought reform, was taken far more seriously and applied to both political and nonpolitical prisoners. Inmates in Chinese labor camps reportedly spent two to three hours daily “in some sort of political study session.”<sup>238</sup> A precondition of reha-

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bilitation was a freely expressed sense of guilt or penitence for the transgressions of which the inmate had been accused, hence the centrality of confession in the reeducation process.

A plausible explanation of the difference between Chinese, Vietnamese, and Cuban approaches as opposed to the Soviet and East European is that the former were newer, more revolutionary, and in some ways more idealistic systems (initially, at any rate), more seriously committed to the idea of creating new human beings; they were also less inspired by orthodox Marxism. Political will or voluntarism was their guiding principle. China's oppressive collectivism also had stronger cultural roots in the pre-Communist Chinese tradition of subjecting the individual to the group. As in all traditional societies, the lines between the private and the public realm were less sharply drawn.

The Cuban regime also avidly pursued a program of "political rehabilitation" comparable to the Chinese in its intensity:

At first the objective . . . was to reduce the number of men in prison who continued to repudiate the government. Therefore the authorities promised better treatment, frequent family visits, correspondence . . . prompt return to freedom and reintegration into the new society. . . . [Y]ou had to turn in reports and make a self-criticism, write an apology for your previous counterrevolutionary activity and confess everything. . . . [T]he ultimate aim . . . was the internal annihilation of the prisoner, the destruction of all his principles. . . . The men who agreed to join [the Program] had to sign a little form renouncing all their beliefs and adopting Marxism as their new philosophy.<sup>239</sup>

The policies of reeducation (or thought reform) can also be explained with reference to the concept of totalitarianism: Communist China under Mao, Cuba under Castro, and Vietnam until the late 1980s were indisputably totalitarian, certainly more so than were the Soviet Union and its East European allies after the death of Stalin. This meant a greater determination to maximize the power of the state and obliterate sanctuaries of personal freedom in the private realm. These third-world political systems were more serious about creating a "new socialist man" suited to living in the totalitarian-collectivistic society being created. While the Soviet system, especially under Stalin, also claimed to be engaged in the creation of the new socialist man, it had made fewer tangible efforts to implement this goal. In the long Brezhnev era the system became even more conservative and reluctant to experiment.

It remains an open question what is more inhumane: to attempt to radically transform human beings by the kind of relentless pressure and invasion of privacy entailed in thought reform, or to discard them (literally or figuratively) in the manner of the Soviet-type penal systems.

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### THE PERPETRATORS

One may distinguish at least three types of motivation and mindset among those involved in the planning, administration, and execution of political violence and coercion in Communist systems.<sup>240</sup> At the highest level there were ideologically driven, puritanical, and ruthless individuals exemplified in the Soviet case by Felix Dzerzhinsky (his Nazi counterpart might be Heinrich Himmler).<sup>241</sup> Such individuals tended to be more prominent in the earlier periods of Communist systems. They seemed immune to doubt, inner conflict, and reservations about the use of harsh, even murderous methods seen as essential for the achievement of their great goals and for staying in power. As Lance Morrow has written: "There is always a professor of violence—realist, zealot, ideologue . . . who lays it down that evil is the price of change. . . . Intellectuals, alas, have an immense tolerance for—even an attraction to—evil if they see it as part of a means to a socially and intellectually satisfying end. . . . [T]he professors of violence, the theoreticians . . . preside over armies of brutal morons. . . ."<sup>242</sup> George Lukacs, the Hungarian Marxist philosopher, himself not involved in the dirty business of keeping the system in power, expressed this mindset with great precision: "The highest duty for Communist ethics is to accept the necessity of acting immorally. This is the greatest sacrifice that the revolution demands of us. The conviction of the true Communist is that evil transforms itself unto bliss through the dialectics of historical evolution."<sup>243</sup> The same attitude is captured by Montefiore:

The Bolsheviks were atheists but they were hardly secular politicians. . . . [T]hey stooped to kill from the smugness of the highest moral eminence. . . . They would die and kill for their faith in the inevitable progress toward human betterment, making sacrifices of their own families with the fervour only seen in religious slaughters and martyrdoms of the Middle Ages—and the Middle East.<sup>244</sup>

Lenin was the supreme embodiment of this type of human being. The Russian historian Dmitri Volkogonov wrote of him: "It is difficult to fathom how a man who loved Beethoven and Spinoza, who read Kant . . . could reconcile himself to a system permeated with police rule. How could Lenin, who claimed to be the leader of a new world, personally write orders to hang, to shoot, to take hostages, to imprison in concentration camps. . . .?"<sup>245</sup>

The human capacity to compartmentalize and selectively highlight or dismiss empirical facts is also reflected in the advice of a Hungarian Communist regarding the Soviet show trials: "Do not look at the details . . . but consider them in their total political context."<sup>246</sup> Molotov's view of the Purges was similar: "of course there were excesses but all that was permissible, to my mind, for

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the sake of the main objective—keeping state power. . . .”<sup>247</sup> Pol Pot, the genocidal Cambodian leader, shared this outlook and conveyed it to an interviewer shortly before his death: “I do not reject responsibility—our movement made mistakes, like every movement in the world. But . . . [w]e had no other choice . . . we had to defend ourselves . . . my conscience is clear. Everything I have done . . . is first for the nation and the people of Cambodia.”<sup>248</sup>

The second type of individual, exemplified by Adolf Eichman, is the proverbial cog in the bureaucratic machinery; he is the embodiment of ordinariness and symbolizes the “banality of evil”—a concept popularized by Hannah Arendt in the Nazi context but equally applicable to the Communist setting. He follows orders rather than being driven by strong convictions. Such individuals were to be found in many authoritarian systems. A former veteran of the Japanese army in World War II who participated in the atrocities in China observed that “the torturers themselves . . . were regular people who simply did their job.” In a similar spirit, Kang Kek Ieu, head of the Khmer Rouge Secret Police and commandant of a prison where 14,000 people were tortured and killed, averred that he merely “wanted to be a good Communist” and “sought to make clear that he had not tortured or killed for the fun of it. . . . [H]e portrayed himself as a harried bureaucrat, constantly concerned about the quality of his product.”<sup>249</sup>

Communist systems made it particularly easy to shift responsibility for carrying out morally problematic tasks to higher authority, given the myth of the infallibility of the party and its leaders and the attendant requirement for obedience just as rigid and unthinking as that demanded by the Nazi and Japanese authorities. This attitude was not limited to those at the lower reaches of the hierarchy: Georgi Piatakov, a leading Bolshevik revolutionary, reportedly said, “If the Party demands it . . . I will see black where I saw white . . . because for me there is no life outside the Party.” George Kennan’s characterization of Andrei Gromyko captures the same mindset: “The Party became . . . his mother, his father, his teacher, his conscience and his master. . . . And if it turned out that what the Party required to be done . . . involved apparent injustice or cruelty—well, one might regret that it was found necessary. . . . But it was not one’s own responsibility.”<sup>250</sup>

The third type of individual drawn to the mechanics of repression represents the least attractive: the amoral or unmistakably malevolent individual, motivated at his highest by the lust for power, at his lowest by the enjoyment of inflicting pain and of being in total control of those at his mercy. This group of individuals includes the anonymous guards, interrogators, and torture specialists whose profiles often emerge from the recollections of their former victims. It is this group which has attracted the least social scientific attention, although the general idea that in every society there are people who possess or develop a personality and mentality congenial to the practices of political repression has been expressed by several authors. For example, Antonio Candido, a Bra-

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zilian writer, has observed that to carry out these tasks “society needs thousands of individuals with appropriately deformed souls. . . . [S]ociety draws from these people the brutality, the need, the frustration, the depravity, the defect—and gives them the repressive function.” Dennis Deletant has come to the conclusion that “brutality was the characteristic feature of the men chosen by the NKVD/MGB [the Soviet political police] to head Romania’s security police.” Joseph Skvorecky, the Czech writer, has perceived among the hardcore supporters of both Nazi and Communist systems “people scarred by private hatreds, grounded in deeply negative personal experience . . . [people] with physical or psychological malformations . . . haunted by a feeling of insecurity . . . exploit [ing] ideas and movements to achieve a feeling of self-worth.” Another Czech author, Peter Hruby, has written: “Every nation has a small percentage of potential criminals in its population. In totalitarian dictatorships these people . . . get their best chance and can really enjoy themselves, at the same time feeling proud that they are serving a great cause.” Victor Serge has observed that during the early years of the Soviet state, the apparatus of repression had already attracted two types of individuals, a small number of “incorruptible men like . . . Dzerzhinsky, a sincere idealist, ruthless but chivalrous. . . . But the Party had few men of this stamp . . . ,” and gradually selection came to be based on more unappealing traits:

The only temperaments that devoted themselves willingly and tenaciously to this task of “internal defense” were those characterized by suspicion, embitterment, harshness and sadism. Long-standing social inferiority-complexes and memories of humiliations and suffering . . . rendered them intractable . . . perverted men tending to see conspiracy everywhere.

This was also the conclusion of Walter Krivitsky: “As the . . . Secret Police gained more power . . . fearless revolutionists were slowly replaced by hardened, dissolute and demoralized executioners.”<sup>251</sup> Orlov thought that there were three major types among “Stalin’s inquisitors”: “sadists . . . unscrupulous careerists . . . and men with a dual mind . . . who have put their conscience on the altar of the party and carried out with broken heart the criminal orders of Stalin.”<sup>252</sup>

While unattractive personality types and traits have been quite readily detected and discussed among both the Nazi elite and lower-ranking Nazi specialists in coercion, only the former victims or citizens of Communist states have made similar observations about the characteristics of those performing corresponding functions in Communist systems. Western social scientists, while readily ascribing certain pathologies to leading Nazis, have resisted recognizing similar traits among Communist leaders, functionaries, or heads of police forces. This attitude has something to do with the divergent perceptions of the

evils Nazism and communism respectively represented; the perception that Nazism was the greater evil has allowed, or predisposed, scholars to focus more readily on their individual pathologies.

Another explanation of this difference in the attribution of personal pathology lies in the fact that while many of the Nazi executioners and torturers were brought to trial and were sometimes objects of study during their incarceration, hardly any member of the Communist apparatuses of repression has been brought to trial and thus subjected to public or social scientific scrutiny. Even when such individuals were removed from power and liquidated, as happened to virtually every head of the Soviet political police, their treatment was secretive, and neither the general public nor social scientists were given a chance to learn about their personalities or the possible social-psychological causes leading to their career patterns and behavior.

Aside from ideological conviction, the propensity to obey the authorities, lust for power, and sadism, one more motive should be noted that often combined with or complemented the others, namely, material incentives. Members of the Communist repressive apparatus, and in particular those at its highest echelons, could count on numerous benefits: better pay, better housing, career opportunities, a wide assortment of privileges and rewards. Access to such privileges depended on the kind of service performed and the position occupied in the hierarchy. There was, for example, a great difference between the lifestyle of an important camp commander and the enlisted men guarding the prisoners,<sup>253</sup> being a guard in a remote camp was no path to privilege, but being an officer in the NKVD, KGB, or the East German Stasi surely was ("the Stasi men were always an elite, a group that benefited from opportunities for training and education . . ."). The memoirs of Oleg Kalugin (a former high-ranking KGB officer) testify to the privileges of the KGB elite. In Communist Czechoslovakia, state security operatives were given bonuses and promotions for increasing their "output" of arrests and confessions. Hungarian state security officials "could fill their pockets with various allowances, bonuses and benefits."<sup>254</sup>

## V: Conclusions

No Communist system was free of repression, but the severity of repression fluctuated over time (North Korea may be an exception, since its repressive policies seem to have changed little over the years). The routine reliance on political violence and coercion was at once a defining characteristic of Communist systems and a telling indicator of the failure of their policies and their lack of (or limited) legitimacy. Communist systems' habitual reliance on repressive policies may also be seen as the institutionalization of their leaders' intolerance.

The decline and fall of Communist states coincided with declining repression, growing corruption, and the underlying weakening of the political will of

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their ruling elites.<sup>255</sup> Those still in power—in China, Cuba, North Korea, and Vietnam—did not and would not hesitate to use force to crush and stifle dissent or opposition and have remained highly repressive. Nonrepressive, noncoercive, tolerant Communist systems “with a human face” have never existed. Hungary in the late Kadar years approached the possibility of such a system, but it eventually fell apart.

In the final analysis, the repressive character of Communist states can be explained by a combination of universal and historically specific factors. The first includes the longstanding and entrenched human potential and disposition to dehumanize, demonize, and mistreat others (those defined as outsiders, strangers, and enemies) without compunction and for a wide variety of reasons; most commonly such hatreds and scapegoating are associated with conditions of scarcity and competition for scarce resources (not only material). Social, ethnic, and physical distances between groups aggravate such dispositions.

Preconditions for the type of massive violence and coercion described in this volume must also include the availability of certain minimal technological and administrative means for carrying out large-scale repression, lethal or nonlethal. Victims must be transported (on trains, trucks, or boats) to particular locations (for incarceration or execution); firearms are required for the rapid and efficient killing of large numbers (absent gas chambers); barbed wire is an essential ingredient for the creation of concentration camps and for rapidly confining large numbers of people.

The second set of factors consists of more specific historical, and ideological elements. Most Communist states had no democratic, liberal, or individualistic political culture or traditions; reflexive submission to authority was more readily forthcoming in these societies. Most of these countries were also economically underdeveloped, inegalitarian, and scarcity-ridden.

Arguably, ideology—that is to say, certain structured and militant beliefs—was most important in channeling frustrations and resentments into politically defined and legitimated violence and aggression; such beliefs led to the mistreatment of designated groups in the service of bringing about a radical break with past deprivations and injustices—although these beliefs were held only by small elite groups.

Communist systems were relentlessly ends-oriented. Their ends provided the assurance and legitimation needed to coerce, or outright eliminate, all those who stood in the way of the great experiment in human liberation, the creation of a better world. In each of these societies small but determined minorities (mostly politicized intellectuals or quasi-intellectuals) found new meaning for themselves in the attempt to radically transform societies and human beings; politics became, at least initially, a quasireligious quest that stimulated ruthlessness and intolerance. As Hilton Kramer, among others, has pointed out: “Socialism had indeed supplanted religion as the source of ‘political idealism,’



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and from that fateful shift there have flowed many of the horrors of the modern age."<sup>256</sup> To be sure, this idealism or utopianism did not endure, but the practices and institutions created in its pursuit remained in place decades after revolutionary fervor had gradually given way to the love of power and privilege among the ruling elites.

The decline and fall of Communist systems shows that the love of power and privilege bereft of ideological and moral certainties is insufficient for keeping such systems going when they are incapable of realizing either their original idealistic aspirations or meeting the less than utopian needs of their people. As Forrest Colburn has written:

Politically intoxicated . . . revolutionaries have shoved their poor societies into an unsustainable recasting of state and economy that has left the majority of people disoriented, politically cynical, and materially more impoverished. . . . The brutal confrontation of dreams with intractable political and . . . economic realities . . . explains the dispiriting outcomes of contemporary revolutions.<sup>257</sup>

In the final analysis the inhumanities discussed in this introduction and detailed in the writings that follow were, for the most part, unintended by-products of the desire to radically and rapidly change the human condition through the inherently limited and crude means at the disposal of human beings.

### **Note on the Organization of this Volume**

The readings included in this volume are organized according to the setting of the writing. For example, a Polish author who was imprisoned in the Soviet Union would be included in the Soviet Union section, not Poland.

The statements that introduce each reading and its author vary in length because of the uneven amount of information available. Some authors have written numerous books; others wrote little aside from the memoir here excerpted. Some have become prominent figures; others were or remain reclusive individuals. Many are still alive; others have died.

Biographical information on the authors was obtained from many sources, including the Internet, prefaces to their books, individuals familiar with their lives and work, and sometimes the authors themselves. In spite of these efforts it was not possible in every instance to provide all essential biographical information, such as dates of birth (or death).