

## **The Human Cost Of Socialism In Power**

By Richard Ebeling, 12 September 2015

The attempt to establish a comprehensive socialist system in many parts of the world over the last one hundred years has been one of the cruelest and most brutal episodes in human history.

Some historians have estimated that as many as 200 million people may have died as part of the dream of creating a collectivist “Paradise on Earth.” Making a better “new world” was taken to mean the extermination, the liquidation, the mass murder of all those that the socialist revolutionary leaders declared to be “class enemies,” including the families, the children of “enemies of the people.”

### **The Bloody Road to Making a New Socialist Man**

We will soon be marking the hundredth anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia (November 1917) under the Marxist revolutionary leader, Vladimir Lenin. In Soviet Russia, alone, it has been calculated by Russian and Western historians who had limited access to the secret archives of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the KGB (the Soviet secret police) in the 1990s, that around 68 million innocent, unarmed men, women and children were killed over the nearly 75 years of communist rule in the Soviet Union.

The communist revolutionaries in Russia proudly declared their goal to be destruction and death to everything that existed before the revolution, so as to have a clean slate upon which to mold the new socialist man.

The evil of the Soviet system is that it was not cruelty for cruelty’s sake. Rather it was cruelty for a purpose – to make a new Soviet man and a new Soviet society. This required the destruction of everything that had gone before; and it also entailed the forced creation of a new civilization, as conjured up in the minds of those who had appointed themselves the creators of this brave new world.

In the minds of those like Felix Dzerzhinsky, Lenin’s close associate and founder of the Soviet secret police, violence was an act of love. So much did they love the vision of a blissful communist future to come that they were willing to sacrifice all of the traditional conceptions of humanity and morality to bring the utopia to fruition.

Thus, in a publication issued in 1919 by the newly formed Soviet secret police, the Cheka (later the NKVD and then the KGB), it was proclaimed:

*“We reject the old systems of morality and ‘humanity’ invented by the bourgeoisie to oppress and exploit the ‘lower classes.’ Our morality has no precedent, and our humanity is absolute because it rests on a new ideal. Our aim is to destroy all forms of oppression and violence. To so, everything is permitted, for we are the first to raise the sword not to oppress races and reduce them to slavery, but to liberate humanity from its shackles . . .*

*“Blood? Let blood flow like water! Let bloodstain forever the black pirate’s flag flown by the bourgeoisie, and let our flag be blood-red forever! For only through the death of the old world can we liberate ourselves from the return of those jackals.”*

### **Death and Torture as Tools of Winning Socialism**

The famous sociologist, Pitirim A. Sorokin was a young professor in Petrograd (later Leningrad, and now St Petersburg) in 1920 as the Russian Civil War that firmly established communist rule in Russia was coming to its end. He kept an account of daily life during those years, which he published many years later under the title, *Leaves from a Russian Diary – and Thirty Years After* (1950).

Here is one of his entries from 1920:

*“The machine of the Red Terror works incessantly. Every day and every night, in Petrograd, Moscow, and all over the country the mountain of the dead grows higher . . . Everywhere people are shot, mutilated, wiped out of existence . . .*

*“Every night we hear the rattle of trucks bearing new victims. Every night we hear the rifle fire of executions, and often some of us hear from the ditches, where the bodies are flung, faint groans and cries of those who did not die at once under the guns. People living near these places begin to move away. They cannot sleep . . .*

*“Getting up in the morning, no man or woman knows whether he will be free that night. Leaving one’s home, one never knows whether he will return. Sometime a neighborhood is surrounded and everyone caught out of his house without a certificate is arrested . . . Life these days depends entirely on luck.”*

This murderous madness never ended. In the 1930s, during the time of the Great Purges instituted by Soviet dictator Josef Stalin to wipe out all “enemies of the revolution” through mass executions, there were also sent millions to the GULAG prisons that stretched across all of the Soviet Union to be worked to death as slave labor to “build socialism.”

Before being sent to their death or to the forced labor camps, tens of thousands would be interrogated and cruelly tortured to get confessions out of people about non-existent crimes, imaginary anti-Soviet conspiracies, and false accusations against others.

Stalin personally sent instructions to the Soviet secret police that stated that in obtaining confessions from the accused, “the NKVD was given permission by the Central Committee [of the Communist Party] to use physical influence . . . as a completely correct and expedient method” of interrogation.

When Stalin was told that this method was bringing forth the desired results, he told the NKVD interrogators, “Give them the works until they come crawling to you on their bellies with confessions in their teeth.” Then, in another purge, this one after World War II, Stalin simplified the instructions even more: “Beat, beat and, once again, beat.”

Thousands of the victims wrote letters to Stalin from their exile and hardships in the labor camps, all of them persuaded that it had all been a terrible mistake. If only Comrade Stalin knew, he would set it all right and they would be freed and restored as good, loyal Soviet citizens ready to once again work to “build socialism.”

### **Stalin’s Personal Hand in Building Socialism Through Blood**

But Stalin knew. He personally signed off on tens of thousands of death warrants and orders for tens of thousands more to be sent to their horrifying fate in the GULAG camps.

Domitri Volkogonov, a Soviet general-turned-historian, gained access to many of the closed Soviet archives in the 1980s, and wrote a biography of Stalin, entitled, *Triumph and Tragedy* (1991), meaning Stalin’s “triumph” to power and the resulting “tragedy” for the Soviet people. Volkogonov told a Western correspondent at the time:

*“I would come home from working in Stalin’s archives, and I would be deeply shaken. I remember coming home after reading through the day of December 12, 1938. He signed thirty lists of death sentences that day, altogether about five thousand people, including many he personally knew, his friends . . .*

*“This is not what shook me. It turned out that, having signed these documents, he went to his personal theater very late that night and watched two movies, including “Happy Guys,” a popular comedy of the time. I simply could not understand how, after deciding the fate of several thousand lives, he could watch such a movie.*

*“But I was beginning to realize that morality plays no role for dictators. That’s when I understood why my father was shot, why my mother died in exile, why millions of people died.”*

Soviet central planning even had quotas for the number of such enemies of the people to be killed in each region of the Soviet Union as well as the required numbers to be rounded up to be sent to work in the labor camps in the frigid waste lands of the Siberia and the Arctic Circle or the scorching deserts of Soviet Central Asia.

A Russian lawyer who had access to some of the formerly closed Soviet archives of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in the 1990s told at the time:

*“Recently I read a Central Committee document from 1937 that said the Voronezh secret police, according to the ‘regional plan,’ repressed in the ‘first category,’ nine thousand people – which means these people were executed. And for no reason, of course.*

*“Twenty-nine thousand were repressed in the ‘second category – meaning they were sent to labor camps. The local first secretary [of the Communist Party], however, writes that there are still more Trotskyites and kulaks who remain ‘unrepressed.’*

*“He is saying that the plan was fulfilled but the plan was not enough! And so he asked that it be increased by eight thousand. Stalin writes back, ‘No increase to nine thousand!’ The sickness of it. Its’ as if they were playing poking [and upping the ante in tragic human lives].”*

## **The Victims of Socialism Literally Reduced to Burnt Ash**

In the last years of the Soviet Union, a Russian historian took *The New York Times* correspondent, David Remnick, to the Donskoi Monastery in Moscow, which in the 1930s was used as a burial ground for the thousands regularly killed on Stalin's orders in the capital of the Red Empire. In his book, *Lenin's Tomb: The Last Days of the Soviet Empire* (1993), Remnick told what the Russian historian explained:

*“See this gate? . . . Well, every night trucks stacked with bodies came back here and dumped them in a heap. They'd already been shot in the back of the head – you bleed less that way . . . They stacked the bodies in old wooden ammunition crates.*

*“The workers stoked up the underground ovens – right in through the doors – to about twelve thousand degrees centigrade. To make things nice and official they even had professional witnesses who counter-signed the various documents.*

*“When the bodies were burned they were reduced to ash and some chips of bone, maybe some teeth. They then buried the ashes in a pit . . . When the purges [of the 1930s] were at their peak . . . the furnaces worked all night and the domes of the churches were covered with ash. There was a fine dust of ash on the snow.”*

The Kalitnikovskiy Cemetery in Moscow also served as dumping ground for thousands of tortured and executed bodies in the 1930s. That same Russian historian told David Remnick:

*“In the purges, every dog in town came to this place. That smell you smell now was three times as bad; blood was in the air. People would lean out of their windows and puke all night and the dogs howled until dawn. Sometimes they'd find a dog with an arm or a leg walking through the graveyard.”*

## **Enemies of Socialism Sent to Torture in the Mental Ward**

The nightmare of the socialist experiment, however, did not end with Stalin's death in 1953. Its form merely changed in later decades. As head of the KGB in the 1970s, Yuri Andropov (who later was General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union after Leonid Brezhnev's death in 1982), accepted a new theory in Soviet psychiatry that said that opposition to the socialist regime was a sign of mental illness.

Why? Because only the mentally disturbed would resist the logic and the truth of Marxian dialectical determinism and its “proof” that socialism and communism were the highest and most humane stage of social development. Those who criticized the system, or who wanted to reform or overthrow the Soviet socialist regime were mentally sick and required psychiatric treatment.

In his book, *Russia and the Russians* (1984), former Moscow correspondent for the *Washington Post*, Kevin Klose, told the story of Alexei Nikitin, a coal mine worker who complained to the

Soviet government about the safety and health environment in the mines of the Soviet Union. He was arrested, tried, and found guilty of subversion and committed to a Soviet mental institution.

Various drugs were proscribed as treatment to bring him to his proper socialist senses. Explained Kevin Klose:

*“Of all the drugs administered [at the mental institution] to impose discipline, sulfazine stood at the pinnacle of pain . . . ‘People injected with sulfazine were groaning, sighing with pain, cursing the psychiatrists and Soviet power, cursing with everything in their hearts,’ Alexei told us. ‘The people go into horrible convulsions and get completely disoriented. The body temperature rises to 40 degrees centigrade [104 degrees Fahrenheit] almost instantly, and the pain is so intense they cannot move from their beds for three days. Sulfazine is simply a way to destroy a man completely. If they torture you and break your arms, there is a certain specific pain and you somehow can stand it. But sulfazine is like a drill boring into your body that gets worse and worse until it’s more than you can stand. It’s impossible to endure. It is worse than torture, because, sometimes, torture may end. But this kind of torture man continue for years.’*

*“Sulfazine normally was ‘prescribed’ in a ‘course’ of injections of increasing strength over a period that might last up to two months . . . The doctors had many other drugs with which to control and punish. Most of them eventually were used on Alexei . . . At the end of two months, Nikitin was taken off sulfazine but regular doses of . . . other disorienting drugs continued the entire time he was imprisoned.”*

The significance of these accounts is not their uniqueness but, rather, their monotonous repetition in every country in which socialism was imposed upon a society. In country after country, death, destruction, and privation followed in the wake of socialism’s triumph. Socialism’s history is an unending story of crushing tyranny and oceans of blood.

### **Socialism as the Ideology of Death and Destruction**

As the Soviet mathematician and dissident, Igor Shafarevich, who spent many years in the GULAG slave labor camps for his opposition to the communist regime, said in his book, *The Socialist Phenomenon* (1980):

*“Most socialist doctrines and movements are literally saturated with the mood of death, catastrophe, and destruction . . . One could regard the death of mankind as the final result to which the development of socialism leads.”*

That twentieth century socialism would lead to nothing but this outcome was understood at the time of the Bolshevik victory in Russia. It was clearly expressed by the greatest intellectual opponent of socialism during the last one hundred years, the Austrian economist, Ludwig von Mises.

Near the end of his famous 1922 treatise, *Socialism: An Economic and Sociological Analysis*, Mises warned that:

*“Socialism is not in the least what it pretends to be. It is not the pioneer of a better and finer world, but the spoiler of what thousands of years of civilization have created. It does not build, it destroys. For destruction is the essence of it. It produces nothing, it only consumes what the social order based on private ownership in the means of production has created . . . Each step leading towards Socialism must exhaust itself in the destruction of what already exists.”*

When voices are raised today calling for socialism in America, including by those attempting to win a major party candidacy to run for the presidency of the United States, **it is important – no, it is crucial – that the history and reality of socialism-in-practice in those parts of the world in which it was most thoroughly imposed and implemented be remembered and fully understood.** If we do not, well, history has its own ways of repeating itself.