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Van Ree presents a virtuoso and truly global history of communism.

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Erik van Ree

World Revolution The Communist Movement from Marx to Kim Jong Il

Whole libraries have been written about communism, but to this day the number of general histories of the movement as a whole, covering the mid-nineteenth century to the present, remains very limited. Attention is often focused on well-known episodes, concentrating on major villains like Stalin and Mao and leaving vague the context in which they operated.

The great merit of *World Revolution* is that it presents a detailed and comprehensive panorama, unburdened by Eurocentrism. It gives extensive coverage to the period after Stalin's death and continues the story through the Eastern European collapse and up to the present day. Erik van Ree describes countries where communist regimes took power, but he also examines places where communist opposition parties or guerrilla movements exerted a powerful influence on political developments. He devotes a great deal of attention to the role

of communism in Asia, Latin America and Africa.

Van Ree shows how communism was able to become the most influential political movement of the twentieth century, but he certainly cannot be accused of identifying too closely with his subject. The communist movement was created and led by 'romantics driven by hunger for power, mass-murdering poets and cynical fanatics, bureaucrats and yes-men dreaming of the great utopia'.

Naturally Van Ree looks in detail at communist ideology and at the significance of Karl Marx. He believes that the success of communism did not result from the naïve utopian message of a classless society. Rather it was able to acquire such a huge following because it allied itself to the democratic revolution that swept across the globe from the eighteenth century onwards, first across Europe and after 1900 the rest of the world. Like parasites, the communists clung to mass movements of dissatisfied workers, farmers, or ethnic minorities who felt discriminated against. Where democratic revolution was successful, in Western Europe for example, the communists remained relatively weak. They achieved their greatest successes in countries with autocratic traditions.

Van Ree's comprehensive overview of one of the bloodiest ideologies of the twentieth century is written in an engaging style with a sharp eye for detail. Nowadays Stalin is seen as at least as great a criminal as Hitler, but many still retain the notion that Lenin and Trotsky were noble souls who had the good of mankind at heart. Van Ree points out, however, that as early as 1917 they called for the 'opening of the sluice gates of blood'. Pin-up Ché Guevara was in reality a ruthless murderer, 'the Bin Laden of communism, the leader of an emerging communist al-Qaida'.



Sample Translation

World Revolution. The Communist Movement

From Marx To Kim Jong Il

(Wereldrevolutie)

by Erik van Ree

(Amsterdam: Mets & Schilt, 2005)

Translated by Liz Waters

Preface

Despite firmly resolving not to immerse myself in the writing of another book once I had completed my investigation into the political thought of Joseph Stalin, I have succumbed to the temptation to compile a history of the communist movement. Many of those who were once part of the movement lost all interest in it as soon as they left. It is now almost twenty-five years since my Maoist faith lapsed, but communism continues to fascinate me.

In this book I attempt to explain why tens of millions of people all over the world in the twentieth century threw in their lot with the communists and how, organised along strict party lines, they managed to gain control of a substantial proportion of the globe. Answers to such broad questions are bound to be inadequate and one-sided. The enduring image is of a movement that perpetrated murder and mayhem in the name of the Enlightenment ideal of equality, a group of people who, firmly convinced justice was on their side and that history would prove them right, stopped at nothing and for no one as they subjugated one country after another. The communist movement brought together romantics driven by hunger for power, poetry-writing mass murderers and cynical fanatics, bureaucrats and yes-men dreaming of a great utopia. It is impossible to say where, in a movement riddled with paradoxes, the idea ended and self-interest began. The comrades themselves could no longer tell.

The success of an ambitious project like this requires the imposition of certain boundaries. I have chosen to concentrate on those communist parties that were a significant force in their home countries. This is the story of parties that took power, helped to form coalition governments or, as guerrilla movements, were effective in undermining the state. I largely ignore parties that never managed to exercise significant influence. British and American communists, for example, are mentioned only in passing,

while considerable attention is given to those of Peru and the Philippines. This approach would have meant excluding the Communist Party of the Netherlands, were it not that this seemed a perverse omission for a book written in Dutch.

The fact that the Trotskyists feature hardly at all in this book should not be put down to the insidious prejudice of a former Maoist; by the criterion of power, they played virtually no significant role anywhere.

In the 1960s and '70s new movements emerged all over the world that drew upon Marxism-Leninism but did not present themselves as communist parties. These were national liberation movements that did not want to leave the freedom struggle to the traditional elite ('the bourgeoisie') but hoped to gather force by allying themselves with industrial workers and the peasant masses. Many different organisations fall into this category, including the various National Liberation Armies (NLAs) of Latin America, the Sandinistas in Nicaragua, Robert Mugabe's ZANU party, the People's Front for the Liberation of Palestine, the Tamil Tigers and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). Although they drew upon Marxism-Leninism, these organisations tended to be armies rather than parties. They did not follow the classic communist formula, with the party in command of an army. Their party programmes were socialist, but these new converts were primarily anti-imperialists and national freedom fighters, so generally speaking they do not fall within the scope of this book.

I have done my best to avoid Euro-provincialism. Ever since I was young I have felt annoyed by so-called histories of the world in which the Middle East and Asia feature as an archaeological prologue to European history, after which the world outside Europe disappears into an impenetrable fog only to reappear once firmly subjected to European rule. To describe the communist movement as a European and Russian phenomenon, with Mao, Ho Chi Minh and Fidel Castro as marginal extras, would be to fail to appreciate its truly global character. I refer to both

Russia and Europe for purely practical reasons, as a way of avoiding awkward formulations. I do not intend to imply that Russia is outside Europe.

Another all too common distortion that I aim to avoid is the tendency to treat the history of communism after 1953 as an epilogue to the era of the Comintern and Stalin. More than half the book focuses on the years since Stalin's death.

Erik van Ree, summer 2005

Chapter 2. Foundations: 1903-1941

The October Revolution

Lenin did not feel cast down by the disintegration of his party. He saw it as a chance to deal with any residual opportunism and with the hesitancy displayed by his comrades. The tone of the next pamphlet he published, in 1904, was even more brazen than *What is to be Done? In One Step Forward, Two Steps Back*. Lenin defended ‘centralism’ as the pre-eminent organizational principle of social democracy. By centralism he in fact meant dictatorship. Since party democracy in the conditions of tsarist Russia was in any case an impossible dream, he called for ‘martial law’ within the RSDLP. The central committee certainly ought to remain an elected body, but it should also be given a mandate to determine the composition of local committees and, where necessary, to forbid debates within the party. Lenin admitted that he saw himself as a ‘social-democratic Jacobin’.

Plekhanov had gone along with Lenin during the congress, but now he turned his back on him and sided with Martov. One of Lenin’s sharpest critics was Lev Davidovich Trotsky. The future world-famous revolutionary was born Lev Bronstein in 1879, the son of a rich Jewish farming family in the Ukraine. He was perhaps the most puzzling of all Russian revolutionaries. He was certainly the most fickle. One minute he would be vigorously defending democracy, the next just as eagerly setting himself up as a high priest of state terrorism and dictatorship. He allowed himself to be carried away by the sound of his own melodious voice and the quicksilver brilliance of his own mind. This flamboyant poseur was later accused by Stalin of narcissism, a charge not without some foundation.

Trotsky was in his element as an orator and he possessed a phenomenal ability to whip up the masses. After the revolution he would take to

dressing in Bolshevik leather, with tight boots and a long coat, topped off by an army cap with a red star. In his armoured train he chugged from one battlefield to the next, dreaming of the French Revolution. Faced by Stalin's rock-solid power politics, however, he was helpless.

Like Lenin, Trotsky escaped abroad from Siberian exile. On the staff of *Iskra* he earned himself the nickname The Pen. His aversion to Lenin's centralism led him to vote for Martov at the 1903 party congress. Trotsky warned against what he called 'substitutionism', saying that anyone who substituted the central committee for the party would one day find himself putting a dictator in charge of the central committee. Trotsky saw Lenin as the Russian Robespierre, but he found it just as hard to get along with the Mensheviks, who were too lethargic for his taste. At the end of 1904 he turned his back on them, haunting the party for many years afterwards as his own one-man faction.

This meant the RSDLP was split before it had properly got off the ground, and it would always be divided by chronic factional in-fighting. It is not entirely clear why the Russian social democrats were unable to treat each other in a civilized manner, but effective police repression under Nicholas II certainly played a role. The ranks of the party were thinned by regular arrests. Membership fell precipitously. Many leaders sought refuge in safe countries abroad. In Paris and Geneva, Zurich, London and Cracow they were cut off from ordinary party members, tending more than ever to lose themselves in fruitless battles over theory.

The first Russian Revolution broke out in 1905. The previous year the Japanese army had mounted a surprise attack on the Russian naval base at Port Arthur in Manchuria. The war, waged for control of Manchuria and Korea, turned dramatically against the Russians when their entire fleet was destroyed in the Tsuchima Strait in a single engagement. The war threw the country into turmoil. Liberals demanded constitutional reform and at the same time the workers made their voices heard. In January 1905 two

hundred thousand workers, led by a priest called Gapon, gathered in the square in front of the Winter Palace in the Russian capital to present the tsar with a petition. The army opened fire, killing several hundred demonstrators.

This Bloody Sunday prompted workers everywhere to go on strike and there were demonstrations all over the country. Peasants set country estates ablaze. In October the workers of St. Petersburg set up a council to coordinate their struggle. Trotsky, who had returned with all speed to his fatherland, was elected chairman. The ‘soviet’ called a general strike. All over the country, factories and banks closed and trains ceased to run. The other social democrat leaders also returned to St. Petersburg when the revolution broke out.

Despite the social democrats’ failure to predict this revolutionary explosion, their influence on the working masses grew rapidly. Membership of the RSDLP reached thirty thousand by early 1906. Social democrats organized their own armed detachments. To replenish party funds they staged bank robberies, took weapons from army barracks, and murdered police spies and civil servants. The RSDLP hoped to unleash an urban guerrilla war.

But the tsar held his ground. In August, after mutiny broke out in the Black Sea Fleet, he permitted the formation of a parliament. The дума would be elected on the basis of limited and unequal franchise, and the government remained answerable only to the tsar. Nicholas made peace with Japan and in December he had the leaders of the Petersburg soviet arrested. After the Bolshevik revolt in Moscow was quashed that same month the revolution ebbed away. In the first half of 1906 fifteen thousand rebels were executed.

The revolution stimulated even fiercer political debate within the RSDLP. The distrustful Lenin expected the liberal Constitutional Democrats to strike a deal with the tsar, so he rejected the established party

strategy of entering into a coalition with the middle classes. He wanted a revolutionary provisional government formed exclusively of representatives of the RSDLP and the Party of Socialist Revolutionaries, which was supported mainly by the peasants. Lenin was hoping for a ‘dictatorship of workers and peasants’ whose power would be based on local soviets. As befits a dictatorship, it would not have to feel ‘restricted by any law whatsoever’. This was the only kind of regime that could force the election of a constitutional conference.

With their rejection of the liberal bourgeoisie as a coalition partner and their reorientation towards the peasants’ parties, the Bolsheviks had formulated a radical strategy. Like the Mensheviks, however, Lenin still saw only an opposition role reserved for the workers’ party in the democratic republic he expected the constitutional conference to create. An immediate ‘permanent revolution’ to take the country in the direction of socialism seemed to him unlikely in a country as backward as Russia.

Trotsky alone had more imagination. In *Results and Prospects*, published in 1906, he defended the concept of ‘permanent revolution’. He advocated a ‘government of workers’, dominated by the RSDLP, which would force the democratic republic to become a socialist state. But even Trotsky’s imagination had its limits. Like all social democrats of his time he assumed that the peasant masses would eventually put a spanner in the socialist works. At that point the only hope for a dictatorship of the proletariat in Russia would lie in support from a revolutionary Western Europe. For the time being they were building castles in the air.

The revolution briefly brought the social democrats closer together. The working-class membership found divisiveness within the party hard to comprehend and Lenin felt a need to show his conciliatory side. The Mensheviks proposed uniting the two factions on the basis of a flexible organisational model they called ‘democratic centralism’. This involved keeping the power of the elected central committee within certain

democratic limits, so that everyone would have a fair chance. Lenin grudgingly accepted this proposal, but in practice he clung to his original ‘centralist’ model. The Bolsheviks chose to adopt the term ‘democratic centralism’, however, so what had been a Menshevik concept now became part of communist jargon.

The RSDLP gathered for a party congress in Stockholm in April 1906. This time the Mensheviks were in the majority. Lenin was not included in the newly elected central committee. Anyone who thought the party had finally grown up was in for a disappointment. Lenin could not accept defeat and formed a secret ‘Bolshevik centre’. Both factions remained in existence and the squabbling continued.

The years of ‘reaction’

After the failure of the revolution the workers’ movement collapsed. The ‘reactionaries’ were riding high. In 1907 there were still three quarters of a million registered strikers, but by 1910 fewer than fifteen thousand remained. Trade union membership fell from a quarter of a million to little more than ten thousand. Of almost a hundred thousand members of the RSDLP in 1907, no more than ten thousand were left by 1910. As a result of repression and the mass exodus of members, only a handful of local committees continued to operate. Social democrat members of parliament were now the only remaining public face of the party. The tsar dissolved the duma twice, in 1906 and 1907, but the third session was allowed to run its full term. It included eighteen social democrats, five Bolsheviks among them.

Factional in-fighting went from bad to worse. At the fifth party congress, held in London in April 1907, the Bolsheviks regained their majority. Lenin, who had moved back to Western Europe, was elected onto the central committee. For many years the Bolsheviks had been financed by adventurous entrepreneurs who believed they could use the revolutionaries to take the tsar down a peg or two, but after the debacle of 1905 rich

backers withdrew their support. In direct opposition to congressional resolutions, the Bolsheviks decided to continue robbing banks and stage-coaches to raise much needed funds. The Mensheviks were not amused. The fact that Lenin was not prepared to share with them sixty thousand roubles of life insurance money that he had received on the death of millionaire Savva Morozov destroyed any remaining trust between them.

Worse still, both factions fell apart. First to split were the Mensheviks. A small group led by Alexander Potresov advocated disbanding the illegal wing of the party. Plechanov rejected this ‘liquidationism’ and formed his own faction. The Bolsheviks split not long after. Lenin’s closest colleague Alexander Bogdanov stubbornly continued to believe in a fresh armed uprising in the near future, whereas Lenin insisted on the need to take part in elections for the duma and warned against neglecting the trade unions. In 1909 Bogdanov established his own faction, called Forwards. As his new number two Lenin took on Grigory Zinoviev, born Radomyslski and Jewish by origin. Zinoviev had a striking appearance, with a sensual face and a mass of curly hair. He was a talented speechmaker, almost of the same calibre as Trotsky, but he was handicapped by a weak and nervous streak in his character. After the revolution he was appointed chairman of the Communist International, but he proved unable to hold his own against Stalin and became one of his most eminent victims.

The only person to make serious efforts to restore party unity was Trotsky. He had settled in Vienna where he published his own magazine, *Pravda*, not to be confused with the later Bolshevik newspaper of the same name. Trotsky’s desire for reconciliation annoyed Lenin immensely.

Lenin now made even philosophy a capital offence. Alexander Bogdanov was a versatile intellectual, a doctor by profession who had written two science fiction novels set on a communist mars: *Red Star* and *Engineer Menni*. As a ‘collectivist’ he championed a terrifying vision of the future, in which the individual would be swallowed up by the community,

hemmed in like a cell in an organism. Bogdanov was a philosopher, the only one of any significance produced by Russian communism. His ‘empiriomonism’ rejected the idea of an objective and knowable reality. Lenin saw this as defiling Engels’ materialist heritage and in his *Materialism and Empiriocriticism* of 1909 he exposed his former comrade as a muddle-headed thinker whose work benefited the class enemy.

Many *praktiki*, the men and women of the Russian underground, struggling to survive by illegal means, were infuriated by the relentless factional in-fighting inflicted upon them by leaders living in comfort abroad. Headed by Alexei Rykov and Michail Tomsky, they objected to the dominant role played by emigrants in the RSDLP. They demanded reconciliation and the transfer of party headquarters to Russia. It is at this point in the epic tale of the Russian Revolution that we first encounter Joseph Vissarionovich Dzhugashvili. As Stalin, he was to become one of the most cold-blooded mass murderers in history.

This small man, with his underdeveloped left arm, pockmarked face and pair of conjoined toes, was reasonably handsome in his youth. In old photographs he looks rather a charmer, relaxed and mysterious, with a jaunty hat. Although a mediocre speaker, Stalin certainly had charisma. His simple vocabulary and his obvious inner conviction made an impression on all who heard him. Stalin was a man of ice rather than of fire. He felt no compassion, sparing neither friends nor family, in fact he did not seem to possess a conscience. He arrested, deported and murdered people in their hundreds of thousands without feeling troubled by it in the least. But neither did the bloodletting bring him any joy. The business at hand demanded such measures, and that was reason enough. If there was any passion that drove him then it was fear of the conspirators and enemies who had him and his state in their sights, with whom he was enmeshed in a life and death struggle in the fairytale world of his imagination.

Stalin was born in 1878 in the town of Gori in Georgia, the son of a washerwoman and a shoemaker down on his luck. Eager to learn, Joseph attended a church school and in 1894 he entered the seminary in Tbilisi to train for the priesthood. Several of the patriotic and populist poems he wrote as a young student were published in the renowned magazine *Iveria*. In 1898 he joined the RSDLP. He was expelled from the seminary the following year and went underground not long after. Most Transcaucasian social democrats converted to Menshevism, but Dzhugashvili belonged to the handful that followed Lenin. Within this small group he played a prominent role. He was active in many party committees and represented the Transcaucasian Bolsheviks at the congresses in Stockholm and London.

In 1907, as a member of the Tbilisi committee, he was involved in robberies organised by Bolshevik central command. He then moved to Baku and joined the oil workers' struggle there. But he was no born strike leader. Dzhugashvili was truly in his element organizing the illegal apparatus of the party. He travelled all over the country to bolster the party's Bolshevik elements, never passing up a chance to play dirty tricks on the Mensheviks. He also edited innumerable newspapers and magazines, which were usually closed down by the police after only a few issues had appeared. Dzhugashvili was regularly arrested, imprisoned and exiled to Siberia or to Europe's high north, but he repeatedly escaped and picked up where he had left off.

Stalin was attracted by Bogdanov's radicalism but nevertheless sided with Lenin. He felt most at home among the *praktiki* who engaged in day-to-day underground activities. In 1910 the central committee met in Paris. A final attempt to mend fences between the different factions ran up against reluctance on all sides. In January 1912 the Bolsheviks in Prague elected their own central committee, whose members included Lenin and Zinoviev. Having decided not to emigrate, Dzhugashvili was unknown abroad, but he was valued highly enough to be co-opted onto the new governing body.

He would not have long to prove himself. In January 1913 he travelled to Vienna via Cracow, where Lenin was living by this time, and there he put the finishing touches to his pamphlet *Marxism and the National Question*. In it he took to task the so-called ‘Austromarxists’ for their proposal to allow national communities ‘cultural autonomy’ within multinational empires. Like Lenin, he felt this would only help to preserve primitive traditions. But he understood that nations could not simply be wished away. Stalin’s definition of a nation as a relatively stable community of language, territory, economics and psychology was later made holy writ by the communist movement. Shortly after his return to St. Petersburg he was arrested again. Until the revolution of March 1917 he lived in the tundra region of Turuchansk in Siberia, a place plagued by mosquitoes in summer and subject to breathtaking cold in winter. He spent his time arguing with other exiles. As often as possible he went on duck hunts.

Meanwhile things gradually began to improve for the Bolsheviks. In 1912, 270 protesting workers at the Lena gold mine in Siberia were shot dead by the army. Hundreds of thousands of workers protested at the bloodbath by going on strike. In the elections of autumn that year the Mensheviks won seven seats in the duma, the Bolsheviks six, but those six seats represented all the workers’ electoral colleges of the great industrial regions. The Bolsheviks were reaping the rewards of their determined efforts. They had become the strongest party of the Russian working class.

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Castro sees the light, Guevarism fails

Castro took power as a revolutionary democrat, promising to make Cuba a free and independent nation. It was not to be. Conservative politicians depicted him as a ‘watermelon’, green on the outside, red on the inside. Once in power, Prime Minister Castro radicalized to become a communist. Before the year was out the ‘revolutionary tribunals’ held by Che [Guevara] and Raúl [Castro] sentenced almost two thousand people to death, mostly functionaries of the old regime who were guilty of torture or murder. From 1960 onwards liberal critics and even Castro’s own comrades-in-arms like Huber Matos were condemned to prison terms of up to twenty years.

Within two years Castro had established a socialist state-controlled economy. In June 1959 all land belonging to *latifundia* of more than a certain size, mostly sugar beet and tobacco plantations or cattle farms, was expropriated. Along with foreign owners, like the ubiquitous United Fruit Company, Cuban landowners were targeted. In a departure from the usual communist formula, Castro left many of the confiscated *latifundia* intact to be run as state corporations. Some of the land was shared out among small farmers. In February 1960 Moscow and Havana signed a trade agreement. The American refineries on the island refused to process oil supplied by the USSR in return for sugar. At this point Castro decided to nationalize all American businesses, along with the banking sector and heavy industry. By late 1960 only small enterprises remained in private hands.

Washington tried every possible means of toppling Castro. It instituted a trade embargo and broke off diplomatic relations. The CIA organized acts of sabotage; hundreds of thousands of tons of sugar as well as factories, shops and storage sites went up in flames. The most spectacular operation came in April 1961, when fifteen hundred armed exiles landed at the so-called Bay of Pigs. American bombers attacked the Cuban air force, but

operation Zapata ended in failure. The supply ships were sunk and the rebels' bridgehead was stormed and overrun.

In May a triumphant Castro declared Cuba a socialist state. His 26th of July Movement merged with the PSP to form the United Party of the Socialist Revolution or PURS.

Castro created an immense military apparatus from a standing start. By the end of 1961 the Cuban army had three hundred thousand soldiers and the ranks of the people's militia as many again. Eight hundred thousand citizens were organised into 'Committees for the Defence of the Revolution' to crush any local opposition before it could raise its head. Castro declared war on decadence and 'abnormal sexual behaviour'. Prostitutes, 'pederasts' and homosexuals were sent to concentration camps; the leader described them as parasites and pigs. In December 1961 he announced his conversion to Marxism-Leninism.

The following year, to make his regime completely invincible, Castro agreed to Khrushchev's proposal to turn Cuba into a Soviet missile base. The intention was to station fifty thousand Soviet troops on the island, along with rockets and planes capable of delivering a total payload equivalent to more than eight thousand Hiroshima bombs into the skies above the United States. When Khrushchev climbed down under pressure from Kennedy, the proud Castro was outraged. Eighteen thousand Soviet soldiers remained in Cuba, but his affection for the Soviet Union had cooled.

It was Guevara who set the tone in the economic sphere. As chairman of the National Bank and Minister for Industry he advocated industrialization of the island and 'diversification' of the Cuban economy to reduce its disproportionate dependence on sugar exports. He was opposed to performance-related pay. All workers in the same job would from now on receive the same wage. On 'days of voluntary labour' Cubans were expected to work without pay. Guevara was on a mission to combat self-

interest and ‘egotism’. Instead of perpetuating capitalist greed by means of ‘material stimuli’, communism would create a New Man, ready to sacrifice himself for the community. Guevara idealized war, along with work, as a form of schooling. Warfare awakened ‘merciless hatred’ in fighters, helping them to rise above their own trivial self interests, he claimed. He described his New Man as ‘an effective, violent, selective and cold killing machine’.

Guevara saw no merit at all in the ‘market socialism’ that was so popular in Eastern Europe. He believed that a socialist planned economy should function like a single large company and in his view the self-financing of businesses out of their own profits was incompatible with this ideal.

But the centralist model did not work. Agricultural production fell. In 1961 Cuba harvested 6.9 million tons of sugar, in 1963 only 3.9. By 1962 many food items were rationed. Partly because of the American boycott the trade deficit increased dramatically. Guevara was forced to admit that he had been too hasty. Though it pained him greatly, he acknowledged that sugar would remain a key factor for some time to come and the ideal of a ‘diversified’ economy was abandoned. This only served to bring Cuba closer to the Comecon strategy of an international socialist division of labour.

Guevara took the defeat badly and decided henceforth to devote his energies to world revolution. Castro and he were the first major communist leaders not to have been schooled by the Comintern. On the basis of his experiences during the Cuban revolution, Guevara developed his own revolutionary strategy. According to his famous *focismo* approach, the revolution did not necessarily have to be led by the communist party. A small guerrilla army could serve as the forge, or *foco*. The revolution could be unleashed even if the masses as yet wanted nothing to do with it. The propaganda of the deed would open their eyes as events progressed. The revolution would, so to speak, create its own preconditions. In Europe this

concept was taken up by the Red Army Faction and the Italian Red Brigades. Like Guevara, they were banging their heads against a brick wall.

For Che Guevara, Cuba was merely a step towards world revolution. This globalist instinct put him well ahead of his time. He realized that the revolution would inevitably take a different course in each country, but for precisely this reason the *foco* did not have to be composed of revolutionaries from the country concerned. Had not he, an Argentine, taken a leading role in the Cuban revolution? Revolutionaries of all nationalities could take the lead in whichever country they liked. Che hoped to set up a flying brigade to serve world revolution, a gang of indeterminate nationality that would foment rebellion in one part of the world after another. Guevara was the Bin Laden of communism, the leader of a communist Al-Qaida in the making.

Che was a media star just like Castro. He took not the slightest notice of diplomatic dress codes. At international conferences the mysterious hero would appear wearing a black beret with a red star, unshaven, a cigar dangled casually from the corner of his mouth. Che was communism's second youth. Even before he died the death of a martyr he was the idol of left-wing young people worldwide.

Guevara established links with the African revolutionaries Ben Bella, Agostinho Neto and Sékou Touré. He relinquished his Cuban citizenship. 'My energies are required by other peoples of the world,' he explained, vanishing into the dark. Along with a gang of fellow fighters he joined the Congolese revolution of April 1965 led by Laurent Kabila. The leadership of the nationalist warlord was so lamentable that Che withdrew from Africa altogether in March 1966, thoroughly disillusioned.

In November that year the restless revolutionary travelled to the mountainous south-eastern region of Bolivia to try again. In a message to the peoples of the world in April 1967 he reported that he was dreaming of 'two, three or many Vietnams'. He deliberately chose the centrally located

Bolivia. If the revolution succeeded here, it could serve as a base of operations for the whole of Latin America. Deep in the rainforest Guevara established the first camp of his National Liberation Army, the ELN, and initiated hostilities. The revolutionaries proved no match for the Bolivian army. Local workers and peasants withheld their support and the ranks quickly thinned. In October 1967 a depressed and emaciated Guevara was trapped in a ravine and captured. The next day he was shot dead and buried beside the runway of a local airfield.

Che lived on as a myth and an icon. With his long hair, short beard and smouldering eyes he looked like a hippy, a 1960s prophet of peace. It is difficult to avoid seeing a twentieth-century Jesus of Nazareth in the famously captivating photograph. It is ironic that a killer and a prophet of hatred and war acquired such a status, but not incomprehensible. This particular prophet combined hatred and warfare with a readiness for personal sacrifice. In Cuba he was guaranteed limitless power and comfort, but he decided not to rest on his laurels. In a gesture unique among comfortably successful revolutionaries he gave up everything he had to risk his life once again. His death made his sacrifice complete.

In October 1965 Fidel had renamed PURS the Communist Party of Cuba. After the failed ‘diversification’ of the economy he put all his hopes in sugar and announced that from 1970 onwards ten million tons must be brought in each year. The campaign was accompanied by a further upheaval in Cuban life. In 1968 Castro declared a Great Revolutionary Offensive to spike the guns of the ‘remnants of the bourgeoisie’. The small business sector was now nationalised as well, hotdog stalls and ice cream stands included. The revolution had not been achieved to help counterrevolutionary parasites to a warm meal, Castro declared. In his weekly speeches El Máximo Líder fulminated for hours against ‘work-shy scum’. Tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands, sometimes a million Cubans hung breathlessly on his every word.

Fidel Castro raised demagoguery to an art form. Communism has not produced very many great speakers and none have matched his ability to stand on a podium and move people directly. When he speaks to small groups he has a thin, squeaky voice, but before a large audience he can thunder impressively. He gesticulates emphatically, with great sweeps of his arms, and punctuates his speech with long, well-judged pauses. The letter 'r' rolls endlessly over his tongue. The narcissist in army fatigues captivates the crowd.

The entire Cuban population was mobilized to take part in the 'economic war'. People were called upon to give all they had to achieve the ten million tons. Toiling under the burning sun an entire population cut sugar cane, from children to pensioners. Fidel himself swung a machete for four hours a day. But with workers and students slaving away in the plantations, industry and education were seriously disrupted. The peasants neglected their other crops and their cattle. Cuba ground to a halt. The great target was not met. 8.5 million tons were harvested in 1970 and in July Castro publicly admitted defeat. The Battle for Ten Million Tons had been lost.

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A glass of water in the desert

As far as the armed struggle is concerned, today's Nepal is again the major exception. Here, parliamentary communism has made significant strides and at the same time the Maoists have increased in strength. Whereas Colombian, Peruvian, and Filipino guerrilla fighters are finding it hard to stay afloat, or have already gone under, their Nepalese counterparts are preparing to take power, even though it is extremely unlikely they will succeed in doing so.

On 13 February 1996 the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) launched the 'Nepalese People's War'. The party has its origins in the CPN (Unity Centre), established in November 1990, which landed nine seats in the elections of 1991, doing particularly well in the poor and mountainous western regions of Rolpa and Rukum where the majority of inhabitants belong to the Magar people. In 1995 the Secretary General, Pushpa Kamal Dahal, changed the name of the party to CPN (Maoist). Like the Shining Path, it belongs to the Revolutionary Internationalist Movement.

The unusually ambitious 'Prachanda', as the leader calls himself, was probably born around 1955. He claims to come from a family of poor peasant farmers. By the age of seventeen, again according to his own version of events, he had developed an aversion to 'Indian expansionism'. He became a Maoist. Prachanda dreamed of becoming the new standard bearer of international communism. As he saw it, poor and mountainous Nepal was eminently suited to guerrilla warfare. The 'backward rural districts', where the government presence was minimal, were a natural 'reservoir of the revolution'. Villages were unreachable by road and local people had never even used a telephone. The national minorities had rough-and-ready democratic institutions, a healthy lack of respect for religion, and a tradition of equality between men and women. Or so claimed Prachanda,

who advocated a Great Leap Forward, by which he meant an abruptly ignited people's war.

In February 1996 the war began, initially in Rolpa and Reklam. Using a now familiar terrorist tactic, Prachanda drove the local authorities out of the villages he wished to occupy. First he attacked the local infrastructure. Police posts were set alight with incendiary bombs, and banks, village development committees and a number of factories were targeted. Most people in positions of authority were forced to flee. Selected figures were murdered. Some of the dead were so-called local tyrants, but others were chairmen of village development committees, teachers, police officers or political party functionaries. Worst affected was the Congress Party, but Maoists later murdered UML party organizers as well. Suspected police spies might simply have their legs broken. By 1999 the Maoists had murdered an estimated 135 people.

No one armed these guerrilla fighters, so initially they fought with knives and old muskets. Nevertheless their progress was swift. They acquired weapons by laying ambushes for the police. The major cities remained beyond their reach, but the countryside in a number of western regions quickly fell to them. At the end of 1998 the CPN(M) announced the formation of 'base areas'.

Prachanda cultivated a spirit of martyrdom. He believed that violence purified the character of revolutionaries, people used to the 'unclean habits' of feudalism. Through 'blood sacrifice' comrades could conquer their individualism. Children were forced to join the Maoist army.

In the villages new governing bodies were created. All citizens were forced to make donations. Despite this many peasants were sympathetic towards the party. School fees were reduced and land reforms implemented. The party established new village schools and organized rudimentary medical care. Teachers were banned from teaching Sanskrit and forced to change the curriculum. Exploitative practices and slavery were tackled,

while ‘people’s tribunals’ provided a rough form of justice. ‘Extortionists’ were beaten up and rapists and men who mistreated their wives were taken to task. A common punishment was public humiliation and beating with a stick.

The Nepalese revolution is a dismal affair. Destitute peasants set out to wreak revenge on those who previously tormented them, spurred on by ideologues who draw their inspiration from a sense of injustice combined with an appetite for power and their own ideological folly. It is a hopeless struggle, no less miserable than the situation the fighters are trying to escape.

In August 2001 a ceasefire was agreed. During talks the CPN(M) demanded the formation of a provisional government, led by the party, which would call elections for a constitutional conference. In November, with the government refusing to comply with this demand, the party broke the truce.

For the first time, Prachanda’s forces started to mount raids on army posts. A wave of attacks followed, targeting radio- and television masts, banks, government offices, village development committees, bridges, hydroelectric power stations and water supply networks, airports and schools across the whole country. With support from all parties in parliament, the government proclaimed martial law and mobilized the army. In January 2003 a second truce was agreed, but in August Baburam Bhattarai, a confidant of Prachanda who was negotiating on his behalf, revoked the agreement.

The civil war is already responsible for more than ten thousand deaths, the vast majority at the hands of government forces. The army and police have caused many more civilian casualties than the Maoists and they are guilty of murder, torture and rape, but Prachanda’s forces show no sign of diminishing. In December 2004 his units briefly blockaded Kathmandu. In early February 2005 the king dissolved parliament and the Nepalese army

began a new offensive, but it has yet to achieve any success. Half the countryside of western Nepal is now in the hands of the Maoists, although their power does not extend to the provincial towns. In most other districts they have at least some influence. The guerrilla army consists of an estimated five thousand men and supports itself by means of bank robberies and forced taxation. Prachanda aims gradually to undermine the government and disrupt everyday life.

The Maoist rebel leader could not be accused of undue modesty. He has declared the 'Path of Prachanda' to be a further development of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism. In his vision the centre of the world revolution has shifted to his fatherland, having previously been located in France, Germany, Russia and China in turn. In a world devoid of communist revolutions, Nepal is 'the glass of water in the desert'. As a first step towards the approaching 'global people's war' Prachanda foresees the establishment of a South-Asian Soviet Federation. He is now forming links with splinter groups of the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) that perpetuate the legacy of the Indian Naxalite movement. Delhi, Washington and London are currently awaiting developments.

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Afterword

In close to a hundred years in which the communists have managed to carve out a path for themselves, they have driven tens of millions of people worldwide to their deaths. Most fell victim to famines caused by ill-advised economic policies or to the merciless bleeding dry of entire populations. Tens of millions have been deported or sent to concentration camps. Millions died on their way to the camps or places of exile, or after arriving there. Millions have been shot, beaten to death, or hanged. Communism has produced some of the most terrible tyrants in history. As well as Stalin, Mao and Pol Pot, the reader of this book will by now have made the acquaintance of many lesser monsters.

The names Lenin and Trotsky are perhaps less tainted, as yet, in the eyes of the public at large. Were they not romantic revolutionaries, engaged in a life-and-death struggle with followers of the tsar and imperialist forces? They may have gone rather too far, but do we not need to go a long way to achieve a better world?

Yet all things considered they too were rogues, leaders of gangs of political thugs. They enjoyed prosecuting civil war. They proclaimed the Red Terror because they imagined themselves to be actors in a fantastic historical drama. They had the privilege of being allowed to repeat the performance at which Maximilien de Robespierre had failed, and they were determined that this time round no one would be left alive who could possibly turn their fortunes against them. Lenin and Trotsky took pride in the fact that they did not care a jot about democracy or human rights. They enjoyed the exercise of their own brutality. They portrayed Western European social democrats as timid lapdogs and agents of the bourgeoisie. To strike terror into their enemies they had innocent hostages shot in droves. They blocked the distribution of food stamps to members of classes they aimed to abolish, who then froze to death in the wintry streets.

It would be easy to write a history of the communist movement consisting only of mass murder and terror, but that would amount to a serious misrepresentation of the truth. Communism's democratic pretensions were not always deceptive. Over the years, more and more comrades emerged who bore no ill will towards democracy; Enrico Berlinguer, Alexander Dubcek and Mikhail Gorbachev returned to communism's democratic roots.

Even in the case of the greatest monsters, history can be painted blacker than it is. I have never been completely convinced by the thesis that Stalin's 'class murder' is equivalent to Hitler's 'race murder'. There is a hint of demagoguery about such an assertion. Anyone forced to choose between travelling to the USSR in 1930 as a 'kulak' or to Germany in 1943 as a Jew would not hesitate for a second. Stalin may have had more murders on his conscience than Hitler, but the principle on which he operated was different and, as a consequence, he acted differently too.

A racist, Hitler was convinced that the Jews were inferior by nature. They represented a contamination of humanity and therefore had to be exterminated. While the Nazis implemented a policy of extermination, the Bolsheviks implemented a policy of terrorism. They were merciless in settling scores with class enemies and other suspect groups and minorities, aiming to deprive them of all power, property and influence, and to terrify them to such an extent that they would never dare open their mouths again. To achieve this they had to kill any 'counter-revolutionary elements' among them, if necessary by the hundreds of thousands, or indeed millions. Events took precisely this course in the USSR in the thirties and forties, in China in the fifties and sixties, and in Cambodia in the decade that followed. But the majority of enemies were not destined for execution but for the cells, the camps, or the deportation zones. They were put to work as forced labourers to help build socialism.

Stalin would not have understood the suggestion that the enemies of the working class should be exterminated. He would have dismissed the idea as childishly excessive. He might quite possibly have had the author of any such proposal executed as a clandestine saboteur.

None of this alters the fact that communism is one of the most criminal movements in history. Communist dictatorship and terror are phenomena it is hard to explain even today. The right-wing extremism that coalesced at the end of the nineteenth century and went on to develop into fascism and Nazism never made any kind of appeal to democracy and human rights. Under the influence of Nietzsche, the principle of equality was dismissed as a decadent aberration of Christianity, a crafty attempt by the weak to generate sympathy and thereby deny the natural elite the ruling position that rightfully belonged to it. Violence was seen as a right that naturally belonged to the strong, a vital and joyous principle that strengthened the human race by liquidating the weak.

Murder is only to be expected from those who deride compassion, but we are not so quick to expect murder from parties that claim to be guided by the principles of equality and democracy. Communist terror has been attributed to influences from outside Europe. Marxism is said to have been a democratic movement that degenerated into despotism when it acquired the despotic traditions of the countries where it came to power. No one would claim that the political traditions of countries like Russia, China and Cambodia were conducive to the development of democracy. These countries had been ruled by autocrats for centuries. Religious traditions had a pernicious influence as well. The Russian Orthodox Church's insistence on religious consensus, Confucianism's cult of authority and loyalty, and Buddhism's attempts at detachment from the ego contributed to communism's 'monotheism'.

But we should not let Marxism off too lightly. The core ideal of Marxism, the common ownership of the means of production, did much to

determine the dictatorial path taken by communism. Even the assumption that this ideal is laudable in itself but simply does not work is highly questionable. It presumes that the right to private property is not of the same order as other rights, like freedom of expression, religion and conscience. Anyone who believes in the importance of economic freedom will reject the communist ideal out of hand.

Communism has, at the very least, the potential to be repressive. Equality in the communist sense means the confiscation of all capital, not only the assets of public utility companies and large shareholders but all shops, all farms, all land, all houses, in short all property that generates income. Even if an elected parliament were to opt for the introduction of a communist economic system, it is barely conceivable that those from whom everything was about to be taken would fail to resist by all means at their disposal. A civil war would not be long in coming. To crush resistance, martial law would be proclaimed. Even Marx and Engels expected that their communist democracy would lead to a dictatorship of the proletariat.

After resistance has been quashed, the ban on private enterprise remains in force. No one holds the right to open a business or to trade on his own behalf. No one holds the right to employ the services of a fellow citizen for reasons of profit, or to provide such services himself. Private interest-bearing loans are forbidden. Every form of free economic exchange is punished as ‘speculation’ and ‘illegal self-enrichment’. In a communist society activities are criminalized that in other societies are not only unpunishable by law but regarded as citizens’ initiatives of a praiseworthy kind. Communism reveals itself as a repressive form of society.

The communists have always had an underdeveloped sense of justice. In this respect even Marx and Engels leave much to be desired. They never had any difficulty with the notion of a democracy that resorted to dictatorial measures wherever necessary to break resistance to its policy of expropriation. Lenin went a step further. Even before he came to power he

overturned the basic principle of the rule of law by denying that all citizens were equal in the eyes of the law. Indeed in *State and Revolution*, written in the summer of 1917, he actually defined democracy as the dictatorship of the majority. Before a single shot had been fired in the civil war, he described democracy as a state in which the minority loses its rights.

The idea that true democracy means denying rights to those who do not deserve them, in the name of higher social ideals, is at the core of the history of communism, from beginning to end. In Santiago Carrillo's work on Eurocommunism it returns yet again, where he speaks of the desirability of a 'hegemony of the workers'. That all citizens deserve equal rights, whatever their social position, is an insight few communists have acquired. Many of their misdeeds, and their lack of regret in carrying them out, can be traced back to this lack of empathy for fellow citizens of the 'wrong class'.

The exceptional violence of the twentieth-century communist movement also has its roots in its unique morality. Taking a lead from Marx and Engels, people laughed at the Christian sermonizers with their universal obligations and constraints. In 1936 Trotsky wrote *Their Morals and Ours*, a work whose very title drips with irony. Humanity is divided into classes. The real world is not governed by goodwill but by class interest. For the egotistical bourgeois, good means whatever is good for him. The workers should think this way as well. There is no salvation beyond the class struggle.

In fact the Leninists had no morals at all. They did not believe in the existence of good and evil, only in things that were good or bad for the cause. Their tactics were their morals. They made themselves the measure of all things and they gave themselves permission to do absolutely anything.

In truth the exercise of power brought the communists no joy. They saw themselves as doing what needed to be done. They scorned the fascist cult

of violence just as they scorned Christian pacifism. Gandhi and Mussolini were tarred with the same brush. The shameless Italian had made himself just as ridiculous with his praise of violence as the Indian saint with his policy of non-violence. If the end justifies the means, then no means can be sacrosanct in its own right. Neither violence nor non-violence have their own intrinsic value; they are simply to be applied according to the circumstances and the demands of the movement. It is difficult to say which kind of morality we ought to prefer, were it to come to a direct choice: fascist or communist.