

Why are we so understanding towards the crimes of Communism?

On June 1, 2015, a deeply shocking event took place in the former Communist-ruled Hungary. A Court of Second Instance (lower appeals court) voided an earlier court's finding that a top Communist official and one of the instigators of reprisals against the 1956 Freedom Fighters, Béla Biszku (94), was guilty of war crimes and was responsible for the murder of unarmed demonstrators in Budapest during the dying days of the Hungarian Revolution.

Figures of these reprisals vary, but over 20,000 people were interned, and another 20,000 were jailed and some 400 executed. A certain number were even kidnapped from nearby states and either murdered on the spot or brought before kangaroo courts.

One of the main movers behind these shocking figures, obviously a man with blood on his hands, now walks free.

By contrast, the trial of Oskar Gröning, a Nazi bookkeeper (also 94 years old) who worked at Auschwitz, who killed no one, and who tried to get himself assigned to another job, has been reported around the world. He was found guilty by a court in Germany and sentenced to four years in prison.

So why did a war criminal go free in Hungary, and why did you likely not even hear about it?

The Communism that did not 'collapse'

Firstly, while what the West called the "collapse of Communism" (Central and Eastern European countries use much less triumphalist terminology, such as "the change of system")

did achieve a largely peaceful transfer of power from a brutal party-state dictatorship to a multi-party democracy; and from a non-functioning centrally-planned economy to some version of a free market, because of the unequal relations between former holders of power and their victims it is not surprising that the erstwhile murderers, torturers and perpetrators of genocide, or their children, came out on top and became both the new political elite and the wealthiest stratum of society.

In other words the members of the all-pervading Communist Party Nomenklatura got into positions where they would be able to take advantage of the "changes". The lesson to the youth was – and remains – "crime pays".

Indeed, there are only three countries that have succeeded in some measure in forcing a small level of accountability on the former single party. These are Poland, the Czech Republic and Rumania. (East Germany is no longer a separate country, but some cases were brought against former Stasi secret police leaders by the united Germany.)

Also, unlike other revolutions, the ones in Central and Eastern Europe were mostly "top down" affairs, where many ordinary people felt they were forced into free markets and were made to accept democracy. This feeling varies, but is most commonplace in Hungary, Rumania and Bulgaria.

Many Communists took advantage of privatisation to become rich. One example would be a man I know of who ran a collective farm. He went to the newly-re-established bank and asked for a loan. The manager asked what collateral he had, so he threw in the upcoming harvest. He got the loan, bought the land on the so-called "free market" and is now a multi-millionaire. There is just one problem. Collective farms were created by stealing people's smallholdings and then forcing them to work there. And did they get their lands back? Some did, most didn't; some got small cash payments. So, while behind the old Iron Curtain there might be a "free" market, it

certainly isn't a "fair" market.

It cannot be surprising then, that the new elite rigged things in such a way that they would elude justice when their countries became democracies.

Short-circuiting democracy in Hungary

In Hungary for instance, they created a kind of Trojan Horse for the future return of democracy. This came about in January 1989, when it was clear that there was a strong pressure for an end to the one-party state and little support from the "Comrades" in Moscow. They created a Constitutional Court with powers to prevent any legislation from passing if the court deemed it "unconstitutional", thus putting the eleven-member body above the elected legislature. They therefore short-circuited the democratic process (unlike the UK or the US court system, which first allows laws to be promulgated, then challenged in court, all the way up the system.) The Constitutional Court replaces the Upper House of Parliament and so all the Communists had to do was get a majority in there and thus totally control the political process.

The first leader of this body was Dr László Sólyom, with whom I had a personal debate at the South Africa Foundation in the early 1990s on the issue of returning property "nationalised" (read: "stolen"). I was deeply shocked at his apparent lack of understanding of basic property rights and the arguments he gave to those present, many of whom had significant property, including homes, businesses and even factories taken and received a paltry sum. (What we didn't know then was that these properties were "privatised" to former members of the Communist Party and their friends and are still in their hands today.)

I challenged him about the three basic liberties, life, liberty and property (blame Thomas Jefferson for the "pursuit of happiness") and he professed ignorance of them, stressing

the French Revolution's "liberté, égalité, fraternité".

It cannot be a surprise that Dr Sólyom found legislation calling on the government to bring people responsible for heinous crimes, including war crimes and crimes against humanity, to book, quite "[unconstitutional](#)". He even ruled that the Geneva Convention didn't apply to the Hungarian Revolution of 1956!

The problem is not unique to Hungary. In the Czech Republic, prosecutors brought charges against a former minister, Lubomir Strouhal in 2001. The case was eventually dropped for lack of evidence. The LA Times [explained](#) part of the problem:

Prosecution of Communist-era officials has been difficult in the Czech Republic because the justice system operates on the principle that Communist laws were valid and, thus, human rights violations can be treated as crimes only if laws that were in force at the time were broken. Strouhal is charged with blocking efforts in the 1960s to redress some of the worst offenses of the early Communist period.

The Platform of European Memory and Conscience

The [Platform of European Memory and Conscience](#) is a organisation within the EU set up to integrate the differing experience of Western and Eastern Europeans. The main difference being that, for the Western Europeans, the end of the Second World War meant the end of the killing, while in the East, it merely continued in a different form, but often with the very same individuals involved.

The Platform succeeded in announcing the Prague Declaration on European Conscience and Memory and succeeded in making August 23 (the day of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact) a Day of Remembrance for the Victims of Communism and Nazism. However, this was a "bridge" too far for the Westerners, who insisted on whitewashing the four million murdered by Lenin and changed the declaration to Victims of "Stalinism" (whatever that is)

and Nazism.

The Platform has since published a [Declaration on Crimes of Communism](#), which calls for an international tribunal to try Communist criminals and to compensate victims, in the light of the unsatisfactory performance of national governments, with the possible exception of Poland. (Incidentally, no-one out of three officials at the Platform responded to e-mails, nor did international lawyers/commentators in Hungary).

Thus, one reason for the lack of justice for victims of communism is the perpetrators and their influence. There is another cause, though. This is Western apathy towards victims.

Western apathy towards victims of communism

Sadly, there is very little empathy in the West for Communism's victims. This is hard to understand for those of us whose families were affected, and is very hurtful. One wonders whether this is a lack of humanity on the part of the West.

Sober thought, however, would indicate that there are two main reasons: The success of cultural Marxism, and simple ignorance. People in Western Europe and North America learned about the Holocaust after a concerted effort by Jewish organisations to publish the horrific photographs, stories of survivors and the sheer size of the crimes committed.

Communism's crimes are no less shocking, but there are very few photos available, very few documentaries in Western languages and no Hollywood movies about them. So the average Westerner basically looks at figures on paper of Stalin's, Mao's or other Communist murderers' victims and shrugs.

One crime that is more typical of Communism than some other shocking crimes is mass rape. Just in 1944/45, the Red Army is estimated to have raped some three-to-four million women from Ukraine in the East to Vienna and Berlin in the West. The

surviving women were not allowed to talk about the crime and it was only in the last few years that these elderly ladies could be persuaded to speak out. Most of the documentaries were aired in Germany, Austria or Hungary but were never shown on major channels in the West, such as the History Channel or National Geographic.

But mass rape by Chinese Communist forces is reported in Tibet, notably against Buddhist nuns, it is not unique to the Soviet military.

One cannot help wondering, where the feminists are in all this.

What can be done?

It would appear that the Platform of European Memory and Conscience, the [US Museum of Communism](#), as well as the museums and institutes in the countries affected – such as the [institution](#) of the same name in Prague, the Polish Museum of Communism in Warsaw and the [House of Terror](#) in Budapest – are part of the answer. They need to continue to educate the thousands who visit. A quite comprehensive list is given [here](#).

There are some memorials to the victims of the Gulag in Ukraine and Russia, but since the rise of Vladimir Putin, some have been taken down and some have been “re-scripted” to whitewash history.

In this, the liberal West and Putin’s regime are in agreement: All memory of Communisms’ crimes must be carefully edited out of all books, films and other media and quickly forgotten.

However, if school texts are changed to reflect the truth perhaps then the Discovery Channel and similar outlets will stop telling us the old lie that “Europe was liberated in 1945”.

In summary, victims and their families can only hope that the

“enlightened West” and the “East” as well will drop their inhumane attitude towards what were, after all, the biggest crimes ever committed on earth, crimes which are not yet over, and embrace us as fellow human beings who have rights. If nothing else, the right to remember.

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