

Bernie Sanders' Staffers Don't Know the Dark Side of Soviet History

One of Bernie Sanders' organizers, Kyle Jurek, wants you to believe that Soviet gulags were not so bad. If Sanders gets elected, [Jurek assures us](#) reeducation gulags are coming to America for Trump voters and others opposed to Sanders' socialist agenda.

Jurek is no better than a Holocaust denier. Around 3 million people died in Soviet gulags according to Pulitzer Prize-winning [historian Anne Applebaum](#).

If you think Jurek's views are the isolated ravings of a disturbed totalitarian, you would be wrong. I have heard similar views expressed by others. Ahistorical and economically illiterate, they are ready to destroy America in the name of a revolution guided by ignorance and prejudice. Some, like Jurek, are gulag deniers too.

If you assume Sanders' senior staff would quickly repudiate Jurek, you would also be wrong. Sanders' campaign [refused to comment on Jurek's beliefs](#), saying Iowan voters "don't care about political gossip."

Sanders himself [has praised bread lines](#) in socialist countries. Last fall, [Sanders bashed capitalism](#), saying he "will not tolerate for one second the kind of greed and corruption and income and wealth inequality and so much suffering that is going on in this country today, which is unnecessary."

Today, politicians bash the wealthy. Almost a century ago in the Soviet Union, the class enemy was small farmers.

In her book [*Red Famine*](#), Applebaum explains how in the 1920s, Stalin ordered that “collective farms, owned jointly by the commune or the state, were to replace all private farms.” Stalin portrayed farmers as the enemies of progress.

These collective farms, Applebaum writes, “would require their members to give up their private property—their land as well as horses, cattle, other livestock and tools—and to turn all of it over to the collective.” A few lucky peasants “would remain in their houses, but others would eventually live in houses or barracks owned by the collective, and would eat all of their meals in a common dining room.”

Applebaum writes, “Supposedly, all of this was to come about spontaneously, as the result of a great upswell of rural enthusiasm.” Few farmers, though, were eager to give up their land and livelihood. Spirited revolutionaries, like Jurek, were needed to persuade the resisters:

In the week starting 10 November 1929 the party's Central Committee met in Moscow and resolved to 'speed-up the process of collectivization of peasant households' by sending party cadres into the villages to set up new communal farms and persuade peasants to join them. The same resolution condemned the opponents of collectivization.

The Kyle Jureks of that time began to show up in rural villages. Applebaum explains what happened:

At first, the villagers didn't take them seriously: 'Their personal appearance amused us. Their pale faces and their clothes were totally out of place in our village surroundings. Walking carefully to avoid getting snow on their polished shoes, they were an alien presence among us.' Their leader, Comrade Zeitlin, treated the peasants rudely and seemed to know nothing of their ways. Supposedly, he mistook a calf for a colt. A farmer pointed out his mistake. 'Colt or calf,' he replied, 'it does not matter. The world

proletarian revolution won't suffer because of that.'

“The motivations of the urban men and women,” people such as Comrade Zeitlin, “were mixed.” Applebaum writes:

Some sought advancement, some hoped for material rewards. Many felt genuine revolutionary fervour, stoked by constant, angry, repetitive propaganda. Others felt fear as well, as the newspapers wrote constantly about imminent war. Urban food shortages, all too real, were widely blamed on the peasants.

Many others shared Zeitlin's fervor and disdained peasants:

Even in 1929 many Soviet citizens already believed that recalcitrant peasants posed a very real threat to themselves, and to the future of their revolution. This powerful belief enabled them to do things that 'bourgeois morality' would have once described as evil.

Kyle Jurek probably is not interested in the cautionary tales shared by Applebaum, but he should be. Like Lev Kopelev, Jurek is caught up in “revolutionary fervor.” In 1929 Kopelev was a “true believer,” but he changed his mind. By 1945 he was exiled to the gulag where he befriended Alexander Solzhenitsyn. “[Kopelev] became a model for one of Solzhenitsyn's characters, wrote powerful memoirs of his own, and [became a prominent dissident](#).” Looking back on his earlier madness Kopelev wrote:

With the rest of my generation, I firmly believed that the ends justified the means. Our great goal was the universal triumph of Communism, and for the sake of the goal everything was permissible—to lie, to steal, to destroy hundreds of thousands and even millions of people, all those who were hindering our work or could hinder it, everyone who stood in the way. And to hesitate or doubt about all this was to give

in to 'intellectual squeamishness' and 'stupid liberalism,' the attributes of people who 'could not see the forest for the trees.'

A grievance culture propelled Kopelev and others. "The Bolsheviks had made extraordinary promises to people, offering wealth, happiness, land ownership, power," but they could not keep their promises. The peasants were served up as scapegoats; the true believers were urged, by the Communists, "to feel no mercy" towards them.

Millions of people died of starvation as the result of the collectivization of Soviet farms. What horrors will result from today's demonization of the wealthy?

Sanders, too, is making extraordinary promises he can never fulfill. Should he become president, he too will eventually cast around for scapegoats to blame.

Soviet history is something every American should learn before it is too late to prevent its repetition here at home.

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