



Enemies of the State Personal Stories from the Gulag

A new book by Donald T. and Agnieszka Critchlow reviewed by F. R. Duplantier who gives examples from three witnesses of extreme persecution by the Communists.

“Long before Alexander Solzhenitsyn’s *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* (1962) shocked the Western world with its frightening tale of a typical day in the life of an inmate in a Soviet forced-labor camp during the Stalin era, there were those in the West who knew of prison life in the Soviet Union, the Eastern bloc, and other Communist countries,” observe St. Louis University History Professor Donald Critchlow and his daughter Agnieszka in their new book *Enemies of the State, Personal Stories from the Gulag*. “A powerful genre of ‘gulag’ literature had emerged in the late 1930s and developed throughout the cold war. It told of prisons and slave labor camps, of prisoners tortured into false confessions and then sentenced to execution or to long terms in the camps, which just as often mean death.”

This gulag literature developed a wide audience among anti-Communist conservatives, especially in the West. These books, often published by conservative presses such as Regnery and Devin-Adair, were avidly read by anti-Communists on the grass-roots level as confirmations of the nature of communism. Indeed, books about prisons and work camps in Communist countries continued to appear from the outset of the cold war until well into the 1980s and we can expect future accounts to be published telling of prison life in North Korea, China, North Vietnam, and Cuba, the remaining Communist countries in the twenty-first century.

Gulag literature paints a consistently grim picture of life under communism. Although the authors in this volume included Russians, Ukrainians, Hungarians, Romanians, Chinese, Vietnamese, and Cubans, and they differed in political perspective, these selections present common themes about the consistently insidious nature of Communist regimes. These memoirs reveal a brutal suppression and terrorization of people. In addition these mem-

oirs suggest that people in these regimes would, if given a chance (and proper encouragement from the West), throw off the yoke of communism. These memoirs expressed a consistent belief that communism was an ineffective economic system which survived only through forced labor; in the long run these Communist regimes would collapse of their own weight. Thus trade with Communist countries only helped bolster the regimes and allowed tyrants to maintain their power. Communism could be resisted, as the authors of these memoirs showed, but resistance took courageous determination. Thus anti-Communist activists in the West must remain determined in their actions and ask the same of their leaders.

DECEPTION

As the Critchlows note in their excellent introduction, these memoirs also express another consistent theme: Communist leaders are deceptive and simply cannot be trusted. Many of the memoirs told of disillusionment among party followers, young idealists who had supported the cause of “revolutionary socialism.” Communists had a beguiling message, and too often liberals in the West were taken in by it, either by ignoring or apologizing for the brutality of these regimes or by believing that detente, arms control, or even appeasement would ease international tensions and eventually ‘liberalize’ Communist dictatorships. “Finally,” the Critchlows conclude, “many of these memoirs told of valiant resistance by Christians persecuted for their beliefs. The memoirs cast a world in war between civilization and savagery, freedom and totalitarianism, a God-centered universe and a man-centered universe. In this struggle there could be no compromise but only one victor.”

The power of the ten selections cannot be fully captured in

a brief review, but here are three enticing, albeit brief, excerpts from Donald and Agnieszka Critchlow's compelling anti-Communist anthology, *Enemies of the State*, published October, 2002 by Ivan R. Dee, with a list price of \$26.

ELINOR LIPPER

Lipper was a young Belgian Communist arrested by Soviet officials in 1937, shortly after she had arrived in Russia to work in a foreign-language publishing house. When she is initially arrested, she believes, as was often the case, that a mistake has been made and she will be released soon. Instead, she was sentenced to five years in prison as a counter-revolutionary. She was not released until 1948, after spending eleven years in work camps in Siberia. After returning to Belgium she wrote her widely read memoir, *Eleven Years in a Soviet Prison* (1951), only to disappear later while attending an anti-Communist conference in Berlin, probably kidnapped or murdered by the Soviet secret police. The only trace of her in history remained her frightening revelations of the reality behind the illusion of socialist equality in the Soviet Union.

In the ten different Soviet prisons and the fourteen Soviet camps in which I was confined, I met a great many people. During the eleven years of my imprisonment constant streams of new people poured into the camps. Only an infinitesimal minority of these people were convicted of a 'religious crime.' But contrary to my original conception, I learned that the majority of my fellow prisoners, apart from former Party members and Young Communists, had not lost their faith, although they scarcely ever practiced the rituals of religion. And many former Party members who had lost faith in their ideal because of their unjust imprisonment sought to fill the void within them with something else—and that something was God. . . . During the war high church dignitaries—those who were still alive—were released from their camps in the far north and restored to office. They were by then willing to do anything, for decades of imprisonment had not failed to leave a mark upon their souls. . . . But all the lesser people who were rotting in the forced labor camps on account of their religion were not affected by this religious renaissance. Not one of them had his term shortened. And they continued to cling to their view that everything done by the Soviets was 'an act of the Antichrist.' They were the hardest and most stoical people in camp. . . . Among them were nuns whose convents had been destroyed thirty years before, but who still felt themselves nuns.

On all Sundays and church holy days they would go to the

lockup. Neither persuasion, threats, mockery nor physical punishment could force them to work on the Lord's days. They ate their slender punishment rations and sang their songs. They were beaten. Their skirts were tied over their heads, and sometimes they were tied together by the hair. It did not help. On the following Sunday they allowed themselves to be pushed into the lockup as patiently, submissively, and unflinchingly as ever.

HAROLD WILLIAM RIGNEY, S.V.D.

Father William Rigney came to China to serve as rector of the Roman Catholic university in Beijing, but following the Communist takeover of the university Father Rigney was arrested as an American spy and spent over four years in the Communist prisons of Tsao Lan Tzu Hutung and Tzu Hsing Lu. He refused to confess to being an agent of the U.S. government. Despite physical torture, sleeplessness, hunger, and fear of death in *Four Years in a Red Hell*, published in 1956, Father Rigney recalls the first two months of his captivity:

During my first sixty days and nights of imprisonment, I had two full nights of rest. In the latter part of these days, my physical reserves were at an end. I was subjected to the nerve racking of long court sessions during the night as well as the day. I was exhausted from lack of sleep. I was tortured by a gnawing hunger; I was covered with bodily dirt and weeks of unwashed perspiration. My one and only set of clothes, literally falling to shreds, were infested with lice. My ankles and wrists, sore and bleeding from the fetters and handcuffs I wore, were in extreme pain. My legs and arms were swollen from these shackles. Often, especially in the long night court sessions when I perspired profusely, I was tormented by thirst. . . .

The fetters I wore cut deep into my ankles. My leather low cut shoes were ruined by then. For a day or so I protected my ankles by wrapping my pants around my ankles under the fetters. These pants were strong U.S. army pants, which I had worn in the army during the Second World War. The fetters cut through this tough cloth, stained with my blood. When the judge saw this protection of my ankles, he ordered me to remove my pants from beneath the fetters and keep them removed. My bare ankles must not be protected from the rusty, rough, dirty, iron fetters. . . .

Seven times I was handcuffed with my hands behind my back for times ranging from one day to seven days and nights. The first time was a few days after my arrest. I forget the reason the judge gave when he ordered them on.

I ask the reader to use his or her imagination in judging and understanding the torture of having your hands handcuffed behind your back. Aside from the pain of the rough, dirty, rusty iron cutting into your skin and flesh, every time you move your hand, there are other sufferings: humiliations, insults you undergo too delicate to write or talk about. This is especially the case regarding acts associated with urination and bowel movements... You cannot bathe yourself. You cannot wash your face. You cannot comb your hair if you have long hair. You cannot scratch yourself when the lice bite... If you wear spectacles, who cleans them of the sweat, dust, and grease that collects on them?... It is most difficult to sleep, on the hard wooden [cot]. You lie on one arm. This is painful. Every position you take, lying down is painful. How can you eat?

JOHN MARTINO

John Martino was an American held prisoner from 1959 to 1962 in Cuba. His account confirmed what anti-communists had been saying about Fidel Castro since he came to power in 1959. Castro was a Communist, aligned with the Soviet Union. His regime was repressive and Cuban prisons had been created for political prisoners. In his 1963 book, *I Was Castro's Prisoner*, Martino describes the treatment of those political prisoners:

The prisoner is thrown into one of these [a torture cell] naked. It is so small that he must stand up and can barely turn around. There are enormously powerful lights in the ceiling and the heat is almost unbearable. The victim is kept in the hot room until he has had all he can stand and then is put into a similar cell, which is air-conditioned and is kept at near freezing temperature. This treatment is continued, alternating heat with cold, until the victim loses consciousness or confesses... They also apply mental torture. One method is to take prisoners from the prison to one of the beaches. The men are tied to stakes and told they are about to be executed. A firing squad is assembled; the commands are given; the only departure from realism is that blanks are fired.

At the time... about 15,000 prisoners were being held at G-2 (Secret Police) headquarters in Havana. Among them were men and children. They were given the physical and mental torture of the [secret police] to make them confess... The questioning was done by teams of interrogators who repeated their questions and charges hour after hour. The prisoners who were recalcitrant would be put back in the hot and cold cells for hours and then brought back again for questioning... There were also G-2 'farms'—in reality, isolated houses—out

in the country, where men were taken for more severe torture. Few people ever returned from these farms and hence it was not easy to find out what happened there... I had seen some men come back from the [torture cells] whose fingernails had been torn out. There was a man who had had all the bones in his fingers smashed with a gun butt and there was another whose legs had been stretched so much to make him confess that he couldn't stand up...

The members of the Catholic youth organizations were of strong fiber. Many were students. All understood the doctrines of the Church. Religion played a guiding role in their spiritual life and made them implacable enemies of the Communist dictatorship... The Castro regime evidently recognized that fact. In the late summer of 1961, we had a special [cell inspection]. The objects of search this time were not weapons, but religious objects. The guards seized all the medals, rosaries, holy pictures and Bibles they could find, piled them in the middle of the patio and, in the presence of the prisoners, set fire to them. The new rule was that no prisoner could possess any religious article and that no more rosaries or prayers could be said.

This did not stop the young Catholics, who by this time constituted a large proportion of the prisoners. Instead of saying rosaries openly in the mornings, we would place men at the [cell block] door at night and say the rosaries clandestinely, as the early Christians in Roman catacombs must have done. As before, prayers were invariably said for the men who were executed. The guards knew of these religious practices and many of them fiercely disapproved, but they were unable to stop them...

The selections in *Enemies of the State: Personal Stories from the Gulag* by the Critchlows should be required reading in our schools. While only a few nations remain Communist, we should not forget that these regimes maintain nuclear arsenals that threaten the security of their neighbors and the United States. Two generations have passed since the collapse of the Berlin Wall. Many of our youngsters do not remember President Ronald Reagan and his heroic efforts to tear down those walls dividing West from East. The illusion of socialism will continue to attract idealist youth seeking equality, peace, and justice. We have an obligation to teach each generation the truths of the "evil empire" our nation faced during the twentieth century. We hold this obligation for the sake of the memories of those who suffered and died under the Communists and for future generations who will confront new challenges brought about by deceptive dreams and evil tyrants.

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NOVEMBER—MONTH OF THE SOULS IN PURGATORY

May the souls of the faithful departed through the mercy of God rest in peace.

The Mindszenty Report is published monthly by the Cardinal Mindszenty Foundation, 7800 Bonhomme Ave., P.O. Box 11321, St. Louis, MO 63105, 314-727-6279, Fax 314-727-5897.

Subscription rate: \$20.00/year, \$36.00/two years. Outside the U.S.A. \$28.00

The Mindszenty Report is not copyrighted, and subscribers are invited to have it printed in their local newspapers.

Eleanor Schlafly, Publisher

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News & Notes

THANKSGIVING TO GOD

Washington advised Americans to set aside a day of public Thanksgiving to God for the great favors He has bestowed on our nation. On October 3, 1789, Washington proclaimed the first Thanksgiving Day—the first of a long series of presidential orders that have remained part of American life down to the present:

"Whereas it is the duty of all nations to acknowledge the Providence of Almighty God, to obey His will, to be grateful for His benefits, and humbly to implore His protection and favor, and whereas both Houses of Congress have by their joint committee requested me 'to commend to the people of the United States a day of public thanksgiving and prayer to be observed by acknowledging with grateful hearts the many signal favors of Almighty God, especially by affording them an opportunity peaceably to establish a form of government for their safety and happiness,' now therefore I do recommend and assign Thursday the 26th day of November next, to be devoted to the service of that great and glorious Being, Who is the beneficent Author of all the good that was, that is, or will be.

George Washington

THANKSGIVING—CMF is thankful to our many friends who remember us with monthly prayers and contributions (no remembrance is too small) so that the mission to defend Faith, strengthen Families and expand Freedom may grow! May God bless you and yours at this special Thanksgiving season.

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