



# Yesterday's Tomorrow

On the Loneliness  
of Communist Specters  
and the Reconstruction  
of the Future

**Bini Adamczak**

translated by Adrian Nathan West  
foreword by Raymond Geuss

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**WE WHO WANTED TO PREPARE THE GROUND  
FOR FRIENDLINESS**

**How much earth will we have to eat  
With the taste of our victims' blood  
On the way to the better future  
Or to none, if we spit it out  
—Heiner Müller, *Werke 1: Die Gedichte***



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# Foreword

This is a book about “communist desire”—that is, about the deep-seated moving force within people that impels them to strive to give their lives self-chosen collective meaning by opposing oppression and arbitrary coercion, abolishing hierarchical structures, and ending the various forms of alienation. The attempts to act on this desire in the twentieth century were a series of colossal and catastrophic failures. What took place in the huge region of Eurasia that was once organized as the Russian Empire and then became the Soviet Union between 1917 and 1939 provides an instructive instance of the way in which utopian hopes, energies, and aspirations can turn against themselves, becoming more destructive the more well founded and disciplined they seemed to be. How, in the face of this, can it be at all reasonable even to try to keep any kind of grip on the utopian contents of communist desire?

Part of the answer, Bini Adamczak argues in this book, must lie in a reflection on the history of the failures of the communist project in the twentieth century. We can only reasonably hope to retain and cultivate a “communist” desire for a utopian future if we understand the

nature of past utopian desires and the specific ways in which they failed. Each of a series of chapters in Adamczak's book is devoted to exploring one historically concrete situation in which this failure became manifest: the Hitler–Stalin Pact, the Great Terror of 1937–1939, the failure of the Left in Central Europe to stop the advent of National Socialism, Joseph Stalin's rise to power, and Kronstadt. Adamczak puts particular emphasis on the way in which agents in the past did or did not realize while it was happening that their commitments were turning against themselves, transforming them into their opposite, and becoming destructive. The failures, the author holds, are *real* failures, and although much can be said about how they are to be best understood, nothing is to be gained cognitively, morally, or politically by closing one's eyes to them, pretending they did not occur, or trivializing them. It is also essential to the future survival (or revival) of hopes for a better future that the work of understanding and mourning be completed in such a way as not to give succor to those who would systematically root out communist desire.

The order in which the failures are presented and discussed in Adamczak's book is the reverse of the historical order in which they occurred (the Hitler–Stalin Pact first; Kronstadt last). This is part of a conscious strategy of the author, who thinks that those who broadly share the ideals and aspirations of the major agents and victims in this story have a natural tendency to think of

the history of this period in this way, looking back from the present and locating at some point in the past a moment of unmitigated “good” that however passed, was lost and then initiated a historical process of degeneration. The natural question to ask is, “Where and when did it go wrong—when Stalin signed the pact with Adolf Hitler, or *already* in 1933, or with Kronstadt?” Part of the point of the book, as I understand it, is to reject this as the right way to understand and come to terms with what happened. There was *never* a single moment in the past in which an aboriginally pure revolutionary will or unsullied communist desire was fully present and on the point of realizing itself, which then passed, was lost, and was perverted or corrupted. When you peel the layers of the historical onion back, you come not to a “pure” onion at the heart but to nothing. This does not mean that an onion is not an onion, or that “nothingness” is the core of the onion, but rather just that one must think about the onion in a different way.

Although the above description may give the impression that this is a book of “history,” it is in fact a particularly admirable feature of the book that it does *not* fall into any of the usual categories. If I had to describe it, I would say it is a lyrical and philosophical reflection on history in the service of a rekindling of utopian desire. “Lyrical” is not a word that is automatically associated with sober analysis, realism, or scholarship. This work has *all* those virtues, but also a remarkable lightness

of touch, and an unsentimental ability to enter into the mental and psychic worlds of those who are now dead and present their world (including the nonworld of their unfulfilled aspirations) in a way that retains its full human vitality. “Real history”—the story of what did happen—and the history of utopian desire—an account of what people at any given time thought ought to happen—are not only compatible but also require each other if we are to retain any hope for the future at all.

**—Raymond Geuss**

# 1 End

**In every generation there must be those who live as if their time were not a beginning and an end, but rather an end and a beginning.**

—Manès Sperber, *Wie eine Träne im Ozean*

The last warm rays of the sun expire. Not a single bird takes off from the leafless trees, not a single wing beat can be heard. As if they have forgotten the point of flying, have lost the faith in being borne up by the air, the creatures perch on the slender branches. Slowly the long shadows of the telegraph poles, once meant to connect a continent to come, retreat in the harvested fields. The odd forgotten blade of grass waits motionless in the windless early dusk, in the distance scattered woodlands mingle with border villages history has forgotten. It's getting dark.

Just maybe, though, there is a bit of light left. A fleeting night offers a glimpse of landscapes animated by unchanged field work. Here and there the dew clings to the waves of grain. The first cars take to the road, and for a few kilometers, they pass alongside the railway. Something warm seeps through the tiny cracks in the

vehicle. At times the fog still clouds the view, which even without it would not be clear. After the daylong journey from Moscow, or further away, on to the Russian border, their eyes can grow weary watching the fields, which rush past and yet, in their immensity, seem stationary. But the eyes of the German antifascists, the communist emigrants, see nothing, there are no windows in their barred compartments. Perhaps outside, the first patches of light are grazing the ground while the mountains on the horizon stretch their stony heads upward into the dawning day.

Or maybe it's already daytime. Possibly, even probably, it is bright out, because the weather bends seldom to the history writer's metaphoric wishes. A radiant day, white from the snow on the summits in the distance, from the glittering of the wide rivers, the multitudinous Polish lakes. The almost noonday sun stands in the otherwise empty sky, warms the roofs of the Stolypinski carriages, rolling prisons where the inmates sit seven to a car. The rattling of the train makes conversation between one compartment and the other impossible. For a time songs are audible, and encouraging words, but then, all at once, they fall silent. The wardens bring water and generous helpings of food, but now the prisoners have lost their appetite. "Why now? Just eat! There's plenty of time for you to go hungry later!" one of the soldiers tells them kindly (Buber-Neumann, 182f.). The soldiers are from the NKVD, the People's Commissariat

for Internal Affairs, and they have been ordered to bring a sealed cargo across the border—a silent, human cargo.

When the train slows down, the sun perhaps reaches its zenith, nature shows itself blind to history. In the train station, the antifascist prisoners step out, walk on foot for the final wooded stretch. On the train bridge from Brest-Litovsk, the newly established border, the road comes to an end. Other soldiers come from the other side of the bridge, raise their hands to their caps to greet the officers of the NKVD (*ibid.*, 185f.). The names are read out, the exchange begins. Those who resist in panic are shoved, and the German soldiers—the SS soldiers—receive the Jews in their ranks with anti-Semitic tirades.

A train of many trains, of forgotten trains. Special trains in which the NKVD transport German or Austrian communists to the German border, deliver them to the Gestapo. First on different tracks, depending on their place of incarceration, through Shepetovka and Negoreloe/Stowbsty and on to the Polish border, through Būcmaņi in Latvia, through Ostrow, or through Finland (Schafranek, 40). Then, once Germany and Russia share a common border, exclusively through Brest-Litovsk, the same Brest-Litovsk where, two decades before, Leon Trotsky met with diplomats from the Central Powers to make peace, to salvage the revolution. Of the thousand deportees, embassy and secret service files document conclusively more than three hundred communists, Jews,



and antifascists.<sup>1</sup> A multitude of transports, the first already in 1935, the last in May 1941, a month before the outbreak of the war (R. Müller, 9; Schafranek, 56). And only two are commemorated, in the publications of Margarete Buber-Neumann and Alexander Weissberg-Cybulski in spring 1940.

Most of those traveling in the trains from Russia to Germany are engineers, specialists, skilled workers whose contracts have expired and who have been released for the journey home. Some of the prisoners are National Socialist sympathizers, a number of them spies under orders from the German regime. Others, though—and these are the ones who concern us *for now*—are communists, mostly members of the German Communist Party or of the Austrian Schutzbund. They arrived in the Soviet Union as supporters of revolution, and most remained until 1933 or 1934. Some of them left only later, after years of fighting in the underground, building and rebuilding the Communist Party, the KPD, without cease until their cover was blown and they had to escape. Many of them have been in German prisons, have suffered torture, some in the first concentration camps. They are antifascists, they even have the state's seal of approval, and the Soviet authorities are strict in these matters. Only those who engaged in active resistance according to the standards of the KPD are allowed to immigrate; anti-Semitic persecution isn't enough to qualify for an offer of asylum.<sup>2</sup>

Persecuted by the Nazis, fleeing the threat of the camps, German and Austrian communists flee into Russian exile, into the Soviet Republic, the fatherland of the workers, of the proletariat, to Moscow, the reddest city on the planet. Protection is not what they hoped for most, but the chance to go on contributing to the construction of socialism, to organize resistance to Germany in exile. Very few of them mean to stay, they want to go back, with new papers, with a different mission. And back they go, but unarmed, not as revolutionaries, as Soviet soldiers, but rather as their captives.

They come from the labor camps, from Karaganda in Kazakhstan, from the penitentiaries of the Solovetsky Islands in the White Sea, or directly from the detention centers in Kharkiv, Gorki, or Engels, where they sit for years, awaiting trials that always proceed according to the same manner. They are shipped in from the most far-flung regions of the Soviet Republics, transported thousands of kilometers, individually or in small groups. Some are old acquaintances by now, as they find themselves once more in group cells in Butyrka, Moscow's central prison, where many were placed after their initial arrests a few years before. But now, unlike before, there are only 25 of them, not 110 lodged in a cell built for 25, and they sleep on beds, not on boards, on mattresses with sheets rather than on the floor wrapped in their coats. Instead of nodding off—nodding off, not sleeping!—they sit in chairs, and instead of whispering

they talk loud and play games. Before, they were forbidden even to walk around, let alone sew or sing (Buber-Neumann, 34ff., 164ff.; Weissberg-Cybulski a, 333). They receive medicine, good food, not the watery soup from before, but generous meals served three times a day. Their hunger that plagued them during their years in remand, that spurred them to forced labor in the camps, is stilled on the eve of their extradition. As if the involuntary deportees should make a good impression on those who would receive them, in this way shining a pleasant light on their host country. Less, presumably, to persuade the Nazis of the humanity of the Soviet prison regime than to demonstrate the Red Empire's largesse, which is enough to spare wholesome provisions for its captives. The latter, naturally, see things otherwise: they have rather been fattened up for delivery to the German butcher (Buber-Neumann, 169 f.).

That's how it seems, but only a few speak of it, only a few dare to speak of what seems likely but at the same time impossible. Among them is Zenzl Mühsam—arrested not long after arriving in the Soviet Union to spread word of the Nazi's crimes, of the murder of Erich Mühsam. Unlike others, she realizes she may be extradited after the pact between Germany and Russia, and she refuses to sign her deportation order “abroad” without specifying a destination. Better to throw herself on the train tracks than go back to Germany, better to

stay in the Stalinist prison network. And she does stay, in jails, in camps, and in exile before migrating to East Germany, the GDR, in 1955. Her warnings fall on deaf ears, no one shares her suspicions. Almost no one, irrespective of the privations, degradations, disfigurement suffered at the hands of the NKVD, considers—is willing to consider—deportation to the Germans possible. Even on the train, they are unwilling to accept it, they encourage one another, vow that after setting off toward Poland, despite all logistical reason, they would be turning back toward Minsk, veering off toward Lithuania (*ibid.*, 181). They will not, cannot believe otherwise. How firm their faith must have been to go on disbelieving, after years of imprisonment and forced labor, in the crime about to occur.

As inconceivable, almost as inconceivable, as the deportations themselves, the expulsion of communists by communists, a gift to the Nazis from the hands of the Nazis' mortal enemies. So inconceivable that not even the Gestapo can believe it, and takes a large proportion of the antifascists, people who had often been jailed on the charge of *fascist espionage*, to be agents of the GPU, the Soviet Secret Service (Schafranek, 94f.). Even more so, because the Germans expressly oppose many of the deportees' repatriation and refuse to accept them numerous times, at least until 1939. The German Embassy and the Foreign Ministry want Germans, not

anti-Germans, not *enemies of Germany* (ibid., 69). They want *Volksdeutsche*, the people with German roots, not Jews, the expatriates, antifascists. And yet they get them, to the Gestapo's great delight. Eighty antifascists before the 1939 Hitler–Stalin Pact, more than 200 (out of 350 deportees) afterward (ibid., 44, 48, 69, 79). Only now do the Germans press for deportations, stressing the *mutual friendly relations between the German Reich and the USSR* (Ambassador Friedrich-Werner Graf von der Schulenberg, cited in ibid., 184). There is no evidence of other pressure, nor of any “reciprocation” to follow. The Nazis give the numbers, the Soviets supply the names. The antifascists are sacrificed not according to some overarching principle of political calculus nor as currency in an exchange but rather as a kind of gift (cf. ibid., 56f.).

Though every detainee designated “repatriated from Russia” is “politically suspect” for the Gestapo, they conclude that the majority of those “infected with Marxism” have been “thoroughly healed of Bolshevik conditioning,” and quite often they are correct (ibid., 89). Buber-Neumann describes how many of the detainees handed over and interned in German prisons lose their faith in the Soviet Union, grow convinced of a German victory, and predict a bright future for National Socialism. Some even find positive aspects in it, discovering socialist traits in the economy and the workers' legislation. Already in Moscow, Weissberg-Cybulski (b, 687) witnesses such discussions:

The prisoners in the deportees' cell in Butyrka stood ... with the weight of both systems bearing down on them. They still feared the GPU, and were now afraid of the Gestapo as well. Loose talk could still bring down the wrath of the Stalinist system. A few weeks later, excessive loyalty to the Soviets might provoke the same from the Gestapo. We had to be cautious, a GPU snitch might be sitting in our cell even then. Not to mention those who would snitch, those who had already decided to betray their fellow man to curry favor with the Germans. In these conditions, just opening your mouth was inadvisable.

Still in the deportation cell, there is a scuffle between Weissberg-Cybulski and a former collaborator of the Comintern for whom National Socialism is a form of organized capitalism that would pave the way for socialism.<sup>3</sup> An anti-Stalinist, but still socialist Jew against a no-longer-Stalinist, National Socialist German.

"I should have stayed quiet," writes Weissberg-Cybulski (*ibid.*, 694). "Carrying on with this conversation was dangerous. ... The majority of the workers in the cell were smarter than I was. They chose the one correct path in this complicated situation: silence."

The workers—those unwilling to repeat what was dictated to them—say nothing. But this is not a shared silence, but a lonesome one, based on mistrust, on fear of one's neighbor. They say nothing because the things they say might be heard—not listened to, but *overheard*. They say nothing out of fear, but not only out of fear: it is also that they have no say, nothing to share, their fate

will be discussed, their destiny decided, between one embassy and another, one state and another. It leaves them speechless—well, not “it,” if there were indeed such an it, but rather the NKVD and Gestapo, whose enigmatic handshake implicated their very bodies.

And these are the ones who will also make them talk, in countless interrogations from bureaucratic to brutal: first the NKVD, and then the Gestapo in Poland or in Germany. The latter will divide them into groups according to the danger they represent, A, B, and C, and will send them off to German factories and barracks or penitentiaries or concentration camps. Many are sent to their place of origin, where they must register with the authorities and labor in German firms under close observation (Buber-Neumann, 197). Many—maybe most—are recruited into the Wehrmacht, and not seldom—here is yet another twist—do they return to the Soviet Union, as soldiers in the war of extermination waged against the Red Army.

Take, for example, the case of Erwin Jöris—though he is not an example, really, not a case, but instead quite singular—who is imprisoned as the leader of the Berlin-Lichtenberg Communist Youth League and remains incarcerated, with Erich Mühsam, among others, for a year in the Sonnenberg concentration camp. No sooner is he released than he joins the antifascist underground and remains there until 1935, when his organization is exposed and he is forced (and able) to flee, first to Prague

and then on to Moscow. Only to be arrested in 1937 and sent back in 1938, this time to Poland and then on to Germany. After a year in remand in Moabit, he is freed by the Gestapo and recruited by the Wehrmacht. In 1944, he is taken war prisoner by the Soviets, omits mention of his first visit to the country, and moreover, speaks not a word of Russian for two long years, despite his thorough mastery of the language. After his release in 1946, he returns to Berlin and there runs into an old acquaintance by the name of Eric Honecker, whom he tells that he has lost all interest in politics. Two weeks later, the NKVD arrest him on the basis of declarations he made to the Gestapo concerning the Soviet Union, he is sentenced to twenty-five years of hard labor in Workuta (Scholmer, 98ff.).

Then there is Franz Langer—again, not just an example—who becomes an affiliate of a *Schutzbund* group (a Social Democratic paramilitary organization) in 1934, flees to Czechoslovakia after the battle against the Austrian fascists in Vienna-Ottakring, and there joins the Communist Party. In 1938, he is arrested and transported from Moscow to Germany in 1940; in June of that year, the Wehrmacht deploys him. In March 1945 he manages to desert and shows up in Vienna, where he will later establish contact with the Red Army and fight with it against the Nazis and their *Volkssturm* units (Schafranek, 146).

Lunatic twists, multiple twists, which take place—in utterly distinct yet not unrelated ways—in the opposite



direction, in the lives of Soviet prisoners of war interned in German forced labor camps, who were arrested on release by the NKVD and again sentenced to forced labor, this time in Soviet camps (*ibid.*, 107; Buber-Neumann, 347). They are caught between the gears, emigrants unable to immigrate, flung across the continents, ground up in the gears of the Great Powers, the teeth of which gnash like teeth in a mouth stretched into an inhuman rictus.

Not all the deported antifascists are freed after their interrogation to labor for the German cause or to fight as soldiers. The Gestapo's orders exclude those who "were active Marxist militants prior to emigration, who engaged in political activities in the Soviet Union, who agitated against Germany, or who continue to cling to their Communist convictions" as well as those "of Jewish lineage" (Schafranek, 180). For these people, "return" means to prisons and ghettos, to concentration and extermination camps. Only a few survive; the rest will die there. In Lublin, in Neuengamme and Mauthausen, in Auschwitz and Majdanek.

Like spokes in a wheel, which seem to stand still, then turn backward, once it reaches a certain speed, these trains travel back from Socialist Russia into National Socialist Germany. In the opposite direction of the sealed train that, decades before, had brought Lenin to Petrograd to wage revolution. Unceasing progress, which was meant to push history toward Communism, with an inevitable leap from the first revolution in 1917 to

the second, then to the worldwide one, ends here. Not halfway—how nice that might have been—not at the beginning, but even earlier. In the camps, almost naturally those of the enemy, but also, incomprehensibly, those of one's allies. Double betrayal. Betrayal of antifascism, betrayal of communism—you rarely get the first without the second, and you never have the second without the first. But above all, betrayal of the communists, of one comrade by the other. Betrayed to those whom they had fought against for the better part of their lives from 1918 on, who were the focal point of their political rage, betrayed by those for whom they had devoted their lives, for whom they were willing to sacrifice their lives. Without a name, they die, without a struggle, most of them, not at the barricades, but behind them, in Moscow's prisons, deep in the Siberian steppes, back in the German camps. They counted on dying, on an early and violent death. But they do not die for revolution, nor for communism, if such a thing exists. For them, there will never be any communism. There is no communism for them. There is no communism without them. There will never be any communism without them.

But how are we to remember them? How do we remember those of whom there is so little left to remember? And above all, with whom do we remember them? To whom do we raise the alarm, whom do we warn or turn to for help? Who do we call to in the name of a justice deferred, past due, of zealous partisanship for those

the party betrayed? With whom do we mourn the lost, the murdered, the abandoned revolutionaries? Abandoned in the train cars, hiding out in another country, betrayed in the concentration camps, subdued in tiny apartments in Moscow, in jail cells, in Siberian work camps. They have no allies left, no friends across the border, no fellow fighters, no comrades back home, no one who takes heart at the thought of them, no one they might think of to fire their hopes. With whom to share their loneliness? At least that. At least to offer them companionship, imaginary, belated companionship.

At the moment when they are awaiting arrest, for example, tipped off by the disappearance of some of their comrades, the ones who were critical first, as it may seem in the beginning. Tipped off, perhaps, by the great show trials, which they may no longer be so inclined to justify as do the major communist intellectuals elsewhere (Brecht, Feuchtwanger), now that they have begun to fear them. Tipped off, perhaps, by the arrest of some relative, resulting in their losing their party membership, the support they received as victims of SS persecution, their job, their home (Steinberger and Broggin, 28, 52ff.). No longer do they sit in the bright new apartments, built to humane proportions, or in the big buildings on the avenues, the successors of which will receive, much later, the pejorative name of block housing. Instead they sublet drafty rooms, a bed in the kitchen next to the coal oven. No more do they sit in

the Hotel Lux, which housed the Communist International, with comrades from the world over. Instead they are in its backyard, in an old, unlit hovel known as the NEP Wing (Buber-Neumann, 15). The comrades who had remained friends with them no longer greet them; instead, they lower their eyes, walk to the other side of the street, from contempt, above all from fear.

They were supposed to be surrounded by friends: every neighbor a comrade, that was how they must have imagined it. At last, belonging to something more than a group of outcasts, no longer mistrustful of people on the street, of neighbors at the workbench, of shoppers in the stores. No more having to hide, like their comrades in Germany, Yugoslavia, Poland, Italy, the way they, too, had hidden, not so long ago; no more reading books in secret, carefully hiding them behind glued-on slipcovers; no more reassurances granted to detested authorities in public confessions (Weiss, 35). Now there hangs on the wall—or maybe it doesn't anymore, since they have already guessed at their imminent incarceration and refuse once again, this time in vain, to bow down—the portrait of the Great Comrade. Maybe one stands up one early afternoon in 1939, after sitting a long time silent at the kitchen table, goes over to the only framed picture in the sparsely furnished room, and takes it down. Possibly she holds it briefly in her hand, as if looking for something, as if she believed there was something there she could find, turns it around and sets it carefully

next to the sink. She no longer has the strength for great gestures of rage. Around this time a few beams of light pierce the narrow window and fall shyly on the cupboard, on the stripes of the now completely bare walls. The white square remains visible on the wallpaper already darkened by the cheap coal oven with its eternally clogged flue: an angular emptiness, a free space apparently waiting for a new occupant. No one should ever have filled it—this much is clear now, far too late—the white square itself should never have been there at all.

Even those faithful to the party's supreme leader, even the most zealous of the Stalinists, are only very rarely safe from arrest. Without a trial, the arrested are condemned by an investigating judge, their confessions extracted through torture. The accusations speak of fascist "deviation," a critical attitude to Comintern politics, or sweeping conspiratorial relations with the National Socialist authorities, espionage (Articles 58, sections 6, 9, 10, and 11 of the RSFSR penal code), sympathy with Nazi Germany, a nation that virtually all of them had voluntarily declared themselves willing to fight against at the war's beginning, on the side, or better yet, as members, of the Red Army.

By this point, every attempt to locate an overarching rationality in the arrests and interrogations, in the guilty verdicts and banishments, even if only the irrational rationality of preserving authority, becomes blame-worthy in its blamelessness, which grasping everything

in expired concepts, overlooks the essential thing—the incomprehension, the debilitating rigidity the Communists lapsed into in their defenseless waiting. “At night, they waited for their own arrest. For weeks and months, the suitcase stood ready, the one that would accompany them to Siberia” (Buber-Neumann, 15).

Perhaps, like Vasso Millitsch, the character from a novel by Sperber (426), they carry out conversations with themselves as they await arrest, conversations in truth addressed to friends across the border, the long-deceased comrades who are the only ones capable of measuring the distance that separates the fall of 1939 from October 1917. To them and to them alone, to those with whom they shared the experience of revolution, the memory of that historically unique, world-spanning hope, could they convey the hopeless disappointment that has beset them. For a brief moment, they were granted, or at least caught a glimpse of, another life, the end of their history and the history of their ancestors—and then it was taken away. Perhaps nothing will ever compensate for this loss, certainly not in their brief lives or in any moment that has come after, all the way down to this very day. Rather the loss itself will become lost: for their successors, this loss will be the precondition of their existence, the basis of their political experience. Even with great effort, they will remain incapable of understanding revolutionary disappointment, though they, though we—all the way down to this very day—are the

children, in the strict, historical, scientific sense, of this disappointment. The experience of this disappointment is not our own, but it does form us.

The Communists waiting in their dwellings to be arrested, in their cells for the next interrogation, in dark cages to be shipped to concentration camps, they know. That is why they converse with the dead, though their hopes are pinned on those born later, on others they will now never meet. With their lost comrades, they discuss their mistakes, their tactical omissions, or if they feel up to it, their clumsy, inspiring delusions, their fateful self-delusions most of all.

Unmitigated loneliness. Loneliness of the communists. Who will share their cell, their last walk out on the yard? Who will offer them companionship, who will step forward to be their ally? Who will bear witness for them? With whom is one to remember those who are only remembered as victims, who serve today only to bury, hand in hand with their murderers, the very hopes for which they were murdered? For often, the wrong people appear to mourn the victims of Stalinism. Appear to mourn—for they are not truly mourning. These dead whom the anticommunists lead to the battlefield are nameless, and if they were still alive, many of them would most likely refuse to be led. The dead cannot defend themselves. Probably they would have gone to the other side, to some other side perhaps (S. Leonhard, 5). Not in absolute numbers, naturally, but in relative ones, the victims

of Stalinist terror came most often from their own ranks, and the danger was greater the closer they stood to the center. Party membership increased one's chances of arrest. They were communists. Who is to mourn them—as communists? Who if not the communists—whoever they may be? And yet the communists—most of them—are silent. The archives are open. But no broad or deep research has been undertaken, or very little, above all on the part of those who should be posing themselves questions most urgently (When? Where?), who should pose themselves questions without reprieve (How? Why?). Hardly any work of remembrance undertaken by those who most need to remember.<sup>4</sup>

No silence is permissible here, nor prevarication—prevarication perhaps even less so. No shameful, guilt-ridden covering over of the dead by those who—still trapped in the logic of the Cold War—take remembrance of the victims to be an anticommunist strategy or feel uttering their names to be the incantation of a procapitalist curse. In their fears, they feel stalked by an army of corpses marching beneath the banner of counter-revolution, determined to drag the last living communists down into their graves. In their blind defense of an allegedly real socialism, which was generally decent enough to refrain from using the *c*-word in the present circumstances, they endorse, with an authority they are as communists entitled to, their enemies' assertion that *this* is what communism was, and an alternative, if



not the only alternative, to capitalism, to which, consequently, there is no real alternative (see S. Leonhard, 6). To the degree that *communists of the past* protect the past from attacks by a victorious present, they defend a temporarily victorious past as presented from the perspective of a present in which Stalin's head will forever remain welded to Karl Marx's cheek. They take the side of the party that liquidated their standard-bearers, position themselves behind the murderers who buried the revolution along with the murdered revolutionaries.

There may be no prevarication here and just as little, or almost as little, silence. A naively joyful continuation of the present, an ahistorical continuation of history by those who dream of a dream of a future that would be capable of redreaming itself, that could start from zero unburdened by the nightmares of the past. Free choice of a new terminology! Or even just a new name, an unsullied name for the project of a (properly something less than) all-embracing emancipation. As though a *new name* could accomplish more here than the simple affirmation of good, purified, best intentions. As though it could also change something about the dangers that live on under new names, unhindered by the caution that comes with the old ones. In their rhetoric of a break with the past, which they cannot break with, because they silence it, they do not even realize, these *communists of the present*, who as a rule do not call themselves communists, bolster their enemies' assertion that the End

of History has already been reached, because for them *this* history is at an end. As though there were no predecessors, no combatants from before. But to bury the past's struggles for the future means nothing more, under the ongoing conditions of defeat, than burying the future itself—that is, another future. Wishing to keep their utopia free of past slaughters, of the revolutionaries' weapons that turned on the revolutionaries, they isolate their dream from the history of power and power struggles, isolate their utopia from the reality toward which it ought to strive. Uninterested in the revolution's victories, lionizing only those revolutionaries who perished before they could make it far enough, they confirm that all they want is to dream, not to triumph.

Both of them, Communists of the past and those of the present, betray again those communists the communists already betrayed. They prevaricate and silence anew those whom death had already silenced. They labor away at the fantasy of a guiltless posture, which yields to the illusion that it is possible to start over from the top, from zero, or simply go on in an unbroken line, liberated from the painful work of and on history. But in this case (as, perhaps, in all such cases), the flight from history turns ever in a circle.



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