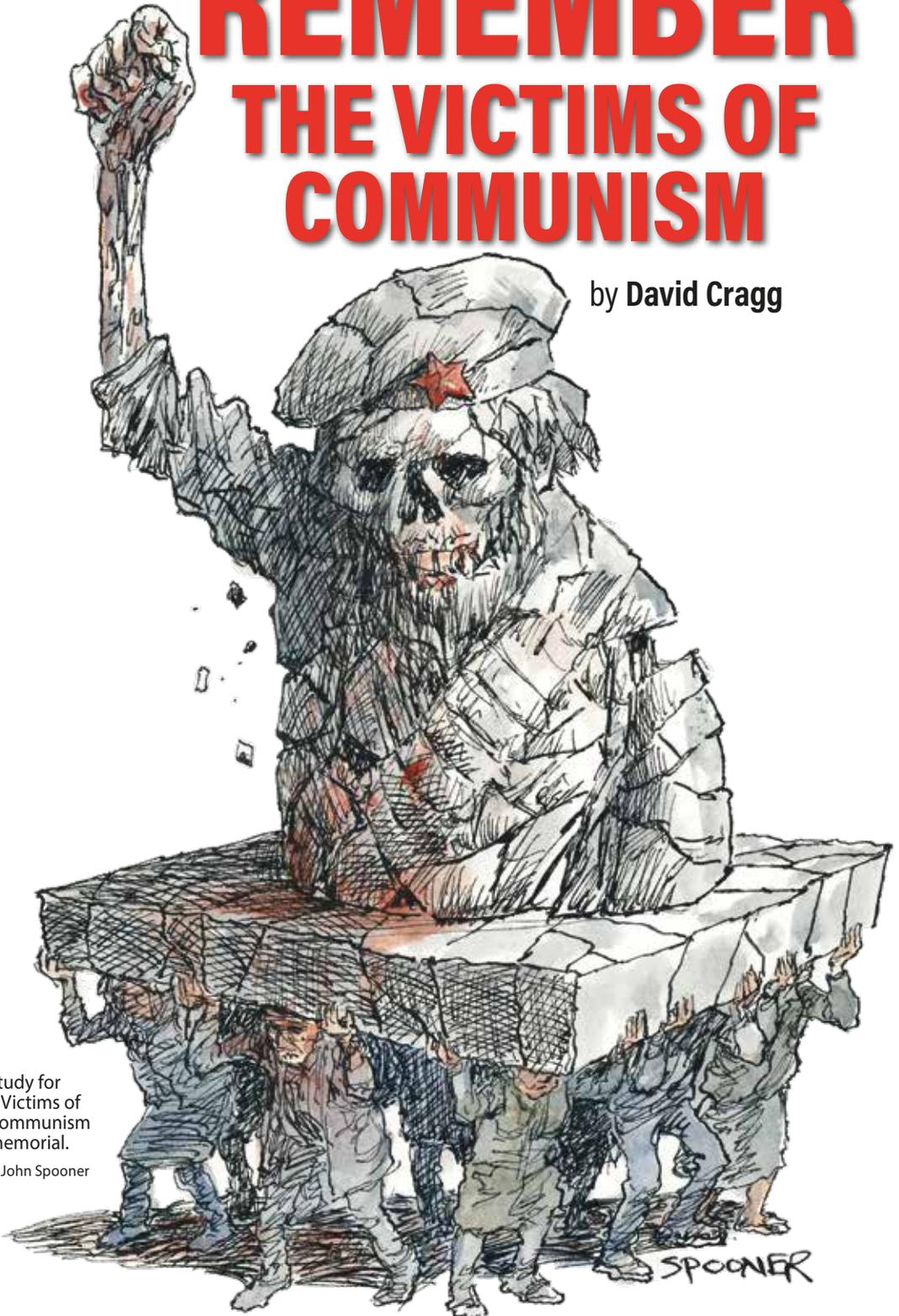


REMEMBER THE VICTIMS OF COMMUNISM

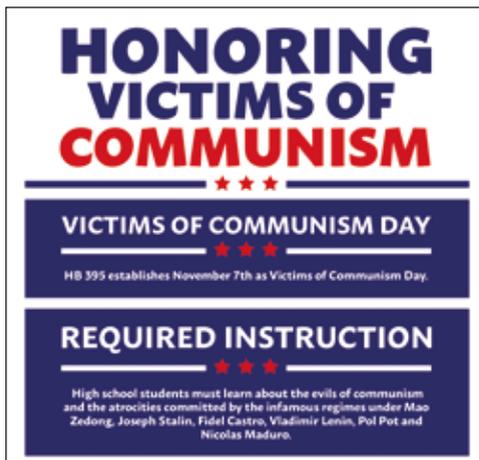
by David Cragg



Study for
a Victims of
Communism
memorial.

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The seventh of November each year has been designated ‘Victims of Communism Day’ in the US state of Florida through State legislation sponsored by Florida Governor Ron DeSantis. This is the Gregorian calendar date of the storming of the Winter Palace in 1917 by the Bolsheviks (Julian calendar 25 October, hence the so-called October Revolution). The November date was celebrated in the former Soviet Union as ‘October Revolution Day’, and is still celebrated as such in contemporary Belarus and Kyrgyzstan, parts of the former USSR.



When DeSantis signed the Bill, he ensured Florida joined 14 other States of the USA in commemorating Victims of Communism Day, but Florida went even further by requiring high school students must learn about the evils of Communism. Announcing the Day in May this year, DeSantis said:

Honoring the people that have fallen victim to communist regimes and teaching our students about those atrocities is the best way to ensure that history does not repeat itself. ... we are guaranteeing that the history of those who fled communist regimes and their experiences are

preserved and not forgotten by our students. While it’s fashionable in some circles to whitewash the history of communism, Florida will stand for truth and remain as a beachhead for freedom.

United Russia, the governing party of President Putin today, has repeatedly opposed Council of Europe resolution 1481, which acknowledges the international need for scrutiny and condemnation of the crimes against humanity committed by Communist governments—apparently a case of ‘move on, nothing to see here’. Memorial—the Moscow-based human rights group founded in January 1989 to chronicle crimes committed by the Soviet Union against its citizens and protect human rights in contemporary Russia—was shut down in December 2021 by the Supreme Court of Russia and formally liquidated as a legal entity on 5 April 2022. Its sacred work for 32 years has now evaporated into memory. Again, move on ...

Today, to commemorate the murder of millions of human beings in the former Soviet Union is to risk conviction of being a foreign agent.

WHY WE MUST REMEMBER

The reason to remember man-made atrocities has been put simply and eloquently by Jewish communities around the world to explain why they commemorate the Holocaust: ‘never again’. All of us would be well advised to join our local Jewish community in remembering the insane horror of the Nazi Genocide, and to consider in the same breath the other ideological source of inhumanity throughout the 20th century, Marxism-Leninism—even as its cruelty continues today in some parts of the world.

To discuss Nazism and Communism together makes sense: both hideous cocktails of 19th century romanticism and utopianism, hardened into irrational hatred and machine-age brutality. The violent trauma of World War I enabled Nazis and Communists alike to dehumanise those they determined to be

their existential enemies, and to justify the extermination of millions of human beings as an historical necessity. For one ‘ethnic bigot’ the key to denying others their innate humanity was the illusion of race, while for the ‘material determinist’ the key was the illusion of class.

Please listen for a moment to Martin Latsis, a commander of the Cheka (Soviet secret police), addressing his officers in November 1918:

We are not waging war against individual persons. We are exterminating the bourgeoisie as a class. During the investigation, do not look for evidence that the accused acted in deed or word against Soviet power. The first questions that you ought to put are: to what class does he belong? What is his origin? What is his education or profession? And it is these questions that ought to determine the fate of the accused. In this lies the significance and the essence of the Red Terror.

Latsis was no outsider; he reflected thought at the centre of the Soviet Union. (As late as 1988, three years before its collapse, the Soviet Union issued a postage stamp celebrating the centenary of Latsis’s birth and 50th anniversary of his death.) In a secret memorandum released in the 1990s, Lenin instructed the other members of the Bolshevik politburo in March 1922: “The more members of the reactionary bourgeoisie and clergy we manage to shoot, the better.”

A tragic reflection in the 1970s was the Khmer Rouge dictatorship in Kampuchea (Cambodia) up to 1979, hailed at the same time as the final victory of North Vietnam in April 1975. Their KR troops in the field were instructed to shoot anyone wearing glasses or a wristwatch, on the assumption they were likely to be bourgeois. The Party leaders taught their Marxism in the Paris *Sorbonne*

felt the rank-and-file subordinates were not up to the subtleties of interrogation expected by Latsis.

WHAT IS MARXISM?

Marxism as developed by Karl Marx (1818–1883) and his collaborator Friedrich Engels (1820–1895) is a broad school of analysis, primarily economic, which attempts to explain history as successive waves of different economic and political relationships. It is one of a number of political philosophies which gained some popularity in the emerging labor movements of the 19th century in Europe, North America, and even on the fringes here in Australia.

Country	Number of deaths
People’s Republic of China	65 million
Soviet Union	20 million
Cambodia	2 million
North Korea	2 million
Ethiopia	1.7 million
Afghanistan	1.5 million
Eastern Bloc	1 million
Vietnam	1 million
Latin America	150,000

Source: *The Black Book of Communism: Crimes, Terror, Repression*, 1999 English language edition, Harvard University Press

Many European political parties of the left would have been described as Official Marxist (the German Social Democrats as late as the 1950s), but Marxism after the death of Marx mellowed with some significant electoral advances made by labor parliamentary candidates across the world. Later in life Engels thought that electoral victories gave some hope that parliamentary legislation could make permanent reform an ongoing prospect for Marxists who participated in electoral politics.



Florida Governor Ron DeSantis visiting a local school 08.17.22.

Photo: FLGOV

Lenin deliberately set out to break the hope of peaceful social change.

A fleeting Labor administration in colonial Queensland in 1899 was hailed around the world, and Labor majority governments in Canberra and Sydney in 1910 greeted as a serious Antipodean step towards social democracy in action. Lenin was sufficiently annoyed to write a blistering critique of the Australian Labor Party in 1913, more or less dismissing the Australian Liberals as verging on conservative and the ALP as an irredeemably liberal party.

The schism in Marxism is often dated to August 1903, when the Second Congress of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party, meeting in London, split into irreconcilable factions of professional revolutionaries (Bolsheviks) and inclusive representatives (Mensheviks). This deep and personally vindictive divide worsened after the Russian Revolution as the Bolsheviks (renamed Communists) set out to isolate their opponents and bend the international labor movement to their Leninist will.

Lenin in Russia deliberately set out to break the hope of peaceful social change, and tragically WWI gave him the opportunity. Throughout 1917, after the middle and working classes had forced the Tsar to abdicate and a new and unfamiliar liberal democracy tried to take root, Lenin consciously set out to divert the World War into a Civil War. Lenin wanted to trigger a brutal and cruel civil catastrophe:

The war taught us much, not only that people suffered, but that those who have the best technology, discipline and machinery come out on top—it is this that the war taught us, and it is a good thing it taught us.

The Dutch historian Erik Van Ree has written a comprehensive and persuasive analysis of the political thought of Joseph Stalin (*The Political Thought of Joseph Stalin: A Study in Twentieth Century Revolutionary Patriotism*, Routledge, 2002) and has coined a useful description of his ideology: Marxist Jacobinism. I prefer to reverse it as Jacobin Marxism, for contrast with the more restrained and quasi-rational Official Marxism.

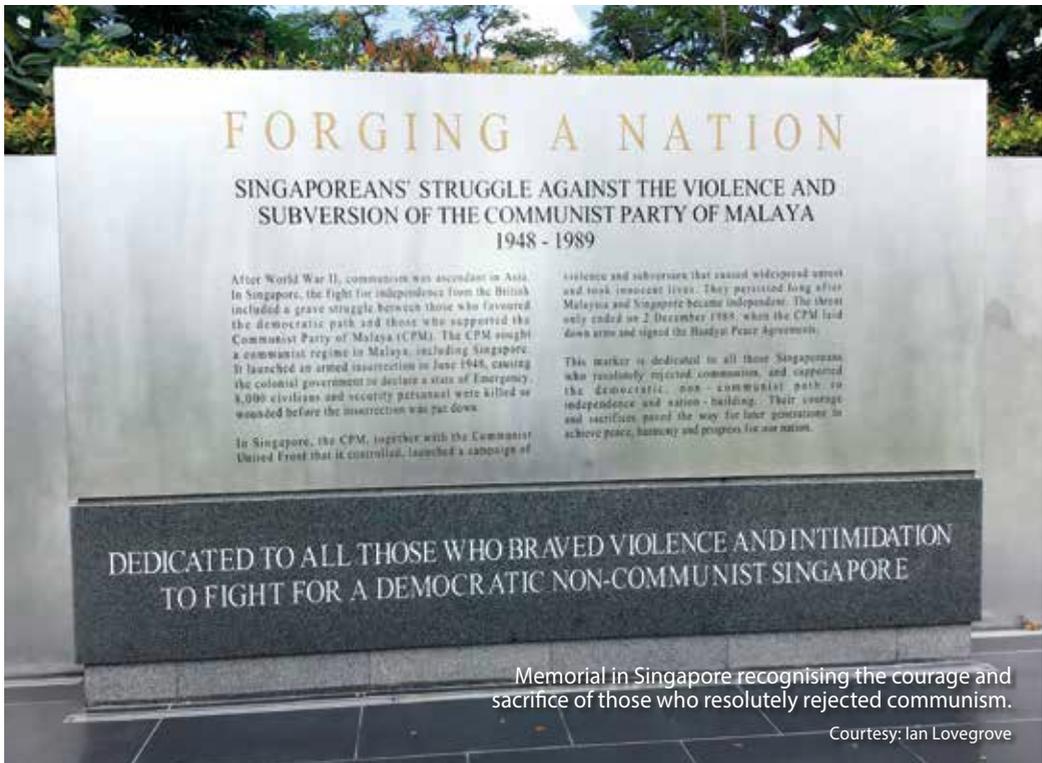
The importance of the French Revolution, and its most extreme and intolerant faction, to the Bolsheviks and the later Communist movement, cannot be understated. As

Van Ree notes, the paranoia and cruelty of Communists is driven by an almost-religious mania for purity: when Lenin and Stalin speak, or any of their lesser followers since, you could be listening to Robespierre or Saint-Just baying for the guillotine to shed buckets of bourgeois blood.

The harder, tougher, and crueller you are, the purer your ideological commitment. The waverers, the compromisers, and the pragmatists must be exposed and expelled. Lenin again, in January 1918 addressing the Third Soviet Congress to force out the remaining pacifist socialists:

We must not depict socialism as if socialists will bring it to us on a plate all nicely dressed. That will never happen. Not a single problem of the class struggle has ever been solved in history except by violence.

Violence is to be positively welcomed and



Memorial in Singapore recognising the courage and sacrifice of those who resolutely rejected communism.

Courtesy: Ian Lovegrove

celebrated, Lenin argued. This willingness to resort to violence, coupled with the ability to deny your opponents their humanity, is a shortcut to barbarism, as big chunks of the 20th century tragically record.

We must stand together, or we will surely be hanged separately.

There is not much point debating whether Stalin or Mao is the apogee of Jacobin Marxism. Both used famine to kill millions and quell potential rebels, and both established authoritarian hierarchies of dictators where petty tyrants at every level were fearful of being exposed and deposed. Life was paranoid and surreal, where only professional revolutionaries could anticipate the leader's latest tests of fidelity.

The Soviets spent 20 years demonising and then physically exterminating a class enemy, the 'kulak' (wealthy peasant), primarily in Ukraine. Historians and agrarian economists since then cannot agree that the 'kulak' ever really existed in any meaningful sense—but that did not stop a generation of urban Young Communists (Komsomol) showing their toughness, backed by Red Army bayonets, in field excursions to confiscate ALL food found in rural villages.

It is to the credit of Soviet citizens that by the 1980s they were too exhausted and disillusioned to believe in any more of the ideological claptrap.

Unfortunately, the West did not take advantage of the wonderful opportunities offered by the collapse of the Soviet Bloc 1989-1991. In equal measure the Clinton and Bush Junior administrations misread the dismantling of State apparatus in the former

Soviet Union and satellite nations, and were positively naïve in hoping Communist China would converge into liberal democracy through economic growth.

Bush Junior wasted massive resources on an ill-fated and equally naively optimistic project to convert parts of the Arab-speaking world into functioning liberal democracies. Since then, and perhaps in reaction, the Obama, Trump, and Biden administrations appear to have been disengaged and largely preoccupied with internal Continental America issues.

WHAT CAN WE DO

Some time ago in the *IPA Review* (February 2015) I wrote that we seem to need a new 'Congress for Cultural Freedom' to play a similar role to the original CCF launched at a public rally in West Berlin in June 1950. There are a number of liberal and libertarian think tanks, as well as other more conservative think tanks and even a few socialist and social democratic ones, trying to draw attention to the rollback of democracy and civil liberties around the world. What is desperately needed today is an international network which draws together the best of all the disparate political threads of thought within the democratic camp. We must stand together, or we will surely be hanged separately.

For the IPA here in Australia, we have a great chance to initiate a project on 'First Generations Seeking Liberty', celebrating the achievements of first-generation Australians who have migrated here to work hard, study hard, and establish a better way of life for themselves and their families. Australia is overwhelmingly a land of immigrants seeking opportunities, and we should chronicle and celebrate that achievement. We have nothing to be ashamed of, and whatever minor ills do persist in our community can be overcome through honesty and goodwill.

Parliament has a role to play in calling to account the transgressions of other countries against civil liberties. A country of migrants like Australia has no shortage of potential



Holodomor Memorial, Washington DC.

Photo: Blake Patterson

witnesses who can speak directly from personal experience or the experience of family members. A classic example we can be proud of is the November 1979 report of the JCFAD (Parliamentary Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence) Sub-Committee on Human Rights on 'Human Rights In The Soviet Union', chaired by ALP Senator John Wheeldon (1929–2006) from a September 1977 reference moved by Liberal Minister Bill Wentworth (1968–1972). The report drew world-class testimony from Soviet dissidents together with the goodwill and interest of a cross-bench selection of veteran Australian parliamentarians.

Communities such as those from Indochina, China including Hong Kong, the central Asian Soviet Republics, the Baltic States, the Balkan States, Ukraine, Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan could all usefully provide to an Australian audience their personal life experiences of totalitarian brutality.

The Australian political parties have a responsibility to mentor sister parties throughout our region. It is shameful that the Liberal and Labor parties seemingly have failed to nurture democratic politics in a regional neighbour such as the Solomon Islands, where politicians can allegedly be bought, and democratic stability subverted, for as little as \$35,000 a head.

Another angle for political parties here in Australia is the urgent need to collectively 'de-Marxify' the Australian Greens. It is part of history that a number of Australian pro-Soviet Marxists, at the time of the Soviet dissolution in 1991, found the nascent Green political movement a suitable place to transfer their activism. Former NSW Senator Lee Rhiannon (born Lee Brown, ex- Socialist Party of Australia) was probably the best-known representative of this distinctively Marxist trend inside Green politics.

It is in the national interest that Australian Greens are exposed to the more

sophisticated and realistic thinking of their political equivalents in Europe, most especially the German Green Party (Bündnis 90/Die Grünen) which is doing hard thinking on the future of affordable energy in their own country—including a reassessment of nuclear power as a clean energy source.

From 1943 to 1997, the Australian Government through initially the Army and later the Foreign Affairs Department maintained a School of Civil Affairs, then later the Australian School of Pacific Administration (ASPA), which brought together Australian and regional public servants and politicians to develop shared values and common understanding. The decision to vacate the field, on the hopelessly unrealistic assumption that its work was done, was a mistake shared by both sides of politics.

The underlying appetite for trashing our society remains as strong as ever.

The Australian Government should consider the reestablishment of an ASPA as part of a broader outreach into our region to project ethical and anti-corrupt public services and greater cooperation with regional allies. New Zealand and Hawaii should be initial partners, with Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan ROC ideally coming into the mix as well.

Today, hard-nosed Jacobin Marxists jokingly call themselves ‘tankies’. They are not afraid to see military tanks crush civil opposition, whether in Tiananmen Square in June 1989, or in Ukraine or Belarus today. These ‘tankies’ admire violence as a way to end political dialogue.

In the US today, a major activist website and print magazine for left intellectual critiques of American life is called *Jacobin*; explicitly calling on a hard-line political position in the spirit of the French Revolution—and a Jacobin Australia subsidiary now attempts to organise the Australian far-left.

The Communist International founded by Lenin in March 1919 may be long gone (abandoned by Stalin as an embarrassment during World War II), but the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) founded at a Shanghai meeting in June 2001 is effectively now a Eurasian forum for authoritarian regimes led by China and Russia, starting to include parts of the Islamic world.

The shape of the threat changes from generation to generation, but the underlying appetite for trashing our society remains as strong as ever.

Florida Governor DeSantis is to be applauded for holding onto some historic truths which have been fading from general community memory since the dissolution of the Soviet Union at midnight on 31 December 1991. What historical optimist Francis Fukuyama thought would be the ‘end of history’, and the affirmation of liberal democracy as a global benchmark, has sadly turned out to be the ‘end of memory’. Few Australians under 30 or even 40 years of age have much grasp of the ideological horrors which marred most of the 20th century.

Today, many young Australians are being taught that our immigrant country’s ill treatment of indigenous Australians since 1788 is a bloody horror beyond any cultural context or international comparison. Little do they know ... but if we do not tell them the truth, who will?

David Cragg is a Life Member of the ALP, and a Trustee of the Victorian Trades Hall & Literary Institute.

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