

A Bloodstained Road Heaped with Bones—a Retrospect and Reflections on the Centenary of the “October Revolution”

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This year marks the 100th anniversary of the "October Revolution" of the former Soviet Union. What has this "revolution"—lauded by the Chinese Communist Party for "launching a new era of world history"—brought to China?¹ This is a question we need to rethink carefully.

The Chinese people's understanding of the "October Revolution" was influenced by Mao Zedong's words: "The cannon shots of the October Revolution presented us with Marxism-Leninism."² This statement has become hallowed words for the Chinese Communist Party. According to Mao Zedong:

The October Revolution helped all the world's progressives, including those in China, to use the proletarian worldview as a tool to study the fate of the nation, and to rethink its problems. The conclusion was to "follow the path of the Russians."

The above statement shed light on three main viewpoints:

(1) The core influence of the "October Revolution" on China was "sending Marxism-Leninism to us"; (2) "using the proletarian worldview as a tool to study the fate of the nation" is the most fundamental help given to the Chinese people; (3) based on the first two points, the so-called "follow the path of the Russians" refers to

¹ See *Selected Works of Mao Zedong*, volume I (1991 edition), p. 303 (page-citation refers to the Chinese edition.)

² See Mao Zedong "On the People's Democratic Dictatorship" (30 June, 1949).

the socialist development direction as revealed by the "October Revolution."³

For the Chinese Communist Party, the "October Revolution" is undoubtedly very important because it directly spawned the party. It can be said that there would be no Chinese Communist Party without the "October Revolution." But for China, it probably brought unimaginable national catastrophe.

Mao Zedong said that the October Revolution "sent us Marxism-Leninism." So what is the Marxism-Leninism imported by the Chinese Communist Party? In simple terms, Marx established the theory of communism, and Lenin was the first to put this theory into practice. Over the last 100 years, it can be said that humankind underwent a century of "communist experimentation."

This "communist experiment" led to unprecedented disasters for all humankind. According to statistics compiled by a group of French scholars, and published in the 1997 *The Black Book of Communism*, fatalities from communist revolutions worldwide in the 20th century totaled nearly 100 million people: the Soviet Union (20 million), China (65 million), Vietnam (1 million), North Korea (2 million), Cambodia (2 million), Eastern Europe (1 million), Latin America (150,000), Africa (1.7 million), Afghanistan (1.5 million); and about 10,000 perished in international communist movements that did not come to power.⁴ The authors also maintained that the death toll caused by the communist regimes is higher than that caused by other political ideologies and movements, including Nazism. The number of victims included people who

³ See Tonghua: "The Great Revolution that Shook the World—the October Revolution in Russia and its Influence on China," collected in *Dangshiwenwei* (8 November, 2015).

⁴ *The Black Book of Communism: Crimes, Terror, Repression* recounts the history of political persecution implemented by communist regimes, including extrajudicial executions, exile, and the famine caused by the implementation of communist policies. The book, co-authored by several European scholars, and edited by Stéphane Courtois (research director of the National Center for Scientific Research in France), was published in 1997.

were directly executed as well as indirect deaths resulting from starvation, exile, detention or forced labor. *This is the very image of "terrorism" in the 20th century.*

According to the first *World Report on Violence and Health* published by the World Health Organization in 2002, some 191 million people died in the 25 largest instances of collective violence in the 20th century.⁵ Four of the most serious were the two world wars, the Stalinist terror and the Great Famine of China (note that this report did not include other catastrophes in China besides the Great Famine). In other words, apart from the two world wars, the large-scale unnatural deaths caused by the two communist countries, the Soviet Union and China, were the greatest human disasters in the last century. No wonder after the collapse of communist regimes in the Soviet Union and in Eastern Europe, these countries established Museums of Communist Disasters, and Institutes of National Remembrance [under the EU's Platform of European Memory and Conscience] in order to remember the terror they lived through, and to teach future generations to never repeat the same mistakes.

It is a matter of fact that every nation that followed the road of the "October Revolution"—that is, every country that practiced communism—inevitably succumbed to serious disasters. It can be said that the road of the "October Revolution" is indeed stained with blood, with bones piled on top of bones.

Why has the road of the "October Revolution" brought about mass killings? This has to do with its essence. From the experience of the Soviet Union and China, the so-called road of the "October Revolution" shares the following features:

1. in the name of the "revolution," an armed coup seizes power;

⁵ *World Report on Violence and Health*, chapter VIII "Collective Violence" (World Health Organization; Chinese translation by People's Health Publishing House, 2002), p. 260.

2. in the name of the "dictatorship of the proletariat," establish a "one-party dictatorship that is not subject to any checks and balances";
3. in the name of the "abolition of private ownership," wantonly plunder private property;
4. in the name of "suppressing the counter-revolution," carry out "national terrorism" by physically and ideologically exterminating one's enemies;
5. in the name of "cultivating new socialist persons," implement ideological "brainwashing" policies, and so control the thinking of an entire nation;
6. In the name of "production and distribution according to needs," practice "imperative planned economy";
7. in the name of "liberating all mankind," pursue a militarist agenda, develop armaments, and export revolution.

The above seven features sum up the painful experience that the Chinese people are well familiar with. Chinese as well as overseas historians, and political scientists can provide detailed documentation, so I will not restate them here.

According to Xin Ziling, a historian who specializes in the Chinese Communist Party: "After the victory of the October Revolution, Lenin made two great promises: 1) create a democracy that is 'a million times more democratic than bourgeois democracy'; and 2) raise labor productivity far exceeding that under capitalism. These two promises have become two major indicators by which we measure the success or failure of the October Revolution, and of the international communist movement."⁶

In 2009, on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the collapse of the Berlin Wall, I visited Russia and the former Eastern Bloc to gauge how local people interpreted the "domino" collapse

⁶ See Xin Ziling: "Where did Leninism go wrong?" published in *Wanweiboke* http://www.creaders.net/m/blog/user_blog_diary.php?did=244036 (25 December, 2015).

of the Soviet Union and East European communist countries in 1989.

The interviews yielded the following reasons:

1. from an economic standpoint, planned economies cannot prevail over market economies; socialist economies could not match corresponding market-economies, for example, the Soviet Union v. the United States, East Germany v. West Germany, China (1990) v. Taiwan, North Korea v. South Korea, and North Vietnam v. South Vietnam, etc. These objective facts show that the "socialist system is inferior to the capitalist system." It is very obvious which system had the advantage. This is the most critical factor in busting the "myth of communism." If we could "quantify" the downfall of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, systemic, economic factors would account for 40%.
2. from the political point of view, the socialist political system is very inhumane. This can be inferred from the large number of unnatural deaths in these countries. In addition, the control of thought and speech constitutes serious violations of human rights, resulting in a great deal of resentment. This factor would account for 30% of the reason for failure. In other words, if we measure according to Lenin's own two indicators, the "October Revolution" is clearly a failure.
3. With an inferior economy and an inhumane political system, people's dissatisfaction was boiling over, leading to strong social disaffection. This is most obvious among ethnic minorities. Dissatisfaction among disadvantaged groups, intellectuals, ethnic minorities and other social groups would coalesce into a powerful force for change, leading to the collapse of the system. This factor would account for 20%.
4. American influence: in the process of the collapse of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, the influence of external

forces, especially the United States, could not be denied.⁷ But this factor I think only accounted for 10%, because if there were no internal crumbling, no matter how powerful the external forces were, it would be difficult to topple the regime.

As the Chinese Communist Party historian Xin Ziling said: "History is the most authoritative judge. The Soviet model existed for 74 years, what did it add to human civilization? What did it leave behind? It did not generate a mode of production or productivity that was more advanced than capitalism; it did not create a political system that was superior to democratic constitutionalism. Underneath the dazzling overcoat of Communism, society regressed politically, economically and culturally to the Middle Ages. Such was the historical record left by the October Revolution and the International Communist Movement."⁸

However, because the Chinese Communist Party miraculously escaped the fate of the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc, and instead developed quickly, with smugness, into the world's second largest economy. For this reason the Chinese communists still believe that the "October Revolution" road was successful. After Xi Jinping took office, he stressed the "Four Self-Confidences" ("confidence in our chosen path, confidence in our political system, confidence in our guiding theories, and confidence in our culture"). "Confidence in our chosen path" means confidence in the path of the "October Revolution."

How do we address the question that the "October Revolution Road" has not come to an end in China? Chinese Communist theorists took pains to argue why the "red flag of the October

⁷ See Peter Schweizer, *Victory: The Reagan Administration's Secret Strategy That Hastened the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (Atlantic Monthly Press, 1996).

⁸ See Xin Ziling: "Russia's October Revolution is the errant path in the history of human civilization," preface to Yin Zhenhuan's *Critique of Leninism*.

Revolution did not fall in China."⁹ These treatises are not worth our consideration.

Just because the Chinese Communist Party has not dissolved today, we cannot conclude that the "October Revolution Road" is therefore successful in China, because the institutional factors that led to the failure of the "October Revolution" in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe still exist today in the Chinese Communist system, for example,

1. the institutional flaw of a "one-party dictatorship, not subject to checks and balances" is still intact;
2. the "national terrorism" that serves to maintain the "one-party dictatorship" is still rampant;
3. Milovan Đilas's prediction of the "new class" [or "red bourgeoisie," the privileged ruling class of party bureaucrats], which was the internal cause of the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc, has intensified in China;
4. systemic and institutional corruption not only corrodes the entire ruling party, but also poisons the thoughts and moral spirit of the Chinese people;
5. the concealed "export of revolution" is still in progress, and the desire to compete with capitalism is not dead.

The institutional factors that led to the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc still exist. The fact that the Chinese Communist Party does not fall now, does not mean it will not fall in the future, nor does it prove that the "October Revolution Road" is victorious.

⁹ For example, Zhou Xincheng's "Chinese Communists see their work as the continuation of the October Revolution: a commemoration of the 100th anniversary of the October Revolution" in *Kunlun Policy Network* (1 April, 2017).