

Why doesn't anyone care about the Soviet document...

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That's the question Claire Berlinski asks in the latest issue of City Journal, but the answer is rather easy to surmise. Michael Moynihan wrote about the problem from a different angle in an excellent article for Reason last year, and various pundits have noted the dearth of admissions over the true nature of the Soviet regime in the period since the end of the Cold War. The archives gathered by Pavel Stroiлов and Vladimir Bukovsky, among others, provide evidence in stark terms of the end result of collectivist impulses and challenge the academic conclusions about the nature of Soviet leaders, especially Mikhail Gorbachev:

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Why doesn't anyone care about the Soviet document archive?

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That's the question Claire Berlinski asks in the latest issue of City Journal, but the answer is rather easy to surmise. Michael Moynihan wrote about the problem from a different angle in an excellent article for Reason last year, and various pundits have noted the dearth of admissions over the true nature of the Soviet regime in the period since the end of the Cold War. The archives gathered by Pavel Stroiлов and Vladimir Bukovsky, among others, provide evidence in stark terms of the end result of collectivist impulses and challenge the academic conclusions about the nature of Soviet leaders, especially Mikhail Gorbachev:

In the world's collective consciousness, the word "Nazi" is synonymous with evil. It is widely understood that the Nazis' ideology; nationalism, anti-Semitism, the autarkic ethnic state, the Führer principle; led directly to the furnaces of Auschwitz. It is not nearly as well understood that Communism led just as inexorably, everywhere on the globe where it was applied, to starvation, torture, and slave-labor camps. Nor is it widely acknowledged that Communism was responsible for the deaths of some 150 million human beings during the twentieth century. The world remains inexplicably indifferent and uncurious about the deadliest ideology in history.

For evidence of this indifference, consider the unread Soviet archives. Pavel Stroiлов, a Russian exile in London, has on his computer 50,000 unpublished, untranslated, top-secret Kremlin documents, mostly dating from the close of the Cold War. He stole them in 2003 and fled Russia. Within living memory, they would have been worth millions to the CIA; they surely tell a story about Communism and its collapse that the world needs to know. Yet he can't get anyone to house them in a reputable library, publish them, or fund their translation. In fact, he can't get anyone to take much interest in them at all.

Then there's Soviet dissident Vladimir Bukovsky, who once spent 12 years in the USSR's prisons, labor camps, and psikhushkas—political psychiatric hospitals—after being convicted of copying anti-Soviet literature. He, too, possesses a massive collection of stolen and smuggled papers from the archives of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, which, as he writes, "contain the beginnings and the ends of all the tragedies of our bloodstained century." These documents are available online at bukovsky-archives.net, but most are not translated. They are unorganized; there are no summaries; there is no search or index function. "I offer them free of charge to the most influential newspapers and journals in the world, but nobody wants to print them," Bukovsky writes. "Editors shrug indifferently: So what? Who cares?"

The problem isn't apathy as much as it is fear. The narrative among popular academics and media is that the Soviet Union collapsed out of a too-generous sense of glasnost and perestroika, with Mikhail Gorbachev as the benevolent national leader whose love of freedom inadvertently ended the Soviet empire. The documentation of the Kremlin's activities and transcripts of Gorbachev's own conversations put an end to that mythology. For instance, Berlinski quotes this passage from Politburo minutes of a discussion of the Tiananmen Massacre in 1989:

Lukyanov reports that the real number of casualties on Tiananmen Square was 3,000.

Gorbachev: We must be realists. They, like us, have to defend themselves. Three thousands . . . So what?

So what, indeed! What's the death of 3,000 unarmed men and women when it comes to preserving the power of the dictatorial state? One must crack a few (thousand) bourgeois eggs to make the Communist omelette, after all. That comes to light again in a transcript of a Gorbachev conversation with a West German politician in which he defends a similar massacre of protesters in Tbilisi by Soviet troops.

These documents have the power to destroy the carefully constructed facade of Gorbachev by his Western apologists as somehow different from his Soviet predecessors. He was not; he could hardly have risen to the Politburo had he not been an advocate of totalitarian control. He had a much better sense of his enemies than his predecessors, and knew how to charm the media better than any of them. And charm them Gorbachev did, enough to get them to make the argument over the last 20 years that Gorbachev won the Cold War by dismantling the Soviet Union, rather than the obvious conclusion that the US won it by forcing the Soviets into an economic war they couldn't possibly hope to win.

That is why the term "Nazi" rightly remains synonymous with evil, while "Communist" gets more of a pass. (When was the last time we saw a movie with a Communist villain? 1959?) The Soviet Communists killed tens of millions of people through malice and neglect over a far longer period of time, and that includes Mikhail Gorbachev, who spent decades working in that system. The documents saved at so much risk to these archivists would show that unequivocally — and that should prompt us to ask, as Berlinski does, why that seems to threaten so many in the media and academia to the point of attempting to ignore their existence.

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This thread should have been moved up top, imo. The neo-comm threat is growing and needs to be addressed.

Connie on May 15, 2010 at 11:44 AM

We say nothing because, as Newspeak (or Newsweek for those who want to pretend it is not a propaganda tool) says, we are all socialist now and socialism is merely a synthesis towards communism. There is still a nostalgic feeling towards the Big Brother of Soviet style communism. I don't get it but somewhere along the line, Americans have lost sight of the horror of Stalin and the rest of the Soviet leadership.

allstonian on May 15, 2010 at 11:52 AM

Colleges used to have departments of Soviet Studies. What happened to the scholarship that helped us understand our enemy in the cold war?

Have they all been co-oped into the progressive movement and dedicated to bringing us to the same state?

Soon China will dominate our lives. We need to have the knowledge to deal with the realities of Communists and an understanding of how tightly the information was controlled, is controlled.

How about the GHW Bush library? Or the Reagan library? Couldn't they be the guardians of these docume

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