

'Although it is painful to admit, it is essential to recognize the fact that for many Latin Americans liberalism represents a tremendous inequality between rich and poor, corrupt politicians, selfishness, and unjust exploitation; in short, it is the worst profile of the society in which they live'. This sectarian vision which unfortunately many Europeans share is one of the key ideas investigated by Carlos Alberto Montaner.

Let me offer you an example of what I mean which I find particularly shocking. About three years ago, the present Spanish Prime Minister, José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, declared to the newspaper El País: 'The collapse of the Wall led to a neo-liberal offensive headed by Thatcher and Reagan that has been a resounding failure in terms of improving the living conditions of the societies that have suffered this onslaught'. In line with this declaration, we now see Zapatero as a fan of the satrap Chávez and champion of a project designed by the Cuban dictatorship which, as Vaclav Havel has recently explained, 'is pushing the dissident Cubans into a political apartheid'. The present objective of the Spanish Government is for the EU to lift what it terms 'damaging sanctions' against Cuba, though in reality they are limited to the fact that European delegations cannot be headed by ministers (thus preventing any photo sessions and subsequent manipulation by the dictator), and that the embassies of Member States invite those fighting for freedom. This bare minimum at least allows Europe to look at itself in the mirror when it claims to defend freedom in Latin America, unlike the despicable proposal of our government.

Carlos Alberto Montaner is Cuban by birth, and has worked as a university professor and speaker at the most prestigious institutions throughout Latin America and the United States. In 1990, inspired by the Spanish experience, he founded the Unión Liberal Cubana (Cuban Liberal Union) in order to forge a peaceful transition towards democracy that would include Cubans from all sections of public life. Another equally important facet of his career are his unstinting writings on the value of freedom and the responsibilities that are entailed by being free. In addition to his work as a prestigious columnist regularly read by an estimated six million people, he is the author of a number of books such as ¿Cómo y por qué desapareció el comunismo? (How and Why Did Communism Disappear?), Libertad, la clave de la prosperidad (Freedom: The Key to Prosperity), No perdamos también el siglo XXI (Let's Not Miss the 21st Century Too), Manual del perfecto idiota latinoamericano (Manual for the Perfect Latin American Idiot) and perhaps the best-known of all, Las raíces torcidas de América Latina (Twisted Roots: Latin America's Living Past), published two years ago.

The life and work of Carlos Alberto Montaner has inevitably been marked by Castro's dictatorship, by the lack of freedom in his country, and by the repression to which Cubans are subjected. He is a witness and at the same time a living example, of how tough, but how important, the struggle for democracy and freedom is.

Ana Palacio

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TOTALITARIANISM AND HUMAN NATURE: HOW AND WHY COMMUNISM FAILED

The ten psychological factors that make man and Marxism incompatible

Carlos Alberto Montaner

In the early nineties I travelled to Moscow on several occasions. The world had witnessed two astonishing events: the peaceful disintegration of the USSR and the dissolution by decree of the largest and strongest Communist Party on the planet. At that moment, back in 1989 when the Communist world collapsed, for a time it seemed that freedom might even reach Cuba, in the same way as it had spread to all the countries of Central Europe. It seemed impossible for Castro's dictatorship to survive if its Soviet Communist point of reference had disappeared. Boris Yeltsin was in power by then, and I spent an interesting morning with him during a trip he made to the United States. I then realized the considerable confusion and degree of improvisation that existed among the upper echelons of the Kremlin and the intense fear that Yeltsin, a politician born in the Urals on the very boundaries of Europe, felt at the idea of being executed by the KGB by means of a device that could paralyze his heart.

Curiously, the burial of the USSR could be considered a victory for Russian nationalism, which regarded this dismemberment as a kind of long-sought liberation freeing Moscow from an array of parasites that entailed an enormous cost. Cuba alone, located in the far-off Caribbean, had cost the Russians more than 100 billion dollars in subsidies over a period of several decades. This is a quite extraordinary amount, when we consider that the Marshall Plan only cost 11 billion dollars. What point was there in continuing to support the Sandinistas in Nicaragua or adding Mengistu's Ethiopia and revolutionary Angola to the list of hangers-on, or even pursuing

the colonial war in Afghanistan? A rather daring phrase was heard time and again during that period which summarized this pragmatic political approach: 'Russia must be liberated from the USSR'. At the end of the day, even after pruning off its various imperial appendages, Russia was still twice the size of any of the other great nations on Earth: the United States, China, Canada, Brazil or India. The world regarded the Soviets as tyrants, whilst the Russians saw themselves as victims of an ideology that had over-extended the boundaries of their economic and military responsibilities, to the detriment of the welfare of the Slavic population itself.

However, perhaps even more surprising than the bloodless collapse of the Soviet empire was the docile behaviour of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). Its 20 million members complied with the order to disband without any protest, and the country of Lenin, the country of the 'Glorious October Revolution', the Mecca and legendary model of all extremist revolutionaries throughout the twentieth century, buried its dogmas and Marxist-Leninist doctrines surprisingly quickly, with a universal gesture of fatigue.

On one trip to Moscow, after holding a meeting with the Foreign Minister, Andrei Kozirev, and the Deputy Foreign Minister, Georgi Mamedov, to discuss –inevitably– Cuban matters, the writer Yuri Kariakin, a great expert on Dostoyevsky and Goya, set up a meeting for me with Alexander Yakovlev, a figure who had already left the Government, having formerly served as the USSR Ambassador to Canada and perhaps as the main adviser and ideological mentor to Mikhail Gorbachev. I wanted to hear in his own words what coherent explanation he might offer regarding the events that had led to the collapse of the Communist system, in the very country which had first put it into practice.

At the time, Yakovlev was a key official at a foundation created by Gorbachev and, ironically, he received us in the enormous office that Mikhail Suslov had occupied until his death in 1982. Suslov had been an implacable advocate of Communist orthodoxy, a hard-liner, a Torquemada who opposed any deviation from the Kremlin line, whether it might be Trotskyist, Titoist or in the vein of the Hungarian rebellion of 1956. If there was one symbol that highlighted the drastic change that had taken place in the USSR, it was Yakovlev sitting in exactly the same place where the much-feared Suslov had sat in his day.

A System Contrary to Human Nature

The story Yakovlev related deserves to be told. In the early 1970s, this Second World War hero and prominent Party member had dared to write an article in which he stated that Soviet Communism had preserved a perverse characteristic of tsarist history which led it to exercise indiscriminate violence against society. In turn, this blocked the development of the USSR and prevented it from realizing its enormous potential.

This opinion was extremely risky and, perhaps to prevent this dangerous verdict from spreading to other comrades, the then Soviet leader, Leonid Brezhnev, who shortly after the Czech invasion in 1968 had formulated the imperial doctrine in which he granted the CPSU the right to decide where and when to deploy Soviet tanks in order to preserve Communism throughout the world (which was tantamount to granting the USSR the right to employ indiscriminate violence on an international scale) procured a golden exile for Yakovlev by appointing him Ambassador to Canada (another huge, frozen country like Russia, though more prosperous), far from the intrigues of Kremlin politics.

However, fate, as in the kingdom of Serendip, sometimes leads us back to precisely the place we have carefully sought to avoid. It so happened that, one day, a young expert in agrarian

development and a rising Communist Party star, Mikhail Gorbachev, visited Canada on an official trip and got together with his Ambassador, Alexander Yakovlev. They talked over a period of several days, maybe because Gorbachev's mission lasted longer than expected or maybe because the Soviet airline, Aeroflot, had broken down again.

It is highly instructive to think that those friendly, passionate chats between two intelligent individuals, fuelled no doubt by excellent Russian vodka, may have changed the course of mankind, without anyone knowing and without even the two parties involved realizing it. This anecdote simply reminds us of the fragile nature of any kind of mechanistic futurology based on the compiling of economic information or experts' predictions. If anyone has ever believed that history is the consequence of a series of economic factors or that it is at all predictable, then all they need to do is listen to the story of Yakovlev and Gorbachev. Because it was then and there that Gorbachev apparently became convinced that Communism could be reformed only by removing that painful element of violence which prevented a free examination of problems. It was then and there that two Communist patriots became convinced that they knew exactly what to do in order to make the largest country in the world, their country, into the richest, happiest and most developed of all nations.

Reform was essential, in the form of the famous *perestroika*. However, for reform to yield its fruits, it was necessary to remove the chains on critical judgement. This was called *glasnost*: transparency without consequences or reprisals, recovery of the truth as a tool for analysing and correcting problems. If collectivist planning and the search for distributive justice inherent in Marxism were to be allied with freedom, then Communism, Yakovlev and Gorbachev concluded, would be an unbeatable model for ensuring the happiness of nations.

And as time passed, the cards fell almost magically onto the table. After the death of Brezhnev, Yuri Andropov became the Soviet leader. He was a moderate and prudent reformist, former head of the KGB and friend of Gorbachev who, under the wing of his powerful protector, rose several rungs within the Soviet bureaucracy. In 1984, when Andropov died, Konstantin Chernenko was elected in what seemed to be a clear step backwards. Chernenko was a hard-liner from the Brezhnev era (he was head of his cabinet), and came to power at the age of 74, already in ailing health.

Indeed, Chernenko died barely a year later, and this probably convinced the Soviet *nomenklatura* of the need to stabilize their authority by electing a figure who was reasonably young and healthy, a man who would be capable of governing the country over a relatively long period of time. This was when Mikhail Gorbachev made his triumphant entrance into the history books. He was only 53 years old and conveyed a youthful and vigorous image. He brought Yakovlev with him, placing him at the head of the propaganda machine in order to defend what was known as '*novoye myshleniy*' or the new line, consisting of 'new ideas'.

The developments that followed are pretty well known. Gorbachev began by continuing the reforms undertaken by Andropov, including those of alcohol rationing or raising the price of alcohol significantly, given that this vice had apparently weakened the country's productive capacity (a campaign that the last Tsar of Russia, Nicholas II, had tried to implement, with no beneficial results at all). However, the really decisive development consisted of a new atmosphere of tolerance and freedom towards criticism, one that inevitably spread to increasingly wide sections of society. Little by little, negative comments ceased to focus solely on specific problems regarding the economy, and voices began to question the very foundations

of the Soviet system and Marxist-Leninist dogmas. All these developments coincided with an acute crisis in terms of production and supply. However, Gorbachev, far from becoming discouraged, extended his reforms to the European satellite countries. Finally, the Berlin Wall fell in October 1989 and then, one by one, almost all of the nations of Central Europe abandoned Communism and the Soviet camp.

Why didn't Gorbachev, I asked Yakovlev and Kariakin, who both knew him intimately, attempt to halt the break-up of the USSR and the socialist camp, in spite of his energetic temperament? The answer they gave me then is still convincing. It was because in Gorbachev's psychological make-up there was a genuine abhorrence of violence. Gorbachev was not unaware of the fact that the world created by Lenin after 1917 was falling apart, but he knew that, in order to sustain it, he would have to call the Red Army out onto the streets and kill several million people. This is probably what Stalin, Khrushchev or Brezhnev would have done, but he had too much compassion to order a massacre of that magnitude. This collapse was not seen as a tragedy, or at least the individuals I spoke to did not see it as such. They even saw it as a liberation of the Russians, in other words they recognized that the Russians had been slaves to the Soviet Union, that the Slavs had paid the imperial price –100 billion dollars– for conquering Cuba, Nicaragua and Ethiopia, and for invading Afghanistan. All of these ventures had been borne by the Russians, who had to foot the bill for an entirely inefficient empire.

After his review of the historical events, which took up almost half the meeting, I asked Yakovlev a final question: 'Why, in fact, did Communism fail in the USSR, when it is the largest country in the world, measuring 20 million km², and the country with the most extensive natural resources at its disposal?' He reflected for a few seconds and gave me an answer that is probably correct, but that must be considered carefully and as a whole: 'Because', he said, 'it did not adapt to human nature'. The reflections that follow aim to explore this idea, although first it will be necessary to review the background to the question.

MARXISM AND ITS FAILURES

In actual fact, scientific method teaches us that, there is something in the Communist system itself that invariably leads to failure. When we carry out a laboratory experiment and later try to repeat the experiment in the same conditions and find that the results are similar, we draw certain rules and conclusions from the experience. However, when we carry out the same experiment and attempt to obtain certain predicted results in different circumstances, and we fail to achieve the results we hoped for, the obvious conclusion is that the scientific premise is wrong. This is a test, by the way, that Marx himself enthusiastically recommended, as we can read in his well-known essay *Thesis on Feuerbach*, in which the German thinker stated the following: 'The question whether objective truth can be attributed to human thinking is not a question of theory but a practical question. Man must prove the truth, i.e. the reality and power, the *this-sidedness* of his thinking in practice. The dispute over the reality or non-reality of thinking that is isolated from practice is a purely scholastic question'.

Let us, then, apply Marx's criterion to the Communist experiment. The Marxist premise established that, through the elimination of private property and through planned production, a considerable improvement in material and spiritual well-being would be achieved, until a just, fair and happy society was created in which the coercive force of the State would be absent because the State itself had been abolished. A kind of society would be achieved in which judges and laws would not even be required, because co-existence among human beings would be based on a kind of spontaneous altruism capable of harmonizing all people's needs and interests in a

brotherly manner. This premise was advocated in the allegedly valuable discoveries that Karl Marx had made within the historical, philosophical and economic field and which Engels skilfully summarized in the funeral oration that he dedicated to him at his death in 1883, which I cite here:

"Just as Darwin discovered the law of development of organic nature, so Marx discovered the law of development of human history: the simple fact, hitherto concealed by an overgrowth of ideology, that mankind must first of all eat, drink, have shelter and clothing, before he can pursue politics, science, art, religion, etc; that therefore the production of the immediate material means, and consequently the degree of economic development attained by a given people or during a given epoch, form the foundation upon which the State institutions, the legal conceptions, art and even the ideas on religion, of the people concerned have been evolved, and in the light of which they must, therefore, be explained, instead of vice versa, as has hitherto been the case. But that is not all. Marx also discovered the special law of motion governing the present-day capitalist mode of production and the bourgeois society this mode of production has created. The discovery of surplus value suddenly threw light on the problem, whilst all previous investigations, of both bourgeois and socialist critics, had been groping in the dark".

Engels might have added that Marx had also attempted to explain capitalism's final crisis as a result of a growing level of superproduction, generated by a lack of planning, given that each greedy businessman would hide his private plans from competitors, accumulating unsellable stocks that would produce huge numbers of unemployed or workers with increasingly low wages, leading to an economic disaster that would plunge the workers into an escalating spiral of misery, one that could not have any other consequence than world revolution aimed at ending this criminal form of exploitation. Once this stage had been reached, the workers and peasants –but especially the workers, who were the historical subjects destined to acquire a 'class consciousness'– would destroy the bourgeois states and replace them with provisional 'proletarian dictatorships', until the marvellous world promised by the Marxists had become a reality. In other words, yet another superstition.

Armed with these fantastical ideas, which they considered to be 'scientific', although really they were nothing more than doubtful hypotheses that almost immediately began to be torn apart by other thinkers (such as Eugen von Böhm-Bawerk, who as early 1896 demolished Marx's theory of value and his postulates regarding surplus value), numerous social reformers in various parts of the world, full of good intentions, decided to act before the final crisis of capitalism had actually taken place, and they sought to justify the violent means they employed by pointing to the sacred ends they were pursuing. Thus, from the late 19th century and throughout the 20th century, figures such as Lenin, Trotsky, Stalin, Khrushchev, Tito, Enver Hoxha, Todor Zhivkov, Fidel Castro, Che Guevara, Georgi Dimitrov, Nicolas Ceausescu, Mao, Tito, Walter Ulbricht, Kim Il Sung, Pol Pot and several dozen other leaders emerged, all of whom shared one prominent characteristic: all of them threw themselves selflessly behind a political cause for which they suffered persecution and hardship and for which they risked their lives on numerous occasions. However, this was not the only characteristic that unified them: all of them, when exercising power within the Communist system, wielded that power with considerable cruelty, murdering and imprisoning millions of people, accusing them of treason, rebellion and simple disobedience, when the vast majority were simply disaffected souls who held different points of view, or former comrades who had been deceived by Marxist ideas.

On occasion I have committed the error, like so many writers, of describing these bloodthirsty dictators as psychopaths. This is wrong. They were not psychopathic, nor mad and, in some

cases, may have even been good-natured, but the system invariably led them towards horror and repression, as if they were unable to escape from this totalitarian fate. Brutal repression is not a perversion of the system, but the natural consequence of attempting to introduce a type of society that is far removed from the values and expectations of its members. Russia's revolutionaries rose to power in 1917 and a year later Lenin had already issued the order to create 'penal colonies' and to use brutal repression against Mensheviks, military cadets, or any force accused of sympathizing with the Kerensky reformists, a task which Trotsky pursued with criminal enthusiasm, as recalled by historians who have described the massacre of the Kronstadt sailors. However, Lenin's instructions went even further: it was important to deal out indiscriminate punishment, even to innocents, so that nobody felt secure and everyone would obey. This was the beginning of the Gulag system that Stalin would later continue with messianic enthusiasm, leaving several million souls dead in ditches and dungeons. He complemented this bloodbath with public trials against Communists accused of collaborating with the enemy, a farcical process that tended to end with the accused confessing to crimes they had never committed and proclamations of revolutionary militancy, followed by subsequent volleys of gunfire and a bullet in the neck.

Of course, this brief description of Communist terror over the first few decades after its introduction in the USSR is quite familiar to us all. However, what I would really like to point out is that these exact same developments, or very similar events, later occurred in Bulgaria and Romania, in Czechoslovakia and Hungary, in China and North Korea, and in Cuba and Ethiopia. Wherever Communist totalitarianism has been introduced, firing squads, innumerable prisons, torture, public trials, ever-vigilant networks of informers, paranoid political police corps constantly searching for traitors ready to sell their country abroad, pogroms, limitless abuses, the persecution of ideological, sexual and sometimes ethnic minorities, and total control over people's lives have all been the result. People find that they are even unable to emigrate, because the desire to leave is interpreted as clear proof of disloyalty to the nation.

It makes no difference that the process might be directed by a Cuban lawyer educated by Jesuits as is the case of Fidel Castro, a former Christian seminarist such as Stalin, a schoolmaster such as Mao, a soldier such as Tito or a shy Frenchified member of the bourgeoisie, such as Pol Pot. It is not a question of individuals, but of ideas and methods. They could not all be evil psychopaths. It makes no difference whether the regimes have been imposed by the Red Army, as was the case in various Central European countries, or whether they may have been the result of revolutions, civil wars or coup d'états, as was the case in Albania, Cuba, China and Ethiopia. The result—except for a few superficial differences—is always extremely similar, as if the very introduction of Communism itself inevitably entails a bloodthirsty mistreatment of human beings.

Why this fatal cruelty? How could such well-intentioned and altruistic individuals, who believe they are devoting their lives to redeeming their fellow citizens, perpetrate such monstrous acts? Probably because they sacrifice any kind of moral criterion in order to achieve the goals they have set themselves, something that Gorbachev did not do. This deviation from the norm led to the collapse of the USSR. As Yakovlev and Kariakin confirmed, Gorbachev could not accept the idea that the system might be maintained through a massacre. Gorbachev was, therefore, quite unlike the author of a key paragraph in the 'Message to the Peoples of the World through the Tricontinental' (the Tricontinental was a worldwide meeting of guerrilla leaders, terrorists and Communist revolutionaries in Havana in 1966). The message was sent by Che Guevara, who was preparing his Bolivian adventure at the time. In it, the Argentinean doctor called for 'Hatred

as an element of the struggle; a relentless hatred of the enemy, impelling us over and beyond the natural limitations that Man is heir to and transforming him into an effective, violent, selective and cold killing machine'. Hating and killing was exactly what the revolutionary had to do in the name of his love of mankind, without feeling the slightest hesitation or remorse.

This fanatical belief in Communist certainty, which made Stalin, Che Guevara, Pol Pot and so many other revolutionaries into political criminals, has two appalling consequences. First, it leads such leaders to create a language of hate, the inevitable precursor to aggression. Ideological adversaries are always described as 'worms', 'stateless beings', 'traitors', 'imperialist bootlickers', in other words, sub-human scum who can be eliminated without any qualms with a bullet in the head or locked up behind bars, as we do with dangerous animals in zoos. The second consequence of this dogmatic approach is moral autism. In general, those who remain faithful to Communist beliefs close their minds completely to any critical intellectual ideas or more reasonable propositions, hiding their heads in the sand like ostriches.

How can we continue believing in Marxist economic analysis after the impeccable refutation offered by Böhm-Bawerk and other outstanding members of the Austrian School? How can we continue to advocate the virtues of centralized planning after Ludwig von Mises in his work *Socialism*, published back in 1922, demonstrated that it was impossible to make economic calculations in complex societies, explaining the value of price as a way of sending out signals and of the market as the least inefficient means of allocating resources, and predicting, along the way, the inevitable failure of the incipient Soviet experiment? How can we espouse dialectical materialism and the superstitious belief that history acts in accordance with the laws allegedly discovered by Marx after we have considered Karl Popper's reflections on historicism? How can we insist on laying the entire blame on the West after we have read works such as Raymond Aron's *The Opium of the Intellectuals* or Isaiah Berlin's seminal essays? How can we not agree with Hayek when he warns us that the socialist path leads to servitude, or with Hanna Arendt when she explains the tortuous mechanisms that destroy our emotional balance in totalitarian regimes and generate that odious feeling of helplessness which this kind of omnipresent dictatorship uses to castrate and mark its citizens?

Marxists, captive to an unjustified intellectual arrogance and in order to feel safe behind their wall of errors, discard the observations of their adversaries out of hand, without even listening to them, or resort to an obscenely crude language that always seeks to destroy the credibility of those who criticize them, rather than their critics' ideas. This is especially true in the case of leftist critics or former Communists who have escaped from the fold and related their valuable experiences, such as Arthur Koestler, André Malraux, Albert Camus, George Orwell, John Dos Passos, Octavio Paz, Joaquín Maurín, Eudocio Ravines, Mario Vargas Llosa, Plinio Apuleyo Mendoza, Jorge Semprún and many other dozens or perhaps hundreds of worthy intellectuals who have become disenchanted with the Marxist-Leninist praxis. These figures are invariably labelled agents of the CIA, servants in the pay of Wall Street or, more generally, 'lackeys in the service of imperialism'.

Other Circumstances, the Same Results

Are we faced, then, with a cultural problem? Are some cultures perhaps more inclined to resort to violence or to accept tyranny, whilst others might foster a milder and more natural form of Communism? This does not seem to be the case. Communism has been attempted throughout the enormous Russian Empire, which exercised its hold over some one hundred different peoples: in East Germany, a developed and refined nation at the heart of Europe; in

Czechoslovakia and Hungary, two glorious fragments of the old Austro-Hungarian Empire; in the patchwork that was Yugoslavia; in Albania, which is culturally dominated by Turkey; in China; in Vietnam; in Cambodia; in North Korea; in Cuba and Nicaragua; in the black African countries of Angola and Ethiopia. In all these countries it has been a veritable disaster. Communism has been attempted in countries of Graeco-Christian origin, such as Russia, Bulgaria and Romania; in Catholic nations, such as Hungary, Cuba and Nicaragua; in Protestant Christian countries such as Germany and Czechoslovakia; in Islamicized nations such as Albania, certain parts of Yugoslavia and certain republics in Soviet Turkistan; and in nations of Confucian, Buddhist and Taoist tradition, such as China, Cambodia, Vietnam and North Korea. It has failed in all of them. Communism has been tried out in societies of Slavic, Germanic, Chinese, Sub-Saharan, Latin, Hispanic American, Scandinavian and Turkmen origin, and all have ended in disaster, abuse, poverty and mediocrity. These countries have only managed to save themselves from failure by abandoning the Communist system or by moving away from Communist principles and combining them with measures characteristic of Western societies and the market economy.

But how can we state with such confidence that these Communist experiments failed? Does Communist propaganda not tell us of societies endowed with extensive health and education systems, societies in which there is no unemployment and everyone enjoys certain minimum levels of wealth, sufficient to lead a happy life? Success and failure are, of course, always relative judgements. However, as in a laboratory environment, we have certain control experiments that enable us to contrast and confirm that the Communist experience was an unmitigated disaster. After the Second World War various countries and homogeneous societies split into two antagonistic systems, which were subsequently plunged into a Cold War over a period of half a century. There were two Germanys, two Koreas, and two or more Chinas (continental China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and even Singapore). Austria was neutral, but opted for democracy and a free market economy, whilst Hungary and Czechoslovakia –the other two large pieces of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire– remained behind the Iron Curtain.

Any comparison of the results could not possibly be more humiliating for the Communist world. West Germany and Austria, South Korea and the capitalist parts of China developed in a much more effective and humane manner. Their evolution towards increasingly democratic ways of life that upheld civil rights became a powerful source of attraction to all those who were unfortunate enough to live behind the bars on the other side. These capitalist societies were not perfect, of course, and still laboured under serious problems, but the voluntary migration of peoples indicated a clear preference. Nobody jumped the Wall to enter East Germany. The Chinese who managed to escape applied for asylum in Taiwan or in Hong Kong, never in Mao's paradise. The majority of the North Korean prisoners who were held in South Korea begged not to be returned to the North when the war ended in 1953. Cuba, having been an important refuge for immigrants throughout the 20th century, suddenly became a persistent exporter of emigrants on rafts after the revolution. The Communist states, as the American lecturer and diplomat Jeanne Kirkpatrick observed, became the first political bodies in history to build walls, not to protect themselves from invasion, but to prevent their unfortunate citizens from fleeing. There is no more accurate measure of the quality of a society than observing the direction in which its migrants flee.

Was it a question, then, of material resources? Not really. It is only too evident that Communism failed in all possible material aspects, even when its countries had huge opportunities to triumph. The USSR had immense natural resources at its disposal, larger reserves than any other country in the world. The Ukraine had been the bread-basket of Europe

up until the First World War. Bulgaria and Romania had also fared successfully in the agricultural sphere. East Germany, Czechoslovakia and Hungary had an established industrial and scientific tradition, accompanied by an abundant supply of human capital trained at a number of outstanding universities. All of these countries formed part of a common market known as the COMECON, the Soviet response to the Marshall Plan and the European Economic Community, which coordinated all their economic and financial efforts and research. However, none of these positive developments was able to generate the wealth, technology or scientific advances that the West managed to promote. If we look back over this period with some perspective, it seems quite inexplicable that, with such enormous potential at its service, the Communist bloc should have failed to originate even one of the important technological revolutions of the 20th century: television, nuclear energy, antibiotics, biotechnology, supersonic air travel, transistors or computing. Only in one field, that of the space race, did the Soviets manage to nose ahead for a short time with their launch of the *Sputnik* in 1957, but this episode is a product of military rocket science, an industry much favoured by the Kremlin and an area in which Moscow subsequently invested an impressive volume of energy and resources.

Nevertheless, advocates of Communism still have a final alibi that enables them to avoid admitting that Marxism is based on a series of intellectual errors, which lead all Communist leaders to fail, in all cultures and even in the most promising material circumstances. The excuse is based on the idea that a 'real socialism' exists, one whose failure is simply due to human errors and clumsy implementation, rather than the erroneous nature of its original precepts. But this view turns a blind eye to many obvious realities, including Yakovlev's melancholy observation that the system simply does not match human nature. Let us now explore the reasons for this fundamental incompatibility.

HUMAN NATURE

Throughout most of the 19th and 20th centuries, psychologists, sociologists, philosophers and biologists argued passionately about the essence of human nature. The core of this debate was quite clear: some believed that Man was essentially the result of external influences, whilst others described him in terms of genetic factors. For a time, a majority of the academic world, no doubt horrified by the Nazi experience, vehemently refused to accept the fact that human beings had innate instincts and tendencies, even believing that it was 'reactionary' and 'racist' to state that heredity and biology played a preponderant role in the behaviour of individuals.

However, during the second half of the 20th century, with the award of a Nobel Prize in 1973 to the Austro-German ethologist, Konrad Lorenz, for the research and reflections contained in his book *On Aggression*, and in the midst of a bitter academic debate that still continues today, a kind of neo-Darwinist approach emerged, which was strengthened by other landmark studies within the field of sociobiology, headed by Edward O. Wilson with his books *Sociobiology* (1975) and *On Human Nature* (1978). As of this moment, an increasing number of prominent thinkers began to accept the idea that human beings, like all other creatures, were subject to the forces of evolution, thus enabling us to explain their behaviour, feelings and attitudes as forms of adapting to the mysterious urgency to perpetuate the species, an urge that governs all living things. This neo-Darwinist approach, which is generally opposed to the stance adopted by social scientists closely allied with Marxism, was also given the name of 'functionalism'. In this way, the existence of institutions such as marriage and family, of religious beliefs and aggressive forms of behaviour towards outsiders, could all be explained as innate survival strategies within the species, urges that had been involuntarily learned and acquired over hundreds of thousands of years of ongoing evolution.

If we accept this theoretical premise and agree that the key to the success of any society is its human capital, its civic virtues, its readiness to work and a coherent and appropriate system whereby the model of coexistence matches the psychological characteristics of the members of that society, what elements of Marxist theory or the Communist State model might we highlight that clearly contradict human nature and exercise a negative effect on society and, in turn, on the process of wealth creation? In my opinion, there are various aspects, all of them linked to the deep-seated psychology of the species. In order to understand these points, it is worth briefly analyzing ten of the most important:

1. Collectivism and the Repression of the Ego

The most obvious aspect that works against human nature consists of the violent imposition of various types of collectivism, which deny or repress the egotistical urge that exists in the psyche of all normal individuals. Collectivism represses the absolutely natural tendency to defend ourselves, our ego, the impulse that allows us to get up each day with a desire to work and do things, because we need to situate our ego within the wider world, we need to find our niche and defend it. Collectivism imposes a kind of dissolution of this entirely natural tendency to defend our ego and becomes an oppressive mechanism that drives the first significant wedge between the form of society that is imposed on us and our own human nature. Totalitarianism has always interpreted the desire to achieve personal prestige and distinction –one of the great driving forces of human action– as a kind of anti-social behaviour punished by law and stigmatized by official morality, overlooking the fact that individuals need to strengthen their self-esteem through social recognition based on the uniqueness of their achievements. Of course, under Communist rule this collectivist repression of egotism and the search for recognition has been accompanied by grotesque forms of ersatz success, official distinctions such as the ‘Heroes of Socialist Labour’ within the Stakhanovite tradition. However, the artificial nature of these awards, generally presented in ridiculous ceremonies and inevitably linked to the bovine nature of those who are chosen to receive them, ends up removing any kind of social prestige, and strips the whole exercise of any emotional substance.

2. Abstract Universal Altruism as Opposed to Spontaneous Selective Altruism

Collectivism presents another strongly negative dimension. It decrees an obligatory form of abstract universal altruism towards workers, humanity, and the socialist camp, whilst combating the spontaneous selective altruism which focuses on a more intimate circle of relationships, this being the sphere that really mobilizes human beings to act. With private property having been abolished, it is no longer possible to give one’s children the material goods that will guarantee their welfare. The strong sense of protection that leads fathers and mothers –especially mothers– to sacrifice themselves for their descendents and to postpone personal gratification in favour of their loved ones, is practically eliminated by the material impossibility of passing on property. The system thus inhibits and penalizes two of the most important attitudes and forms of behaviour that underlie the desire to work and the consequent creation of wealth: the search for personal success and the desire to protect and improve the status of one’s own family. Why should we be surprised, then, at the miserable material results produced under Communist totalitarianism, when this system, generally imposed by force, suppresses the very driving motivations that lead people to work enthusiastically?

3. The Disappearance of Material Rewards for Effort

However, the negative effects on normal, everyday individuals’ desire to work do not end there. As its goal, Marxism proposes a paradise that is always unattainable, constantly hovering just over the horizon. It demands constant sacrifice, for the benefit of future generations, and denies

workers an effective and immediate recompense for their efforts. It thus overlooks a basic principle for motivation, namely that there should be a direct link between the level of effort deployed and the immediacy of the rewards on offer: the greater and more immediate the rewards, the stronger the effort will be to obtain them. For how long and for how many generations could workers defend enthusiastically a system that denies them legitimate compensation for their efforts or that postpones this recompense indefinitely?

4. An Unreal Collective Solidarity and the Weakening of the ‘Common Good’

As a consequence of collectivism and the disappearance of material rewards associated with personal effort, all Communist states have presented a paradoxical phenomenon that Marx was quite unable to foresee: collective solidarity, far from being strengthened, disappears until it is virtually imperceptible. Nobody looks after public property. The official truth is that everybody owns everything. The real truth is that nobody owns anything, and, as a consequence, nobody cares about stealing from the State or about dilapidated collective facilities, and nobody has any qualms in abusing the services that are on offer. This attitude generates a lethal combination of wastage and acute shortage within the system itself.

In Communist states, equipment is always astonishingly obsolete. Tractors, transport vehicles and any other machinery handed over to workers always has a surprisingly brief useful life, one that is shortened even further by the lack of spare parts, typical of centrally-planned economies. Nobody looks after anything because people are unable to mentally grasp the idea of the ‘common good’. The State, a remote, uncomfortable and oppressive burden, does not belong to them, so there is no point in protecting it. This has always been clear in the urban environments of cities governed by Communist regimes, with their neighbourhoods always dirty, unpainted, poorly lit and populated with dilapidated buildings. A country such as East Germany, the most prosperous of the Communist nations, did not even have sufficient resources to collect all the rubble left behind after the Second World War. In Havana, labouring under the boundless burden of Castro’s regime, we find that whilst the official cars in the service of the *nomenklatura* hardly last two or three years, the old vehicles in private hands, many dating from the 1940s and 1950s, continue to circulate heroically around the capital’s streets. The difference between the two is an unspoken, yet effective, way of demonstrating the unmitigated inefficiency of socialism and the immense material cost that this system imposes on society. The public arena disappears in the face of Man’s alienation (to use a typically Marxist expression, although in a somewhat different sense): the alienation of Man living under socialism, who never associates the State in which he is living with the idea that the State actually belongs to him.

5. The Breakdown of Family Ties

Collectivism and the impossibility of contributing to the welfare of one’s own family is not simply an accidental consequence of the disappearance of private property, but a consciously engineered consequence sought by totalitarian dictatorships in their desire to break up family ties, with the purpose of forging men and women who are not subject to traditional morality. Thus we have the Chinese communes, Cuban schools in the country and Cambodia’s brutal rejection of urban life during Pol Pot’s tyrannical reign, based on a wild desire to destroy cities and urban ties, because pure Communist values can only be conveyed in a rural world. Cuba has even gone to the morbid extreme (perhaps also witnessed in other Communist countries) of decreeing that families must hate all those members who have left the country, because their ideas are contrary to those of the government. What is astonishing is not that this hate for one’s own family should be decreed, but that people might actually obey the decree. People have either

pretended to hate or actually hated family members for having different ideas. These pressures have broken or attempted to break up family structures. The idea is to destroy blood ties in order to create a brotherhood based on ideology, one in which the only source for conveying values is the omnipresent Party. This is why all Communist governments have always sung the praises of children who are capable of overcoming the bourgeois loyalty to family and who have reported their parents or brothers and sisters to the political police when these family members have broken the laws of Communist doctrine.

It is not even possible to love those who do not demonstrate qualities of Communist fervour, in other words, 'revolutionaries'. Children, parents and siblings, split apart by political militancy on the implacable orders of the State, stop talking or writing to one another. In Cuba, the police files, application forms to educational centres and company registers have offered the following dangerous observation in their files: 'The accused maintains links with family members living abroad'. In other cases the warning have referred to the individual's circle of friends: 'The accused maintains links with known counter-revolutionaries'. This brutal manipulation of people's emotional lives has a high emotional cost. In fear of the State, people obey its orders and renounce family ties and committed friendships, but secretly they distance themselves still further from a State that forces them to undertake this abject mutilation of their own feelings.

6. Institutions as Cattle Pens

Consequently, totalitarianism denies and represses any form of organization that is not subject to the control and scrutiny of the governing body. Society cannot spontaneously create institutions to defend its ideals or legitimate interests. Participation is limited to the few channels actually created by the governing authorities: the Party, mass organizations, unanimous parliamentary decisions, and tame trade unions. People do not feel that they are really represented by any of these official institutions. Contrary to historical tradition, Communism is a system that consciously endeavours to break spontaneous ties and structures and any other natural bonds generated by society, replacing them with the driving belts of an arbitrary and repressive authority, disguised in the form of artificial channels of participation which are really just cattle pens in which to herd members of society so that they will obey. Channels such as parliaments where nothing is debated and everything is applauded, trade unions in which the workers are not defended, mass organizations whose only purpose is to organize society in support of the reigning dictatorship. These false institutions recruit members assiduously in order to prevent society from spontaneously organizing movements to promote its own objectives and interests, in accordance with its natural instinct. What is the result of this cruel stabling of society's members? A growing sense of alienation within society as a whole, which is incapable of feeling that it is represented, much less protected, by a public sector that is perceived as a distant and alien imposition.

7. From the Helpless Citizen to the Parasitical Citizen

However, the Communist sin of coercing all members of society to comply with the orders of the State and clipping their wings so that people cannot think, organize themselves or create wealth on their own, has its own curious retribution. It turns people into unproductive parasites who expect the State to provide all the goods and services that it is unable to provide, precisely because of the restrictions imposed on society. The defenceless citizen (a term coined many decades ago by Hanna Arendt) thus becomes a permanently dissatisfied consumer, one who is constantly obliged to break the unjust rules to which he is subjected by means of stealing or by recourse to the black market, weakening, in the process, many of the ethical norms that should preside over any just and reasonable social organization.

8. Fear as a Means of Coercion and Lies as the Consequence

How do Communist societies actually achieve these levels of social control? It is done through an unpleasant and omnipresent physical feeling that is typical of totalitarian societies: fear. Fear of repression. Fear of physical and moral punishment. Fear of being expelled from a university or a job. Fear of being evicted from one's home. Fear of being incarcerated. Fear of terrifying pogroms. Fear of beatings. Fear of firing squads. Nobody wants to feel fear, but fear is uncomfortably real in this kind of society in which the omnipresent State places its spies on every corner, sticks its nose into everybody's private life, listens to conversations, issues threats and enters people's homes.

The only problem is that fear, like any negative instrument –and, in this respect, behavioural psychologists are quite correct– is a precarious form of motivation that can generate counterproductive reactions. Among these, the most serious are undoubtedly deception, simulation and concealment. Lying is a specialized art in which all Communist societies are well versed. The Party lies when it advocates approaches it knows to be false and unattainable. Civil servants lie when they are asked to produce reports on the results of the management tasks they have been entrusted with, which are generally poor because of the lack of resources. Leaders lie when they present deliberately distorted results. Militants and people with no conviction lie when they are asked to give their opinion regarding supposed achievements. However –and this is even more serious– everyone, all and sundry, teaches their children to lie, because in a Communist system, quite unlike what we are taught in the Bible, truth does not make us free, but leads us straight to jail. This atmosphere of deception is known in Cuba as 'double morality' or the 'morality of the *yagruma*' (the trumpet-tree, which has a leaf whose two faces are of different colours). It gives rise to the starkest and most destructive kind of cynicism, an impossible environment in which to create wealth, as revealed by a phrase that has been heard in all societies governed by Communism: 'They (the State) pretend to pay us, and in exchange we pretend to work'.

9. Disappearance of the Competitive Urge

Predictably perhaps, a model of organization such as Communism, which introduces a series of artificial psychological tensions into society based on fear and on the permanent incompatibility between what is believed, what is stated and what is done, also destroys the urge to compete, a natural urge whose purpose is to improve the species.

Human beings tend to compete in practically all areas of life, ranging from the simple exchange of opinions, when all the members of the group unconsciously attempt to establish themselves within a certain hierarchy (this has been closely studied by theories on group dynamics), to sporting competitions, in which the search for success is self-evident and men and women seek to stand out and climb the ranks.

Unfortunately, within the Communist system, where the only institutions that exist are artificially designed by the Party, and where the only initiatives that are permitted originate from the governing authorities, creative individuals are nearly always sidelined and find a severely restricted field in which to realize their dreams and projects. The 'heroes' and 'captains of industry', as Thomas Carlyle called them, driven by nature to carry out impulsive social accomplishments, are outlawed, persecuted or cruelly hounded from public life if they become dangerously visible. It is very probable that in countries such as the USSR or Czechoslovakia, with their high levels of education, individuals such as William Shockley, one of the creators of the transistor, or restless young men such as Steven Jobs, the creator of the Apple personal computer, must have existed, but how can good ideas translate into concrete actions in social

systems that are closed, guided by infallible dogmas and administered by political bureaucracies, and which are blind and deaf to any new initiative?

The overwhelming success of societies such as those of the United States compared to Communist regimes is due, in large part, to the immense opportunities that creative individuals have wherever personal freedoms and institutions that favour exceptional talent exist. It is noteworthy that a genius such as Thomas Alva Edison should have patented over 1,000 inventions, including the electric light bulb, or that a student called Bill Gates should have created an ingenious software that could be used as an operating system for computers. However, as admirable as these achievements are, we must also recognize the fact that the societies they lived in were also capable of rapidly transforming the idea into an artefact and the artefact into a business. Edison did not only invent the light bulb, he also created the company required to distribute the electricity and charge for the service. Gates not only perfected the Basic language and gave it a specific application as a key element of personal computing. In a humble garage, and with the assistance of four friends, he managed to create the company Microsoft, which in 20 years was to become one of the largest on Earth. If these two figures had been born in the Communist world, the most probable outcome would have been that all the creativity and energy that drove them to work, compete and triumph would have been slowly crushed under the lethal weight of a system conceived to destroy any spontaneous initiative from within society.

10. The Need for Freedom

To this repression of the competitive spirit we must add the fatal suppression of freedom implicit in any kind of social organization that revolves around the existence of incontestable dogmas, as is the case with Marxist scholasticism. Why use the expression 'Marxist scholasticism'? Because Marxism, in the same way as medieval scholasticism, believes that the truth is already revealed and is contained in the sacred books written by the authorities. The only thing left for Marxism to do is to confirm the wisdom of the authorities and the corresponding leaders, especially if they occupy exalted positions, endowing them with ridiculous epithets such as 'great helmsman', 'maximum leader', 'beloved leader', or 'father of the nation' —all perfect examples of the most debased form of cult worship of the leader.

It so happens that, in order for us to gain the necessary information, examine reality and propose possible courses of action, freedom is not a dispensable spiritual luxury, but rather one of the foundations of the prosperity enjoyed by modern societies. If there is one precise definition of a human being, it is that of a 'being who informs himself on a constant basis'. It is no coincidence that the most widespread greeting among all members of the human species should be 'What's new?' This is because the most characteristic feature of our species is its ongoing transformation of the environment in which we live, and this entails constant change to adapt to the dangers involved and the opportunities that arise. New developments determine whether we should flee from danger or whether we can take advantage of the opportunities that present themselves. The possibility of informing ourselves freely and abundantly is the key to any person or group's success. When a society such as that proposed by the Communist model curtails this possibility of informing ourselves, by censoring books and incarcerating those who possess different or contrary ideas, this society is effectively draining away the very sap that sustains human behaviour. It is terrible to think that, over a period of 40 years, Communist societies actually banned films, books and ideas that were inconvenient to the dictatorship's bureaucracy, whilst heretics were persecuted for being enemies of the socialist paradise. By opposing freedom, this approach simply goes against the very essence of the human spirit.

Yakovlev and Gorbachev were right to believe that the freedom to exchange information without fear of reprisals —*glasnost*— was the correct path to follow in order to tackle the USSR's enormous problems, although they were wrong to think that the Communist system could be reformed. It could not, as Yakovlev finally admitted to me, because such a system is contrary to human nature. This alone condemned it to failure.

EPILOGUE

Evidence itself is not enough to convince certain people of the unfeasibility of Communism. A lecturer friend of mine once told me that he had travelled to a Latin American country to deliver a lecture on the demise of Marxism. When he reached the doors of the university he was met with an eloquent banner that read: 'Marx is dead! Long live Trotsky!' That is the way it is. Dozens of failed experiments in as many countries and in many different circumstances over a period of many decades are not sufficient to convince some people of the truth. People prefer to close their eyes to reality. Why? Perhaps because Marxism, although mistaken, provides a simple, elementary and understandable explanation for our social ills, one that is within the grasp of any mind, however limited the person's education or his capacity for analysis. Perhaps it is because the absurd solution it proposes is equally simple. It may also be because utopias, which have caused some of the greatest catastrophes in history, are always seductive to a certain section of society that prefers to dream, as opposed to observing and reflecting upon reality. However, the fact that some people continue to err does not represent a tacit recognition that they might be right. It is simply an example of irrational stubbornness, of which there are countless examples throughout history. People adhere, with mysterious frequency, to what Ana Palacio has called 'zombie ideas': dead ideas that, nevertheless, persist among us as if their intellectual demise, their historical death had never really taken place. Whatever the case may be, I shall never forget a sad observation that Yuri Kariakin, a Marxist when young and a democrat in his declining years, once made whilst we were waiting for Yakovlev. 'How strange and disproportionate Marxism is!' he exclaimed 'In our youth we filled our heads with ideological stuff and nonsense in just a few days, but then it took us many years to get it out of our brains again'. Some people never manage to do so at all.