

Statue unveiling in Washington:

Bush, Democrats resurrect anticommunism in service of US “war on terror”

Bill Van Auken
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US President George W. Bush was joined by a crowd of right-wing Republican ideologues and several Democrats Tuesday for the unveiling of yet another monument in the already statue- and memorial-crowded streets of Washington, D.C.

This rather unimpressive 10-foot bronze statue, modeled on the papier-mâché figure of “Liberty” erected by the protesting Chinese students in Tiananmen Square in 1989, has been dubbed the “Victims of Communism Memorial.”

The monument, the pet project of the right-wing Heritage Foundation think tank, has been 17 years in the making. Much of the funding for the statue came from the government of Taiwan, with other money contributed by anti-communist émigré organizations and from some governments in eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union.

The chairman of the commission that organized the statue’s building is one Lee Edwards, a Heritage Foundation regular and “historian” of the Republican right, whose latest book is a paean to Reagan’s former attorney general, Edwin Meese. The commission’s “honorary chairman” was George W. Bush.

Carved on the pedestal of the statue are the words, “To the one hundred million victims of communism and to those who love liberty.”

The 100-million figure was invoked by virtually all of the speakers. In his remarks, Bush described communism as “an ideology that took the lives of an estimated 100 million innocent men, women and children.” He went on to include in that figure all those who died in famines in the Soviet Union and China, Ethiopians killed by the Mengistu military junta, Miskito Indians who died during the US-backed contra war against Nicaragua and Cubans who drowned trying to get to Florida by boat.

The crimes carried out by the Stalinist regime that usurped power in the Soviet Union are without question massive and horrific. The aim of those who erected the monument in Washington, however, is to equate those who carried out these crimes with their first and principal victims, the entire generation of Marxists who led the October 1917 revolution and the tens of thousands of socialist opponents of Stalinism within the USSR, who were systematically exterminated in the Moscow Trials and the great terror of the 1930s.

Of course, the US officials who were the predecessors of those erecting the monument in Washington viewed this act of political

genocide with grim satisfaction, recognizing in the murder of Trotskyists, and all those identified with socialist and Marxist opposition to the Stalinist bureaucracy, an irrevocable turn by the Kremlin against the revolutionary internationalist policy identified with Lenin, Trotsky and the October Revolution.

The hypocrisy of those erecting and dedicating the monument by no means ends there. If one were to utilize the same methodology in calculating the number of victims that can be attributed to the crimes of capitalism, it would produce the justification for a far larger memorial. They would include not only those tens of millions killed in two World Wars, the Holocaust, the US wars in Korea, Vietnam and Iraq as well as innumerable CIA-backed counterrevolutionary bloodbaths from Indonesia to Guatemala, but also the countless victims murdered or worked to death under the colonial regimes established by capitalist states in the oppressed countries.

And what about the hundreds of millions condemned to die from hunger and disease by a world economic system driven by profit? It is estimated that six million infants under the age of five, the vast majority of them in the oppressed countries, die each year because they lack clean water or elementary forms of health care. These basic necessities are denied to them because of the impoverished conditions to which capitalism condemns billions of human beings all over the planet.

Even more directly, what can one say of the historically unprecedented rise in the mortality rate in Russia following the dissolution of the Soviet Union? The number of excess deaths resulting directly from the restoration of capitalism has been estimated at more than 1.3 million in the first four years alone.

Needless to say, no monument is in the works for these innumerable victims of capitalism. And, if Bush and company came out to cry crocodile tears for the victims of Stalinism, it was not, as they sanctimoniously claimed, to honor their memory or record history’s lessons. Rather, it was to prepare new crimes to further the interests of capitalism and to employ anticommunist demagoguery in an attempt to deny that there is any possible alternative to global militarism and social inequality.

As it quickly became clear at the monument unveiling, the victims of Stalinism were meant to serve merely as a prop for furthering and justifying the war policies that are being pursued by Washington.

Bush and other speakers essentially attempted to draw an improbable equal sign between communism and those responsible for the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks.

“Like the communists, the terrorists and radicals who have attacked our nation are followers of a murderous ideology that despises freedom, crushes all dissent, has expansionist ambitions and pursues totalitarian aims,” he told the crowd gathered in front of the new statue. He continued: “Like the communists, our new enemies believe the innocent can be murdered to serve a radical vision. Like the communists, our new enemies are dismissive of free peoples, claiming that those of us who live in liberty are weak and lack the resolve to defend our free way of life.”

No one at the ceremony was so impolite as to point out that those blamed for the attacks of September 11 were Washington’s allies in the “struggle against communism” barely 20 years ago, when the CIA poured hundreds of millions of dollars into the Mujahideen fighting against the Soviet-backed regime in Afghanistan. In those days, President Ronald Reagan, whose memory was invoked ad nauseam at the statue ceremony, proclaimed these “freedom fighters”—Osama bin Laden among them—the “moral equivalent of our Founding Fathers.”

Such unpleasant contradictions are beside the point, as far as the White House is concerned. Its aim in promoting the anticommunist statue was to invoke the Cold War as a precedent for what is being presented to the American people as a “global war on terrorism,” a supposedly inevitable and “generational” struggle that will see the US occupying Iraq and waging war elsewhere for many decades to come.

It was left to a Democrat to spell out this aim most directly...and crudely. Representative Tom Lantos of California, the chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, was brought on to the platform for the opening speech, which quickly turned into a tirade not only against Iran and Islam, but also against various European leaders.

Comparing what he termed “distorted Islamic fascism” to “godless communism,” Lantos said that NATO must be rebuilt “as the military arm of the civilized world and see to it that no Nazism, no communism, no Ahmadinejad-ism [referring to the Iranian president], will prevail on this planet.”

He went further, denouncing the former leaders of both Germany and France for failing to support the illegal US invasion of Iraq in 2003. His harshest words were reserved for former German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, whom he termed a “political prostitute” for “taking big checks from [Russian President Vladimir] Putin.” After leaving office in 2005, Schröder took a position as chairman of the North European Gas Pipeline, which is 51 percent owned by Russian state natural gas company Gazprom.

As for former French President Jacques Chirac, Lantos said he “should go down to the Normandy beaches. He should see those endless rows of white marble crosses and stars of David representing young Americans who gave their lives for the freedom of France.”

“I am so glad that the era of Jacques Chirac and Chancellor Schröder in Germany is now gone,” Lantos said to applause from the right-wing audience.

Lantos, a Holocaust survivor, who fled his native Hungary for

the US in 1956, said he had fought Nazism and communism, and “it is now my privilege to fight against Islamic terrorism determined to take us back 13 centuries.”

How is one to explain the gratuitous swipes at Schröder, Chirac and Putin and the thinly veiled appeal for military action against Iran at a ceremony supposedly called to honor the memory of the “victims of communism”?

The tirade from the California Democrat helped place this strange little political episode in perspective. Behind all of the rhetoric about a supposedly endless struggle between “totalitarian evil” and “freedom,” ideologues in both major US parties are attempting to mythologize the Cold War in order to better promote an agenda of global US militarism.

In the final analysis, US imperialism waged the Cold War for the same reason it is now pursuing its “global war on terror”: to pursue US geopolitical and economic interests, further American capitalist hegemony and suppress the threat of social revolution. The targets of Lantos’s vitriol—the European powers, Russia and Iran (China came in for ample attacks from others)—are those global actors seen as impeding the hegemonic ambitions of US imperialism.

In the end, there was something tawdry and almost pathetic about this statue unveiling, which took place in a largely deserted corner of Washington surrounded by parking lots. The right-wing ideologues who had promoted it were veterans of the anticommunist crusade of the Reagan administration, who saw the collapse of the USSR as the advent of “unipolar world” in which Washington would rule unchallenged. It was based upon this false perspective that they promoted the policies of “preemptive war” that have created such a debacle in Iraq and led to the unprecedented popular opposition to the Bush administration and its war policy.

This attempt to resuscitate anticommunism, which for decades served as what amounted to an official state ideology in the US, in order to rescue the discredited occupation of Iraq and “global war on terrorism,” is a measure of the growing desperation and disorientation of the American ruling elite.



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