

New York Times publishes scurrilous attack on Marxism

David Walsh
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As its “Idea of the Day” on September 29, the *New York Times* posted an absurd and slanderous article entitled “Communism’s Nuremberg” by French right-wing pundit Guy Sorman.

Among other things, Sorman’s hysterical column claims, “There is no such thing as real Communism without massacre, torture, concentration camps, gulags, or laogai [Chinese prison labor]. And if there has never been any such thing, then we must conclude that there could be no other outcome: Communist ideology leads necessarily to mass violence, because the masses do not want real Communism.”

Sorman also writes, “Nazism’s trial took place in Nuremberg beginning in late 1945, and Japanese fascism’s in Tokyo the following year. But until now, we have had no trial for Communism, though real Communism killed or mutilated more victims than Nazism and Fascism combined.”

The “Idea of the Day” blog is edited by the staff of the *New York Times* “Week in Review” and described as a “must read.”

Sorman’s article first appeared in the *City Journal*, a right-wing publication of the Manhattan Institute for Policy Research think tank, co-founded in the 1970s by Ronald Reagan’s future campaign manager and CIA director, William Casey, and Antony Fisher, the notorious British advocate of “free enterprise” and a leading inspirer of Thatcherism. Ultra-right ideologues Peggy Noonan and William Kristol sit on the Institute’s board of trustees.

A commentator notes, “The institute’s board of trustees reveals its deep financial pockets and ideological leanings. Many of its board members are leading investors, attorneys, and corporate leaders.” Vice President Dick Cheney delivered a major foreign policy speech on the Iraq War in January 2006 and paid tribute to the Manhattan Institute as a “place of tremendous creativity, of original thinking, and of intellectual rigor.”

Sorman is one of the many neo-conservative French intellectuals who sprouted like poisonous blossoms in the post-1968 cultural and political atmosphere. A friend of French President Nicolas Sarkozy’s for several decades, Sorman claims, in one of his many scribbles, that “the free market,” in the final analysis, is “only the reflection of human nature, itself hardly perfectible.”

Sorman is an editor of the *City Journal*. He shares that post with a collection of disreputable figures (including former *New York Times* reporter Judith Miller!), among them numerous warmongers and social reactionaries, who regularly vent their spleen against the urban “underclass” or liberals and leftists who are supposedly destroying the fabric of American society.

Sorman’s article was inspired by the trial of the four surviving leaders of Cambodia’s Khmer Rouge regime. After reviewing the case, he asks “but who or what was behind what the tribunal has called the genocide of Khmers by other Khmers? Might this be the fault of the United States? Was it not the Americans who, by setting up a regime in Cambodia to their liking, brought about a nationalist reaction?”

Brushing aside this accusation, Sorman goes on to assert that one must find the answer in the “declarations of the Khmer Rouge themselves.... Since Pol Pot and leaders of the regime that he forced on his people referred to themselves as Communists...we must acknowledge that they were, in fact, Communists.”

Sorman then goes on to make his claim that Nazism and Japanese imperialism had their trials in 1945-46. This is historically false. There really never was a Nuremberg for the Nazis, in the sense of bringing to justice many of the figures in and behind that monstrous regime. Many Hitlerite officials and collaborators were never brought to trial and went on to enjoy prosperous and prominent careers in West Germany, in the court system, the military, the media, and politics.

The case of Richard Gehlen is instructive in this regard. A member of the German military’s general staff under Hitler and later senior intelligence officer on the murderous Eastern Front during World War II, Gehlen was recruited by the US after the war to set up a spy ring directed against the Soviet Union and became head of the West German intelligence apparatus during the Cold War. In that position he directed the assault under the postwar “democratic” German regime against Communists and left-wingers.

The Krupp family, manufacturers of steel and armaments, supported Hitler and provided him with weaponry. Under Alfried Krupp, the company used slave labor at its plants in German-occupied Europe, including prisoners from concentration camps. Krupp was tried as a war criminal, but after serving only three years, was released and resumed control of the company in 1953.

This process finds its most telling embodiment in the person of Kurt Kiesinger, who joined the Nazi Party in 1933 and during World War II worked at the foreign ministry’s radio propaganda department where he was responsible for the ministry’s link with Joseph Goebbels’s propaganda ministry. Kiesinger became chancellor of West Germany in 1966 and served in that position until 1969.

The same case could be made for leading figures in the Japanese

wartime regime. An official in the ministry of commerce and industry, Nobusuke Kishi was deeply involved in the brutal operations of the Japanese puppet state of Manchukuo and later served in the war cabinet of Prime Minister Hideki Tōjō as minister of commerce and industry. Kishi was imprisoned after the war as a “class A” war crime suspect, but was never indicted or tried. With the backing of the US and its CIA, he became prime minister of Japan in 1957 and signed the extension of the vastly unpopular US-Japan Mutual Security Treaty in 1960.

As for war crimes considered more generally, it could be argued persuasively that every US president since World War II has violated the Nuremberg principles and committed crimes against humanity. The Korean War resulted in three million civilian deaths; in Vietnam, the US killed some three to four million civilians. An untold number died in Cambodia and Laos as the result of American bombings.

Calculating conservatively, more than one million Iraqis have died as the result of two US-led wars and the years of brutal sanctions between them. The Afghan population has known nothing but misery as the result of an encounter with US imperialism now lasting more than 30 years. The official policy of the US government, advanced by George W. Bush and adhered to by Barack Obama, is the doctrine of preemptive war, which threatens to plunge the planet into a new cataclysm. When it comes to mass murder in the modern era, the American ruling elite and its military-intelligence reign supreme.

The Khmer Rouge movement was neither socialist nor communist. It was a peasant-based movement, rooted in Maoist, populist and extreme nationalist ideology. It rejected the working class as a revolutionary force and was deeply hostile to it, along with the rest of the urban population. It had nothing in common with the ideas or teachings of Marxism.

Australian-born journalist John Pilger, among others, has documented the relations between US imperialism and Pol Pot. Writing in the *Nation* in 1998, Pilger pointed out “that Cambodia’s nightmare did not begin with Year Zero but on the eve of the US land invasion of neutral Cambodia in 1970. The invasion provided a small group of extreme ethnic nationalists with Maoist pretensions, the Khmer Rouge, with a catalyst for a revolution that had no popular base among the Cambodian people.

“Between 1969 and 1973,” Pilger wrote, “US bombers killed perhaps three-quarters of a million Cambodian peasants in an attempt to destroy North Vietnamese supply bases, many of which did not exist. During one six-month period in 1973, B-52s dropped more bombs on Cambodians, living mostly in straw huts, than were dropped on Japan during all of World War II, the equivalent of five Hiroshimas.”

US officials noted at the time that the American terror was critical in Pol Pot’s drive for power. “They [the Khmer Rouge] are using [the bombing] as the main theme of the propaganda,” reported the CIA Director of Operations on May 2, 1973. “This approach has resulted in the successful recruitment of a number of young men [and] the propaganda has been most effective among refugees subjected to B-52 strikes.”

When the Vietnamese eventually freed Cambodia from Pol Pot’s regime in early 1979, the US began backing the latter “almost

immediately,” comments Pilger. “Direct contact was made between the Reagan White House and the Khmer Rouge when Dr. Ray Cline, a former deputy director of the CIA, made a clandestine visit to Pol Pot’s operational base inside Cambodia in November 1980. Cline was then a foreign policy adviser to President-elect Reagan.

“Within a year some fifty CIA and other intelligence agents were running Washington’s secret war against Cambodia from the US Embassy in Bangkok and along the Thai-Cambodian border. The aim was to appease China, the great Soviet foe and Pol Pot’s most enduring backer, and to rehabilitate and use the Khmer Rouge to bring pressure on the source of recent US humiliation in the region: the Vietnamese. Cambodia was now America’s ‘last battle of the Vietnam War,’ as one US official put it, ‘so that we can achieve a better result.’”

The US continued to back the Khmer Rouge, pressing the World Food Program in 1980 to pass on \$12 million worth of food to Pol Pot’s movement.

Pilger continues: “If the US bombing was the first phase of Cambodia’s holocaust and Pol Pot’s Year Zero the second, the third phase was the use of the United Nations by Washington, its allies and China as the instrument of Cambodia’s, and Vietnam’s, punishment. With Vietnamese troops preventing the return of the Khmer Rouge and a Hanoi-installed regime in Phnom Penh, a UN embargo barred Cambodia from all international agreements on trade and communications, even from the World Health Organization. The UN withheld development aid from only one Third World country: Cambodia, which lay unreconstituted from the years of bombing and neglect. For the United States the blockade was total. Not even Cuba and the Soviet Union were treated this way.”

This is the real history. Sorman is lying in his capacity as a defender of French and global capitalism. Elsewhere he has written with admirable bluntness, “An essential task of democratic governments and opinion makers when confronting economic cycles and political pressure is to secure and protect the system that has served humanity so well, and not to change it for the worse on the pretext of its imperfection.”

As other articles appearing under his name indicate, Sorman is quite conscious of the threat represented by Trotskyism, the mortal enemy of Stalinism-Maoism and the genuine representative of Marxism today. In the face of a massive social and economic crisis that must once again raise the specter of socialism and social revolution, Sorman is doing his part to slander Marxism and inoculate those who read him against its appeal. One can only draw the conclusion that the *New York Times* “Week in Review” staff, in passing on his filth to their readers, is up to the same unscrupulous business.



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