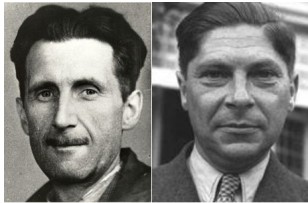


## Animal Farm, 1984, Darkness at Noon: Death Knells of Communism?

Written by Eric Walberg Эрик Вальберг/ Уолберг □□□□□ □□□□□□

Tuesday, 30 July 2019 16:47

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The two most celebrated leftist literary figures of the 1930s--40s, George Orwell (1903--1950) and Arthur Koestler (1905--1983), lived through the 20th century's revolutionary times as documentarists. They were on the front lines as journalists in the Spanish civil war, came close to death there and in WWII, and then wrote their explosive novels dissecting the communist experience from the inside.

Orwell never joined any party, let alone the Communist Party of Great Britain, but was inspired to go to Spain to fight fascism, and was condemned when he returned to Britain in 1937 for having joined the Trotskyist POUM (Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista) to fight Franco. His brush with both fascist snipers and Stalinist enemies led him to write *Animal Farm* and *1984*, after which he died of TB, before he could witness what was done with his works.

Koestler joined the German Communist Party in 1931, 'saw the light' by 1934 as his friends started being arrested in Moscow, but stuck it out until 1938, writing *Darkness at Noon*, becoming the toast of post-WWII western Cold War intellectuals (and the CIA). Diagnosed with terminal cancer, he eventually committed suicide with his wife in 1983.

Though K was the one to survive and revel in his instant fame and wealth, openly supporting imperialism in the Cold War, it is Orwell who lives on in the world of images, his less pretentious expose of totalitarianism adapting itself to the post-communist world as a critique of authoritarianism and the military-industrial complex.

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They are a study in contrasts, Orwell passionate, undisciplined, Koestler cold, rational, disciplined. They became friends during the last years of Orwell's life.

### Launching the Cold War

Their classics, Animal Farm (1945) and 1984 (1949) vs Darkness at Noon (1940), all of them written in the heat of WWII, couldn't be more different. Orwell's colourful, if gloomy, social parables, were both successfully adapted more than once for the screen.

Darkness at Noon never attracted any film offers. However, it is the first notable work equating Hitler and Stalin as totalitarian dictators, and became the bible of the post-WWII Cold War. Prisoners in some nameless totalitarian country (but the protagonist Rubashov, is Russian, i.e., Soviet), sentenced to death.

Guilty not of crimes for which they are going to die. Guilty for placing the interests of mankind above man, sacrificed morality to expediency, means to ends.

K identifies various types of confessions:

\*save their necks (Radek),

\*mentally broken (Zinoviev),

\*shield their families (Kamenev)

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\*'hard core' believers (Bukharin)

The first three were convinced by torture and blackmail. The latter were convinced by appealing to their desire to preserve the revolution at all costs. Rubashov agrees readily to total self-abasement. Interrogator: Comrad Rubashov, I hope that you have understood the task which the Party has set you.

Walter Krivitsky, head of Soviet Military Intelligence for western Europe, who defected in 1938, confirms this in *In Stalin's Secret Service* (1939), 'Their sole remaining service to the party and revolution is to defend the hated regime of Stalin as the last faint gleam of hope for that better world to which they had consecrated themselves in early youth.'

This is a telling analysis of the logic of revolutionary correctness, though it is a standard literary device. How many saints were falsely crucified, but stood fast? K denies knowing about Krivitsky at the time, but he knew first hand what was happening. Bukharin was a friend, and his confession in 1938 was so over-the-top that K felt he *had* to act. K's close friend from German party days, Otto Katz, sounded as if he were quoting K and Bukharin in his 1952 confessions during a similar trial in Czechoslovakia.

In his memoirs *Special Tasks: The memoirs of an unwanted witness -- a Soviet spymaster* (1994), Pavel Sudoplatov also states that he was arrested, tortured. But he miraculously survived, kept his personal grudges to himself, and remained an unapologetic OGPU/ NKVD/ KGB officer, uncorrupted to the end, despite his travails.

Confessions of an apostate

In his resignation letter to the party in 1937, K

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professed his belief that the foundations of the Workers' and Peasants' State had remained solid and unshaken, and that the nationalisation of the means of production was a guarantee of her eventual return to road of Socialism; and that in spite of everything, the Soviet Union still represented 'our last hope on planet in rapid decay.

He clung tenaciously to this belief for another year and a half, until the Hitler-Stalin pact destroyed this last shred of the torn illusion.\* He pushed ahead with *Darkness at Noon*.

Almost all his friends who went to the Soviet Union were arrested, imprisoned, tortured, killed. Willi Muenzenberg was assassinated by agents of Stalin *while trying to escape the Germans in France in 1940* . Only Margarete Buber-Neumann, imprisoned in Kazakhstan, survived, only because the NKVD (updated OGPU) eventually arranged for her to be handed over to Hitler in 1940, inadvertently saving her life. She wrote her memoirs *Under Two Dictators* (1949) at K's urging, as a prisoner of both Stalin and Hitler.

In his memoirs, *The Invisible Writing* (1954), K ridicules FDR's view of Stalin's regime as a kind of uncouth, Asiatic New Deal, and the belief that after the war, the US would 'get on very well with Stalin and the Russian people.' By now a solid Cold Warrior, he assumed that Stalin was expansionist and would topple Europe's bourgeois governments if given the chance.

Life of an apostate

Both Orwell and K were spurned during their radical youth by Britain (K only allowed entry in 1940 by pressure from The Times correspondent in Lisbon), but both were drawn into a fervent patriotism during WWII, K not yet a British citizen, working as propagandists for the cause of democracy.

Orwell betrayed his communist acquaintances to MI5 in 1945, and was feted by British society

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as he lay dying.

K? Well, his attack was arguably more important during the height of the Cold War in the 1950s than Orwell's now legendary dystopias, helping keep communists out of power in Europe, despite their popularity, until the bitter end in 1990-1.

Soviet communism was the big loser to Stalinist terror, with a huge chunk of the faithful killed, or, like Sudoplatov and Korolev (the father of the Soviet space program), merely imprisoned, tortured, throw out on the street, sometimes in the depths of winter without a kopeck or coat, and miraculously surviving. Not to mention the revolutionary left in Europe.

And what solace did K's cash cow *Darkness at Noon* and his subsequent crusade against communism provide to his fallen comrades, martyrs to the cause? How could K be so despicable? Serving the devil and making a fortune to boot!

K was not surprised that former comrades Joliot-Curie and Picasso denounced him in 1945, but was disappointed that he lost all his leftists friends, that there were no western campaigns to expose the Stalin purges.

When you are critical inside the party, that's okay. But ex-communists are tiresome cassettes, fallen angels returned from heaven with bad news. Losing faith is embarrassing. Sir Peter Chalmers-Mitchell, who had saved his life in Spain in 1938, told him in 1941: 'What a pity you sold yourself for thirty pieces of silver.' K ridicules the aristo: Sir Peter liked people who changed their Clubs even less that the Stalin-Hitler pact.

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Is it really that surprising that people were indifferent to communist spies, detested ex-communists who denounced their friends as 'traitors', named names? K's only support was from MI5, HUAC and OSS, the proto-CIA.

I'm with Sir Peter. K was a cad, the real 'traitor'. Yes, his friends were dead. But he helped only the 'bad guys'. He didn't have to 'go to the other political extreme,' as he accused other excommunists of doing.

Publishing *Darkness* when and how he did, and actively undermining the communists after the war was a betrayal of his dead idealistic friends.

Despite K, people sense(d) that capitalism was the greater evil, and that it is always right to denounce the system that gave rise to the 20th century horrors. Despite his claim in *Darkness at Noon*, Stalin was not the same as Hitler.

K calls his nay-sayers hypocrites, and insists in his memoirs, that 'hanging the messenger' was wrong. But if the message is wrong, maybe we *should* hang the messenger.

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### K's greatest moment

Only in France did Koestler's *Darkness* became a bestseller as *Le Zero et l'Infini* (Zero and Infinity) , published in 1945. The French had just survived 4 years of Nazi occupation, and K's ruse to portray the protagonists as victims of a generic dictator worked. It immediately became a bestseller, despite its real target being popular wartime ally Stalin.

The French Communist Party was the only strong, uncorrupt political force emerging from the war and the political vacuum. If the FCP-backed constitution had been adopted in the 1946, this would have ensured a strong socialist policy in shaping French society, at least in the short run.

*Le zero et l'Infini*

was key to prevent this. K sees this as his greatest moment.

But even as he wrote his memoirs (at the age of 49), he was aiding imperialism, and his life of contradictions would lurch in the direction of spiritualism, the search for communion with a higher reality, the 'other extreme' for excommunists that he dismissed in his memoirs. A kind of traitor's hat trick. Orwell was less spectacular in his lurching, remaining an atheist until the final moment, when he asked for an Anglican burial.

### Spies as heroes

The fate of communist spies and communists who were 'disappeared' in the purges is of course tragic. But there are many who survived and made history. Contrast K as renegade spy with Kim Philby, perhaps the greatest communist spy, who escaped to Moscow in 1963, celebrated in John Banville's *The Untouchable* (1997), the BBC's *Cambridge Spies* (2003) and dozens of other works. When he died in 1988 he was given a hero's funeral, posthumously awarded numerous medals, and featured on a Soviet postage stamp. Intuitively, we (East or West) know such spies were acting honorably, that their message 'capitalism is bad' is true.

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None of the great Cold War parables, Orwell's or K's, are convincing as proof that socialism/communism is 'bad'. They reveal more about their authors, neither particularly likable, who wrote out of personal revenge in the great struggle of the 20th century against capitalism, a struggle which has definitely taken two giant steps back after its original great leap forward in 1917.

Some people are beginning to realize it was a great setback for humanity that the Soviet Union collapsed, pushing the world back into an imperial mindset that looks more like the Roman Empire, than the humane world at peace promised in 1991.

Orwell's and K's message was flawed. The French communists would not have betrayed France in 1946. There was no communist plan to invade Europe. Stalinism was an aberration, a post-revolutionary Thermidor, but Stalin was a reliable ally against Hitler, and would have continued his alliance with Britain and the US if it was offered. FDR's dream was not bogus. 1945 was not 1917. A humane world at peace was on the table in 1945.

Orwell has survived the test of time better than K. K is more remembered as an ESP nut and serial seducer cum rapist (Orwell's opinion: the chink in K's armour is his hedonism.)\*\* than for his role in saving the Free World from the spectre of communism. Poor Krivitsky made it to the US with his wife and son, but, apparently [committed suicide](#) in 1941, with three suicide notes by the bed, leaving his wife and son anonymous and living in poverty in the Free World.



Almost no one cheers for Stalin anymore, but the communist spies, the prototype of Assange, [Snowden](#)



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### Bergdahl

, have survived in the popular imagination, despite Orwell and K, as quixotic heroes in the fight against imperialism. Rudolph Abel, like Philby, was immortalized on screen, first in a Soviet film,

Dead Season

(1968), and even 'won' an Oscar for best supporting actor in Steven Spielberg's remake

Bridge of Spies

(2015).

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\*Arthur Koestler, *The Invisible Writing: The Second Volume of an Autobiography 1932--40*, Hutchinson, 1969 [1954], 474.

\*\*K did nothing to discourage his (third) wife Cynthia Jefferies from joining him in a suicide pact, though she was in her 50s and healthy. He left his estate to a British university that would use it to set up a department of parapsychology . Oxford, Cambridge and other leading universities refused. Edinburgh University finally agreed. As his abuse of women came to light, feminist protesters forced the removal of his bust from the university.