



FOREIGN POLICY RESEARCH INSTITUTE

Footnotes

The Newsletter of FPRI's [Wachman Center](#) **Living Without Freedom: A History Institute for Teachers**

By Trudy Kuehner, Reporter

Vol. 12, No.14
September 2007

On May 5-6, FPRI's [Marvin Wachman Fund for International Education](#) hosted 41 teachers from 17 states across the country for a weekend of discussion on [Living Without Freedom](#) (videocasts and texts of lectures available). The Institute was held at and co-sponsored by the National Constitution Center and the National Liberty Museum in Philadelphia.

The [History Institute for Teachers](#) is co-chaired by [David Eisenhower](#) and [Walter A. McDougall](#) and made possible by a grant from the Annenberg Foundation. The program on Living without Freedom was supported by a grant from the Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation. The next history weekend, [Teaching Military History: Why and How](#), September 29–30, 2007, will be held at and co-sponsored by the First Division Museum in Wheaton, Illinois.

The Soviet Gulag

[David Satter](#), Senior Fellow at the Hudson Institute and Research Fellow, Hoover Institution, explained how the Soviet Union illustrated the mechanisms of repression in unfree societies that condition people to obey. The early Bolsheviks' conviction that they were operating according to scientific theory gave them the wherewithal to commit unprecedented atrocities. They killed thousands within their first four months of rule. In the ensuing Red Terror, people would be killed simply for belonging to a specific class. When the economy ground to a halt under the communists' economic policies, the government responded by cutting food rations to major cities in 1921. When starving peasants revolted, Lenin used methods to suppress this revolt such as killing the oldest son in any family known to have had contact with the insurgents and using poison gas on the insurgents' forest redoubts. The rebellion was suppressed, but the conditions which had led to it eventually caused a famine in which 5 million people died.

The communist leaders then instituted the New Economic Policy. There were still government requisitions, but the peasants were allowed to sell their food. In the late 1920s, the Stalinist leadership sought to collectivize agriculture, lest peasants refuse to sell their production to the government. The first step was dekulakization. Millions were identified as *kulaks*, or exploiters of the countryside. Anyone who opposed collectivization or lived a little better than others was sent to uninhabited areas of Siberia and Central Asia where the mortality rate was horrific. This terrorized the rest of the peasants into collective farms, from which the government then increased its demands. When the peasants resisted, the Politburo simply starved them into submission.

Probably 6–7 million people starved to death in 1932–33 in a party-made famine which achieved its purpose of subjugating the peasants. The party then turned on itself. In the Great Terror, Stalin sought to eliminate all those who had some tradition of thinking for themselves. In all, 800,000 people were shot and another 800,000 arrested and sent to labor camps.

The arrests and executions ended with Stalin's death in 1953, but the memory of them left a culture of fear that facilitated the post-Soviet system of repression. If someone showed signs of opposition, the party organization would inform the secret police. You could be fired, demoted, excluded from any work, or put in a labor camp, the fate of the democratic dissidents who began to raise their heads in the late 1960s.

In 1965, the trial of authors Yuli Daniel and Andrei Sinyovsky for anti-Soviet agitation gained worldwide attention and

<http://www.fpri.org/footnotes/1214.200709.kuehner.livingwithoutfreedom.html>

provided the impetus for the modern Russian dissident movement. In 1975, when Moscow signed the Helsinki agreements on human rights, the dissidents monitored compliance, circulating material that became known as *samizdat*—petitions, information about protests and banned literature, etc. Other dissidents implicitly demonstrated that the regime was totalitarian—for example, by demanding their rights. For them, there were psychiatric hospitals and behavior modification drugs, the equivalent of Room 101 in George Orwell's *1984*.

So it was until Gorbachev and perestroika. But the habits of mind shaped by repression still existed. A lack of respect for law and human life and a lack of understanding of democracy remain today. This is the principal obstacle to Russia's creating a better future. Where an individual feels no protection and where he can at any moment be victimized, he inevitably seeks protection in an authoritarian system.

China : The Cultural Revolution and Beyond

Chinese human rights activist **Wei Jingsheng**, author of *Courage to Stand Alone: Letters from Prison and Other Writings*, described his years of imprisonment and solitary confinement as a dissident. For more than a year he was not let out of his cell even once. No one was allowed to speak with him; the door stayed closed, with food delivered through a small opening. In this environment of complete isolation from the outside world, people begin to slowly lose their will or even go insane.

Many prisoners become indifferent to eating or to being beaten, even welcoming the pain of a beating for its cathartic value. Wei would kick the door and yell to try to provoke the guard to come in and fight. But this only worked once, as the guards caught on.

Freedom is the most important condition for sustaining human life, Wei said. Throughout recorded human history mankind has been searching for an ever better social system, one that can provide even more guarantees of freedom. As long as it upholds social order, a system that can provide greater guarantees of freedom is a better system. Autocratic systems may have greater social order than some democratic societies, but the trade-off is a large sacrifice in personal freedom. When enough people realize what they have lost, they eventually object and revolt.

Social order seemed excellent in China during Mao Zedong's time; there seemed to be order. Some Western scholars concluded that Mao had created a society that conformed most closely to their standards of an ideal social system. But just as they were coming to believe this, in 1966 the Cultural Revolution started. After more than a decade of the Communist Party's autocratic rule, the impetus to resist and revolt had grown too great.

Chinese Communist leaders beginning with Deng Xiaoping have been afraid both that the people will revolt and also that the people will call them a dictatorship. They have therefore not allowed people to talk about the Cultural Revolution, which imposed practices that took on the aura of religious rituals. Every day one had to listen, read, ask for instructions in the morning, report back in the evening, bare one's heart to the party leaders. This was in part Mao's idea, but also in part it stemmed from the left's May 4th movement, which had brought the CCP to power. That movement, which began in 1919, was born out of concerns about Westernization. At the time it was thought that the failure of the 100 Days' Reform of 1898 owed to fundamental problems in China's culture. So the first step was to destroy Chinese culture and then to paint on a blank piece of paper. This was developed to the ultimate degree during the Cultural Revolution. Destroying all traditional Chinese culture, all the Western culture that was not beneficial to the establishment of communist dictatorship, ended up making China a cultural desert.

The CCP believes that America's existence is a threat to its own existence. The existence of democratic systems testifies to the failure of despotism. It is lack of freedom that compels Chinese to revolt, no matter what their material life conditions.

Living Without Freedom in China

Edward Friedman of the University of Wisconsin discussed post-Mao China, whose lack of freedom is difficult for outsiders to understand. It's not totalitarian: Chinese travel abroad in huge numbers, and hundreds of thousands study abroad. China is about to overtake the U.S. in internet use. It's a brutally competitive market society, but the economy is less state-owned than those of many Western democracies. Most young Chinese would say they live in a free,

democratic society.

The brilliance of China's system is how it makes people complicit with the unfreedom. You know that if you aren't complicit with the committees for the defense of the revolution, maybe you won't get a passport, or it may be held against your child when s/he applies for college. You and your family will be shunned; you could be admitted to a psychiatric hospital. You get forced every day with decisions that remind you that you're not free. Medicines are often frauds in China; baby formula has been bogus. China has no regulation, safety and environmental standards, or health oversight. Hundreds of thousands die in industrial accidents and from drinking the polluted water.

China has courageous lawyers and journalists who try to do something about this, but also the largest number of lawyers, journalists, and Netizens in prison. Wealth is extremely concentrated. Over 97 percent of all millionaires in China are relatives of the top party elite. But go to the railroad station at midnight and you will see tens of thousands of people sleeping in the street. It is probably the most unequal stable society in the world.

Freedom means the ability to hold your government accountable. There is no way to do this in China. Everything is corrupt. This creates a sense of no morality. But people want meaning in their lives. So there's a tremendous religious revival, which the Party fears. It's pushing essentially its own state religion, a combination of Han chauvinism and Confucianism. China wants to explain its extraordinary rise to its own people and to the world as the result of its Confucianism.

China's rise means that freedom is in trouble. Authoritarian models are rising and becoming more attractive. The Chinese regime has fostered a nationalism to trump democracy. People are taught that they are threatened by democracy, that democracy makes people weak. So what is growing in China is an authoritarian, patriotic, racially defined, Confucian Chinese project which is going to be a challenge to democracy, freedom, and human rights worldwide.

North Korea: the Nadir of Freedom

[Kondgan Oh](#) of the Institute for Defense Analyses discussed North Korea, a country devastated by tyrannical rule, famine, and death. North Korea is now a hybrid dictatorial, pseudo-dynastic society. Kim Jong-il rules the country, the Party, and the Army. The socialist system is still the main superstructure of the government, but a strict class system divides the society into three political classes: the core, who are assumed to be loyal to Kim; the ordinary, who give the regime no particular reason not to trust them; and the hostile, who are of suspicious family or personal history.

The core gets the best in food, housing, education, jobs, and medical care. The ordinary must depend on luck, effort, and bribery in their struggle for a decent life, while the hostile are pushed out to the countryside and towns, where they must fend for themselves. Many of them die (1-2 million in the famine of 1994-5, out of a population of only 21 million). Class assignment is recorded secretly in police documents; people infer what class they are in. It is unusual to move up from the hostile class, but demotions are frequent.

The state and party control all media. Radio dials must be tuned to the government's station, and televisions receive only the government station. Houses are wired to receive announcements from the local party officials. You must attend weekly meetings prepared to answer questions on that week's broadcasts. Listening to foreign broadcasts is punishable by imprisonment. The police serve as watchers/controllers, and the State Security Department employs civilian informants to spy on their neighbors. In short, everybody watches everybody, and nobody knows whom to trust. Even the security organizations watch each other.

North Korea ranks zero or near zero on all the usual freedom indices: freedom of public speech, private speech, public religious worship, assembly and association, the press, residency, domestic and foreign travel, political participation, and due process of law. The regime assigns you your house and city—the place where a job is provided and ration coupons are issued. Living or traveling elsewhere requires special permits. The government may banish handicapped people or those who have committed political offenses from Pyongyang to the remote mountains, or relocate people away from major highways, railways, or foreign investment zones.

North Korea's economy is basically supported by foreign aid and drug and weapon trafficking. North Koreans survive

on barter, walking dozens of miles to trade what they can for potatoes, for instance. Men are drafted for 10 or more years of military service, after which they are assigned jobs, often sent in groups to construction sites. Women are also assigned jobs, although some get permission to stay home to rear their children. There has been no revolution because no one wants to get his family in trouble, for males up to the eighth cousin level will be punished for anything you do. Most people know little about other towns or countries, and they often believe party propaganda about the hostile outside world. Only perhaps some 2 million members of the top cadre support the regime; how to spur them to take action is a challenge. It is hard to physically reach its people, but we can better use international media for public diplomacy, countering the North Korean propaganda. We also need to encourage South Korea to improve its treatment of defectors and facilitate their communicating with those they left behind.

Cuba: Repression Disguised as Social Justice

[Carlos Eire](#), Riggs Professor of History and Religious Studies, Yale University and author of [*Waiting for Snow in Havana*](#), explained how in 1959, Cuba had a prosperous economy, a huge middle class, a high literacy rate and a liberal constitution. But the country, only independent since 1902, was politically immature. In 1952, an army coup had brought to power Fulgencio Batista, who ruled with an iron fist. Fidel Castro led one of 17 different revolutionary groups who took on Batista. On gaining power, the first thing Castro did was to ensure that these other revolutionaries quickly disappeared. Soon he had declared Cuba a Marxist-Leninist state.

By 1961, there was a Communist Party Committee for the Defense of the Revolution on every city block, citizens who would spy on their neighbors, distribute ration cards, and handle petitions for promotion or education. Children were required to perform “volunteer labor” in the countryside for six weeks each summer for no pay, in sweatshop conditions. From the beginning, parents wanted desperately to get their children out of Cuba. The State Department and the CIA devised a visa waiver program under which, from 1960 until Cuba sealed its borders after the October 1962 missile crisis, 14,600 children were airlifted to the U.S.

Eire was one of them. He never saw his father again (his mother was eventually able to leave through Mexico). If a family applied for an exit permit, the father would be fired from his job and sent to perform slave labor in the countryside “until you’ve paid off your debt to the revolution.” Today Cuba remains like the pre-Gorbachev Soviet Union. Government permission is required to travel abroad, change jobs or residence, own a computer, access the Internet, sell products or services, gain access to a boat, retain a lawyer, organize activities or performances, or form a business. One cannot receive religious instruction, watch independent TV stations, read anything not approved or published by the government, earn more than the government-controlled rate (\$17 per month for most jobs, \$34 per month for professionals), refuse to participate in mass rallies organized by the Party, or criticize the laws, the regime, or the Party.

The regime has closed down sugar mills as tourism, mostly European and Canadian, has become the main source of income. While there is a dearth of housing for Cubans, European firms are investing in hotels there. The laborers are paid European union wages, which the government skims. Government approval is required to work in these hotels, and the only Cubans allowed to enter them are those who work there. Any contact between Cubans and foreigners are heavily regulated.

Outsiders need to be wary of believing in a mythical Cuba , an example of how a third-world country with a strong leader was able to combat poverty, disease, and illiteracy.

Marxist-Leninist Totalitarianism

[Michael Radu](#), an FPRI Senior Fellow and Romanian emigre, observed that the basic definition of totalitarianism is a system in which everything that is not compulsory is forbidden. The goal of such regimes is for there to be no space at all for freedom. There have been three regimes with this kind of goal: Nazism, Marxist-Leninism, and now Salafist Islam. Probably the regime that came closest to achieving this goal is the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia (1975–79). The entire intellectual life of the country, its historical traditions, were literally erased, physically destroyed, together with all intellectuals and administrators. Anyone whose hands did not look like those of a peasant was either killed directly or moved to the rice fields, where given their lack of experience they died fairly soon. Every move you made was controlled by the party. Children were taken from the family to be educated in the new ideology. Despite this

inhumanity, it took a foreign invasion to eliminate the regime. A system like this in most cases cannot be eliminated from the interior; it generally takes outside intervention.

For these regimes, after their initial establishment, survival is based on fear and intimidation. People avoid doing those things the government doesn't approve of because they expect to be punished. Intentionally or not, the regime creates confusion by producing infinite laws while at the same time existing almost completely outside of the law. When law and reality conflict, uncertainty is bred.

Romania had only one employer, the government, and it was corrupt. In the late 1950s, Romania collectivized agriculture. Private property in agriculture was demolished, collective farms replaced individual peasant farms. The four or five mountain villages where this was not done because it was thought there was no arable land became the richest by far in the country by having sheep. One peasant who had 3000 sheep made a fortune selling wool, cheese, milk, etc. He spent a great deal of time with the chief of the secret police. So every time there was an inspection in the village, there were no privately owned sheep. They were all mixed in with collective farm sheep.

The regime tries to control the past in order to define the future. For instance, archeologists discovered in Transylvania a synagogue from the 3rd century. The official line was that the only people who lived there then were Romanians. So the synagogue was destroyed and the remains covered over. Access to information in general is controlled (RFE and BBC were nonetheless key sources of information); travel was forbidden or controlled. Birth control was forbidden, in order to increase the population.

The role of religion varies from one to another of these states. In Romania, the first thing communist regime did was to dismantle the Greek Catholic church. Officially atheist, the regime then coopted the Orthodox church, to which about 80 percent of the population belonged. Clergy who resisted were sent to concentration camps. For totalitarian regimes, religion is seen as the only possible institutional adversary and must be repressed or coopted.

People adapted to the system, playing by the rules officially and cheating as much as they could. Workers didn't work because they knew the government was underpaying them. Even the secret police charged with making sure that people thought the right way told political jokes to show that they saw the regime for what it was. They also knew the real results behind the elections, the announced results of which always showed 95-98 percent approval for the official candidate. Unfortunately for the regime, when the secret police concluded that the system was not working, the regime went down in 1989. (They are now part of the richest class in Russia and the formerly communist states of Eastern Europe.) When there was no longer any risk of the Soviet Union's interfering after 1989, regimes across the former Soviet sphere fell.

Genocide and Living Without Freedom

[Alan J. Kuperman](#) of the LBJ School of Public Affairs, University of Texas, explained why the relationship between societies that aren't free and genocide is not what one might assume. We think of the Holocaust as the prototypical case of genocide: an oppressive state begins to discriminate against people, and this discrimination escalates into genocide. The more typical case may start with state oppression, but is followed by rebellion, to which the state responds with a counterinsurgency campaign and then targets civilians on the grounds of supporting the insurgents, forcing them to leave (ethnic cleansing) or killing them.

In Rwanda, the Hutu and the Tutsi who settled there hundreds of years ago originally had a symbiotic relationship. The majority (85 percent) Hutu were mainly farmers, while the Tutsi raised cattle. After WWI, the Belgians ruled Rwanda indirectly, allying with the Tutsi elite. The Tutsi-Hutu relationship devolved into oppression as the Tutsi pressured the Hutu to produce more tea and coffee, for which the Tutsi were rewarded. When Rwanda became independent, the Hutu, newly empowered by majority rule, took small-scale vengeance against the Tutsi, killing some and forcing others to flee. The Tutsi refugees began invading Rwanda and trying to recapture power. A dynamic emerged in the 1960s of Tutsi rebels invading, the Hutu government fighting them off and then starting to attack Tutsi within the country. In 1967, when the Tutsi refugees gave up on the invasions, attacks on Tutsi also stopped. The genocide came only when the Tutsi refugees reinvaded in 1990, having acquired military expertise and materiel in neighboring Uganda.

In 1993, with pressure mounting from the rebels and the international community, the government signed a peace

treaty, but, fearing that the Tutsi wanted not just to share but to take power, it stalled on implementation. In 1994, when the president was assassinated, apparently by the Tutsi rebels, the Hutu immediately pursued a “final solution.” Over the next three months, the fastest genocide in recorded history took place, with over a half-million Tutsi killed. The common wisdom is that intervention could have prevented this. But there was no window for intervention. Most of the killing occurred during the first 2–3 weeks, so getting troops/equipment in would have been difficult. Nor was it immediately known that it was a genocide. Moreover, since the rebels were winning the civil war, it was hard initially for outsiders to see the Tutsi as victims of genocide.

The case of Sudan involves both a north-south civil war that ran on and off for nearly fifty years and the war in Darfur. The civil war was between the mainly Arab/Muslim north and the African/animist/Christian south. Under British colonial rule, each had its own administrator. As independence approached, the south (where most of Sudan’s oil is) wanted to be separate. Civil war ensued from 1956-72, which was settled by the north’s granting the south autonomy. But the north reneged on the agreement in 1983. In an upsurge of Islamic belief, it revoked autonomy and imposed sharia law. The south launched a new rebellion in 1983, starting a civil war that continued until a few years ago. Khartoum responded with a brutal counterinsurgency, causing massive deaths and displacements. After a major diplomatic effort, a peace framework was signed in 2002 and finalized in January 2005 that provides for oil revenue sharing and a referendum in six years on southern independence. War is therefore likely to restart when the south votes on independence in 2011, if not sooner.

Darfur, in northwest Sudan, is Muslim, but had been neglected, like the south. The herders (mainly nomadic Arabs) and farmers (mainly settled Africans) have been attacking each other ever since the settlement of the north-south war, trying to gain the same financial rewards. It’s a repeat of what happened in the south but accelerated. The Darfur rebels succeeded in bringing international pressure onto Khartoum, which signed a peace agreement in 2006. But the rebels did not get as good a deal as the south had, and so they fight on. The government continues to respond with a brutal counterinsurgency. The losers are Darfur’s civilians, whom the rebels are willing to sacrifice in order to get international attention and thereby more power. Well intentioned calls for international military intervention in Darfur unfortunately actually embolden the rebels to hold out for a better deal.

Freedom: The History of an Idea

J. Rufus Fears of the University of Oklahoma noted that while U.S. foreign policy since the time of Woodrow Wilson has been based in the belief that freedom is a universal value that is wanted by all people in all times, the history of the world been one of tyranny, misery, and oppression.

Freedom consists of three component ideals: national freedom, political freedom, and individual freedom. The desire for national freedom is basic, which explains why the U.S.-led troops were not welcomed as liberators in Iraq in 2003. One can have national freedom without political or individual freedom (e.g., North Korea, Iraq under Saddam Hussein). In fact, national freedom has been the justification for some of the most terrible tyrannies in history. Some great civilizations (e.g. ancient Egypt) have had no clear concept of freedom. Ancient Mesopotamia’s word for freedom had the connotation of liberties bestowed by the king that could be taken away. In China, the teachings of Confucius concern order, not freedom. The Middle East arguably has had no real concept of freedom, and Russia from the tsars through to Vladimir Putin has never developed clear ideas of freedom. In fact, the very beginning of civilizations five millennia ago represented the choice of security over freedom, giving up freedom for the security of a well regulated economy under a king.

The U.S. has achieved a unique balance of national, political and individual freedom owing to its own particular history, which is both a cause for hope and a caution as to whether its ideals can be transplanted to the rest of the world. The U.S. has never been conquered. It has a unique legacy of freedom flowing from the confluence of several historic inheritances. First, we have the fusion of the self-government legacy of Greece and Rome with ideas derived from the Old Testament of a nation chosen by God to bear the ark of the liberties to the world. The legacy of Greece and Rome became the belief that all men are created equal and endowed by their creator with unalienable rights; freedom became a universal proclamation. From England came the notion that government is under the law, which governs the government itself. Finally, our frontier meant equality of opportunity and permitted us to overcome ancient hatreds and class frictions. Other nations possess one or more of these legacies, but not the same combination. Founded on principles, we have been a nation where anyone could come, regardless of language, origin, or religion.

The Civil War that was fought to remove the stain of slavery is also unique in history. With it we see the growth of democracy, the beginning of the expansion of the franchise to women and younger people. The question today is whether we will find the understanding among ourselves to see the great task that, as Lincoln said, is still before us. America's destiny is to bring freedom to the world, in the same way that more people than ever before live in freedom today because of America.

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