

Trafficking in Lies, Demagoguery, and War Mongering, Timothy Snyder is a Vicious Anti-Communist Ideologue And Shameless Apologist for the US Empire: A Challenge to Debate from Raymond Lotta

Timothy Snyder is a high-profile, anti-communist historian who equates communism with Nazi-ism/fascism, and Stalin with Hitler. His work *Bloodlands* focuses on the period 1933-45 in *the region* from central Poland to western Russia, through Ukraine, Belarus and the Baltic states. It is a modern-day, Cold War-style diatribe against communism from the perch of Western imperialism. And the historical “lessons” he draws in this and other works and lectures also serve Timothy Snyder’s current side-vocation--as one of the U.S. ruling class’s go-to intellectual cheerleaders for America’s proxy war with imperialist rival Russia over Ukraine. He argues that this war must be conventionally escalated to achieve total victory over Russia...never mind that this could lead to nuclear incineration.

Humanity is facing unprecedented horror and peril. Accelerating climate catastrophe...the growing danger of world war....rampaging fascism...Israel’s genocidal slaughter of Palestinians in Gaza, with America providing Israel with weapons, “moral backing,” and diplomatic support...worsening oppression of Black and Brown people, of women, of LGBTQ people, of migrants and refugees. This is a world that cries out urgently for revolution. And this revolution to emancipate humanity and protect the planet is more possible.

Which is why Timothy Snyder’s anti-communist propaganda masquerading as scholarship is so harmful. He offers up distorted history and lies whose effect (if not express purpose) is to frighten people away from communist revolution. It is the message pumped out by this capitalist-imperialist system that communism is a utopian project that inevitably turns into a ‘totalitarian’ nightmare. Professor Snyder is wrong, his arguments do not stand up to the evidence, and he is causing great harm.

And so I issue this call for a public debate. I do so as a revolutionary political economist who has written on the experience of socialist revolution in the 20th century; on the “parasitism,” the global tentacles of super-exploitation and resource plunder, of the US economy; on the environmental emergency and socialist sustainable development. I am an advocate for the new communism developed by the revolutionary leader Bob Avakian.

ISSUE ONE FOR DEBATE:

Lies About Stalin and the Soviet Union, And the Big Lie That Communism and Nazi-ism Are ‘Twin Totalitarianisms’

--Timothy Snyder’s outrageous and bogus claim that the Soviet famine of 1932-33 was part of “purposeful policies of mass murder carried out by Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union”--an act of deliberate starvation to punish nationalist-minded Ukrainians and recalcitrant peasants/farmers.

A major famine took place in the Soviet Union in 1933. But Snyder produces no evidence of a “conscious” plan on Stalin’s part to “starve” Ukrainians; he can’t, because it’s not true. Agricultural experts like Mark

Tauger have shown that a shortfall of production caused famine, which affected non-Ukrainian regions as well. This was largely the result of natural factors—extremely wet and humid weather that led to widespread plant infestation and disease, especially rust. The famine was secondarily compounded by problems of the new planning system, which emphasized heavy industry and urban development...and by problems in how agricultural collectivization was carried out, causing dislocations and resistance. But the revolution was aiming to promote all-around agricultural-industrial development.

In response to an increasingly dire situation, Stalin and Soviet leadership took measures to modify grain collection policies, and to provide assistance to affected regions. Hardly evidence of ethnically-targeted starvation plans! Descending to further depths of distortion and slander, Snyder declares that this so-called intentional starving of Ukraine was an inspiration, a template, for Hitler's "mass killing." Once again, Snyder offers no real evidence, just the wild assertion that Hitler and Stalin were like-minded monsters.

--The outrageous and bogus claim that the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of 1939--the non-aggression agreement reached between the socialist Soviet Union and fascist-imperialist Germany--was an "alliance" of like-minded tyrants intent on dividing territory. Reality check. The Soviet Union entered into a "non-aggression" pact with Germany in order to buy time to prepare for what was clearly in the offing: an attack on the Soviet Union by the Hitler regime. It was signed against the backdrop of the refusal of West European countries to join collective security agreements with the Soviet Union. Indeed, countries like Great Britain in the west and Poland in the east had entered into non-aggression agreements with Nazi Germany earlier in the 1930s.

Snyder depicts this temporary agreement as an "alliance" of tyrants wanting to feast on the spoils of a divided Poland. Fascism and communism cut from the same cloth? Consider the plight of Jews in those parts of Poland conquered by the Germans. They were ghettoized/terrorized, starved, and exterminated. Where the Soviet Red Army reached, Jewish lives were saved: two-thirds of the Polish Jews who survived the holocaust...were protected in Soviet-controlled territory in Poland and in the Soviet Union! And Snyder well knows that it was the socialist Soviet Union, the mortal antagonist of Nazi Germany, that was overwhelmingly responsible for defeating marauding German imperialism—at the cost of 26 million Soviet lives!

--The outrageous and bogus claim that the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany were two "anti-civilizational" and morally indistinguishable "totalitarian" regimes. Reality check. The Nazis set out to establish the rule of the so-called German 'master race' over Europe and the East—and the German state ultimately embarked on the program of the genocidal extermination of the Jewish people in Europe. The socialist Soviet Union was the world's first multinational state based on equality. Soviet scientists and educators worked to explode the myth of 'backward' and 'superior' races. Meanwhile, Jim Crow segregation and lynching of Black people--as sick, public spectacles and festivals—and eugenics were having their day in the U.S.

The Nazi program for women was one of total subordination. The Nazi "role model" projected in state propaganda, in the educational system, and culture was the "Aryan" male: patriarch and racial warrior. The Soviet revolution stood for the liberation of women; and in the 1920s and early 1930s, Soviet society was challenging traditional gender roles and customs enslaving women—as no society had done before.

The German economy under Hitler maintained and enforced the system of capitalist ownership and control and exploitation of wage labor. It was transformed into a predatory, militarized economy that sought to gain control of the resources and labor of vast stretches of Europe and beyond: through annexation, war, and plunder. The Soviet revolution under Stalin's leadership forged history's first planned socialist economy. Unlike capitalism, it operated according to the principle of production for social need. It was not driven by the need, nor did it seek, to expand and exploit globally, or to colonize people's and regions.

Reality check. The Nazi world outlook was based on concepts of German “blood and soil,” racial purity, male supremacy, hatred and contempt for critical thinking, and irrationalism. Communism is a science that requires the evidence-based investigation and rational understanding of reality. It is internationalist. It aims to transform reality, to bring into being a world free of exploitation and all oppression...on the basis of the real-world potential to forge such a society and the conscious struggle of oppressed humanity and all who aspire to a world fit for human beings.

THERE IS A NEW COMMUNISM DEVELOPED BY BOB AVAKIAN

There were problems and shortcomings, some quite serious, in how Stalin dealt with the relentless pressures of imperialist encirclement and threat...in how dissent and disagreement were often conflated with the real threat of counter-revolution, which led to grievous mistakes, including the violation of rights and arrest and execution of innocent people. The approach to defending the revolution and solving problems of the revolution was often marked by the poisonous notion that “the ends justify the means.”

The revolutionary leader Bob Avakian has identified the underlying causes of these and other problems, as part of summing up the precious and overwhelmingly positive, liberatory experience of the first wave of communist revolution in the Soviet Union (1917-56) and especially China (1949-76). He has drawn from different spheres of human endeavor. He has developed the “new communism.” It is a continuation of but also represents a qualitative leap beyond, and in some important ways a break with, previous communist theory and practice.

The vision and blueprint for an emancipatory society is crystallized in the *Constitution for the New Socialist Republic in North America* authored by Avakian. Nowhere else, in any existing or proposed document of any government, is there anything like not only the protection but the promotion of dissent and intellectual and cultural ferment in the framework of a society moving towards overcoming all exploitation and oppression. We can go much further and do much better in making revolution in today’s world--in creating a society and world in which human beings can truly flourish and safeguard the planet. Avakian cuts through the “anti-totalitarian-fascism-and-communism-are-twin-evils” nonsense peddled by the likes of Timothy Snyder:

Fascists stand for and are determined to intensify, to grotesque and hideous dimensions, every dimension of oppression and exploitation and the horrors perpetrated by the system of capitalism-imperialism. Communists, particularly the advocates of the new communism, are determined to put an end to all these horrors, and potentially even worse horrors, through the overthrow of the system of capitalism-imperialism and the abolition of all relations of exploitation and oppression throughout the world.

ISSUE TWO FOR DEBATE:

The Nature of the War in Ukraine—Not a Battle Between “Tyranny and Democracy” But a Proxy War Between Russia and the U.S.

Timothy Snyder would have the public believe that the US is pumping billions of dollars of weapons of death and destruction into Ukraine to defend the “rule of law” and “democracy” against “authoritarianism.” Really? Is that what motivated America’s genocidal war in Vietnam that resulted in the deaths of some 3 million? Is that what drove the brutal invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq and ensuing death, maiming, and displacement of millions? Was it the “rule of law” behind the US-sponsored coups against elected governments in Iran, Guatemala, Indonesia, and Chile that led to authoritarian regimes ruling through death squads, torture, and “disappearing” of people? But, alas, these were “our” authoritarians, serving the needs of *America’s unparalleled and blood-soaked empire of exploitation, plunder, and environmental devastation.* Snyder

denounces Putin for genocide in Ukraine, but he's on board with Biden's military support for Israel as it carries out genocidal slaughter against Palestinians in Gaza.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine was and is brutal and unjust. But two things must be clearly understood. *First*, this invasion was to a large degree provoked by the massive expansion of the U.S.-NATO military alliance east towards Russia, underway since the collapse of the former Soviet Union in 1991. This encirclement of Russia in Europe has posed the prospect of NATO-allied troops being positioned on Ukraine's border with Russia (think of a scenario of a Russia-Mexico alliance, with Russian troops on the US-Mexican border). *Second*, the U.S. has transformed the Russia-Ukraine conflict into a proxy war between two rival imperial powers: the U.S. and Russia. And contrary to Snyder's proclamations and poetics of this war as democracy writ large, the US is cynically and calculatingly using Ukrainian soldiers and people as cannon fodder to advance US imperial interests--to prevent Russia from becoming a rival pole of power in Europe, central Asia, and the Middle East.

It is an exceedingly dangerous situation. But never too dangerous for Timothy Snyder to engage in demagoguery on behalf of US imperialism. In a May 23rd *Washington Post* op-ed he declares, "When Russians talk about nuclear war, the safest response is to ensure their very conventional defeat." In a November 3 MSNBC interview, he calls for bolstering Ukrainian air-power and artillery capability—and providing long-range missiles (that could strike into Russian territory). As for the nuclear tripwire, he tells us to worry not: "forget [Putin's] nuclear performance art...and psychological distractions." This is lunacy from a modern-day Doctor Strangelove in academic garb. Snyder has consistently ridiculed discussion of this war's potential for nuclear escalation. And has historian Snyder forgotten that the US is the only country to drop atomic bombs, has never apologized for this unconscionable mass murder, and refuses to this day and minute to renounce first-use of nuclear weapons?

Our responsibility here in the "belly of the beast" is not to line up with our rulers but to oppose this cruel, inter-imperial proxy war as part of building the revolution to put an end to this system and all its horrors. In Russia, it is the responsibility of the people there to act in the same way towards their rulers.

A CONCLUSION AND A CHALLENGE

Timothy Snyder's project is to slander and demonize communism...to lie about and distort the historical experience of communist revolution...and to warn people away from the need for and desirability of bringing a radically and far better world into being, a world without exploitation and oppression. His project is to prettify and ideologically reinforce allegiance to America's empire of exploitation, plunder, and war.

Professor Snyder, let us debate these questions—at Yale or in NYC at Revolution Books. I eagerly await your response.

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