

## HITLER WAS A SOCIALIST

For obvious reasons, no significant party advocates Nazi socialism today. Ever since the general public became aware of the Nazi death camps, no one has wanted the stigma of being anywhere close to Nazism on any political spectrum. So, despite the Nazis literally having “socialist” in their name—the National Socialist German Workers’ Party—the left has made a concerted effort to label Nazis as “far-right-wingers.”

As George Watson points out: “For half a century, none the less, Hitler has been portrayed, if not as a conservative—the word is many shades too pale—at least as an extreme instance of the political right. It is doubtful if he or his friends would have recognized the description. His own thoughts gave no prominence to left and right, and he is unlikely to have seen much point in any linear theory of politics. Since he had solved for all time the enigma of history, as he imagined, National Socialism was unique.”<sup>1</sup>

The description of Hitler being from the “right,” however, had largely been cemented by the time of the Spanish Civil War in 1936. By then, as Watson puts it, “most western intellectuals were certain that Stalin was left and Hitler was right. By the outbreak of world war in 1939 the idea that Hitler was any sort of socialist was almost wholly dead.”<sup>2</sup>

Socialism is not a direct path to genocide or military imperialism. Still, national socialism was part and parcel to Nazism from

the beginning. In 1920, Hitler first presented the Nazi Party a twenty-five-point plan for national socialism. Most of the plan could be found in any Bolshevik platform except for the racial animus against Jews.

Hitler's platform called for "THE GOOD OF THE COMMUNITY BEFORE THE GOOD OF THE INDIVIDUAL." I think both Marx and Bernie would approve of that collectivist motto.

If you weren't informed that the following points were from the Nazis' twenty-five-point plan, you could be excused for believing them to be part of any socialist manifesto, even a "democratic" one. Highlights of Hitler's national socialism included:

- "The state [was to] be charged first with providing the opportunity for a livelihood and way of life for the citizens."
- "Abolition of unearned (work and labour) incomes." (*This plank derives from Marx's belief that the value of a product equaled the labor used to create the product. If the owner or banker who lent the money took any portion of the product's sale price then this "profit" was "unearned."*)
- "Breaking of debt (interest)-slavery." (*Hitler not only accepted Marx's view that the collection of interest was robbing labor but argued against Jews explicitly for collecting interest income.*)
- "Common national criminals, usurers, profiteers and so forth are to be punished with death, without consideration of confession or race."
- "... personal enrichment through a war must be designated as a crime against the people. Therefore, we demand the total confiscation of all war profits."
- "We demand the nationalisation of all (previous) associated industries (trusts)." (*The essence of socialism—state ownership of the means of production*)

- “We demand a division of profits of all heavy industries.”
- “We demand . . . immediate communalization of the great warehouses. . . .”
- “We demand a land reform suitable to our needs, provision of a law for the free expropriation of land for the purposes of public utility, abolition of taxes on land and prevention of all speculation in land.”
- “The state to be responsible for a fundamental reconstruction of our whole national education program.”
- “For the execution of all of this we demand the formation of a strong central power in the Reich. Unlimited authority of the central parliament over the whole Reich and its organizations in general.”<sup>3</sup>

Hayek described “the famous 25 points drawn up by Gottfried Feder, one of Hitler’s early allies, repeatedly endorsed by Hitler and recognized by the by-laws of the National-Socialist party as the immutable basis of all its actions, . . . [as being] full of ideas resembling those of the early socialists.”<sup>4</sup>

And yet, during Hitler’s rise and fall, he and his followers fought the communists for political power in Germany. Instead of the battle being seen as a fight between different strands of socialism, purposefully or not, the dispute came to be categorized as right versus left.

Today’s left presents the argument that Hitler’s attacks on the Communist Party and Bolshevik socialism prove that he was not a socialist. In *National Review*, Jonah Goldberg responds that “when people say Hitler can’t be a socialist because he crushed independent labor unions and killed socialists, they need to explain why Stalin gets to be a socialist even though he did likewise.”<sup>5</sup>

The left persists in trying to convince us that the Nazis were not

socialists because they were not orthodox Marxists. But, as Goldberg writes, while the “German National Socialist economics differed from Russian Bolshevik economics. So what? The question was never, ‘Were Nazis Bolsheviks?’ Nor was it ‘Were Nazis Marxists?’ The question was ‘Were Nazis socialists?’ Demonstrating that the answer is no to the first two doesn’t mean the answer to the third question is a no, too.”<sup>6</sup>

Reisman laments that today “practically no one thinks of Nazi Germany as a socialist state. It is far more common to believe that it represented a form of capitalism, which is what the Communists and all other Marxists have claimed. The basis of the claim that Nazi Germany was capitalist was the fact that most industries in Nazi Germany appeared to be left in private hands.”<sup>7</sup>

But, as we will see, industries were privately owned in name only. State control over industry was so complete that, in reality, owners were essentially stripped of private control of their property.

Some argue that fascism and communism are not variants of socialism, but as Peter Drucker writes, “It’s not that communism and fascism are essentially the same. Fascism is the stage reached after communism has proved an illusion, and it has proved as much an illusion in Russia as in pre-Hitler Germany.”<sup>8</sup>

If you read the Nazis themselves, they never doubted their socialism and were proud of its distinct brand.

In the *Independent*, George Watson disputes the idea that Hitler was not a socialist. He writes, “It is now clear beyond all reasonable doubt that Hitler and his associates believed they were socialists, and that others, including democratic socialists, thought so too. The title of National Socialism was not hypocritical.”<sup>9</sup>

Watson writes: “Hermann Rauschning, . . . a Danzig Nazi who knew Hitler before and after his accession to power in 1933, tells how in private Hitler acknowledged his profound debt to the

Marxian tradition. 'I have learned a great deal from Marxism,' he once remarked, 'as I do not hesitate to admit.'<sup>10</sup>

George Orwell, the author and socialist, although a critic of Hitler, did still agree that Hitler's rise and dominance proved that socialism works, and that "a planned economy is stronger than a planless one."<sup>11</sup> As Watson describes it, "The planned economy had long stood at the head of socialist demands; and National Socialism, Orwell argued, had taken from socialism 'just such features as will make it efficient for war purposes.'<sup>12</sup>

Rather than argue that Hitler's Germany was not socialist, Orwell acknowledged at the time: "Internally, Germany has a good deal in common with a socialist state."<sup>13</sup>

Not only did Hitler promote socialism, but he considered socialism to be the unfulfilled mission of Christianity. As Watson explains: "Socialism, Hitler told fellow Nazi Wagener shortly after he seized power, was not a recent invention of the human spirit, and when he read the New Testament he was often reminded of socialism in the words of Jesus. The trouble was that the long ages of Christianity had failed to act on the Master's teachings."<sup>14</sup>

Nevertheless, Hitler, in many ways, accepted and expounded traditional Marxian socialism. Like Marx, Hitler believed "the one and only problem of the age . . . was to liberate labour and replace the rule of capital over labour with the rule of labour over capital."<sup>15</sup>

Hitler, rather than rejecting socialism, considered his brand of national socialism to be an improvement over the Bolsheviks. Hitler believed he improved socialism by adding nationalism and a touch of his conception of Christianity—along with a side of racial hatred.

Hitler's lieutenant Joseph Goebbels also was explicit in describing the Nazi goal of socialism.

In his diary, Goebbels described the Nazi dream for socialism. Goebbels predicted that when Germany defeated the Soviet Union, Bolshevism or Jewish socialism would be replaced by “real socialism.” Listening to the Nazis themselves in their own words, it seems they never wavered in their support of socialism. They simply believed they had a better form of socialism to offer.<sup>16</sup>

Likewise, the Nazi Gregory Strasser spoke of his fellow Nazis thus: “We are socialists. We are enemies, mortal enemies, of the present capitalist economic system with its exploitation of the economically weak, with its injustice in wages, with its immoral evaluation of individuals according to wealth and money instead of responsibility and achievement, and we are determined under all circumstances to abolish this system!”<sup>17</sup>

Whether or not the Nazis were socialists is still important. Today’s socialists don’t want any part of their doctrine tainted with Nazism. Yet the Nazis’ history of national socialism and underlying hatred of capitalism are undeniable. None of which is to argue that today’s socialists are Nazis or will become Nazis. However, surrendering more and more freedom to the state is something socialism, fascism, and Nazism have in common.

Today’s socialists should look harder at what has happened in the past when the rights of the individual are made secondary to the desires of the collective, even in the name of fairness or social welfare. Democratic socialists argue, “Not to worry, the will of the collective will always be represented by the majority!” The question remains: is fully democratic, majoritarian rule immune from human envy, greed, or racial animus? Jim Crow and even lynching were countenanced by majorities in the South for decades. The left might argue that we need better people elected to government, to which Madison replied in Federalist Paper 51, “If men were angels, no government would be necessary.”

As long as socialists continue to promote the will of the collective over the rights of the individual, it remains a danger that the determiners of the “collective will” may determine to carry out policies for their own self-interest, their own power, or even their own petty prejudices.

Hitler, like so many megalomaniacs before him, was proud of his unique modifications of Marxism. Hitler believed his great additions to Marxism were to achieve labor’s dominance over capitalists without a destructive class or civil war, to make Marxism consistent with nationalism, and to fire up and unite all classes for socialism using racial animus.

Watson summarizes Hitler’s confidant Otto Wagener: “Without race, [Wagener] went on, National Socialism ‘would really do nothing more than compete with Marxism on its own ground.’ Marxism was internationalist. The proletariat, as the famous slogan goes, has no fatherland. Hitler had a fatherland, and it was everything to him. Hitler’s discovery was that socialism could be national as well as international. There could be a national socialism.”<sup>18</sup>

To Hitler, Wagener confided that “the future of socialism would lie in ‘the community of the volk,’ not in internationalism . . . and his task was to ‘convert the German volk to socialism without simply killing off the old individualists.’”<sup>19</sup> Instead of class struggle killing off the bourgeoisie, the socialist workers’ state would come about without destroying the country in the process and without confiscating all property.

Hitler felt that this insight would allow him to succeed where the Bolsheviks had failed in Russia. Complete dispossession of all private property meant, Watson wrote, “Germans fighting Germans, and Hitler believed there was a quicker and more efficient route. There could be socialism without civil war.”<sup>20</sup>

So, rather than Hitler rejecting socialism, he found a different

route to the same workers' paradise. As Hitler told Wagener, the trick was to "find and travel the road from individualism to socialism without revolution."<sup>21</sup>

As Watson summarizes Hitler's hopes, "Marx and Lenin had seen the right goal, but chosen the wrong route—a long and needlessly painful route—and, in destroying the bourgeois and the kulak, Lenin had turned Russia into a grey mass of undifferentiated humanity, a vast anonymous horde of the dispossessed; they had 'averaged downwards'; whereas the National Socialist state would raise living standards higher than capitalism had ever known."<sup>22</sup>

For the past seventy years, Hitler's horrific murder of millions of Jews and his obsession with race have, as Watson puts it, "prevented National Socialism from being seen as socialist."<sup>23</sup> Failing to see the socialism in Nazism misses that which Hitler saw as his great insight—achieving socialism without civil war and in the name of nationalism driven by racial animus.

Hitler never denied his socialist platform. It can be argued, and easily accepted, that in the end his all-consuming desire for power made any other objectives secondary, but that really is the exact story we find when others, such as Stalin, Mao, and Pol Pot, achieved power. Power for power's sake blinded them, but none of these dictators ever relinquished their goal of socialism.



## Chapter 21

# THE NAZIS HATED CAPITALISM

As the economic historian Chris Calton writes: “It is now the conventional wisdom that the Nazis were capitalists, not socialists,”<sup>1</sup> despite the name “Socialist” being in the official party name—“the National Socialist German Workers’ Party.” The long-standing movement to erase socialism from the history of Nazism is not without ulterior purpose. To conclude that the Nazis were capitalist is to cast historical aspersions on capitalism.

As Calton explains, “At a time when many members of the European intelligentsia were still enamored with the Soviet Union, this narrative of the Nazis as capitalists was a welcome lie.” No socialist wanted to be associated with Nazism, even though the Nazis proudly proclaimed their socialism. Acknowledging that Nazism was a variety of socialism did not, as Calton writes, “fit cleanly into the Soviet-Marxist worldview, and this false narrative survives today.”<sup>2</sup>

A decade before he published *The Road to Serfdom*, Friedrich Hayek had warned the world of national socialism. In 1933, before the depth of depravity of Hitler became known, Hayek wrote in a letter to William Beveridge, the head of the London School of Economics and a Fabian socialist, about the nightmare of national

socialism. Even in 1933, Hayek understood that socialists would claim that national socialism was somehow “right-wing.” Hayek argued, “Nothing could be more superficial than to consider the forces which dominate the Germany of today as reactionary—in the sense that they want a return to the social and economic order of 1914.”<sup>3</sup>

Hayek wrote that the Nazis’ “persecution of the Marxists, and of democrats in general, tends to obscure the fundamental fact that National ‘Socialism’ is a genuine socialist movement, whose leading ideas are the final fruit of the anti-liberal tendencies which have been steadily gaining ground in Germany since the later part of the Bismarckian era, and which led the majority of the German intelligentsia first to ‘socialism of the chair’ and later to Marxism in its social-democratic or communist form.”<sup>4</sup>

As to the argument that Nazism is not socialism because of its affiliation with big business, Hayek replied,

*One of the main reasons why the socialist character of National Socialism has been quite generally unrecognized, is, no doubt, its alliance with the nationalist groups which represent the great industries and the great landowners. But this merely proves that these groups too—as they have since learnt to their bitter disappointment—have, at least partly, been mistaken as to the nature of the movement. But only partly because—and this is the most characteristic feature of modern Germany—many capitalists are themselves strongly influenced by socialistic ideas, and have not sufficient belief in capitalism to defend it with a clear conscience. But, in spite of this, the German entrepreneur class have manifested almost incredible short-sightedness in allying themselves with a movement of whose strong anti-capitalistic tendencies there should never have been any doubt.<sup>5</sup>*

As for the Nazi platform, Hayek claimed that it differed from the Bolsheviks “only in that its socialism was much cruder and less rational.”<sup>6</sup>

To Hayek, “the dominant feature [of national socialism] is a fierce hatred of anything capitalistic—individualistic profit seeking, large scale enterprise, banks, joint-stock companies, department stores, ‘international finance and loan capital,’ the system of ‘interest slavery’ in general.”<sup>7</sup>

Hayek recognized that Germans were attracted to national socialism because they “were already completely under the influence of collectivist ideas. . . .” National socialism, rather than being an abrupt break with the Bolsheviks, was rather socialism mixed with nationalism and animated by racial hatred.

## Chapter 22

# THE NAZIS DIDN'T BELIEVE IN PRIVATE PROPERTY

**D**espite the common roots of national socialism and Russian socialism, the mainstream media of the day, as well as mainstream thought, refused to acknowledge them. Even after the war, when saner minds might have prevailed, most critics saw only the horrors of the Holocaust and not the link between that horror and the collectivism underlying socialism. Mainstream thought also ignored Stalin's horrors for decades, and when they finally got around to acknowledging the terror of the gulag, they often refused to accept that terror was a consequence of socialism.

Shortly after World War II, in his essay "Planned Chaos," Ludwig von Mises explained the superficial differences between Russian and German socialism.

Mises acknowledged that German socialism "seemingly and nominally, maintains private ownership of the means of production, entrepreneurship, and market exchange."<sup>1</sup> But Reisman points out that Mises "identified . . . that private ownership of the means of production existed in name only under the Nazis and that the actual substance of ownership of the means of production resided in the German government."<sup>2</sup>

Ayn Rand in "The Fascist New Frontier" concurs: "The main

characteristic of socialism (and of communism) is public ownership of the means of production, and, therefore, the abolition of private property. The right to property is the right of use and disposal. Under fascism, men retain the semblance or pretense of private property, but the government holds total power over its use and disposal.”<sup>3</sup>

Leonard Peikoff reinforces this point in *Ominous Parallels*: “If ‘ownership’ means the right to determine the use and disposal of material goods, then Nazism endowed the state with every real prerogative of ownership. What the individual retained was merely a formal deed, a contentless deed, which conferred no rights on its holder. Under communism, there is collective ownership of property *de jure*. Under Nazism, there is the same collective ownership *de facto*.”<sup>4</sup>

Under national socialism there was, as Mises put it, “a superficial system of private ownership . . . but the Nazis exerted unlimited, central control of all economic decisions.” With profit and production dictated by the state, industry worked the same as if the government had confiscated all the means of production, making economic prediction and calculation impossible.<sup>5</sup>

In addition, the Nazis dictated the wages of workers. By 1935, one’s choice of occupation was often dictated by the government. Employment was guaranteed by the government, but a forced labor camp was not what most workers imagined full employment would be.

As Adam Young reports, “Every German worker was assigned a position from which he could not be released by the employer, nor could he switch jobs, without permission of the government employment office. Worker absenteeism was met with fines or imprisonment—all in the name of job security.”<sup>6</sup>

The Nazis, like the Soviets, used slogans to reinforce their

message. Nazi slogans like “Put the common interest before self” could have just as easily been seen in communist Russia. Substitute the word “fairness” for “the common interest” and you have a talking point for many of today’s new democratic socialists in the United States.

Wage and price controls were enacted and interest rates were fixed. As Mises puts it, once prices are fixed, “The authority, not the consumers, directs production. The central board of production management is supreme; all citizens are nothing else but civil servants. This is socialism with the outward appearance of capitalism. Some labels of the capitalistic market economy are retained, but they signify here something entirely different from what they mean in the market economy.”<sup>7</sup>

Adam Young describes how extensive the Nazi economic controls became. The Nazis established the Reich Food Estate “to regulate the conditions and production of the farmers. Its vast bureaucracy enforced regulations that touched all areas of the farmer’s life and his food production, processing, and marketing.” So, while the Nazis, for the most part, did not confiscate the farmland (except those farms owned by Jews), they exerted control over every aspect of how the land was used.<sup>8</sup>

The Nazis paid for this the same way their predecessors had paid for reparations. They simply printed the money and manipulated their foreign exchange rate. Tariffs shut down international trade and wage and price controls wreaked havoc on the economy.<sup>9</sup>

It wasn’t just Jewish businesses. As Mises reminds us, the Nazis used the word “Jewish” as a synonym for “capitalist.” Even non-Jewish businesses worried that the Gestapo would come for the “white-Jews” next, explaining that the Nazi animus featured both racial and traditional socialist anger toward capitalists.<sup>10</sup>

Economic controls threatened everyone. As one factory owner

complained: "It has gotten to the point where I cannot talk even in my own factory. Accidentally, one of the workers overheard me grumbling about some new bureaucratic regulation and he immediately denounced me to the party and the Labor Front office."<sup>11</sup>

As Ralph Reiland reports, this was official policy: "In this totalitarian paradigm, a businessman, declares a Nazi decree, 'practices his functions primarily as a representative of the State, only secondarily for his own sake.' Complain, warns a Nazi directive, and 'we shall take away the freedom still left you.'"<sup>12</sup>

Young gives us an idea of how extensive the Nazi economic controls were. "The bureaucratization of the economy necessarily followed suit. The minister of economics in 1937, reported that 'Germany's export trade involves 40,000 separate transactions daily; yet for a single transaction as many as forty different forms must be filled out.'"<sup>13</sup>

Our Democratic regulation-loving colleagues should acknowledge the historic parallel of government overregulation and loss of freedom. The current U.S. government is awash in regulations. President Obama set the record for new regulations. In his last year in office he added 95,894 pages of them. In contrast, President Trump added the least amount of regulations in recent history but still managed to add 61,950 pages to the *Federal Register*. To its credit, the Trump administration did roll back some regulations; for example, a regulation mandating the number of cherries that must be used in a frozen cherry pie was repealed. I'm sure there are some democratic socialists complaining right now that our citizenry is no longer protected from the danger of purchasing a pie containing an insufficient number of cherries.

My friend Senator Mike Lee of Utah stacks the *Federal Register* of regulations in his office next to the corresponding legislation passed. The regulations reach to the ceiling and the laws are only

a few inches high. The problem is that Congress, for decades, has delegated its authority to write regulations to the president.

While we don't refer to our regulatory state as socialism (yet), the overwhelming regulatory control of business that occurred under the Nazis is a form of government control over the means of production and is, in essence, a form of socialism.

As Young describes it, under Nazi socialism "businessmen and entrepreneurs were smothered by red tape, were told by the state what they could produce and how much and at what price, burdened by taxation, and were forced to make 'special contributions' to the party. Corporations below a capitalization of \$40,000 were dissolved and the founding of any below a capitalization of \$2,000,000 was forbidden, which wiped out a fifth of all German businesses."<sup>14</sup>

Reisman explains that "what specifically established de facto socialism in Nazi Germany was the introduction of price and wage controls in 1936. These were imposed in response to the inflation of the money supply carried out by the regime from the time of its coming to power in early 1933. The Nazi regime inflated the money supply as the means of financing the vast increase in government spending required by its programs of public works, subsidies, and rearmament. The price and wage controls were imposed in response to the rise in prices that began to result from the inflation."<sup>15</sup>

Wage and price controls led to shortages and ultimately to chaos—not unlike what has happened in Venezuela. The Nazis, like Chavez and Maduro in Venezuela, tried to counteract the shortages with rationing and ultimately with production controls.

Reisman reminds us that "the combination of price controls with this further set of controls constitutes the de facto socialization of the economic system. For it means that the government then exercises all of the substantive powers of ownership."<sup>16</sup>



He continues, "This was the socialism instituted by the Nazis. And Mises calls it socialism on the German or Nazi pattern, in contrast to the more obvious socialism of the Soviets, which he calls socialism on the Russian or Bolshevik pattern."<sup>17</sup>

So, we see that the facts (and the Nazis themselves) argue that Nazism was a branch of socialism. The only reason this debate continues is that today's socialists only want to admit to a lineage of "kinder, more gentle" socialists like the Danish (who are not socialist and utterly reject the description). Today's socialists have seen it in their best interest to arbitrarily assign the Nazis to the "right wing."

This debate still matters as each generation chooses the government and economic system they think will best provide prosperity. So, if you want to be an American socialist, by all means, learn of your forebears, including socialists like the Nazis, who decided to animate their socialism with racial hatred in order to implement it more quickly.<sup>18</sup>

# SOCIALISM PROMISES EQUALITY AND LEADS TO TYRANNY

**T**oday's socialists don't want anything to do with Nazi socialism or for that matter Mao's socialism. But the question remains—if Mao's China is not representative of socialism, where are the differences? It is important to remember that the post-World War II revolution that brought Mao to power was fueled by the promises of socialism. Mao promised to redistribute wealth and abolish private property. Mao promised to abolish income inequality and create a more equal society. Anything sound familiar?

Modern socialists' goals are not dissimilar, except for the gulag, the famines, the cultural revolution, oh . . . and the millions of victims, I suppose. But Mao and Stalin and Hitler didn't come to power promising tyranny. They came to power promising equality. It is important to know something of the horrors of Maoism so that we can resist the same calls for government-enforced equality. We can see quite clearly that the more you destroy economic carrots, the more you have to resort to economic sticks. Not everyone wants equality of income, and those citizens must be penalized until they agree.

Richard Ebeling makes clear that “under a regime of comprehensive socialism the ordinary citizen would be confronted with the worst of all imaginable tyrannies.” Not by the accident of “thugs” taking over control of socialism but by socialism’s very nature, “the individual [is] totally and inescapably dependent on the political authority for his very existence.”<sup>1</sup>

Indeed, once you have a centralized government in control of your health care, your child care, your college education, and your employment, you are on the slippery road to the regulation of cultural and scientific work, including what can be published, studied, or researched. After all, if you want the government to pay for it, they control it. In the complete socialist state, Ebeling writes, “Man’s mind and material well-being would be enslaved to the control and caprice of the central planners of the socialist state.”<sup>2</sup>

Socialism also crushes the spirit of work and entrepreneurship. As Ebeling puts it, socialism weakens “the close connection between work and reward that necessarily exists under a system of private property. What incentive does a man have to clear the field, plant the seed, and tend the ground until harvest time if he knows or fears that the product to which he devotes his mental and physical labor may be stolen from him at any time?”<sup>3</sup>

Today’s socialists argue: “No, that is not what we want at all. We want more ‘freedom’ for the individual. Those who lack wealth under capitalism are enslaved by the rich!” And what of the argument that socialist rulers would be guided by their own self-interest, just as capitalists are, but with the brute force of government at their disposal? Doesn’t the government, even now, exert control by withholding or granting funds to individuals and groups who are ever more dependent on them? As the saying goes, “The government big enough to give you everything you want is a government strong enough to take away everything that you have.”

Socialists have argued since the time of Plato that political evolution will bring about philosopher-kings who are disinterested in their own material gain. Lenin predicted that class struggle would lead to a “New Soviet Man” guided by altruism and the common good. Instead, history has given us Stalin, Hitler, Mao, Pol Pot, and innumerable other socialist elites who began by pursuing the ideology of equality but ultimately and perhaps inevitably succumbed to a tyrannous accumulation of power—all while preaching egalitarianism, redistribution of wealth, and an age of enlightened “new men” full of hope, change, and altruism. Before anyone signs up with any of today’s young socialists, it’s worth learning the dark origin and decline of Mao’s attempt to create a workers’ paradise.<sup>4</sup>

Mao admitted that the socialism he strove for would, at least at first, require war. Mao is famous for saying that “political power grows out of the barrel of a gun.” To get that power, Mao decided to weaponize the divide between the rural peasants and the urban capitalist class. Mao saw a path to victory by mobilizing the rural peasants. While Mao believed the Chinese People’s Revolution would lead to its own unique socialism, he also saw the Chinese revolution in the context of a worldwide class struggle as Marx had described. Mao, like Marx, believed in the Hegelian notion of the inevitability of socialism. Workers are naturally pitted against owners who, according to Marx, steal “value” from the labor of the workers, which leads to class warfare and ultimately to a synthesis where a workers’ paradise comes into being.<sup>5</sup>

Mao, like Marx before him, believed that socialism was a Darwinian destiny. Mao wrote: “Socialism, in the ideological struggle, now enjoys all the conditions to triumph as the fittest.”<sup>6</sup>

Interestingly, intervention by European powers played a role in Mao’s rise. At the end of World War I, the Treaty of Versailles

ceded the Shandong region of China to Japan. This region had been controlled by Germany until her defeat. The socialist movement was able to incorporate Chinese nationalism and pride into its message, setting the stage for the people's revolution of Mao.<sup>7</sup>

Likewise, the chaos of World War II and the unifying opposition to Japanese rule allowed the communists to combine socialism with nationalism to grow its forces. In the ensuing civil war with Chiang Kai-shek, like so many revolutions before and since, the communists "fought against" the injustices and lack of freedom under the rule of Chiang's Kuomintang. But when the communists came to power they, in turn, became the despots they had once despised.

The People's Republic of China was founded in 1949. Factories were nationalized; land was expropriated and divided up among the peasants. Taking everyone's land, as you can imagine, is difficult to do overnight. To stamp out resistance, Mao targeted the bourgeoisie, seeking "to destroy the property-owning class by killing at least one landlord in every village via public execution."<sup>8</sup>

Over an eight-year period, the land was confiscated and the farmers forced to work in gradually larger and larger "cooperatives." These agricultural cooperatives ranged from 100 to 300 families.

The economy was planned from the top down, and the communist government attempted to micromanage several hundred million people.

By 1953, Mao determined that the post-civil war economy and collectivization had progressed enough that he could emulate the Soviets by launching a five-year plan for the Chinese economy. Like Soviet five-year plans, Mao claimed his agrarian socialism was working, but the facts argued otherwise. Nicholas Kristof writes, "China's per-capita income was actually lower, adjusted for inflation, in the 1950s than it had been at the end of the Song

Dynasty in the 1270s.” The government conclusion was that the five-year plan from 1953 to 1958 had succeeded, but the truth was the opposite.<sup>9</sup>

In 1958, an optimistic Mao launched “the Great Leap Forward.” Collectivization of the farms was completed, and private farming was banned. The goal was to quickly transition Communist China from agrarian socialism to a modern, albeit socialized, industrial nation.

The result was disastrous almost beyond human comprehension. Instead of a Great Leap Forward, what ensued was perhaps the worst man-made famine of all time.

The famine was no accident. When ownership is collectivized, the incentive to work harder, to be more productive evaporates. When the government purchases nearly a third of the crop at prices controlled by the government and regulates the prices of the remaining two-thirds, shortages inevitably occur. Over time the government began to buy more and more of the harvest. The central planners “calculated” a great harvest and so increased export of grain and dictated that land be converted from grain to cash crops. The farmer co-ops were merged into giant people’s communes.

Mao did not anticipate the result. Once private property was abolished, so too was the ability to have rental income, to sell land for profit, or to use the land as collateral to borrow money. Peasants were reassigned from farm work to industrial iron and steel work and sent to the cities.

Like all attempts at government-enforced equality, the need for the truncheon arose.

In China, sticks served the purpose of truncheons. Professor Frank Dikötter describes beatings that were meted out by roving bands of communist enforcers. As the Great Leap Forward became the great leap backward, starvation and desperation required

more brutality to keep people in line. Victims were buried alive, forced to labor in the subzero cold, with government thugs chopping off ears and noses of any who resisted.<sup>10</sup>

Dikötter describes the descent into darkness:

*On the other hand, the farmers who were herded into giant people's communes had very few incentives to work. The land belonged to the state. The grain they produced was procured at a price that was often below the cost of production. Their livestock, tools, and utensils were no longer theirs. Often even their homes were confiscated. But the local cadres faced ever-greater pressure to fulfill and over-fulfill the plan, having to drive the workforce in one merciless campaign after another. In some places both villagers and cadres became so brutalized that the scope and degree of coercion had to be constantly expanded, resulting in an orgy of violence. People were tied up, beaten, stripped, drowned in ponds, covered in excrement, branded with sizzling tools, mutilated, and buried alive. The most common tool in this arsenal of horror was food, which was used as a weapon: entire groups of people considered to be too old, too weak, or too sick to work were deliberately banned from the canteen and starved to death.<sup>11</sup>*

Dikötter traveled to China and examined the local documents concerning the Great Famine. Dikötter's best estimate is that at least 45 million people died throughout China.

Dikötter maintains that “[b]etween 2 and 3 million of these victims were tortured to death or summarily executed, often for the slightest infraction. People accused of not working hard enough were hung and beaten; sometimes they were bound and thrown into ponds. Punishments for even the smallest violations included mutilation and forcing people to eat excrement.”<sup>12</sup>

Dikötter found a government report that describes how “a man named Wang Ziyou had one of his ears chopped off, his legs tied up with iron wire and a 10-kilogram stone dropped on his back before he was branded with a sizzling tool. His crime: digging up a potato.” He describes another horror story where a father was forced to bury his son alive for the crime of stealing a handful of rice. The famine was so terrible that the government eventually resorted to simply withholding food as punishment.

It’s always hard to imagine people resorting to cannibalism, but Dikötter found police records of fifty such cases in one village. One report read, according to Dikötter, “culprit: Yang Zhongsheng. Name of victim: Yang Ecshun. Relationship with culprit: younger brother. Manner of crime: killed and eaten. Reason: livelihood issues.”

The Chinese still see this famine as largely the result of natural causes, though even the official party line now acknowledges some “planning” mistakes. Millions died at the hands of government equality enforcers.

Mao, never that sentimental, continued to confiscate ever-larger portions of the grain. Dikötter describes it:

*At a secret meeting in Shanghai on March 25, 1959, he ordered the party to procure up to one-third of all the available grain—much more than ever before. The minutes of the meeting reveal a chairman insensitive to human loss: “When there is not enough to eat people starve to death. It is better to let half of the people die so that the other half can eat their fill.”<sup>13</sup>*

The starvation and death became so widespread it was impossible to deny. Yu Dehong, a communist functionary in Xinyang during the Great Leap Forward, stated:



*[F]ive kilometers from my home, there were dead bodies everywhere, at least 100 corpses lying out in the open with no one burying them. Among the reed ponds along the river embankments I saw another 100 or so corpses. Outside it was said that dogs had eaten so many corpses that their eyes glowed with bloodlust. But this was inconsistent with the facts: people had already eaten all the dogs, so where would there be dogs to eat the corpses?*<sup>14</sup>

The Chinese journalist Yang Jisheng describes how China attempted to modernize and follow the Soviet Union's attempt at rapid industrialization, but rather, the Great Leap Forward "brought inconceivable misery, bearing witness to what Friedrich Hayek wrote in *The Road to Serfdom*: 'Is there a greater tragedy imaginable than that, in our endeavor consciously to shape our future in accordance with high ideals, we should in fact unwittingly produce the very opposite of what we have been striving for?'"<sup>15</sup>

Certainly, famine was an unintended consequence, but it was not as if the socialists had not been warned. Hayek had written that any "Great Utopia" that required central planning according to a government blueprint would fail, that any "Great Utopia" that prevented the interaction of free individuals in a free marketplace was doomed to fail.

Dikötter comes to a similar conclusion: "Is there a more devastating example of a utopian plan gone horribly wrong than the Great Leap Forward in 1958? Here was a vision of communist paradise that paved the way to the systematic stripping of every freedom—the freedom of trade, of movement, of association, of speech, of religion—and ultimately the mass killing of tens of millions of ordinary people."<sup>16</sup>

As Yang Jisheng puts it: "In order to bring about this Great Utopia, China's leaders constructed an all-encompassing and

omnipotent state, eliminating private ownership, the market and competition. The state controlled the vast majority of social resources and monopolized production and distribution, making every individual completely dependent on it. The government decided the type and density of crops planted in each location, and yields were taken and distributed by the state. The result was massive food shortages, as the state's inability to ration food successfully doomed tens of millions of rural Chinese to a lingering death."<sup>17</sup>

There is no kinder, gentler version of state ownership of the land. Jisheng channels Hayek when he describes China's socialism: "An economy with 'everything being directed from a single center' requires totalitarianism as its political system. And since absolute power corrupts absolutely, the result was not the egalitarianism anticipated by the designers of this system, but an officialdom that oppressed the Chinese people."<sup>18</sup>

## *Chapter 26*

# ALL ASPECTS OF CULTURE EVENTUALLY BECOME TARGETS FOR THE PLANNERS

**T**he dangers of socialism don't end with ruining the economy. When the economy fails, it must be blamed on malefactors besides the socialist leaders. Usually the blame falls on dissidents, capitalists, insufficiently productive workers, and foreigners. The economy is sick because the culture is diseased, and the disease must be eradicated. Not every socialist purge turns out as badly as China's, but it's worth exploring how and why China ended up the way it did.

No sooner had the nation begun to recover from the famine of the Great Leap Forward than Mao decided to distract the masses with a new program. The Cultural Revolution was launched in 1966. The Cultural Revolution purged the remaining capitalist and traditional elements from Chinese society and put Maoism at the center of the Party.

Mao, like socialists before and since, maintained that the failure of the Great Leap Forward and the famine was due to outsiders, lingering capitalists, and impure party members. The Cultural

Revolution was to make socialism purer by purging opponents. The Red Guard was formed to enforce the purge.

After the bungled Great Leap Forward, Mao's leadership position in the Chinese Communist Party was threatened. The Cultural Revolution was a way to solidify his position by eliminating his rivals and purifying Chinese socialism. Like Stalin, Mao sought to develop a cult of personality around himself.

A book of Mao's quotations, *The Little Red Book*, was published and distributed far and wide to spread hero worship of Mao. This pocket-sized volume was printed by the hundreds of millions (some say billions). The Red Guard presided over public readings of Mao's wisdom. One such exhortation read: "Be resolute, fear no sacrifice, and surmount every difficulty to win victory!" Flight attendants on Chinese airlines even intoned Mao's words overhead to the passengers. Chinese citizens were expected to have a copy with them at all times.

As part of the Cultural Revolution Mao closed down all the schools, libraries, shrines, and anything else perceived to be traditional. Houses were pillaged, and religious icons and books piled in the streets and burned.

Mao exhorted China's youth to purge the country of any who were sympathetic to capitalism or the "old" ways, to destroy the "four olds"—old ideas, old customs, old habits, and old culture.

The Red Guard would attack people simply for wearing "bourgeois" clothes rather than the gray unisex communist pajamas, which represented complete equality. Mao encouraged the Red Guard to take matters into their own hands. The violence spread unchecked until 1968, when Mao finally intervened. While much of the violence was committed by the paramilitary Red Guard, the government had its hands in the conflict as well. Estimates are that the government killed upwards of 500,000. Military rule was

instituted. The violence touched even leading figures in the party. Deng Xiaoping, who would become the most powerful man in China in the 1980s, was purged in 1967. China's current president Xi Jinping's father was beaten and sent into exile. Xi, himself, was a thirteen-year-old boy at the time.<sup>1</sup>

Orders came down from Beijing for all Chinese families to send one child to reeducation camps in the countryside.

Dr. Ming Wang, a friend of mine and a fellow ophthalmologist, was one of those children.

He was born in Communist China in 1960 amid Mao's Great Leap Forward. Ming's family were present to see farmers forced off their farms and into the cities. They experienced the famine firsthand.

Ming was entering high school when the news came that he would not be able to continue his education. According to Dr. Wang's book, *From Darkness to Sight*: "The first aim [of the Cultural Revolution] . . . was to eliminate higher education. Universities across China were shut down. Anyone with knowledge and education was labeled the 'stinking ninth class,' the absolute bottom of the social ranking, beneath even criminals, prostitutes and beggars."

Ming came from a family of doctors. All nine members of his grandfather's family were physicians. Both of his parents were doctors. During the Cultural Revolution, the Red Guard marched on the medical university with clubs to destroy the classrooms and laboratories. Ming's mother heard they were coming and bravely tried to protect her lab. She was beaten so badly that she was not able to rise from bed for one year and lived in pain for the rest of her life. When she finally could walk again, she was exiled to a work camp for two years. Ming was eleven years old at the time.

In 1974, word came that each Chinese family could keep only

one child. Other children would be deported to labor camps. Ming's family chose him, hoping the policy would change before his younger brother reached the age of deportation. Choosing Ming meant he would not be deported—but only if he quit school. So, at the end of junior high, Ming was forced to quit school.

Ming secretly attended the medical university with his father but ultimately was discovered and forbidden from attending lectures.

Ming's story is so moving and extreme that he could be a character in a dystopian novel. In fact, the grotesque concept of preventing the intellectually capable from pursuing higher education and assigning them to menial labor is not that different from the plight of the narrator of Ayn Rand's *Anthem*.<sup>2</sup>

Ultimately, Ming's story brightened as he escaped to America and graduated magna cum laude from Harvard Medical School. He is now a prominent eye surgeon in Nashville.

The Cultural Revolution is said to have ended with Mao's death in 1976, but Tom Phillips writes, "Dikötter believes the nightmarish upheaval also served to destroy any remaining faith the Chinese people had in their Great Teacher. Even before Mao died, people buried Maoism."<sup>3</sup>

One can read of the millions who died during Stalin's terror or Mao's Great Leap Forward and still not grasp the horror of what it was like. Perhaps the best way to try to understand the magnitude of what happened as Mao strove to achieve complete socialism is to listen to the victims tell their stories.

Chen Dake was one of those caught up in the Cultural Revolution. Like Ming Wang, Chen Dake's life was turned upside down by the Cultural Revolution. Both men were part of the mad rush to take the college entrance exam when the Cultural Revolution finally allowed the universities to reopen. It is estimated that in

1977, after a decade of closed universities, approximately 5.7 million students attempted to attend college, in one year.

Chen was accepted to Hunan Normal University to study physics. As a kid, Chen had thought he might want to study literature or history, but in the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution, science seemed the safer course. Chen ended up becoming a famous oceanographer who recently led a team of scientists to the South Pole.

But during the Cultural Revolution, Chen was exiled to the rice paddies of central China to do manual labor. His crime? His parents were intellectuals. While some students did attend university during the Cultural Revolution, others like Chen and Ming were banned because of their ideology.

Mao made room for “acceptable” applicants like peasants—and of course the children of government officials. An example of the politically motivated admissions process recounts a farmer named Zhang Tiesheng who was admitted to college in 1973—even though he answered not one question correctly on the chemistry and physics entrance exam.

Chen remembers the excitement and challenge of competing with the five million college applicants that had built up because of ten years of limited university access.

“I was sent to the countryside after high school and toiled in the rice fields for three years before getting back to the city and entering college,” Chen said.

“I barely had time and energy to prepare for the entrance exam, but I guess that’s probably true for almost everyone who took that exam. I remember that almost every young person in the countryside where I worked took the exam.”<sup>4</sup>

Chen recalls, as Ming does as well, that there was space for only about 5 percent of the five million applicants. To be accepted in 1977 was an extraordinary feat.

The stories of Chen Dake and Ming Wang are testaments to the power of human will in the face of nearly unimaginable hardship and terror. Ming Wang spent much of his childhood singing and dancing to the propaganda songs extolling Mao (the only music allowed) as a way to ensure that he would not be sent to a work camp.

Chen Qigang, who is now a composer living in France, also lived through the Cultural Revolution.

Chen was plucked out of middle school in Beijing and sent to a forced-labor reeducation camp in the countryside. Chen describes what happened to him:

*I have always been a very direct speaker. When the Cultural Revolution was starting, I spoke out about what I was seeing. The day after I said something, a big-character poster appeared on campus overnight: "Save the reactionary speechmaker Chen Qigang." I was so young. I didn't understand what was going on. Yesterday we were all classmates. How come today all of my classmates are my enemies? Everyone started to ignore me. I didn't understand. How could people be like this? Even my older sister, who was also at my school, came to find me and asked, "What's wrong with you?" You saw in one night who your real friends were. The next day I only had two friends left. One of them is now my wife.*

Chen continues,

*At the time, no one really knew who was for or against the revolution. It was completely out of control. The students brought elderly people into the school and beat them. They beat their teachers and principals. There was nothing in the way of law. There was a student who was two or three years older than me. He beat two elderly people to death with his bare hands. No one has talked*



*about this even until this day. We all know who did it but that's the way it is. No one has ever looked into it. These occurrences were too common.*

*If there had been no Cultural Revolution, then I would not be who I am today. People who haven't been through it can't appreciate how easy everything else is. It wasn't the manual labor. That's a different kind of hardship. This was the worst kind of bitterness. You are constantly told: "You are against the revolution, so therefore you have no right to speak. You don't have freedom. You will have no future in this place. You will not have a good job. Everyone looks down on you."*

*That burden, that burden on your spirit, is very heavy. It was very different later when I went to France. I could have been criticized. I could have had a different opinion on something artistic. But for me that was nothing. It is nothing. Because it doesn't affect my freedom.<sup>5</sup>*

Yang Jisheng, a famous writer and historian, was in high school in 1966. He writes:

*People who didn't experience the Cultural Revolution only know that a large number of officials were persecuted, but they don't know that the numbers of ordinary people who suffered were 10 times, a hundred times, more.*

*They only know that the rebels were the culprits in the Cultural Revolution, and don't know that the rebels were active for only two years. The main culprits were the power holders in different periods. They only know that the Gang of Four and the rebels supported the Cultural Revolution, and don't know that a large number of senior officials also supported the Cultural Revolution for some time.*

*Unfortunately, now there are some people doing everything*

*in their power to cover up the mistakes of history. They treat one-sidedly extolling the achievements of the past as a "positive energy" to be exalted, and they treat exposing and reflecting on the mistakes of history as a "negative energy" to be beaten down.*<sup>6</sup>

Professor Zehao Zhou is haunted by the Chinese Cultural Revolution. Zhou was an eleven-year-old when Mao decided to unleash the Red Guard to purge opposition. Zhou describes the Red Guard as "mostly brainwashed teenage hooligans, [who] stormed into any neighborhood they pleased, assaulted anyone they wanted, and tortured their victims to death with impunity—all in the name of revolution."<sup>7</sup>

Mao encouraged the violence. "Revolution is not a dinner party! Be violent!" Mao declared.

Zhou remembers "the 'Chinese Crystal Night' in the summer 1966 when waves of Red Guards from different factions repeatedly stormed my 'bourgeois neighborhood' in the former French Concession of Shanghai over a period of weeks, terrorizing the innocent, ransacking homes and parading their victims through the streets for the purpose of public humiliation."

Still a child at the time, Zhou could never forget the "screaming, shouting, yelling and cries for help [that] rang out all around me—nearly every household was subjected to such abuse. Chaos was the order of the day."

As the Red Guards closed in on their house, Zhou describes his mother's feverish destruction of any incriminating evidence. "After closing the curtains, she started to burn books, notebooks and the entire collection of family photos. I saw my mother gingerly putting one photo after another into the flames. I had never seen most of them before. The only time I got to see what my parents looked like at their wedding or how my father looked in uniform

was in those fleeting moments before each photo started to curl and blacken in the flames.”<sup>8</sup>

That first summer of the Cultural Revolution, Mao started the “Destroy the Four Olds Campaign.” The Red Guard was goaded to attack anything or anyone who expressed old ideas, old habits, old customs, or old culture.

To this day it is sad to think of five thousand years of Chinese artifacts being burned or destroyed. Zhou explains that “almost 90 percent of Tibet’s monasteries and temples were razed to the ground and roughly 74 percent of the historical sites in the birthplace of Confucius . . . were obliterated.”

Zhou remembers the Red Guard attacking the local Christian church. They “brought out all of its Bibles into the middle of the street, and set them on fire. That horrific moment—seeing the sky darkened by the floating ashes of burned Bibles—remains seared in my memory even now.”

Zhou ponders the ironies: “The result is a curious kind of doublethink. Mao led the country to ruin and is responsible for more deaths than either Hitler or Stalin, but he remains the political idol of millions of ordinary Chinese. The Red Guards were eventually denounced as aberrant radicals, but the ruling faction of the Chinese Communist Party is composed of a significant number of former Red Guards.”<sup>9</sup>

To better understand the Cultural Revolution, Karoline Kan interviewed her uncle Lishui, who was and is an unrepentant Red Guard. What is alarming about her description is how “normal” he seemed to her. She describes how “as a young child, when I heard him coming to visit, I would rush out of the house, climb onto his shoulders, and pull his ears.”<sup>10</sup>

Kan describes her uncle as “kind and honest” but he “says he doesn’t regret a single thing he did—not even today. . . .”

Lishui joined the Red Guard at eighteen, and astonishingly his first raid was on his grandfather's house. When the orders came to eradicate the "Four Olds," Lishui answered the call. What kind of fervor is enough to lead a young adult to raid his grandfather's house?

Kan describes how "terrified of severe punishment, the old man handed over his collection of books and paintings before those young people, including his own grandsons, would find them. The Red Guards piled the books and paintings and burned them. To show his sincerity and to avoid further punishment, my great-grandfather used the fire to boil water in front of the guards."

Kan's great-grandfather had been educated in Confucianism and had been a village leader. Kan reports that "none of that mattered during the Cultural Revolution. My great-grandfather was forced to step on stage and accept criticism, wearing a 'high hat,' which looked like a dunce cap, enumerating his crimes." Lishui, perhaps feeling guilty about harassing his own grandfather, agreed to help his grandfather avoid more punishment by writing down "self-criticisms," a form of forced confessions. According to Lishui:

*My grandfather "was old and his eyes were diseased, so he told me his stories, and I wrote them down. . . . I also guided him to write what the Red Guards would like to hear. I remember a few lines: "I was born in 1899; at eight years old I started studying the Four Books and Five Classics taught by private teachers. I will reflect deeply and profoundly on my past."<sup>11</sup>*

Like the Nazi prison guards who blithely followed their orders, it is hard to imagine how Lishui could justify committing terrorism against his own family much less still defend it fifty years later. The power of groupthink or peer pressure, especially when

encouraged by the state, is somehow able to motivate “normal” people to commit what most of us would consider highly “abnormal,” abhorrent acts.

Today’s socialists who choose to write off such horror as an anomaly need to explain why history shows the same story time and time again—when governments take on sufficient power to enforce state ownership of property, the leaders ultimately become ruthless and barbaric.

Millions of people were killed under Mao. It is easy to become inured to violence when you hear such large, almost unbelievable numbers. So it is useful to meet a few of Mao’s victims.

Fang Zhongmou had been a member of the Communist Party. In fact, she had served in the People’s Liberation Army. Her enthusiasm for Mao’s regime waned, however, when her husband was charged with being a “capitalist roader,” a nonspecific accusation equivalent to being a sympathizer of capitalism. The government detained her husband on multiple occasions and made him submit to “struggle sessions.”

In the privacy of her home, Fang Zhongmou lashed out at Mao. Her family informed the authorities. Fang retaliated by burning a portrait of Mao. Her husband and son turned her over to soldiers. She was subsequently executed.<sup>12</sup>

It’s hard to imagine families turning in their family members, but this was not uncommon when everyone lived in fear of everyone else, including their own family.

Bian Zhongyun was an early victim of the Cultural Revolution. She was a vice principal at the well-known Beijing Normal University Girls High School. Mao encouraged the Communist Party youth to denounce traitors, and so they did. Bian fit the profile as an intellectual with a college degree and a well-to-do family background.

The students and the Red Guard became a mob. They harassed, beat, and tortured her. She was warned not to return to school. When she did, the student mob beat her with table legs with protruding nails. Bian died of her wounds.<sup>13</sup>

I remember the Chinese Ping-Pong players of the early 1970s, when the exchange of players between the United States and China became known as “Ping-Pong diplomacy.” But a decade or so before Ping-Pong diplomacy, three Chinese players were hounded to their deaths by the Chinese government.

Rong Guotuan, Fu Qifang, and Jiang Yongning, though they were originally from Hong Kong, competed for China in the 1950s and 1960s. Rong became the first Chinese player to win the World Table Tennis Championship in 1959. Because they had been born outside of mainland China, the hysteria of the Cultural Revolution made them suspect. They were subjected to “struggle sessions” and beatings and then accused of spying. Ultimately, all three would commit suicide, with Rong leaving a note denying that he was a spy.<sup>14</sup>

The terror was so pervasive that there likely was no Chinese citizen alive in the late 1970s who did not know of someone who had been killed, tortured, or sent to a forced labor camp. Even as Deng Xiaoping began to relax Mao’s terror, Chinese citizens still lived an uncertain existence.