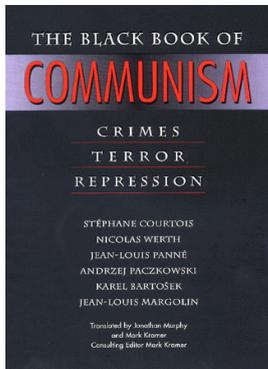


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**The Black Book of Communism: Crimes, Terror, Repression** by *Stephane Courtois and Five Other Writers, translated from the French (1999), 850 pages.*



This is an assembly of extensive articles published in France two years ago and now expertly translated into English under the auspices of the Harvard University Press. It is a most impressive piece of work, encyclopedic in scope; it covers every part of the globe where Communism took hold at one time or another from 1917 until the present, and it is devoted to what the title suggests. The authors deal with crime; a monumental compendium is presented probably the first of this type in the Western World. As expected, extensive commentaries, along with many translations, have been written in prestigious periodicals and newspapers since the original publication.

Here is how one can handle this extensive material. The book has 5 parts, but Parts 2,4 and 5 deal with the Comintern, a fairly familiar subject to our members, or with non-European areas. Actually you can reduce the reading matter to less than 400 pages in

Parts 1 and 3.

The Russian experience is thoroughly discussed starting with Lenin who impressed on his countrymen that the "kulaks" must be crushed without pity because they are rich bastards and blood-suckers who should be hanged. After all, some owned two samovars and were observed visiting churches much too often. Thirty categories were deprived of civil rights because they were ex-shopkeepers, ex-employees of private companies, ex-monks, and those who collected stamps or spoke Esperanto because they were potential spies. The law of 1934 took care of them: no legal representation, the dreaded so-called troika trial, no appeal, immediate execution

This Great Terror caused 6 million arrests, 3 million executions and 2 million deaths in camps. Here are a few additional grim statistics of world communism: close to 100 million people were killed, half of them by the Soviets, the other half mainly by the Chinese. The preferred method was starvation, no matter the victim's origin, belief, or occupation. At one point Soviet luminaries began to disappear quickly: 3 marshals out of 5, 13 generals out of 15, 8 admirals out of 9, 50 army corps generals out of 57, and 154 division generals out of 186. As Andrei Vyshinsky shouted, "Shoot these rabid dogs." Jean-Paul Sartre said in 1952; "Any anti-Communist is a dog!" We also may recall that Molotov's wife was arrested and shipped to a camp and Stalins personal secretary's wife was shot in 1952. Both gentlemen served Stalin as though nothing of importance had happened.

The Polish section was written by Prof. Andrzej Paczkowski of the Polish Academy of Sciences. It is only 30 pages long and, quite frankly, very modest in scope as well as in details. The Polish reader may think that it was inserted in the volume almost perfunctorily. It describes the events from 1937 through 1956. It tells us how the entire governing body of the Polish Communist Party was liquidated in Moscow just before the war in 1938, with only Gomułka surviving because he happened to be safe in a Polish jail at the time. Katyń, Starobielsk and Ostaszów are naturally mentioned; the comrades Merkulov, Kobulov, and Bashtakov were in charge of these horrors, and in June '40 they cheerfully reported to their superiors that the Polish camps were now empty and they were awaiting new arrivals. The terror of 1945-56 is inadequately presented, probably because of space limitations, which is disappointing. After all, that was the period when the Polish society formed by proud history and great traditions was systematically and viciously violated. And what of the hundreds of thousands who disappeared in the taigas and tundras of Siberia right after 1939?

The Preface to this book by Prof. Martin Melia of Berkeley University is lucid and worth reading. The introductions and conclusions to various Parts written by different researchers are sometimes enlightening but on occasion baffling when they try to compare the crimes of the Nazis with the horrors of Communism because here the discussion reminds us of the argument in Hell as to who is worse, Satan or Beelzebub. However, on the whole, this is an extremely valuable and informative book.

A recent publication of the Polish translation of this book is also available in our Library.

**George E. Suboczewski**