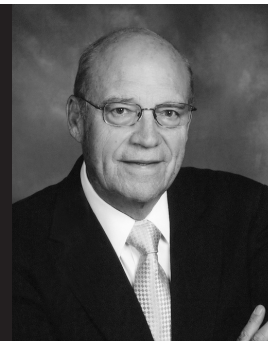




Dr. Fred Schwarz

The Schwarz Report



Dr. David Noebel

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Communist China—2015

by David Shambaugh

On Thursday, the National People's Congress convened in Beijing in what has become a familiar annual ritual. Some 3,000 "elected" delegates from all over the country—ranging from colorfully clad ethnic minorities to urbane billionaires—will meet for a week to discuss the state of the nation and to engage in the pretense of political participation.

Some see this impressive gathering as a sign of the strength of the Chinese political system—but it masks serious weaknesses. Chinese politics has always had a theatrical veneer, with staged events like the congress intended to project the power and stability of the Chinese Communist Party, or CCP. Officials and citizens alike know that they are supposed to conform to these rituals, participating cheerfully and parroting back official slogans. This behavior is known in Chinese as *biaotai*, "declaring where one stands," but it is little more than an act of symbolic compliance.

Despite appearances, China's political system is badly broken, and nobody knows it better than the Communist Party itself. China's strongman leader, Xi Jinping, is hoping that a crackdown on dissent and corruption will shore up the party's rule. He is determined to avoid becoming the Mikhail Gorbachev of China, presiding over the party's collapse. But instead of being the antithesis of Mr. Gorbachev, Mr. Xi may well wind up having the same effect. His despotism is severely stressing China's system and society—and bringing it closer to a breaking point.

Predicting the demise of authoritarian regimes is a risky business. Few Western experts forecast the collapse of the Soviet Union before it occurred in 1991; the CIA missed it entirely. The downfall of Eastern Europe's communist states two years earlier was similarly scorned as the wishful thinking of anticommunists—until it happened. The post-Soviet "color revolutions" in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan from 2003 to 2005, as well as the 2011 Arab Spring uprisings, all burst forth unanticipated.

China-watchers have been on high alert for telltale signs of regime decay and decline ever since the regime's near-death experience in Tiananmen Square in 1989. Since then, several seasoned Sinologists have risked their professional reputations by asserting that the collapse of CCP rule was inevitable. Others were more cautious—myself included. But times change in China, and so must our analyses.

The endgame of Chinese communist rule has now begun, I believe, and it has progressed further than many think. We don't know what the pathway from now until the end will look like, of course. It will probably be highly unstable and unsettled. But until the system begins to unravel in some obvious way, those inside of it will play along—thus contributing to the facade of stability.

Communist rule in China is unlikely to end quietly. A single event is unlikely to trigger a peaceful implosion of the regime. Its demise is likely to be protracted, messy, and violent. I wouldn't rule out the possibility that Mr. Xi will be deposed in a power struggle or coup d'état. With his aggressive anticorruption campaign—a focus of this week's National People's Congress—he is overplaying a weak hand and deeply aggravating key party, state, military, and commercial constituencies.

The Chinese have a proverb, *waiying, neiruan*—hard on the outside, soft on the inside. Mr. Xi is a genuinely tough ruler. He exudes conviction and personal confidence. But this hard personality belies a party and political system that is extremely fragile on the inside.

Consider five telling indications of the regime's vulnerability and the party's systemic weaknesses.

First, China's economic elites have one foot out the door, and they are ready to flee en masse if the system really

begins to crumble. In 2014, Shanghai's Hurun Research Institute, which studies China's wealthy, found that 64% of the "high net worth individuals" whom it polled—393 millionaires and billionaires—were either emigrating or planning to do so. Rich Chinese are sending their children to study abroad in record numbers (in itself, an indictment of the quality of the Chinese higher-education system).

Just this week, the *Journal* reported, federal agents searched several Southern California locations that US authorities allege are linked to "multimillion-dollar birth-tourism businesses that enabled thousands of Chinese women to travel here and return home with infants born as US citizens." Wealthy Chinese are also buying property abroad at record levels and prices, and they are parking their financial assets overseas, often in well-shielded tax havens and shell companies.

Meanwhile, Beijing is trying to extradite back to China a large number of alleged financial fugitives living abroad. When a country's elites—many of them party members—flee in such large numbers, it is a telling sign of lack of confidence in the regime and the country's future.

Second, since taking office in 2012, Mr. Xi has greatly intensified the political repression that has blanketed China since 2009. The targets include the press, social media, film, arts and literature, religious groups, the Internet, intellectuals, Tibetans and Uighurs, dissidents, lawyers, NGOs, university students, and textbooks. The Central Committee sent a draconian order known as Document No. 9 down through the party hierarchy in 2013, ordering all units to ferret out any seeming endorsement of the West's "universal values"—including constitutional democracy, civil society, a free press, and neoliberal economics.

A more secure and confident government would not institute such a severe crackdown. It is a symptom of the party leadership's deep anxiety and insecurity.

Third, even many regime loyalists are just going through the motions. It is hard to miss the theater of false pretense that has permeated the Chinese body politic for the past few years. Last summer, I was one of a handful

of foreigners (and the only American) who attended a conference about the "China Dream," Mr. Xi's signature concept, at a party-affiliated think tank in Beijing. We sat through two days of mind-numbing, nonstop presentations by two dozen party scholars—but their faces were frozen, their body language was wooden, and their boredom was palpable. They feigned compliance with the party and their leader's latest mantra. But it was evident that the propaganda had lost its power, and the emperor had no clothes.

In December, I was back in Beijing for a conference at the Central Party School, the party's highest institution of doctrinal instruction, and once again, the country's top officials and foreign policy experts recited their stock slogans verbatim. During lunch one day, I went to the campus bookstore—always an important stop so that I can update myself on what China's leading cadres are being taught. Tomes on the store's shelves ranged from Lenin's "Selected Works" to Condoleezza Rice's memoirs, and a table at the entrance was piled high with copies of a pamphlet by Mr. Xi on his campaign to promote the "mass line"—that is, the party's connection to the masses. "How is this selling?" I asked the clerk. "Oh, it's not," she replied. "We give it away." The size of the stack suggested it was hardly a hot item.

Fourth, the corruption that riddles the party-state and the military also pervades Chinese society as a whole. Mr. Xi's anticorruption campaign is more sustained and severe than any previous one, but no campaign can eliminate the problem. It is stubbornly rooted in the single-party system, patron-client networks, an economy utterly lacking in transparency, a state-controlled media, and the absence of the rule of law.

Moreover, Mr. Xi's campaign is turning out to be at least as much a selective purge as an antigraft campaign. Many of its targets to date have been political clients and allies of former Chinese leader Jiang Zemin. Now 88, Mr. Jiang is still the godfather figure of Chinese politics. Going after Mr. Jiang's patronage network while he is still alive is highly risky for Mr. Xi, particularly since Mr. Xi doesn't seem to have brought along his own coterie of loyal clients

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to promote into positions of power. Another problem: Mr. Xi, a child of China's first-generation revolutionary elites, is one of the party's "princelings," and his political ties largely extend to other princelings. This silver-spoon generation is widely reviled in Chinese society at large.

Finally, China's economy—for all the Western views of it as an unstoppable juggernaut—is stuck in a series of systemic traps from which there is no easy exit. In November 2013, Mr. Xi presided over the party's Third Plenum, which unveiled a huge package of proposed economic reforms, but so far, they are sputtering on the launchpad. Yes, consumer spending has been rising, red tape has been reduced, and some fiscal reforms have been introduced, but overall, Mr. Xi's ambitious goals have been stillborn. The reform package challenges powerful, deeply entrenched interest groups—such as state-owned enterprises and local party cadres—and they are plainly blocking its implementation.

These five increasingly evident cracks in the regime's control can be fixed only through political reform. Until and unless China relaxes its draconian political controls, it will never become an innovative society and a "knowledge economy"—a main goal of the Third Plenum reforms. The political system has become the primary impediment to China's needed social and economic reforms. If Mr. Xi and party leaders don't relax their grip, they may be summoning precisely the fate they hope to avoid.

In the decades since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the upper reaches of China's leadership have been obsessed with the fall of its fellow communist giant. Hundreds of Chinese postmortem analyses have dissected the causes of the Soviet disintegration.

Mr. Xi's real "China Dream" has been to avoid the Soviet nightmare. Just a few months into his tenure, he gave a telling internal speech ruing the Soviet Union's demise and bemoaning Mr. Gorbachev's betrayals, arguing that Moscow had lacked a "real man" to stand up to its reformist last leader. Mr. Xi's wave of repression today is meant to be the opposite of Mr. Gorbachev's perestroika and glasnost. Instead of opening up, Mr. Xi is doubling down on controls over dissenters, the economy, and even rivals within the party.

But reaction and repression aren't Mr. Xi's only option. His predecessors, Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao, drew very different lessons from the Soviet collapse. From 2000 to 2008, they instituted policies intended to open up the system with carefully limited political reforms.

They strengthened local party committees and experi-

mented with voting for multicandidate party secretaries. They recruited more businesspeople and intellectuals into the party. They expanded party consultation with nonparty groups and made the Politburo's proceedings more transparent. They improved feedback mechanisms within the party, implemented more meritocratic criteria for evaluation and promotion, and created a system of mandatory midcareer training for all 45 million state and party cadres. They enforced retirement requirements and rotated officials and military officers between job assignments every couple of years.

In effect, for a while Mr. Jiang and Mr. Hu sought to manage change, not to resist it. But Mr. Xi wants none of this. Since 2009 (when even the heretofore open-minded Mr. Hu changed course and started to clamp down), an increasingly anxious regime has rolled back every single one of these political reforms (with the exception of the cadre-training system). These reforms were masterminded by Mr. Jiang's political acolyte and former vice president, Zeng Qinghong, who retired in 2008 and is now under suspicion in Mr. Xi's anticorruption campaign—another symbol of Mr. Xi's hostility to the measures that might ease the ills of a crumbling system.

Some experts think that Mr. Xi's harsh tactics may actually presage a more open and reformist direction later in his term. I don't buy it. This leader and regime see politics in zero-sum terms: Relaxing control, in their view, is a sure step toward the demise of the system and their own downfall. They also take the conspiratorial view that the US is actively working to subvert Communist Party rule. None of this suggests that sweeping reforms are just around the corner.

We cannot predict when Chinese communism will collapse, but it is hard not to conclude that we are witnessing its final phase. The CCP is the world's second-longest ruling regime (behind only North Korea), and no party can rule forever.

Looking ahead, China-watchers should keep their eyes on the regime's instruments of control and on those assigned to use those instruments. Large numbers of citizens and party members alike are already voting with their feet and leaving the country or displaying their insincerity by pretending to comply with party dictates.

We should watch for the day when the regime's propaganda agents and its internal security apparatus start becoming lax in enforcing the party's writ—or when they begin to identify with dissidents, like the East German Stasi agent in the film "The Lives of Others" who came

to sympathize with the targets of his spying. When human empathy starts to win out over ossified authority, the endgame of Chinese communism will really have begun.

Dr. Shambaugh is a professor of international affairs and the director of the China Policy Program at George Washington University and a nonresident senior fellow at the Brookings Institution. His books include *China's Communist Party: Atrophy and Adaptation* and, most recently, *China Goes Global: The Partial Power*.

—*The Wall Street Journal*, March 7-8, 2015, p. C 1-2



A Theology of the Corporation

by Dr. Michael Bauman

I. Genesis 1

Perhaps J. R. R. Tolkien's most salient contribution to theology is the doctrine he called the principle of "sub-creation." By it, he meant that we make according to the principle by which we are made. That is, like all things else, we human creatures were spoken into existence by a multi-personal God acting in unity. We are the result of the powerful and creative word of a plurality-in-unity. That implies three important things: (1) language, (2) community, and (3) mutual love are at the core of all reality. From them, all created things arise.

In Genesis 1:1, we read that "in the beginning *elohim*," a plural word, "created" (a singular verb) "the heavens and the earth." (KJV). That is, a plurality acting as a unity made the world, and He made it with words. He spoke it into existence. The same principle re-emerges later in the same chapter when God says "Let us" (plural) make (singular) man in our (plural) image. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him, male and female created he them" (v. 27).

Note that the image of God is something said about no other creatures but the humans, and that this image is distributed among them across both sexes. While each human creature possesses it, no person has it in its fullness. Without others, male and female, it is incomplete in us. In order to make it more full, in order to manifest it more effectively, we are to be communal, to work in concert with one another, just like our Creator, and we are to work the way he works, by making things with words, by speak-

ing things into existence, things personal and impersonal, and things that are singular and plural simultaneously. Corporations fit that description quite fully.

As God made the universe with words, corporations are made with words, in this case, the precise legal language of incorporation, the result of which is that many persons become one, that corporate one being both personal and impersonal, much like the universe in which it exists, a universe filled with persons and non-persons. A corporation is, as we all know, a person at law, a personal entity replete with rights and obligations, composed of multiple persons, acting in concert, a marvelous thing sprung from words. To revert to Tolkien, we make according to the principle by which we are made.

When God made us, He placed upon our shoulders what theologians call the "creation mandate." We are to have "dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth" (v. 26). "Dominion" here does not mean reckless exploitation. It means the prudent stewardship by which we are to "be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it" (v. 28). It means transforming the entire earth from an uncultivated jungle into productive and well-sustained garden. Corporations can be, and ought to be, part of that creation mandate, part of that stewardship of productive sustainability. Corporations, being in our image, have the same obligations we have, being in God's image. We are to make the best of things, to cultivate the world in ever richer and more productive ways, always with an eye toward our Divinely imposed obligations and our Divinely bestowed opportunities. We are to "fill the earth," leaving none of it less habitable or less productive than is possible, not even the deserts in all their native hostility, which nations like Israel and cities like Las Vegas have turned into a garden, a city, a workplace, a school, and a resort. Much of that subduing was the work of corporations, doing what they, and we, were created to do.

One of the central doctrines of Christianity is the Lordship of Christ. As Lord, He is not the Lord of merely some things, but of all. If He is Lord of all things, then nothing is properly secular. Therefore, anything pursued in a secular fashion is at least partly, if not wholly, mis-pursued. Our task, then, is to bring his Lordship wisely and prudently to bear upon all that we do, including filling the earth, subduing it, and making it what it was meant to be. It means running a corporation as if Jesus were its CEO, as if the One who turned water into wine were still at work, turning deserts into oases.

II. When Corporations Succeed

Just like the persons who form them, corporations sometimes are effective; sometimes not. They have built transcontinental railroads. They have put satellites into orbit. They have pushed the frontiers of digital know-how further and faster than any of us ever expected. They’ve even made the deserts bloom. When corporations succeed in these and other ways, please consider who benefits. The list is impressive and wider than you might think.

When corporations succeed, most folks simply assume that the fat cats get fatter and that the rest of us get left out. Not so. Corporate investors are not who you think they are. They aren’t merely the affluent folks who own big cars and big houses. More frequently they are the little old ladies whose financial security is tied into corporate ventures, whose retirement and well-being depend directly upon corporate success. Corporate yields are their yields. Corporate success keeps their graying heads above water. It keeps those elderly women fed, clothed, and housed. Corporate success means personal success and security for lots of persons who otherwise would be worse off, maybe even desperate and indigent. When the desert blooms, the poor become less poor. I’m glad about that. I’m glad that thousands of folks have a prosperous and secure old age rather than having their final years immersed in penury and want. When corporations succeed, the elderly succeed.

So do workers. When the desert becomes a resort, workers of every sort find jobs where there used to be nothing.

Cooks, valets, bellmen, housekeepers, managers, wait staff, caddies, car rental workers, high-end shop owners and shop keepers, just to name a few, all get jobs. So do home-builders, developers, contractors, and the laborers, architects, electricians, plumbers, carpenters, brick layers, roofers, and painters needed to build the houses in which the folks who now work in the blossoming desert need to live. So do the police, the fire fighters, the school builders, the teachers, and the administrators needed to make the new communities safe and efficient. And where people go, so do churches. Those churches require the same things everyone else requires: They need worship facilities, houses, and schools for their staff, and all the attendant blessings of community. Have I mentioned book stores, fitness clubs, car dealers, and clothing stores? Successful corporations make it possible.

There’s more: the desert itself benefits. Its native dangers are tamed, domesticated. Rivers and streams are re-routed and managed. Farmers are attracted. Land

is irrigated and food is grown. Hunger gets pushed back a little further. Parks get designed and built, along with their ponds, lakes, bike paths, and numerous conveniences. Wastelands become a pleasure spot. Barrenness becomes an oasis.

I am not saying that corporations are perfect. They are not. Like all human institutions, they have their flaws. They make mistakes, and it is only fair to acknowledge them.

I am saying that when corporations succeed, so also do the elderly and retired, the working class and the investor class, churches, the hungry and the indigent, and even the desert itself. When corporations succeed, so do employers, employees, and the environment.



First Class Assassinations

by Ariel Cohen

The murder of my good friend Boris Nemtsov is a personal tragedy. When we met for lunch in Tel Aviv a few months ago, I warned him not to return to Moscow. Posters and ads denouncing him as a “national traitor” had been plastered all over the city’s Novy Arbat Avenue and on the Internet.

His 87-year-old mother Dina, a retired pediatrician, also warned him to watch his mouth, “otherwise Putin will kill you,” he disclosed in a recent interview. Mother knew best.

Just like being named an “enemy of the people” under Stalin, the label “national traitor” or “foreign agent” under Russian President Vladimir Putin can mean a long prison sentence—or death. “To paraphrase *Pravda*, Putin is the Stalin of today,” says Stephen Blank, senior fellow at the American Foreign Policy Council and author of a book on Stalin’s nationality policy.

Boris Nemtsov joins the long list of assassinated friends and acquaintances over years. It includes Duma members Galina Starovoytova and Sergei Yushenkov, *Novaya Gazeta* editor Yuri Shchekochikhin, Serbian Prime Minister Goran Djindjic and Georgian Prime Minister Zurab Zhvania. I did not meet Alexander Litvinenko, the fugitive FSB officer who was poisoned with polonium in London, attorney Sergey Magnitsky, who died in a Moscow prison in 2009, or the slain journalist Anna Politkovsk-

kaya, but their names belong on this list of martyrs as well.

The damage wrought by Nemtsov's murder, and the murders which preceded it, goes well beyond the personal. This trail of blood and tears has enormous implications for Russia, both political and economic.

Since 2011, Russia has been rapidly transitioning away from a "soft" authoritarian state, where the principal means of control were restricted access to the state-dominated media, stuffed ballot boxes, and police batons. All that is now in the past.

In the new Russia, there is a fierce struggle going on between "system liberals"—essentially, market economists who include former Deputy Prime Minister Alexei Kudrin, Deputy Prime Ministers Igor Shuvalov and Arkady Dvorkovich—and the "siloviki"—the men of the security services and armed forces. They include Mr. Putin's confidante Igor Sechin, Defense Minister Sergey Shoygu, Investigations Committee head and former Putin classmate Alexander Bastrykin, as well as Security Council Chairman Nikolai Patrushev.

Thus far, the siloviki have been in ascendancy, and Kremlin political captains Vladislav Surkov and Vyacheslav Volodin also like to play rough. It is too early to say who gave the order to kill Nemtsov on the eve of a mass rally against the war in Ukraine and just prior to his release of a report on the Russian military involvement there. However, the truth will come out sooner rather than later because the factional struggle inside the Kremlin is intensifying.

The current turn toward "high" authoritarianism, replete with external warfare and internal murders, as well as an incessant barrage of hate-filled TV brainwashing, suggests that Russia will not see the dawn of democracy any time soon. On the contrary, what is coming is a calamitous period for the country, not unlike the fascist takeovers in Italy, Germany, Argentina, or Chile in the last century.

As the dictatorship hardens, witch hunts ensue. Millions of the best and the brightest are leaving the country. Pro-Kremlin cohorts are attacking democratic and environmental activists. Gays are being reviled on television and beaten in the streets. Businesses are being expropriated and entrepreneurs driven into exile. Brave souls who tell the truth, like Boris Nemtsov, are being murdered.

Irreparable damage is being done by raising the degree of political risk involved in foreign investments in Russia and in Russian firms abroad. The EU and US sanctions imposed in response to the Kremlin-backed war in Ukraine

and low oil prices will eventually bankrupt Moscow.

Recently, British authorities blocked a \$5.5 billion sale of oil and gas fields in the North Sea to the LetterOne investment fund, which sought to acquire the German energy company Dea. LetterOne is owned by Russian oligarchs Mikhail Fridman and German Khan, who may face sanctions in the future.

Exxon has frozen its investments in the Russian Arctic due to the sanctions. Last December, Mr. Putin killed the South Stream, a giant natural gas pipeline project worth \$30 billion.

Beyond deals involving natural resources, food and consumer goods, Russia had been having a hard time attracting foreign investments even before the war in Ukraine began.

For the last couple of years, capital flight from Russia has been estimated at \$120 billion annually. This is close to 5 percent of the country's gross domestic product. Clearly, Russia's businessmen are voting with their feet. Now, with clear signals that the Kremlin has set a course for stone-cold fascism, capital flight from Russia is likely to exceed even those recent records.

Thus, the murder of my friend Boris Nemtsov is but the tip of an iceberg. The iceberg is a political system based on murder, corruption, and Orwellian propaganda. It presents the burden of political and reputational risk that Western businesses should consider carefully before investing in Russia.

- Ariel Cohen is director of the Center for Energy, Natural Resources and Geopolitics at the Institute for the Analysis of Global Security and principal of International Market Analysis Ltd.

—*The Washington Times*, March 9, 2015

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The Obama-Francis “Axis” Cuba, Sleights-of-Hand, and Confusion

by Armando F. Valladares

Cuba, my homeland, just completed 56 years of martyrdom under a nefarious Communist Revolution. Before this gigantic drama and tragic anniversary, hardly a voice of outrage is raised throughout the world over a situation that cries out to heaven to be heard.

Year after year many governments rend their garments at the UN condemning the so-called US “external embargo” and send messages of greeting to the Castro tyrants. But not a word is spoken about the regime’s implacable “internal embargo” against the 12 million inhabitants of the island prison.

We are witnessing one of the greatest examples of a publicity sleight of hand in history: a regime that for decades was the spearhead of bloody revolutions in Latin America and Africa and still has ideological umbilical cords throughout the three Americas, whose deserved image as an aggressor has instead become a mendacious image of a victim.

Silence in face of oppression

Countless times international aid has been given to the Cuban regime that has allowed and continues to allow its survival. There was the huge financial backing of the Soviet Union until its collapse; of Chavez in Venezuela until it recently fell apart; and of the Lula-Dilma regimes in Brazil which also finds itself now with emptier coffers.

The Cuba deal: already under discussion at Francis’ meeting with Obama in March 2014 at the Vatican

And now the unexpected Obama-Francis “axis” surges in the Americas. A sui generis spiritual-political “axis” that,

regardless of the intentions of its high personages, will provide rivers of money and lend prestigious publicity to keep afloat the repressive apparatus of the communist regime.

On December 19, two days after the announcement in Rome of the restoration of diplomatic relations between the US government and the Cuban dictatorship, Castro’s Coast Guard, presumably in international waters, rammed against a boat carrying 32 persons fleeing from Cuba—including seven women and two children—and sank the frail craft.

Those Cubans were simply seeking freedom and trying to break the infamous “internal embargo” that Castro’s tyranny has imposed on the people.

Masiel Castilian González, a woman who survived the attack and whose husband drowned, narrated by phone later: “We were screaming and crying out for help because the boat was sinking. But they ignored us. Instead, they continued charging against our boat. Some persons jumped into the water and others stayed aboard as the boat sank.”

“They knew there were children aboard, but continued to charge against us. They didn’t care,” she said. It was a brutal action on the part of a regime whose back is covered by powerful allies.

This criminal act committed by the Castro regime deserved a global outcry of repudiation, but it was generally ignored by the international press, Western governments, advocacy groups for “human rights” and, pain of pains!—by ecclesiastics who should imitate the Good Shepherd, ready to give His life for His sheep.

On December 31, a repressive wave was released against dissidents who simply planned to meet in the Plaza of the Revolution in Havana, to coincide with the 56 years of Revolution. This illustrates well, should there be any doubt, the real disposition of the regime.

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The betrayal of Francis

Pope Francis urged an international gathering of grassroots social activists to struggle against the “structural causes” of poverty and inequality, with a “revolutionary” program drawn from the Gospels.—Francis X. Rocca, *Catholic News Service*, October 28, 2014

In the United States, many specialists have documented how the almost unconditional support of the US government for the Cuban regime harms the cause of freedom on the island, whose inhabitants are still at the mercy of tyrants. Consequently, harsh criticism is made of President Obama (cf. “Cuban dissidents blast Obama’s betrayal”, “Obama gives the Castro regime in Cuba undeserved rescue”).

However, few analysts point out the most serious and tragic aspect of the recent accord: the responsibility that falls on its most eminent inspirer and mediator, the Pontiff Francis.

It is extremely painful to say, but the boot with which Castro continues to crush Cubans on the island now has the highest ecclesial endorsement.

We must remember that these “detainees” were actually Cuban spies prosecuted and convicted by the State Justice system for complicity in the murder of members of the Miami-based anti-communist group Brothers to the Rescue, as well as plans to introduce explosives in Miami to carry out terrorist acts.

Therefore, the ringleader of the “detainees” (called the Cuban Five) had two life sentences.

This is not the first time that Francis, independent of his intentions, has taken actions that objectively favor the political and ecclesiastical left on our Continent.

For example, at the World Meeting of Popular Movements that gathered in Rome from October 27-29, 2014, 100 revolutionary world leaders met, including known Latin American professional agitators. http://www.traditioninaction.org/Questions/B746_Marx.html - stinks

I have commented on other occasions of similar incidents, as when Francis overturned the “suspension a divinis” of the infamous Maryknoll priest from Nicaragua, Miguel D’Escoto Brockmann, former Sandinista foreign minister and one of the most pro-Castro figures of Liberation Theology. D’Escoto was suspended by the Vatican in 1984 for his involvement in the persecution of Catholics during the first Nicaraguan Sandinista government (cf. “Francis, Pro-Castro and Confusion”, Armando

Valladares, August 6, 2014).

Unfortunately, with regard to Cuba and Latin America, the words, deeds and gestures of Francis are directly or indirectly favoring the oppression of the Cuban people and the leftward shift of the Continent. In this respect, we find ourselves facing a pontificate marked by confusion and even chaos, with disturbing consequences for the political, social, and Christian future of the Americas.

As a Catholic and a former Cuban political prisoner who spent 22 years in Castro’s dungeons—my faith strengthened hearing the screams of young Catholics who died from the “firing squad“ shouting “Viva Cristo Rey! Down with Communism!”—I must admit the perplexity, anxiety, and deep feelings raised by the events described above. This is the most painful situation possible because it regards the bonds to the Holy See.

However, as I have noted on other occasions, the faith of Catholics must remain intact and even strengthened before these dilemmas because, in political and diplomatic matters, even Popes are fallible. And there is no obligation for Catholics to accept these words and deeds to the extent that they stray from the traditional line adopted by the Church in relation to Communism.

—Miami, Florida, January 4, 2015

Armando Valladares, writer, painter and poet, spent 22 years in Cuba’s political prisons. He is the author of the bestseller *Against All Hope*, which recounts the horror of Castro’s prisons. He was United States Ambassador to the UN Human Rights Commission under the Reagan and Bush Administrations. He received the Citizen’s Presidential Medal and the Superior Award of the State Department. He has written numerous articles on ecclesiastical collaboration with Cuban communism and Vatican “Ostpolitik” with Cuba.

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