

Chernobyl, Covid, and the Curse of Communism

by Lev Tsitrin



Chinese doctor who tried to warn world of pandemic

Two major disasters that shook the world, a nuclear one at Chernobyl, and a medical one known as Covid are, on the surface, starkly different. The former affected just the country in which it occurred; the latter, the world outside it. One was rooted in physics, the other, in biology. And yet, there are commonalities. Both were a product of scientific progress, and both resulted from the desire to push it further. The experiment that caused the Chernobyl disaster was supposed to help prevent the hypothetical nuclear meltdown at power plants; the Covid virus apparently escaped a lab dedicated to keeping us safe from such diseases. But the most important similarity, I would argue, is that both occurred

under the Communist rule.

This is important not so much because the Western countries are free from accidents – they are not, as the Three Mile Island, the Challenger, and the Deepwater Horizon disasters tragically illustrate – but because of the contrasting ways in which the two systems handle them.

Ideology-based systems of governance like Communism, Nazism, and Islamism, for all the difference in their ideologies, share one key feature: since they are based on a doctrine that their adherents perceive as infallible, those in power treat their system as perfect and, in fact, sacred, thus to be defended at all costs. What their perfection means, is that bad things cannot happen there. Since they cannot happen, they do not happen. Which in practical terms means that if and when they do happen, the government reacts as if they did not happen – with dire consequences. The Soviet government publicly acknowledged the Chernobyl disaster only after Swedish nuclear plant's operators mistook Chernobyl's fallout that reached Sweden for their plant's radioactive leak, and raised the alarm about their own plant. Not only did the Soviet government keep its citizens in the dark when the incident occurred; a week later, it proceeded with the official May Day parade in the cities near Chernobyl, further exposing people to the fallout. And, needless to say, the Chinese Communists acted similarly in the Covid situation, initially hush-hushing it: move on folks, nothing to see here. Under Communism, there is never anything to see.

The Western societies operate differently not only because their freer system lets journalists be more independent and aggressive, informing the public and keeping the government accountable – but also because there is a recognition that the social system is not perfect. Hence, acknowledging a problem does not mean losing the face. In part, this attitude was inherited from the evangelical view that biblical Fall rendered humans sinful and imperfect. If Western countries are

to be considered ideological at all, their ideology is exactly the opposite of the Communist or Islamist idea of perfection under which the regime can do no wrong because it follows the ultimate truth discovered by Marx/Lenin/Mao/Xi/Mohammed/Khomenei, and, therefore, denies being in the wrong with all its might – even at the cost of endangering people’s lives. In sharp contrast, the West merely hopes for a “more perfect” social union, the idea of change vial elections being constantly in the air; so bad things happening in the West merely invite remedial measures – but not the denial that they happened. An accident in China or Iran, if acknowledged, undermines the all-important perfection of their system, a proverbial egg splashed not just on the face of the government, but, much worse, all over the sacred ideologies they espouse as the ultimate truth.

This leaves the regimes based on ideological perfection with no tools of staying in power other than brute force. Any acknowledgment of imperfection will bring a thought of a possibility of a better system of governance, shattering a major taboo. Hence, such regimes have no choice but to insist that a change can only be for the worst, a product of demonic “counter-revolution.” To prevent such terrible evil, they have to blind – or the very least, mute – those who see their imperfections. Hence, intimidation of the populace through surveillance and arrests. This, in fact, is the key lesson they must have learned from the Gorbachev’s “perestroika:” his acknowledgment of the need for “rebuilding” the Soviet system implied that the system was imperfect – and once the people heard it, their eyes opened to the fact that the Emperor of Communism had no clothes. The screws of indoctrination loosened, people started to openly mock the Soviet system, putting Communists on the defensive when they no longer had the shield of doctrinal infallibility. Nothing can survive mockery, and the system was finished. The Chinese and the ayatollahs will bully, imprison, and kill those who notice and say that the ideological “truth” of Communism or Islamism in

which the regimes are wrapped is not true.

What underpins ideological regimes like the Communist China, or Islamist Iran was called in biblical times an “idol” – a man-made thing worshiped as a god. Idolatry gives the confidence to act, yet because it is utterly misleading, that action leads only to self-destruction. Ideological idols of China, North Korea, and Iran promise blessings and salvation, yet in fact they only bring a curse. Chernobyl and Covid are just two practical results; the millions who died in China’s Cultural Revolution, or in the Soviet collectivization and Gulags, or in the North Korean famine (or for that matter, the thousands of Iranians killed, as we now learn, by the newly-“elected” Iranian president in his prior career of a “judge”), being gruesome reminders of the curse of blind, idolatrous trust in those who, like ayatollahs and Communists, claim to know better.

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