

WHAT TO DO WHEN THE RUSSIANS COME: A SURVIVOR'S GUIDE

(ROBERT CONQUEST)

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One fine day in April, 1945, a cousin of mine was shot by the Russians. His name was Félix Straszer. His crime? None, of course. In February, Stalin had conquered and occupied Budapest, overwhelming determined and heroic Hungarian and German resistance. Two dead Russian soldiers had been found in the street, so the Russians rounded up all the men from the nearby apartment houses, collected them in the Gamma Optical Instruments Factory, chose ten at random, and murdered them. As it turned out, the two soldiers had been killed by other Russian soldiers in a drunken brawl, but that didn't help Félix Straszer.

Such behavior, and vastly worse, multiplied thousands of times over, ever was and always shall be the behavior of the Left when it seizes total power. A few details may vary, due to local culture or the degree of military action, but none of the substance. A salutary and timely reminder of this basic truth is offered by a reading today of Robert Conquest's 1985 book, *What to Do When the Russians Come*. With the benefit of hindsight, our first reaction on hearing about this forgotten book is that it must be a satire, and if not a satire, that Conquest got it wrong, contemplating and half predicting a *Red Dawn*-like takeover of America only four years before the collapse of the Soviet Communist empire. True, the Russians never came, but had they, what Conquest details would have taken place. He was not wrong in that. And his book of warning, not in the least satirical, usefully abstracts the universal conduct of the Left; it is therefore not a mere frozen slice of alternate history, but a living document with present-day application.

Conquest, who was born in 1917 and died in 2015, was perhaps the world's leading expert on the Soviet Union. Because he was an anti-Communist scholar, he was viciously attacked his entire career by other Western academics, who after World War II were, and to this day are, dominated by philo-Communists, eager to excuse the crimes of Communism (and of the Left generally), and to draw false moral equivalence between Communism and the Cold War governments of the West. In particular, Conquest's books detailing for the first time the crimes

of Stalin, both the purges of the 1930s and the earlier Ukrainian terror famine, were greeted with rage and contempt, although, no surprise, Conquest was proved completely correct after the fall of Communism.

This book advises the reader what to expect and how to behave under Soviet occupation of the American mainland. He would, Conquest warned, face horrors and hard choices. None of what Conquest wrote was fiction; Conquest merely transposed actual Soviet behavior, from 1919 Poland to 1984 Afghanistan, into a new geographical frame. We think of the 1980s Soviet Union as a sclerotic and slightly silly society, a fragile gerontocracy, and that's true enough, in retrospect (and in those characteristics has many parallels to our own current ruling class, which I intend to explore in a future piece). But the Soviet Union in the 1980s was also a society, and government, with tremendous power that was still in the grip of a poisonous utopian ideology, and it gave little sign of crumbling. In the West, popular media focused not on the danger to the West, but rather obsessively on the risks of nuclear war, as in agitprop films such as *The Day After*. All correct-thinking people cooperated to broadcast a unified message, that the worst possible course of political action was to offer any substantive resistance to the Soviet Union. Ronald Reagan was therefore excoriated by our already-rotting ruling class, because he refused to play the game. "Here's my strategy on the Cold War. We win, they lose." So it happened.

Or that is how it appeared. As we can see now, however, the ideology of Soviet Communism did not die with the Soviet Union. It was smoothly absorbed into so-called liberal democracy with which, as Ryszard Legutko has ably outlined, and as Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn warned us before Communism fell, it shared most of its first principles. That's not what the average citizens of the Soviet empire wanted—they wanted a return to traditional values and traditional society, a restoration of ordered freedom, not the destructive atomized individualism of the West. But then, nobody consulted them; the Communist ruling class simply made new friends with the Western ruling class, and enriched themselves while imposing the latter's ideology. The fruits of this failure to destroy and cauterize the ideology underlying Communism we see today, with Russia and the Visegrád countries bitterly resisting increasingly fierce efforts by the dying American empire to complete imposing its ruling class ideology, globohomo, a sibling of Communism. It wasn't

supposed to be this way in the heady days of 1990, though in retrospect it was probably inevitable. It is strange how history works.

Speaking of history, Conquest identifies the Soviet Union of the 1980s as nastier than that of the 1960s, but not as bad as that of the 1950s, suggesting that the simple straight line from Stalin to *perestroika* that we are told sums up twentieth-century Russian history is, at a minimum, not complete. On the other hand, it's also true that in the 1980s, some Soviet misbehavior was exaggerated. For example, I remember much being made on the Right about the Soviets air-dropping mines disguised as toys in Afghanistan. As we've seen innumerable times in the past thirty years, propaganda designed to drive public support for the American ideological empire and benefit those who gain from conflict, from lies about babies dying in incubators in Kuwait to lies about Viktor Orbán, is very common. It turns out, upon a little research today, that the Soviets used a mine, the PFM-1, that was almost certainly the source of such claims. The mine was painted green (for use in Europe, but then transposed to the rock and sand of Afghanistan) and looked a little like a bird. So, perhaps, there was less nastiness to the late Soviet empire than Conquest thought, although certainly it was bad enough.

Is Conquest's book accurate about what would have happened in America if occupied by the Soviets, after perhaps a limited nuclear war or just as the result of a failure of will? Mostly yes, but I think he ignores that the Soviets never occupied any country nearly the size and scale of the United States. Thus, he paints a picture of massive looting, rape, and murder being the first experience Americans would have of a Soviet occupation. In the cities that would be true, to be sure, but even leaving aside armed resistance (of which more later), outside the cities it seems as if the number of soldiers required would be completely impractical to truly occupy the country. (For an updated analysis of this matter, you should read Kurt Schlichter's analysis of the impossibility of Blue America militarily occupying Red America.) Control would therefore require local assistance, built up over time.

That control would depend on coopting Americans into a new ruling class, something the Soviets indeed had much experience with. Conquest spends considerable time transposing into the American context this usual political approach of the Soviets. A key would have been using compliant existing American political leaders as front men

to staff institutions, providing a veneer of normalcy in the transition to totalitarian rule. Recruiting such men has never been hard when the Left seizes power. Some are looking for the main chance, some could be blackmailed, and many were ideologically sympathetic to the new rulers. (Czesław Miłosz's *The Captive Mind*, which Conquest does not mention, deftly sketches each of these types in the Polish context, as well as has much else to say of the mental attitude of those under occupation.) We can even, looking backward, see who some of these men would have been. Take the odious John Brennan, director of the CIA under Barack Obama and a nasty exemplar of the rot at the core of the modern American state, who was a Soviet sympathizer in the 1970s (and no doubt long after), voting for the Communist Party candidate for President in 1976. He would have been a key man in the new system in Conquest's scenario. Regardless of these skills and front men, the Communists would directly control all key levers of power, in particular the army and the secret police. And over time, they would fully cement power, bringing more areas of life fully into their orbit, and purging every level and aspect of society of any person deemed to be unreliable.

Plenty of ongoing violence would have awaited America too. The Soviets arrested, as a matter of course, entire categories of people, and either shot them or sent them all to labor camps from which many did not return. Conquest offers practical advice if you are a member of one of these groups, whether ex-military, clergy, wealthy (even a little above the norm), active in politics, or some other target category. This advice includes having warm clothing ready when the police come, what to expect from forced confessions, and physical and psychological fitness. Staffing America with camp guards, torturers, and secret policemen would be easy; Conquest estimates that, in any country, two to three percent of the population "will be ready to carry out, for power and payment, the most revolting tasks that any regime wishes to perform," and that seems about right, looking at BLM and Antifa types, and highly relevant today. For those not an immediate target of the new government, keeping a low profile makes the most sense. Life will get harder, much harder. Consumer goods will be essentially nonexistent, and automobiles (and gasoline) will soon largely disappear. Barter will be common. But at least you'll be alive and "free," in the sense of not being in prison.

A good portion of the book is taken up with specific advice for individuals in various walks of life, from “Academic” to “Pharmacist” to “Youth.” It occurred to me, reading this data, that it was boring to me, because I know everything in it, but that a young person today probably knows nothing at all in it, and many would reject it as paranoid hysteria. After all, even before the fall of the Soviet empire, American schools rarely taught anything about the horrors of Communist domination, and since 1990, I am quite sure that schools teach exactly none of it.

Not coincidentally, Conquest’s description of academic life under Communism is eerily prescient, for it essentially describes today’s American academy, from the elevation of the politically correct and the degradation of any person suspected of not conforming, to snitches in classes reporting professors for any wrongthink, to the removal of any non-ideological text, to the requirement to “import Marxist-Leninist jargon into the most unlikely topics.” Merely substitute “woke” for “Marxist-Leninist,” and today’s universities, and increasingly all publicly-funded (and many privately-funded) schools, are indistinguishable from what Conquest describes. Thus, Conquest says of schoolteachers, “You too will have to teach your pupils versions of history that are entirely untrue.” We have the 1619 Project. “You too will lead them in ceremonies of loyalty to the regime.” We have race grifting and forced celebration of sexual deviants. “You will spend hours on teachers’ committees in which ways of improving the political education of the children is discussed.” We have forced participation in how to indoctrinate children in the filthy ideology today called “diversity, equity, and inclusion.”

What further strikes a reader of this book is how much of the Soviet program of thought control of the society as a whole has already been successfully implemented here by the Left. “Authentic news will be largely absent, and what there is will be highly dubious.” So-called mainstream news in America today is far less reliable than *Pravda* and Tass (the Communist equivalent of the Associated Press) were in 1985. As the average Russian knew at the time, but more so, the only purpose in reading the *New York Times* or watching CNN is to know what lies the ruling classes are trying to feed us, and to try to ascertain truth by reading between the lines or noting what is not said. “You will have to develop a feeling for the plausibility or implausibility of anything you hear. . . . Often you will have to suspend judgment until some later piece

of information confirms or refutes what you have heard.” For example, and relevant to Dementia Joe’s turn to recognizing the Chinese probably artificially created the Wuhan Plague, “Particularly sharp concentration on the evils of China or some other foreign country may well imply that war is contemplated.” The problem is that, unlike the Russians or others under the Soviet heel, a great number of Americans seem very bad at this and easily subject to emotivism based on fabulism. For example, huge percentages of Americans believe laughable total falsehoods about the effects and dangers of the Wuhan Plague, simply because they have been consistently lied to and can’t bother to think for themselves, or even to spend a little time reading the actual facts disproving what they have been told.

Equally applicable to today is Conquest’s description of the Left’s hyper-politicization of social existence. “Then, as the Occupation tightens its grip, you will have to accustom yourself to the prospect of living a life that will be totally politicized. In all Communist countries, politics is an obsession, the central core of all thought and activity. You will find your life is heavily bound up with questions of your own orthodoxy; with matters of heresy, schism, blasphemy and back-sliding; and of the orthodoxy of the people around you.” “You will begin to practice the compartmentalized existence practiced by all people who survive under a Communist dictatorship.” This is certainly true here, and anyone in the professional-managerial elite, even in Red America, lives in fear of being named a heretic and punished. Often I have dinner with normal, apolitical people, who look fearfully around each time they realize they intend to enunciate a forbidden thought, such as that there exist only two sexes, knowing that if a single person hears and reports them to the authorities they could be ruined. (I don’t bear this risk, which is why I more and more loudly declaim wildly heretical statements in public, for fun, hoping to cause a conflict.) The good news is that the resentment this inevitably breeds will be possible to weaponize when the fracture comes.

Under Russian occupation, there were still some sources of truth. Conquest says, “[I]f you wish to remain well informed, you will have to rely on rumor and on foreign broadcasts.” For us, foreign broadcasts are of limited use, since almost all English-language media has been completely corrupted. And rumor is a very poor guide to reality. On

the other hand, we have the internet, undreamed of by Conquest, which allows open communication, if enough effort is put into circumventing the extreme censorship regime on all popular internet platforms. The problem with the internet, though, is the same as with rumor—separating lies and exaggeration from fact is very difficult. For example, again of the Wuhan Plague, I knew early on its danger was grossly exaggerated when videos circulated showing obvious lies, such as Chinese people dropping dead in the street (lies also pushed with the influenza pandemic in 2009), or purporting to show the Chinese government welding the doors of apartment buildings to imprison residents. Yet huge numbers of people blindly believed these, and believe innumerable other, lies, on this and many other topics, and those on the Right are far from immune to this problem. What might help us is the creation and dissemination of foreign-produced English-language media by reliable sources, perhaps the Hungarian and Polish governments, but such production is very expensive, and those governments aren't rich (and moreover, as of yet, are still far too dependent on America and its German satrapy).

It might be objected that it is histrionic to compare today's American Left to a Soviet occupation. Nobody is getting shot or raped in today's America (except perhaps, as far as rape, the political prisoners increasingly being held by the Left, and a few people killed by the BLM troops of the Left, plus Ashli Babbitt). Wait a little, though—as I've said before, in my criticism of Rod Dreher's Pollyanna-ish vision, the soft totalitarianism of the Pink Police State will inevitably morph into hard totalitarianism, and the death toll will mount rapidly, in direct proportion to Left power, unless it is first broken.

And what of resistance? Conquest offers a judicious endorsement of resistance, and offers hope that the Soviet empire will crumble soon enough. In fact, at a time when the CIA was telling us the Soviet economy was robust, Conquest says "The Soviet Union is economically far behind the United States. American technology is always a generation ahead of theirs. They have to turn to the United States for wheat. The Soviet economy is at a dead end." Conquest suggests that escape from occupied America, if possible, makes sense because you might be able to return within a few years upon "the inevitable eventual breakup of the Soviet empire." He's optimistic about the "Youth"—they may, in

their teens, be convinced Communists, but are likely to turn against it, and “you may find that the overthrow of Soviet power will come when you are still in the full vigor of, perhaps, your forties, when you will provide the leaders to build a new America and a new world.” “In Soviet-occupied countries, it has been the young who have formed the core of mass resistance whenever that has become feasible.” That’s probably going to be true here too. (It’s a silly myth that youth in the Soviet empire wanted Western clothes and music, and for that reason began to oppose the system. They wanted, as I say, neither Communism nor the West’s political philosophy, although to be fair the corrosion eating at the West was largely masked in the 1980s, and well-stocked grocery shelves were not something to sneer at.)

How is that resistance to manifest? Conquest in effect endorses partisan activity. I think he grossly underrates how feasible that would be—not only does he gloss over the sheer size of America, as I discuss above, but he very strangely claims, as a positive, that Americans own “nine million” private firearms. Even in 1985, Americans owned hundreds of millions of guns, not nine million, and now it’s probably close to a billion, an inconceivably great number of highly useful tools that last hundreds of years. Far more than Conquest suggests, resistance to tyranny would, if the moral fiber and determination of the resisters was up to the task, make Communist, or any Left, rule untenable very rapidly.

Thus, strangely, viewed from a certain retrospective angle, this is an optimistic book. We won, they lost. And while it seems like the ideological twin of Soviet Communism, today’s American Left, is on the ascendant, their grip on power is likely to fade just as quickly, and unforeseeably. It’ll probably need some aggressive pushing to get the job done, though. If you keep in mind the future this book outlines, you’ll feel more motivated to push.