

June 24, 2004

Draft fundraising letter for
the Victims of Communism
Memorial Foundation

name
address1
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Dear xxx:

As our nation recently paid its last respects to President Ronald Reagan, one theme, one shining achievement, rose above all others: He led the West to victory in the Cold War against Soviet Communism. Ronald Reagan possessed the strength of character to look the Evil Empire in the face and stare it down. And for that we revere him.

During that week of mourning and remembrance, the outpouring of appreciation was probably more than most of us hoped for, certainly more than we expected. A great President, often maligned during his presidency, was at last receiving due recognition for his greatest triumph. It gave Americans a sense of finality, the closing of that long, dark chapter of the Cold War.

That chapter, however, is not yet complete, and that is why I'm writing to you today. The Cold War is certainly over. The West most assuredly prevailed. And the man who led us to victory received the tribute that he earned. But we have yet to pay our proper respects to the most grievous aspect of the scourge of Communism: its victims.

The Victims of Communism Foundation is very close, now, to building a memorial in Washington, D.C., dedicated to those victims. I hope you will consider helping us erect a permanent tribute to those forgotten millions. Before I tell you about the memorial, let me give you some background that puts this project in perspective.

We can take some measure of this unfinished business by way of comparison. I suspect that if you asked people to name the greatest moral outrage of the 20th century, many if not most would say it

was the Nazi Holocaust. And when you think about it, that's understandable, because Nazism has such a clear identity in our minds. It was personified in the maniacal figure of Adolf Hitler. He visited his atrocities on a particular race of people, European Jews. His favored engines of murder were gas chambers at the extermination camps. His grisly campaign was waged by a single nation, Germany. Thousands of American soldiers fought and died in the most famous military invasion of the 20th century, D-Day, to liberate Europe from Hitler's grip. Countless movies and documentaries have given us graphic images of Nazism in all its grotesqueness, and its 10 million victims are memorably represented in such innocent figures as Anne Frank.

All of these markers converge to put a distinctly recognizable face on the evil of Nazism. Since 1993, thousands of detailed brush strokes have been added by the United States Holocaust Museum in Washington, bringing Nazism out in bold relief against a hundred years of history. So when we search our minds for the most sinister episodes of the 20th century, it is understandable if we first think of Nazism.

Now, please try to imagine something that seems unfathomable. Try to imagine *ten* Adolf Hitlers: ten Dachaus, ten death camps for every one that existed, ten Gestapos herding humans into cattle cars, ten victims for every innocent soul murdered at the hands of the Nazis. And try to imagine all that happening in less than a century. As unfathomable as it may seem, that is our best estimate of Communism's human toll during the 20th century. More than 100 million people were killed under color of that hideous ideology.

How do we begin to comprehend the magnitude of that figure, 100 million victims? Try this: The Washington, D.C., phone book is about three inches thick and has more than 1,300 pages, with about 250 names on each page. If we listed the names of Communism's victims in that format, they would fill more than 300 phone books. Stacked up, they would reach the top of a seven-story building.

This at least is a visual image the mind can grasp. But it is more than a measure of Communism's victims. It is a measure of a blind spot that has obscured our perception of those victims. In her book *Gulag: A History*, Anne Applebaum notes that even in post-Soviet Russia, you will find no monuments or museums to commemorate the victims of Communism. There have been "no public truth-telling sessions in Russia, no parliamentary hearings, no official

investigations of any kind into the murders or the massacres or the camps of the USSR.”

It's much the same here in America. Though we expressed boundless gratitude for President Reagan's courageous stand against Communism, our nation's capital has no memorials, no monuments, no museums, nothing of any note to express our sympathy for those 100 million victims. We haven't so much forgotten Communism's victims as we've never consciously and deliberately identified them *as victims*.

This, too, is understandable, because Communism lacks most of those identifying characteristics that make Nazism stand out against the broad sweep of history.

- Communism has no central villain like Hitler to personify it, but rather scores of dictators: Lenin, Stalin, Pol Pot, Ho Chi Minh, Mao, Tito, Ceausescu, Castro, Ortega, Kim Jong Il, and many, many others.
- There is no single nation like Germany where we can locate Communist atrocities, but scores of countries all over the globe. At its height, Communism enslaved the peoples of more than 40 nations.
- Communism has no favored instrument of death like the gas chambers of the Third Reich to rivet our attention. Its victims have been starved by the millions in Ukraine, crushed under tank treads in Ethiopia, frozen to death in the gulags of Siberia, butchered by machetes in sub-Saharan Africa, beaten to death on Cuba's Isle of Pines, worked to death in the rice paddies of Cambodia, shot down by firing squads in Romania, and subjected to no end of unspeakable tortures the world over.

What we have in the history of Communism is an evil so vast and so varied that the mind simply cannot take it all in. And that is one reason we need a memorial to its victims in our nation's capital: to provide a focal point that coalesces all that evil into a single concept: *victims*. No matter where, when, or in what variant Communism has been implemented, it has always produced victims, millions upon millions of victims.

It is a matter of simple decency, of course to memorialize the forgotten millions, many of whom were buried like so much rubbish without even a simple stone to mark their graves. But there

is a larger and more fundamental reason to do so, and it has to do with preserving the blessing of freedom that you and I enjoy.

Let me explain. Economists tell us that the value of anything is measured by the forgone alternatives. The value of your car is measured not just by the uses it serves but also by the food or clothing or education you might have bought with the same dollars.

And so it is with liberty. We cannot fully appreciate the value of our freedom by the many ways that we enjoy it day by day. We don't take full measure of its value until we understand what it would mean to be unfree. And we do that by example, by pausing now and then to reflect on those who lost their freedom. In identifying the victims of Communism and paying tribute to them, we reaffirm our own claim to liberty. We fully comprehend moral goodness only when we look evil in the face; and in doing so, we fortify our resolve to cherish and preserve the blessings of liberty.

These are large lessons, and they're crucial to preserving America's priceless legacy of freedom. As a free people, we have a duty to teach those lessons, continually and deliberately, to each new generation. That is the nature and value of this memorial to the victims of Communism. It will stand as physical presence and constant reminder of the greatest evil history has ever seen, and as a symbol of our respect and sympathy for its victims.

The central structure of the Memorial will be a 10-foot replica of the statue of the Goddess of Democracy; the original was erected by student demonstrators in Tiananmen Square in 1989 and was modeled after the Statue of Liberty, with the Goddess holding a torch aloft with both hands. An eternal flame will burn at the statue's base. The statue will be surrounded by square columns, each bearing inscriptions about Communism from such leaders as Reagan, Truman, Kennedy, Havel, and Solzhenitsyn.

After more than 10 years of seeking an appropriate location for the Memorial, the Victims of Communism Foundation is very close to securing permission to build at the intersection of Constitution and Maryland avenues, a triangular plot one block from the U.S. Capitol and directly behind the U.S. Supreme Court. In May the National Park Service approved this site, and on July 29 the National Capital Planning Commission will hold a public hearing, at which time we expect to receive final approval.

At the hearing we hope to be able to announce that we've received sufficient funds—approximately \$500,000—to build the Memorial. Thus far we've received \$TK and need an additional \$TK to fully fund construction.

The moral significance of this Memorial will far exceed the modest cost of bricks and mortar, for we will at long last honor the victims of Communist tyranny from the capital of the greatest preserve of freedom the world has ever known.

Won't you please consider a generous contribution to help us achieve this very worthy goal? I can't think of a more eloquent motive than this simple line penned by Anne Frank, who died at age 15 in a Nazi concentration camp: "Nobody need wait a single moment before starting to improve the world."

Sincerely,