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## Communism Collapsed, But Communists Are Still With Us

*Angela Davis, the Soviet Union's best friend, keeps the faith.*

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Being a communist means never having to say you're sorry. In 1998, the *New York Times* ran a front-page story on Sunset Hall, a retirement home for "aging lefties," a group of "former Communists, still-staunch Socialists, liberals, intellectuals and other freethinkers." The charming story described a gaggle of undaunted elderly activists dedicated to giants in both revolution and slaughter, such as Vladimir Ilyich Lenin and Leon Trotsky.

The nature of the cause they still served went unmentioned. A rabbi's son, Jacob Darnov, then 101, had served in the Bolshevik military and called Lenin, the architect of the murderous totalitarian Soviet state, "the greatest politician we ever had in this world." No doubt, the *Times*' treatment of, say, the Horst Wessel Retirement Center for elderly Nazis, complete with busts of leading gauleiters and praise for Adolf Hitler and Herman Goering, would have been rather different.

The *Times* continued in a related vein last week by including Angela Davis in the magazine's special style issue on "The Greats." The onetime staid establishment *Times*, now desperate to embrace radical chic, wrote that Davis shared "a largeness and clarity of vision, a fierceness of belief. For the scholar and activist Angela Davis, who argued for decades that the Black civil rights movement must consider women's and queer voices, and the feminist movement must include Black and poor women's voices — a dedication to intersectionality even before the law professor Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term in 1989 — the current moment in grass-roots activism is one she both precipitated and inspired."

Left-wing *Portside* used the *Times*' celebration as the occasion to run an equally gushing, but much longer, story on Davis. She is an unashamed radical and revolutionary who rose to fame in the 1970s and twice ran as the Communist Party's vice presidential candidate alongside the notorious Gus Hall. Writing about an outdoor portrait, Nelson George observed: "Davis' image is painted from a photograph taken in the early '70s, when she became a symbol of the struggle for Black liberation, anti-capitalism and feminism. It's a powerful portrait — she is wearing her hair in a round, black Afro, her hand curled as if she's making a rhetorical point. Her expression is pensive, intelligent, challenging."

“Challenging,” yes, that is one word for someone who gained fame while palling around with communist despots. Nevertheless, the attention and honors still flow. For years she taught at the University of California (Santa Cruz). Observed George, even at age 76 “[s]he remains a vital presence in the world, lecturing at major universities and advising young activists.”

Davis was an honorary co-chair of the 2017 Women’s March on Washington and one of the featured speakers. She declared: “The next 1,459 days of the Trump administration will be 1,459 days of resistance — resistance on the ground, resistance in the classrooms, resistance on the job, resistance in our art and in our music. This is just the beginning. And in the words of the inimitable Ella Baker, we who believe in freedom cannot rest until it comes.” Of course, everything depends on how one defines “freedom.”

In 2018 Halifax’s Dalhousie University gave her an honorary degree. Later that year the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute announced that she would be the recipient of its annual human rights award. Complaints over her support for the Palestinian cause led to revocation of the award. NPR ran an article detailing the outrage expressed by the usual suspects at this terrible injustice directed at the “human rights activist” Davis, whose books and lectures “address the social problems associated with incarceration, poverty and race.” Her “support of Soviet bloc countries in the 1970s” was mentioned only in passing and quickly dismissed by NPR’s Sherrel Wheeler Stewart.

Instead, the article highlighted the usual gaggle of lefties who called the decision “shameful” and “disheartening” and greeted it with “dismay.” The city council unanimously passed a resolution praising Davis’ work. She expressed her disappointment with the revocation since, she said, she had “devoted much of my own activism to international solidarity and, specifically, to linking struggles in other parts of the world to U.S. grassroots campaigns against police violence, the prison industrial complex, and racism more broadly.” Actually, her behavior suggested that she liked “the prison industrial complex,” having hung out with peace- and freedom-loving Soviet apparatchiks who created a vast Gulag in which to imprison anyone with the temerity to criticize the regime or seek freedom.

Then came another reversal, trailing behind the overwhelming PC storms, and the organization reinstated the award. Institute President Andrea L. Taylor decided that “Dr. Angela Davis, a daughter of Birmingham, is highly regarded throughout the world as a human-rights activist” and Davis’ “credentials in championing human rights are noteworthy.”

Alas, Davis continues to blight the public discourse. In January the University of Michigan had her give the Memorial Keynote Speech at its MLK symposium. In June the *Guardian* published a fawning profile which did not even mention her commie dalliances and justifications for murderous tyranny. A couple weeks ago, reported the student newspaper the *Observer*, “Author, professor and activist Dr. Angela Davis was the keynote speaker at the 27th Annual Hesburgh Lecture in Ethics and Public Policy” at Notre Dame University.

Harvard University has purchased her papers and memorabilia. Of course, it seems slightly inconsistent for a great socialist activist *to make money* selling her property to a great educational

institution. Maybe Marx included a relevant exception in a footnote in *The Communist Manifesto* that I missed. Or Vladimir Ilyich Lenin added an addendum to cover the work product of revolutionary heroines.

Rather like Che Guevara, who made his name as Fidel Castro's executioner but ended up with his image on American t-shirts, Davis has gained almost cult status. Wrote George:

*The consistent theme is a woman both radical and chic. Davis was more likely to be seen than read or heard at the time, but her very existence complicated the white and Black male gaze of what Black women could be. The impact of this representation has lingered in the culture. Consider this: For 50 years, Davis has existed as a pop-cultural reference point as well as a serious academic, one whose ideas were once thought of as extreme but are now part of the popular discourse. Both the Rolling Stones as well as John Lennon and Yoko Ono recorded songs about her in the early '70s.*

You don't get more liberal chic than having Yoko Ono take up your cause.

But Davis is no Vestal Virgin, dedicated to saving humanity. There is a complicated history of her stance on domestic violence, with an acquittal on criminal conspiracy charges. Her responsibility remains unclear. *Reason's* Cathy Young offers a measured view of Davis' culpability.

There is no doubt, however, in Davis's embrace of tyranny writ large. She was quite the commie fangirl. She was no naive humanitarian who showed up in Moscow in the early 1920s and was duped while searching for a new way in a world that had just escaped the madness of World War I. She was a hardened revolutionary who visited the Soviet Union and its satellite states because she was one with them, repression and all.

In *Portside* George sought to soften the blow to her character:

*Throughout the '70s and '80s, as the Communist Party U.S.A.'s presence dwindled, and Communist regimes worldwide became increasingly totalitarian, Davis remained a staunch supporter of the party's ideas, twice running as its candidate for vice president in the '80s. In 1991, she stepped away, along with a number of other members, because the party refused to engage in processes of democratization; they formed a new organization, the Committees of Correspondence for Democracy and Socialism. Today, she describes herself as a "small c" communist, remaining enthusiastic about the ideology but not beholden to any single organization.*

She is not so beholden because the organizations to which she demonstrated loyalty, most notably the Soviet Union, are no more. They were destroyed by the people who they had oppressed for decades. An event that likely still fills her with regret.

After all, the great humanitarian was feted by the usual commie states. Fidel Castro's Cuba was a favorite spot which she visited. After one trip she decided that "only under socialism could the fight against racism be successfully executed."

In December 1979, about three weeks before Soviet forces invaded Afghanistan, Davis was in Moscow to receive the Lenin Peace Prize and receive an honorary degree from Moscow State University. She accepted the former with a broad smile, receiving a floral bouquet along with the requisite three kisses from the Soviet official who pinned the award onto her dress. She noted with approval that the prize bore “the glorious name of Vladimir Ilyich Lenin here on the very soil where he led the great October Revolution.” Ah, the glorious, peace-loving, freedom-promoting, justice-inspiring Lenin. Davis made quite an international splash with her praise for the USSR.

Davis twice visited East Germany, more formally known as the (So-Called) German Democratic Republic, where she received an award, the “Star of Friendship of the People of the World,” and an honorary degree from the University of Leipzig. She had a pleasant meeting with Erich Honecker, who took over the communist party in East Germany in 1971. A photo shows the two smiling broadly, lovely and loving servants of the people no doubt discussing how they could better serve the masses. She also met the Stalinist leader ousted by Honecker, Walter Ulbricht, who ordered construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961.

Of course, among the points of interests she visited was the infamous fortified barrier, where she expressed her condolences *for the East German border guard* who was shot by a fleeing citizen, calling the former a “loyal soldier, who sacrificed his life for his socialist country.” She promised that on her return to America she would “undertake to tell our people the truth about the true function of this border.” Alas, apparently even the East German people failed to understand the Berlin Wall’s real purpose since they tore it down the moment they could.

In fact, German workers were notoriously fickle, having revolted against the Soviet-installed leadership in 1953. That, after all the work loyal communists had done to suppress dissent! So Honecker & Co. were forced to rule what amounted to a national prison which famously walled its people in. Around a thousand were murdered trying to escape. The last East German to be shot down seeking freedom, a 20-year-old restaurant worker named Chris Gueffroy, was killed in February 1989, just nine months before the border fortifications fell.

Tragically, Honecker did not enjoy as pleasant a retirement as Davis. He lost his job in October 1989. Ungrateful proletarians just did not appreciate his devotion and hard work. He reportedly wanted a crackdown against growing protests across the workers’ not-so paradise, especially in Leipzig — ironically the same city in which Davis received her honorary degree. However, the rest of the Politburo balked: the Soviet Union’s Mikhail Gorbachev said the Red Army would remain in its barracks and East German officials could not be sure which direction their own troops would fire. Davis’ dictatorial friend found himself “seeking other opportunities,” as the saying goes.

Still, the USSR was her greatest promoter. In the *Federalist* author David Harsanyi noted that Davis became a focus of Soviet propaganda, with more resources devoted to her “than was being spent on propaganda directly about the Vietnam War.” Harsanyi cited Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, author of *The Gulag Archipelago* about the Soviet system of prison camps, who observed: “We had our ears stuffed with Angela Davis. Little children in school were told to sign petitions in

defense of Angela Davis.” Soviet-born Cathy Young remembers her elementary school class being obliged to sign postcards on Davis’ behalf.

Davis’ friendship toward the Soviet state and its Stalinist spin-offs was no passing fancy for someone unfamiliar with the USSR as a prison state. For instance, when Czech dissidents made a moving appeal to her for assistance, she responded: “They deserve what they get. Let them remain in prison.” Davis’ spokeswoman (imagine, a proletarian heroine having a spokeswoman!) said that Davis “did not think people should leave socialist countries to return to the capitalist system.” Precisely what one would expect from a great and respected human rights activist.

Harvard Law Professor Alan Dershowitz, who consulted on Davis’ legal defense, similarly requested that she speak out on behalf of Soviet Jews seeking to emigrate to Israel. Her response? According to Dershowitz: “Several days later, I received a call back from Ms. Davis’ secretary informing me that Davis had looking into the people on my list and none of them were political prisoners. ‘They are all Zionist fascists and opponents of Socialism.’ Davis would urge that they be kept in prison where they belonged.”

Naturally, Davis has her academic defenders, who dance on pinheads while dismissing her affection for human tyranny. But even they should ask why a devoted representative of the working classes would have a secretary. What could be a more typical example of an oppressor and beneficiary of accumulated capital living off the labor and effort of the proletariat held in bondage by the capitalist system? Surely Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, or at least the “glorious” Lenin said something about this situation. How forgiving would Vladimir Ilyich be if confronted with such an outrageous example of capitalist oppression? Had America’s communist revolution actually occurred, Davis’ head also might have ended up on a pike!

Angel Davis is a model member of the tyrannical left, which seeks to destroy everyone and everything that stands in its way. Davis sanctimoniously claimed moral authority to judge others while endorsing a monstrous system which imprisoned more than a billion people, starved and impoverished entire societies, and murdered tens of millions of opponents, critics, independents, and innocents. This was no minor mistake. It was an overwhelming, debilitating ethical failure that undermined her credibility to speak even on other issues, such as racism.

America and Western societies have much to answer for. But they have acted to redress past errors and crimes, and undoubtedly will do more in the future. And they never had to wall their people in, something which Davis saw first-hand on her visit to East Germany. But she chose to take the side of the oppressors. When it comes to communism, proponents really should have to say they are sorry. And say it again and again. As should Angela Davis, before mercifully, finally, and quietly retiring from public life.

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