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The Most Vile Column of the Day: Berlin Wall Edition

Michael C. Moynihan | November 9, 2009

Was getting a Polish translator for Gen. Jaruzelski proving difficult? Did the emails to the long-dead Comrade Honecker keep bouncing? I mean, I expected this from *The Guardian* (and boy did they deliver), but I was rather surprised that *The New York Times* weighed in the Berlin Wall anniversary with this unbelievable nonsense from the Stalinist Slovenian academic Slavoj Zizek, who inveighs bravely against the "rightists" in Eastern Europe, the "new anti-Communist scare," and supposedly resurgent "anti-Communist paranoia."

Nothing, alas, on those hideous dictatorships toppled twenty years ago today. No Stasi, no Securitate, no KGB. Not a peep about Lubyanka, Berlin-Hohenschönhausen, or Kolyma. Perhaps on the anniversary of Dachau's liberation, the *Times* can solicit a piece from that delightfully heterodox historian David Irving. A sample from Zizek:

Where does this resurrection of anti-Communism draw its strength from? Why were the old ghosts resuscitated in nations where many young people don't even remember the Communist times? The new anti-Communism provides a simple answer to the question: "If capitalism is really so much better than Socialism, why are our lives still miserable?"

Why bother with this piffle (well, I suppose because it is in the *New York Times*)? And why bother when Cato's Marion Tupy, who grew up in a communist country, has already cut his argument to ribbons?

And yes, Zizek is *actually* a Stalinist. Writing in *The New Republic*, critic Adam Kirsch observed that "Under the cover of comedy and hyperbole, in between allusions to movies and video games, [Zizek] is engaged in the rehabilitation of many of the most evil ideas of the last century." And he quotes the great "rock star" of European academia as confirmation: "Better the worst Stalinist terror than the most liberal capitalist democracy." Quite.

In a forthcoming piece to be published elsewhere, I mention Zizek's starry-eyed Stalinism: "If Stalinism was indeed a negative development, [Zizek writes], it was because it was too *capitalistic*: 'Stalinist 'totalitarianism' was the capitalist logic of self-propelling productivity liberated from its capitalist form, which is why it failed: Stalinism was the symptom of capitalism.'" Note the scare quotes around totalitarian, and the utter

incoherence of the argument that follows.

Obviously Americans have no interest in hearing the tired bromides of fire-breathing neoliberals and anti-communists; those relics of the Cold War like Havel, Walesa, Laar, or Michnik, who shamefully traded woman's rights and full employment for Coca Cola and the occasional McRib. But it is shameful that, on this day when millions were liberated from the 20th century's most sinister political project, the *New York Times* thought it clever to hand its opinion page over to a man dedicated to resuscitating the very ideology responsible for their enslavement.