

COMRADES – The Rise and Fall of World Communism by Robert Harvey.
John Murray 2003.

GULAG – A History of the Soviet Camps by Anne Applebaum.
Penguin Allen Lane 2003.

Two political phenomena cut scars into the twentieth century so deep that they may not be eradicated for many decades to come; they were Fascism and Communism. As with many extremes they hated each other with a passion that was at times self-destructive, but in other ways they had a great deal in common. Both were morally bankrupt, both were paranoid, both treated the human beings under their aegis with contempt, and both developed highly systematic ways of disposing of their enemies.

In COMRADES, Robert Harvey turns his attention to the rise and fall of world communism: from its Marxist origins through the revolution in Russia to the creation of the Soviet Union; from the Chinese civil war to the cultural revolution of Chairman Mao; through the internal crises, bitter divisions, global tensions and regional manifestations that kept West and East at loggerheads for most of the second half of the twentieth century.

As readers of Robert Harvey's last book will expect, the writing is of a very high standard and what might at times in another's hand be heavy going is at always compelling and involving. Although the story of Communism is about much more than the Soviet Union it is that 'evil empire' which gets the lion's share of the book, and his chapters on Gorbachev – whom he observed at first hand – and the rise of Boris Yeltsin, are fascinating. The story of China cannot yet be conclusively written but Harvey is confident that in Europe at least Communism is a spent force.

The dark side of Communism in the Soviet Union is revealed in all its horror in Anne Applebaum's superb and meticulous analysis of the *GULAG*, an acronym whose English translation means Main Camp Administration. This banal term stood for a system of imprisonment, internal exile, forced labour, brutality and inhumanity that stands alongside the concentration and death camps of Nazi Germany as a monument to human brutality.

This is a terrible story, compiled on the basis of an increasing number of survivor testimonies as well as archive material that is being systematically analysed and collected as the innermost workings of the Soviet Union are unravelled in the post-communist era.

The story told by Solzhenitsyn in *A Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovitch* and the *Gulag Archipelago* is the closest most readers will have got to the GULAG; but for all of us who were moved and horrified by those works when they were first published Anne Applebaum's book is essential reading.

This is a book that will haunt your dreams for a long time, that will appal, horrify and sicken you, yet it should not be shirked. Ultimately, juxtaposed against the waste of life, the cruelty and the evil there are glimpses and more of the indomitability of the human spirit at its best, and that is a leaven which makes the rest easier to bear.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh