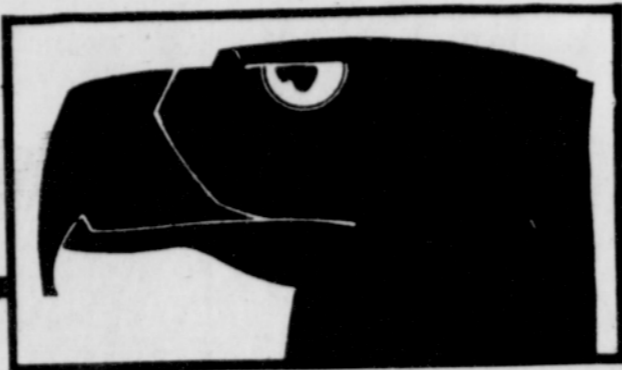


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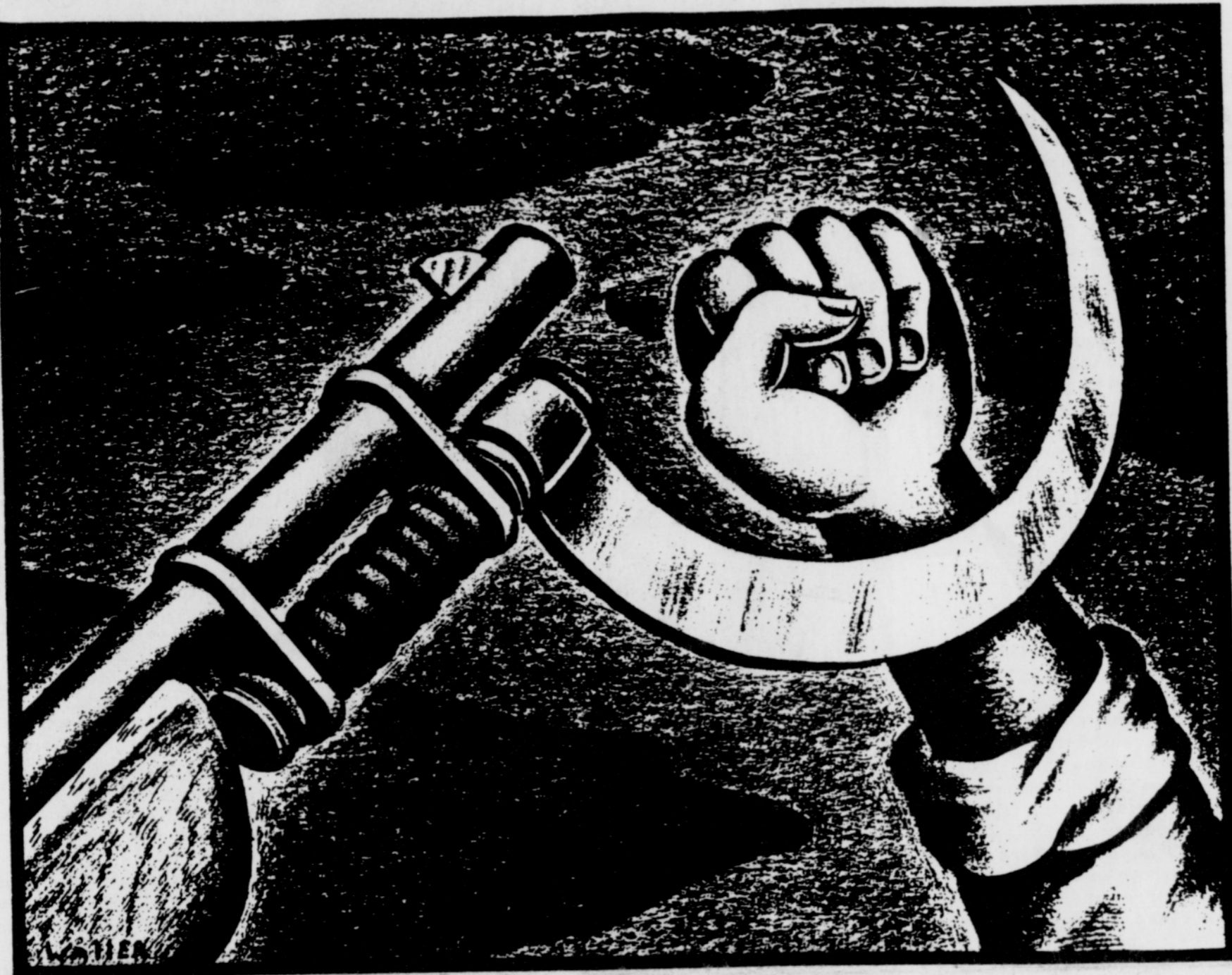


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In a dark time the eye begins to see.
— Theodore Roethke

WALLER



SEVENTY-FOUR YEARS THAT SHOOK THE WORLD

BY MICHAEL PAUL McCUSKER

"You Russians and we Americans! Our countries so distant, so unlike at first glance — such a difference in social and political conditions... and yet in certain features, and vastest ones, so resembling each other."
— Walt Whitman

"Under communism man oppresses man. Under capitalism, just the other way around."
— A joke

One year short of its platinum anniversary Bolshevik communism has disintegrated into ruin and chaos. Once hoped to be the essential revolution of the masses against the long history of tyranny and oppression, Bolshevism quickly developed into a monstrously cruel and eventually stagnant system that simply fell apart from the mendacious inertia of its own history. The final suicide of the reigning Communist Party was an unsuccessful putsch by its old guard in August — History, Karl Marx paraphrased Hegel, recurs twice; "Once as tragedy, and again as farce."

The vast empire of Russian "republics" and east European satellites has collapsed into bitter splinters of ancient hatreds, as around the world communism is simultaneously rejected as a successor to colonialism and as the structure and ideology of newly enfranchised governments. Instead of seizing the future and producing a "New Man" through world revolution, communism is swiftly becoming a relic of the past, swept, it might be said, into the dustbin of history, the god that both failed and died.

Although Marx, the principle architect of 20th century communism, envisioned a "higher form of society" based on a highly developed industrial system "in which the full and free development of every individual forms the ruling order,"

the colossally monstrous Bolshevik attempt to rapidly transform a backward Russia, which had ended serfdom only half a century before (in 1861), into a 20th century industrial giant cost the lives of millions and the uprooting and virtual enslavement of millions more. And despite the forced industrialization and expansion of Soviet society through civil and world war, the communist system forged by the Bolsheviks ultimately collapsed, in no small measure as a result of its failure to keep pace with the West in the post-industrial age of computerization and communications technology. The stifling conformity of centralized decision making precipitated a deadening stagnation that has led to the breakdown of the communist system. Yet the corporate capitalism of the West, celebrating its triumph as a "superior" system, is itself staggering on the precipice of economic flatline, imperiled by the same crippling centralization and paranoid conformity that doomed the Soviet system. The broken bloc in eastern Europe, torn apart by ancient enmities, strives for economic and environmental recovery from decades of careless ravage, yet these dramatically released peoples do not necessarily desire the United States' form of winner take all capitalism; they more likely prefer democratic socialism, which usually combines political equality with the principle of social responsibility — responsible for the health, welfare, education, housing and employment of the population. Corporate capitalism, nemesis of state-controlled communism, seldom pays much attention to social responsibilities while in pursuit of a buck. The gap between rich and poor continues to widen dangerously in the Western countries, particularly in the United States, where public education is a shambles, affordable housing for poor and growing numbers of unemployed (and for large numbers of employed) is ever more

scarce, as are dependable and good paying jobs; adequate health care is available to fewer and fewer Americans; and the nation's environment is continually despoiled for profit despite public demands for safeguards. A similar frustrated anger that rose against communist repression is rising also in the West against the political and economic conditions that precipitated communism.

The system that has collapsed was born in great hope. It reflected not only antipathy to authoritarian rule but the excesses of industrial democracy. Socialism was conceived as an antithesis to the pervasive inequities of 19th century industrial capitalism: the working classes were not only "slaves" of the "bourgeoisie," by which is meant the "class of modern capitalists who are the owners of social production and employers of wage labor" (Friedrich Engels), but according to Marx and Engels in their "Communist Manifesto" of 1848, "they are daily and hourly enslaved by the machine... and above all, by the individual bourgeois manufacturer himself." Marx believed that the central contradiction of capitalism was that instead of benefiting from the product of their labor, workers are made ever poorer and miserable. "The modern laborer... instead of rising with the progress of industry sinks deeper and deeper below the conditions of existence of his own class," Marx wrote, maintaining that "the bourgeoisie" is unfit to rule society because it is incompetent to prevent its working "slave" from sinking into "such a state that it has to feed him, instead of being fed by him."

The conflicts between the beneficiaries of production and its producers — the "conspiracy" of impoverishing the producers by preventing

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