

**WHILE THE WEST WAS “SLEEPING”...
OR
WHEN DID THE COLD WAR REALLY START?**

**A talk given before the Philosophical Club of Cleveland
by Sigrid Miller
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As I prepared tonight's talk, I became aware of the fact that some of my books have actually been lifelong companions. Over the years, I have been drawn back to them, again and again. All of these books seem to possess a common denominator: They portray an honest, intellectual struggle of the human mind, a mind in search of principles and values, a mind committed to freedom and morality. One of the books falling into this category is "Child of the Revolution" by Wolfgang Leonhard. The revolution Leonhard refers to is the Bolshevik October Revolution of 1917. The book itself is an autobiography covering the years from 1935 - 1949, during which time Leonhard was a Marxist-Leninist. In this book Leonhard describes his years in the former Soviet Union from 1935 - 1945 and also talks about his life in the Soviet occupied zone of Germany from 1945 - 1949. I intend to use Leonhard's book - at least to some extent - for the purpose of highlighting some historical and political events that may facilitate answering the question: "When did the Cold War really start?"

With amazing foresight Leonhard already predicted in his book, which was first published in 1955, that as a direct result of rigid, centralized bureaucracy and cult of personality new social forces would emerge in the Soviet Union. He further predicted that the autonomy of these forces would eventually lead to the

process of political and economical decentralization and to the liberation of art and literature from Party control. He reasoned that this, in turn, would lead the Soviet Union into the direction of industrial modernization and to the process of future democratization of the countries of the Eastern Bloc which “could hardly be brought to a halt.” The west considered Leonhard to be the expert on political and socio-economic issues of the former Soviet Union; the east categorically denounced the validity of various parts of the book and consequently questioned Leonhard’s credibility. However, when the Iron Curtain fell and classified State Security files in the former German Democratic Republic became accessible, proof of Leonhard’s accuracy in reference to statements, political and historical data and system related analyses was provided. Leonhard, by the way, lectured - after having spent some time at Oxford - on the subject of History of the Soviet Union at Yale from 1966 - 1987.

Before going into details of the book, let me state the most important points conveyed in it.

1. It shows how it is possible for an ideology, as irrational as Marxism-Leninism, to come into existence and survive for more than 70 years in a forum the size of the former Soviet Union.
2. It reveals little known facts on how party functionaries were trained in the Soviet Union for work in post-war Germany and that they were already operating there before the end of World War II.

3. It clearly demonstrates how basic human rights are violated in a totalitarian system where individuals just exist for the purpose of serving the state.
4. It emphasizes the absolutely crucial necessity of accurate terminology and precise definitions of words and concepts used - either verbally, written, or in thinking.
5. It shows the great vulnerability of the innocent, unsuspecting human mind.
6. It makes it painfully clear how difficult and complex it is to break away from an ideology one grew up with and one honestly believes in. The transformation from being subordinate to the state to an individual who believes in and thrives for political, social, economic and spiritual freedom is an extremely complicated and slow process.

And now to the book. The year is 1935. Hitler has already been in power for two years and has taken steps to cleanse his country of the Bolshevik element. Leonhard's mother, who is an active member of the Spartacus Association, has a difficult decision to make: Leave Germany with her son or work underground and run the risk of being arrested by Hitler's secret police. (Just a brief explanation about the Spartacus Association. Its name was adopted in reference to the Roman slave and gladiator Spartacus who rebelled against the all-powerful Roman Empire and its Legions. The German Communist Party, which was founded in 1919, had its roots in the Spartacus Association.) Eventually, Leonhard's mother decided in favor of the Soviet Union, where Stalin

was welcoming antifascists from Austria, Italy, Spain, and Germany. Especially German speaking antifascists and their children received preferential treatment. They had their own school named after Karl Liebknecht, one of the founders of the German Communist Party. They also were provided with their own Children's Home, which, in comparison to children's homes for Soviet youngsters, was luxuriously decorated. They had their own bus, their own German speaking doctor, and were regularly offered tickets to plays, ballets and operas. Leonhard's mother was fortunate to secure a place for her son in the German school as well as the German Children's Home. Curricula and teaching methods were in absolute compliance with communist party directives. The children's home also operated under party auspices. For Leonhard this meant, that from now on he would not be exposed to any information which was contradictive to the official party line. The only newspaper Leonhard had access to was the "PRAVDA", only party authorized books were available and he had no opportunity to listen to foreign broadcasts. In a fairly short period of time his reasoning mechanism had adapted to the prescribed way of "correct" thinking. Social and political events were analyzed according to where they took place. A rise in the price of food in capitalist countries was assessed as fresh evidence of the intensified exploitation of the workers, but a rise in the price of food in the Soviet Union was seen as an important economic contribution to the construction of Socialism. Dilapidated housing in the west became proof of the miserable standard of living of the already disadvantaged workers. However, dilapidated housing in Moscow was interpreted as just a "relic of the past". With such

difference in terminology and interpretation, it certainly is no surprise that East-West talks continued indefinitely - ad absurdum - without accomplishing anything productive.

After less than one and one-half years in the Soviet Union, at the height of Stalin's purges, the 15 year old Leonhard also becomes one of its victims although only indirectly: his mother, as a member of the "Old Bolshevik Society", disappears, she just vanishes. Please allow me to briefly go into details of this event, because it displays a beautiful interaction between mother and son but it also portrays the immense cruelty of a totalitarian government. On a rainy day at the end of October 1936, Leonhard meets his mother and confides into her that he has a problem with one of his subjects at school, technical drawing. His mother picks up on the hint and promises to have the work done for him the following day. Leonhard hurries off, because he has to be back at the Children's Home, but still turns around one more time to see his mother standing there with her handbag and his unfinished drawings under her arm. Lovingly they wave good-bye to each other. The next day, Leonhard comes to the designated meeting point to receive his completed homework. His mother does not show up. He finally decides to go to the apartment building where his mother rents a room. He is let into the apartment his mother shares with other tenants. The door to his mother's room is locked and bears two seals. One of the co-renters tells him without any sign of empathy: "Go home, your mother is not here anymore." "Hasn't she left a note for me?" "No, she left nothing behind. She is probably gone on an assignment." Well, this "assignment" lasted for twelve

years. It was amazing as well as frightening to read Leonhard's acceptance of his mother's disappearance. His reasoning process - keep in mind that he was only in the Soviet Union less than one and one-half years - was already so conditioned, that he was able to justify his mother's arrest in the following way. If one has an apple with a rotten spot, the only way to save the apple is to cut out the rotten part and in this process some of the good part is also removed. And this is the way one has to see the purges. Some innocent people - like his mother - are arrested with the traitors, spies, etc... The purges, of course, had to be justified in order to maintain the ideal of his belief in the Soviet Union as the first Socialist country. And wasn't it Marx who spoke of "force as the midwife of a new society?" From now on the only parent Leonhard had in the Soviet Union, was the Communist Party. But what an irrational, demanding, insensitive and cruel parent it proved to be. Just as abruptly as the purges had begun, they ended equally abruptly at the turn of the year from 1938 to 1939. Besides the millions of people who died or vanished during the purges, sixteen of the original twenty-one members of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of 1917 also disappeared during the purges, presumably having been shot, three had already died of natural causes, leaving only two survivors: Stalin and Alexandra Kollontai. Another interesting factor may be, that in 1937, at the 20th anniversary of the October Revolution, the creation of the first Soviet Government was celebrated. Again, of the original fifteen members, nine had been arrested by the Narodny Komissariat Vnutrennyku Del, or better known as the N.K.V.D. Trotsky was already in exile and we all know what happened to him in Mexico in 1940,

the N.K.V.D. hunted him down and killed him. Four members had died of natural causes, leaving only one surviving member: Stalin!!! Stalin had systematically eliminated obvious and imagined opponents. He consolidated all power in his person while the west was “napping.” (I am not at the sleeping stage yet!) Or did the west fear and distrust Hitler more than Stalin and therefore overlooked or ignored Stalin’s actions? I welcome your comments to this question, because I do not have an answer.

Now back to Leonhard’s irrational “parent”. In the summer of 1939, Stalin signed the non-aggression pact with Hitler, in which both countries contracted, among other issues, that neither of them would enter into an agreement with another power against the interest of the other party. Please remember that Stalin had welcomed German and Austrian immigrants and had even extended preferential status to them in consideration for their opposing Hitler’s fascist regime! Overnight Hitler and Stalin had become trusted comrades, there was no room for antifascists anymore! The signing of the non-aggression pact meant a complete reversal of the whole foreign policy of the Soviet Union. It also had an immediate effect on the domestic political situation. German emigres lost their special treatment: The German School and Children’s Home were immediately dissolved and the children of honored and praised antifascists were ordered to be assimilated by the Soviet system. The fate of the German emigres was at the mercy of a political arrangement made with a foreign power! In addition to the non-aggression pact between the Soviet Union and Germany, a treaty of friendship was also signed. This resulted in the disappearance of plays with

antifascist themes from theaters all over the Soviet Union and the term “Fascism” ceased to appear in the Soviet press. Leonhard, fortunately, was old enough at this time and had reached an academic level that enabled him to enter the Institute for Foreign Languages in Moscow. The younger students were less fortunate, they were put into Soviet Children’s Homes and Schools.

For the next one and one-half years, Stalin portrayed Hitler as his ally. Innumerable articles about plans of England and France for world domination appeared in Pravda. One article of March 1940 states: “...the Anglo-French imperialists have so far achieved no success with their plans for a new division of the world.” Even Hitler’s attacks on Denmark and Norway were justified. A distinction between justified and unjustified war was made: a just war could never be a war of conquest, but only a war of liberation. In Hitler’s case his wars were classified as just wars, since he fought against imperialists’ attempts to suppress its citizens. By this definition, Hitler had become the liberator (at least for a little while). This, of course, all changed on June 22nd, 1941 when Hitler’s troops crossed the border into the Soviet Union. By September 1941 Stalin gave orders that all people of German descent had to be deported to Kazakhstan or the Bashkir Republic. It was easy for the authorities to “collect” citizens of German descent, since in a census of 1939 every citizen had to declare his or her ethnic origin. So Leonhard found himself with fifty other people in a railroad car on a twenty-two day trip to Karaganda in the republic of Kazakhstan and then to Ufa, the capital of the Bashkir Republic. Since Leonhard was a gifted and highly intelligent young man, he was selected to attend the Communist International

School (or abbreviated Comintern School) in Kushnarenkovo, where children of revolutionaries from all over the world were trained as the Kremlin's agents. Marshall Tito's son also attended the school at this time. The school was situated forty miles northwest of Ufa. In the summer it could only be reached by ship and in the winter only by sledge, no roads lead to the school. A perfect place for keeping students isolated, totally cut off from all contact with the outside world. Here they were molded into compliant tools of the Soviet government. Students were forbidden to communicate their real identities with each other or to exchange a word about their past lives to their closest companions. Here, Leonhard became Comrade Linden. And if isolation and denial of identity was not enough to create a "puppet," the humbling practice of criticism and self-criticism accomplished it for sure. Students learned quickly, that every word was politically significant. Through the practice of criticism and self-criticism they were taught self-discipline. Students spied on each other and revealed particular information of fellow students at sessions of criticism and self-criticism, where every kind of remark - innocent, trivial, completely non-political - was exaggerated and distorted for the only purpose of creating an unreasoning, absolutely obedient agent of the Stalinist regime. When Leonhard was about to graduate from the Comintern School, the unbelievable happened: On May 16, 1943 - per Stalin's orders - the Communist International ceased to exist, although Stalin had sworn a solemn oath at Lenin's grave: "We swear to you, Comrade Lenin, that we will not spare our lives in our efforts to strengthen and extend the

league of workers of the whole world, the Communist International.” And now, from one day to the next, Stalin disposed of the Communist International.

In September 1943, Leonhard returned to Moscow, the city he had left as a deportee two years ago. He came back as a skilled and trusted party functionary, ready to be put to work wherever the regime would see fit. And, it has to be stated, the system treated its agents well: Their living quarters were at the Hotel Lux in downtown Moscow, cars with drivers were at their disposal, as well as reserved dining rooms, laundry services, tailors’ shops, a special, exclusive clinic, etc. There was no need for the agents to get into contact with the outside world, they had become a class of its own in a country, whose alleged goal it was to create a classless society.

One month before the end of World War II, three groups of highly trained, Soviet educated agents of German descent were formed in Moscow and its members received precise directives for future political tasks in Germany. Each group consisted of ten members. Leonhard, who was just 24 years old, was by far the youngest member of the first group which was sent to Berlin on April 27, 1945, before the end of World War II and before the Allied Forces could reach Berlin. Leonhard’s group was headed by Walter Ulbricht - who later became head of state of East Germany. Each agent was given a certain territory in Berlin and was instructed to contact former communists and social democrats for the purpose of establishing local administrations which, according to Walter Ulbricht “have to look democratic, but we must have everything in our control.” Within a few days, members of the group established - while the west was

“sleeping” - in every district of Berlin active cells, which were mainly composed of former members of the communist party. These cells formed the basis on which local administrations were built. They were established in the following way - and here I would like to quote Ulbricht again, on how he - per Stalin’s orders - wanted to see party members positioned in the administrations: “The Senior Deputy, who will be responsible for questions of personnel and the official responsible for popular education, must both be our men. You will also have to find a completely reliable comrade in every district whom we shall need to build up the police. This applies to all districts. In many of them we will limit the appointment of our own people to these posts. In the working-class districts we can perhaps put in one or two more of our own people.” As soon as local administrations were formed in Berlin, Ulbricht proceeded with his next step - (and I wish to quote him again): “We now shall have to restrict ourselves exclusively to the districts to the north-west, south-west and west of Berlin. About a month from now we must count on the arrival of the Western Allies, and by that time the local administrations must be functioning in their districts unchallenged.”

On June 12, 1945 the inaugural proclamation of the K.P.D. (the new Communist Party of East Germany) was announced. However, it soon became apparent that the general public was not in favor of the communist party, so Ulbricht moved to unify the left wing of the Social Democratic Party with the Communist Party to form the SED, which stands for Socialist Unity Party of East Germany, deliberately omitting the word communist. The first official regional elections in the Soviet occupied zone took place on October 26, 1946. The SED

experienced a humiliating defeat by only securing 19.8% of the votes. However, any person, who had hoped for a separate German road to Socialism, a road independent of Stalinism, was to be disappointed. The process of Sovietisation, the link between the Soviet Union and the Soviet occupied zone of Germany was now rigorously pursued by Stalin's agent Walter Ulbricht. Their goal was to establish or elevate the SED first as the controlling and eventually the only party in the Soviet occupied zone. As part of this process, the Karl-Marx Party Academy was founded and Leonhard was appointed as one of their instructors. While teaching at the Party Academy, Leonhard had access to and read the most important Western newspapers on a daily basis from 1946 onwards. Did this open his eyes? No, it actually delayed his breaking with Stalinism. For Leonhard about three quarters of the space in Western newspapers was devoted to news which was of no interest to the Eastern reader. And the remaining one quarter did not have any appeal to well educated officials in the East. They perceived the "unscientific" phraseology of the Western press as an intellectual insult. To the Eastern reader expressions like people, freedom, socialism, etc. referred to precise political definitions. Freedom, for example, meant insight into historical necessity, an insight based on scientific theory. In their definition, the West lacked the scientific theory, it just confronted the historical evolution with an unreasoning mind, the West was merely a plaything of historical evolution and consequently the West was unfree, or in other words, there was no freedom in the West. Also, in reference to the standard of living in the Eastern bloc compared with the West; whenever this fact was mentioned in the Western

press, the reaction among the privileged Eastern readers was, that, finally, the West was catching on, because historically declining societies always had a higher living standard than the emerging ones.

Over a period of years, Leonhard slowly broke with the Stalinist system, however, not as a result of Western arguments, but as an expression of the contradictions between the teachings of Marx, Engels, and Lenin on one hand and the Stalinist theory and practice on the other hand. The Stalinist thesis that the Eastern satellite states have to follow the example of the Soviet Union on its path to Socialism was in direct opposition to the equality status laid down by Marx and Engels which stated that the evolution of each individual state towards Socialism should follow a course corresponding to its own economic, political, and cultural conditions. Leonhard also questioned the immense privileges of Party officials in contrast with the principles of Marx, Engels, and Lenin, which stated that in a Socialist community no one should receive remuneration exceeding a worker's wage.

Publicly, Leonhard - especially at the academy - had to convey to his students the "true" form of Communism, namely Stalinism, while his honest convictions had to be kept in absolute secrecy. Eventually, it became very difficult to continue teaching with such an underlying intellectual conflict. March 15, 1949 was just another day at the Party Academy. Leonhard was scheduled to give a lecture. Students from the Soviet occupied zone as well as students from areas occupied by the Allied Forces were trained here to become Stalin's obedient servants. This morning, students were already assembled in the

auditorium waiting for their instructor. - They waited in vain. - Where was Comrade Leonhard? - Was he on assignment? - Could he have defected? - Western newspapers remained silent. Where was Leonhard, an official, distinguished by ten years' residence in the Soviet Union; a trusted comrade who had grown up and received his education and political training there? - He, indeed, had defected, however, not to the West, but to Yugoslavia, which had just broken away from Stalinism to pursue its separate way to Socialism.

Leonhard was a young man who had grown up without political and intellectual freedom. But he was a human being of unusual integrity who sacrificed a glamorous career - being part of building up the Communist Regime in East Germany - for the sake of principle. I would like to mention that it would have been very easy for Leonhard to cross over into West Berlin, where the authorities would have happily welcomed him, where he could have sold his story to the news media for generous compensation, but he was not ready for the Western ideology yet. He was in opposition to Stalinism but this did not mean approval of the Western system. He chose the difficult and dangerous escape from East Germany via Czechoslovakia to Yugoslavia. Leonhard stayed in Yugoslavia for about two years before moving to the West, not as a Marxist-Leninist anymore, but as a Socialist. Socialism, in this context, is to be understood in its fundamental sense: the achievement of general prosperity and peace.

His political awakening was a slow one. He came to realize that the individual does not just exist for the purpose of serving the state or that the

individual finds freedom in subordination to the state but that freedom is preeminent and that it is the duty of the state to protect the freedom of the individual. And - in the sense of Henry David Thoreau, although Leonhard had never read Thoreau's works - Leonhard reasoned, that if the government is wrong, it would be wrong for an individual to support the immorality of such an institution.

And now to the question: "When did the Cold War really start?" The generally accepted definition of the term Cold War refers to a period after World War II during which time Communist and non-Communist countries had entered a phase of extreme rivalry for political and territorial supremacy. The expression Cold War was used to describe conflicts that did not lead to actual fighting. In order to answer the abovementioned question, we have to take a look at Stalin and his actions: Stalin had a profound distrust of the West, especially of the United States, dating back to the Russian Civil War, when the United States supported the White Russians instead of the Bolsheviks. The Anglo-American and Soviet solidarity during the second World war - which ideologically did not make any sense - was an alliance of convenience or - more specifically expressed - it was an alliance of survival for the Soviet Union. Through his actions, Stalin proved to be a master of deception. Of the many promises to the Allies, how many did he keep? Stalin claimed, that buffer states between Germany and the Soviet Union were needed, but, while the West was still believing in Stalin's good will and friendship - or was the West just "sleeping"? - Stalin had no intentions of ever allowing democratic elections in the Soviet

occupied countries although he had solemnly pledged in the Declaration on Liberated Europe, which was signed by the Allies and Stalin, to do so. Before the war had ended, his agents were already in place to guarantee that democratic self-determination of the German people in the east would not succeed. Stalin was determined to keep tight control over the occupied territory of Eastern Europe disregarding and breaking promises and pledges he had made. I am not a historian, in other words, I am not qualified to analyze historical events, but I am still expressing an opinion: Stalin has to be understood through his “wants”. He wanted power and he achieved it, he wanted to expand communism and wherever he detected a chance that would bring him closer to world domination, he vehemently pursued it. Therefore, I believe the Cold War started well before the end of the second World War: Some time between the Teheran Conference in November 1943, where for the first time the issues of zones of occupation and the restructuring of Germany after World War II were discussed, and D-Day in the summer of 1944, while the West was “sleeping”.