



When Marvel Comics was Anti-Communist

Although the reviews on the new Captain America movie have been good, according to us afficiandos of the Golden and Silver ages of comic books, it would be very strange, but very welcome, if Hollywood took the next logical step and made a second Captain America film which showed his fight against Communism. It was easy, during the Second World War, to create gruesome stereotypes of Nazi and Japanese military and political leaders. The brutality of Hitler and the horror of the Rape of Nanking were all too real.



But comics, of course, avoided all reference to the inhumanity of our ally, "Uncle Joe" Stalin or the unbelievable savagery of the Soviets toward everyone: Germans, of course; allies such as Rumanians and Hungarians; but also victims of Nazi aggression such as Poles and Czechs; and finally the Soviet subjects and the Red Army itself. Captain America could fight Baron Zemo and Red Skull and other fictional fiends, but the Holodomor of the Ukrainian people or the tens of millions consigned to slow death in the Gulag were invisible in the Golden Age of comics.

War did generate great sales of comic books, though, and World War II- and Korean War-themed comics remained popular throughout the 1950s. Succeeding those, a new generation of comic books played around with crime themes and sometimes goofy super-foes (Toyman, for example, comes to mind). The humorous or romantic comics did not need Nazis, so finding new villains was not an issue. Western comics always had outlaws and fast guns, so ideological foes were not a problem — just bad guys.

Some time after the Second World War ended, most Americans woke up from a hangover (caused by too many vodka toasts) to the monstrosity of Soviet power and inhumanity. Men and women who had been prominent communists, such as Louis Budenz, who was editor of the Communist Party's *Daily Worker*, Max Eastman, and Howard Fast began to tell the world just how Orwellian the world of Communist conspiracy really was.

Comic books, for a while at least, responded. One, for example, showed Red Skull — once a Nazi villain, now a Communist villain — being defeated by Captain America. As [John Gizzi](#) points out in an excellent piece in *Human Events*, "Captain America, Commie Smasher" was the title of a 1954 Marvel comic book series. Issue #77 in July 1954 shows Captain America fighting communists in an issue entitled "Striking Back at the Soviet," and in the very next issue fans got to "See Captain America Defy the Communist Hordes."

The same year, in May, 1954, Captain America exposed Communist spies in America in "The Betrayers," and the very same issue revealed American traitors producing propaganda for the communists in Indochina in a story entitled "Come to the Commies!" Our hero dropped behind enemy lines posing as a traitor, and then learned that captured Americans are drugged into making the broadcasts, and he freed the prisoners. Marvel also had Captain America take on Red China and in issue #77, Captain America unraveled a Communist plot to blackmail Chinese living outside Red China



Written by [Bruce Walker](#) on July 26, 2011

into sending money back to Peking. Steve Rogers (Captain America's secret identity) was revealed in another issue to his girlfriend, Elizabeth Ross, who was an FBI agent. Other Marvel superheroes, such as Submariner, fought —logically enough — Soviet submarines during the 1950s.

When the "Silver Age" of comics began in the late 1950s through the 1960s, Marvel Comics did not completely leave behind the anti-communist theme.

Thor, for example, helped the Indian Army defeat Red Chinese aggressors in an early appearance in *Journey into Mystery*. The supervillain, the [Radioactive Man](#), was also a Chinese Communist enemy of Thor. Iron Man fought the Crimson Dynamo, a villain created by Soviet science at the insistence of Khrushchev. The Fantastic Four fought the Red Ghost and his Super Apes. These Communist (primarily Soviet) super villains were regularly featured in Marvel Comics until about 1966. Then they vanished.

In their place, Marvel introduced the danger of "Super-Patriots" in the Avenger's battle against the Sons of Serpents. Communist enemies were no more. There were, apparently, no atrocities committed against American soldiers during the Vietnam War (or at least none that any Marvel comic book reader would find). The Prague Spring and the invasion of Czechoslovakia by Warsaw Pact tanks in 1968 did not even merit a blip on the radar screen of 1960s comic books.

Even Nick Fury, when he took over S.H.I.E.L.D., which was short for "Supreme Headquarters International Law Enforcement Division," found menaces such as Hydra and A.I.M. but no Communist menace at all. Needless to say, the Killing Fields of Cambodia under Pol Pot were slipped without a word into the memory hole. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, which included such truly hideous things as booby-trap toys for children intended not to kill but to maim, was not morally reprehensible enough to touch on in the comic-book world.

Instead comics shifted their focus to "social problems" in America — greedy corporations, polluters, homeless people, etc. — as if America was the problem with the world. Jimmy Olsen, Superman's pal, for example, lived in his car (one might think that Superman could build him a home in about five minutes, but apparently not). Green Arrow became a junkie.

Marvel began to bring in its "New X-Men," which included Colossus, a super strong Russian farmer who was the virtual image of Stalinist art about the New Soviet Man — and apparently the only human on earth, outside of American academia, who actually still believed in the Soviet economic miracle. The whole team became multinational and some superheroes, such as Northstar in *Alpha Flight*, was openly homosexual.

There were, and are, real villains in our world. In the 1960s and 1970s it was very easy for anyone to see just how brutal and dangerous the Communist conspiracy was to mankind. Writers, interestingly enough, turned out many exceptional books about the ghastly nature of the Soviet Union (Eugene Lyon's *Workers' Paradise Lost: Fifty Years of Soviet Communism: A Balance Sheet*, a 1967 appraisal of communists since the Bolshevik seizure of power, is one excellent example; Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's books also showed evil from within the belly of the beast). It would have been easy to write honest stories about the Communist threat over the last 50 years. But instead, Marvel (and D.C.) decided to utterly ignore that danger. Marvel even rewrote the history of Magneto so that instead of being the brutal leader of the Brotherhood of Evil Mutants, he was a Holocaust survivor. Why not a Gulag survivor? Why did Marvel and D.C. utterly ignore the Gulag and other crimes of Communism even as it resurrected Red Skull in the 1960s, this time as a Nazi — again?

Those familiar with the machinations behind the scenes which have caused the bulk of our liberal media



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always to have had a soft spot for Communism will know the answer.

Illustration: Marvel Comics #1 in October, 1939.



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