

Henry A. Wallace (1952), "Where I Was Wrong", *The Week Magazine* (September 7):

Here are startling admissions from a former vice-president of the United States. For years a Russian apologist, he now tells "Where I Was Wrong", by Henry A. Wallace.

Wallace says his big mistake was not denouncing Red coup in Czechoslovakia.

Henry A. Wallace:

Many people have asked me how I reconcile my stand before Korea with my uncompromising anti-Communist attitude of the past two years. The answer is simple.

Before 1949 I thought Russia really wanted and needed peace. After 1949 I became more and more disgusted with the Soviet methods and finally became convinced that the Politburo wanted the Cold War continued indefinitely, even at the peril of accidentally provoking a hot war.

In this article I shall speak frankly of some of the circumstances which have caused me to revise my attitude.

Reports from Czechoslovakia

Among the first were the shocking revelations of the activities of Russia's atomic spies. This plus the testimony of American ex-Communists convinced me that Russia had been getting information illegally to which neither she nor any other nation was entitled.

Next, I was deeply moved by reports of friends who had visited Czechoslovakia shortly after the Communist took control. In the summer of 1949, a member of the Progressive Party visited Czechoslovakia and reported the dispossession of relatives whose only crime was to own a small business. No one, I was told, could amount to anything who was not an outspoken critic of the U.S. and capitalism. Only Moscow-trained Communists were allowed in positions of authority.

As I look back over the past 10 years, I now feel that my greatest mistake was in not denouncing the Communist take-over of Czechoslovakia of 1948.

Ruthless Nature of Communism

At that time I labored under the illusion that the Communists had beaten us to the punch in popular appeal, and that they had the support of most of the people, who feared a resurgent Germany more than a domineering Russia. Therefore I said democratic Czechoslovakia was a victim of the Cold War. Her hatred and fear of the Germans had thrown her into the arms of Russia, and placed first Benes and Masaryk and finally the Czech-born Communists in an impossible position.

In other words, I blamed the Communist coup in Czechoslovakia partly on geography and partly on history.

Up to a point, my analysis was sound, but it failed utterly to take into account the ruthless nature of Russian-trained Communists whose sole objective was to make Czechoslovakia completely subservient to Moscow.

Time has also brought me new understanding of the Korean question. In 1948 I believed both Russia and the U.S. should take their troops out of Korea.

Today, knowing more about Russia's methods, I am sure it was a serious mistake when we withdrew our troops. Russia may not want a hot war at tang time in the net ten years, but she certainly wants such a continuation of the Col War as will enable her, through her satellites and internally-planted subversives, to take over the greatest amount of territory possible. Russia is still on the march, and the question now is whether she will be able to take over all of Asia, including India and the Near East.

Turning back to World War II, it is necessary to mention the period in 1944 when I went across Soviet Asia to China on a wartime mission for the President. My only instructions from Roosevelt as far as the Russians were concerned was to take a look at their agricultural experiment stations, factories, and schools. And, of course, Roosevelt was always interested in the Gobi desert and the vegetation there, past, present, and future.

I was not sent to gain secret information of any kind. No mention was made of slave-labor camps. I had not the slightest idea when I visited Magdan that this far-north Pacific port--center of a vast, sub-arctic gold field--was also the center for administering the labor of both criminals and those suspected of political disloyalty.

Slave Labor

Nothing I saw at Magadan or anywhere else in Soviet Asia suggested slave labor. True, I had heard that many kulaks who had their farms taken from them in the early ;30s and been sent to Siberia, but I had not the slightest idea that there ere many slave-labor camps in Siberia in 1944 and that of these the most notorious was Magadan.

On the other hand, I had long had the idea that the RUssians might actually be doing a better job of developing the agriculture and industry of their Far North than we were doing in Alaska. Therefore I visited every factory, school, and agricultural experiment station I possibly could.

Russian hospitality is proverbial, and it is not surprising that on this occasion the Russians should do everything possible to impress the Vice-President of the country which was sending them so many billions of dollars of vital necessities of many kinds. So on the whole these visits made a most favorable impression on me.

But, as I now know, this impression was not the complete one. Elinor Lippor, who was a slave laborer in the Magadan area for many years, has subsequently described the great effort put forth by the Soviet authorities to pull the wool over our eyes and make Magadan into a Potemkin village for my inspection. Watch towers were torn down. Prisoners were herded away out of sight. On this basis, what we was prodded a false impression. I was amazed that the Russians

could do so much in such short time--as was Wendell Willkie, who had visited the same region in 1942. But unfortunately neither Willkie nor I knew the full truth. As guests we were shown only one side of the coin.

Even so, what we saw was important and should never be forgotten in these days when so many people contemplate the possibility of conflict in the Northern Pacific. The Soviets in their totalitarian way have done their best to bring the full power of science to bear on those areas which they deem of strategic importance.

More Science in Schools

I visited a number of schools in Soviet Asia, and even in the lower grades I found evidence of a much stronger emphasis on science than we give in the US. It is quite probable that within a generation Russia may have twice as many well-trained scientist as we. Russian resources are separated by vast distances. Her climate is exceedingly difficult. Transportation problems will always be most serious. But much of her soil is rich in the elements which when combined with a severe climate produce a most vital type of human being.

Willkie as well as I had been greatly impressed with the rapid development of eastern Siberia and had likened it to the American Far West expansion in the 19th century. We were rightly interested in the immense human labor being put forth under the most difficult conditions. What we didn't see were the living conditions of the slave workers.

"I Was Too Impressed"

As I look back across my trip across Soviet Asia to China, I can see after reading accounts by former slave laborers who escaped from Siberia that I was altogether too much impressed by the show put on by high Russian officials, who as human beings seemed just like typical capitalistic "go-getters".

Later, during this same trip in 1944, it is possible that I underestimated the speed with which China could develop her military potential.

In China, which has 15 times as many people as Siberia to the north, I found almost nothing in the way of modern industry.

Her one capacity seemed to be the ability of her farmers to work impossible hours on tiny farms. From what I saw of Chinese soldiers in 1944 I would have said it would be impossible to train them by 1952 to make the kind of fight they are now staging in Korea. But the Chinese soldiers at Kunming in 1944 had excellent ability to move medium-sized artillery and to fire it accurately.

While I've been greatly surprised at the speed of development of Chinese military power in the past eight years, I felt even in 1944 that China might some day become the strongest military power on earth. I feared she might eventually lead the aspirations of the Asiatic people against the West.

But in other respects, ideas formed during this trip have not changed and are as true today as they were then.

I went to Asia in 1944 feeling that colonialism could easily be the downfall of the white race. I felt that the supreme problem of modern times was the unrelenting march of the common man, and that most of the common men of the world were earning less than one-twentieth as much as the workers in the US, Canada, Britain, and western Europe. These people because of poor food, disease, and ignorance now have a life expectancy 40 years less than ours. With education and good food they have just as great capacity as we. I wanted the on-rushing common man on our side, and the best way to keep him with us was to trade with him and help him to increase his production.

In brief, I felt that in the long run the only safe course for the US was to make friends with the so-called backward peoples and to make such friendship pay by expanding trade and productivity.

We Could Have Saved

Therefore when I returned from China and Siberia the first thing I did, on July 9, 1944, was to give a speech at Seattle on the possibilities of greatly expanded productivity and trade with the Far East across the Pacific. It was a good speech, and if the course I charted had been followed, we could have saved many billions of dollars.

I had seen some evidence of the common man on the march in Asia in 1944, but what I did not see was the Soviet determination to enslave the common man morally, mentally, and physically for its own imperial purposes. Today the Soviet Union has, for the moment, through Mao Tse-tung, millions of Chinese workers at its disposal to be impressed into the Chinese army.

What Moscow does not seem to realize is that the dragon which she has stirred out of its sleep may turn on her. At the moment, for the sake of chasing the white man out of Korea, the Chinese Communists may profess loyalty to Moscow, but in the long run the Chinese will not love the Russian white man any better than the American or Western European. China will find there is no net gain for China in trading Chinese feudalism and colonialism for Russian Communism.

Time Isn't Ripe

The future of the world may depend on our ability in America to make it clear through the UN that in order to escape from Soviet domination China does not need to go back to colonialism or feudalism. Instead she can go forward into an era of greatly expanded production and trade with a much higher standard of living than she can ever get by fighting wars for Russia. The time is not yet ripe for this but it will come.

More and more I am convinced that Russian Communism in its total disregard of truth, in its fanaticism, its intolerance and its resolute denial of God and religion is something utterly evil.

So far as Asia is concerned the US has never been an imperialistic nation. We freed the Philippines and will get out of Formosa and Japan when the danger of Red military aggression is certainly past. The US never has engaged and never will engage in colonialism on the mainland of Asia. But at the moment, in spite of our superior wealth and technology, we are losing ground in Asia because we do not understand the people as well as Russia.

Who Will Lead

Of course we know that the Kremlin will betray the people when it gets control of them, but at the moment it more nearly has their sympathy than we. The problem is one of small farmers and agricultural workers earning less than 50 cents a day.

Who will lead the march of the common man? At one time I hoped that Russia and the US could cooperate through the UN to do the job. But the Soviets' behavior in recent years makes me believe that the only core now is for the UN, through UN agencies like FAO, to go all out with technical assistance in countries like India, Nepal, Iran, etc. By helping these people to help themselves, we can buy more security with \$1 than we can get with \$20 worth of arms.

I Wanted Peace

One thing of which I am very proud is that I risked my public career for the sake of promoting peace at a time when it was very unpopular to talk about such things. No figure of high public position in the US tried harder than I to bring about understanding between Russia and the Western World before it was too late.

Many people believe Roosevelt and I tried to appease Russia. It is true that both of us saw the possibility of future conflict and wanted to prevent it. But I am one of those who believe that if Roosevelt had remained alive and in good health the whole course of history would have been changed and we would not today be spending \$60 billion a year on arms.

What I wanted was peace, but not peace at the price of Communist domination. I thought the Soviets had more sense than to do what they have been doing during the past few years.

There I was proved wrong by subsequent events. yet I know I am not wrong in predicting that if the Soviets continue along present lines they may *possibly* cause disaster to the whole Western World--but in the process they will *certainly* destroy the Politburo, the Communist Party in Russia, and bring misery to the people of Russia and her satellites.