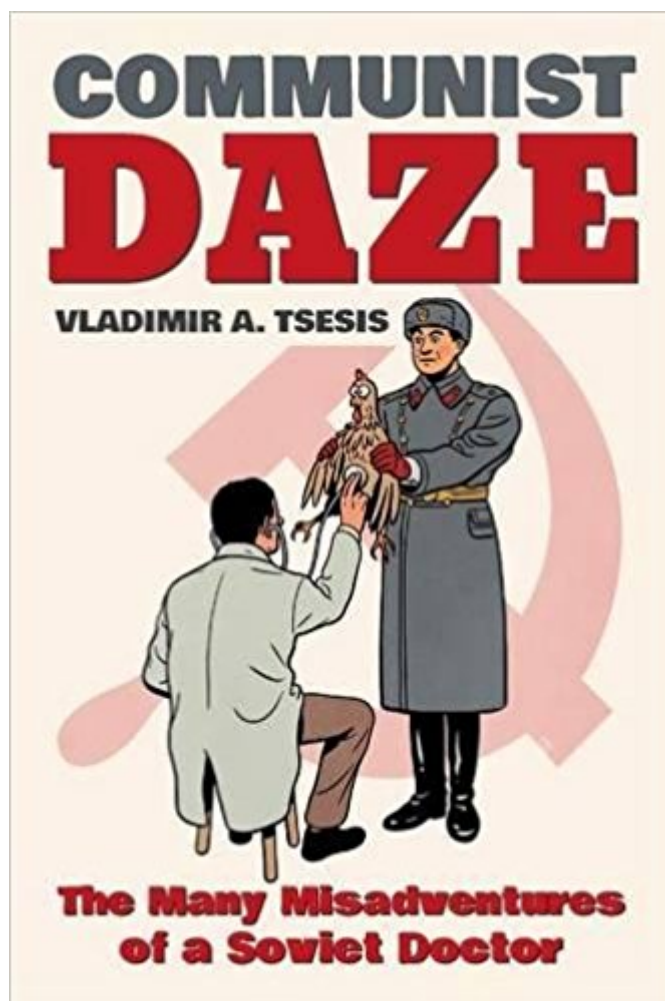


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Communist Daze: The Many Misadventures Of A Soviet Doctor



Synopsis

Welcome to Gradieshti, a Soviet village awash in gray buildings and ramshackle fences, home to a large, collective farm and to the most oddball and endearing cast of characters possible. For three years in the 1960s, Vladimir Tsesis— an inestimable Soviet doctor and irrepressible jester— was stationed in a village where racing tractor drivers tossed vodka bottles to each other for sport; where farmers and townspeople secretly mocked and tried to endure the Communist way of life; where milk for children, running water, and adequate electricity were rare; where the world's smallest, motley parade became the country's longest; and where one compulsively amorous Communist Party leader met a memorable, chilling fate. From a frantic pursuit of calcium-deprived, lunatic Socialist chickens to a father begging on his knees to Soviet officials to obtain antibiotic for his dying child, Vladimir's tales of Gradieshti are unforgettable. Sometimes hysterical, often moving, always a remarkable and highly entertaining insider's look at rural life under the old Soviet regime, they are a sobering exposé of the terrible inadequacies of its much-lauded socialist medical system.

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Customer Reviews

" I . . . found it convincing. I hope . . . (this) book has many readers because the wide public in the United States, while not sympathetic to Communism, seems to believe that Communist Russia is a wholesome country that gives its citizens what they want. (The) book, based on personal experience, should help them get rid of this delusion." -- Richard Pipes, Distinguished Harvard Historian and government adviser. "In this memoir, a pediatrician describes his work in a Moldovan

village; Vladimir A. Tsesis's stories are darkly funny and reveal much about the poverty, drunkenness, political corruption, anti-Semitism, and fundamental absurdity of rural life in the Soviet 1960s." — Deborah A. Field, author of *Private Life and Communist Morality in Khrushchev's Russia* "To understand the confusing reality of Russia today, it helps to recall the 'bad-old-days' of the late, unlamented Soviet Union. This warm, touching and occasionally hilarious book can assist those recollections." — Michael Medved, nationally syndicated radio show host

Vladimir A. Tsesis, MD, was born and grew up in the Soviet Union, and became a pediatric doctor there. In 1974 he emigrated to the United States, where he continued to practice for another thirty years. Presently he is retired and lives in River Forest, IL. His books include *Children, Parents, Lollipops: Tales of Pediatrics* and *Who's Yelling in My Stethoscope?*

Good read shows how fortunate we are

All the books by Vladimir Tsesis capture the reader at once though in different ways. His new book is dedicated to the theme which is not so often addressed in storytelling, the dreadful health care system in the Moldovan village in Mid 60s. It is a satirical satire on socialism as a whole. The author describes the hardship of the beginning of his professional career there, the struggle with demons and mills that accompanied his path in uncivilized rural area of Soviet country. Though he does that with humor and all the joy of a young life, the faith in self, the sensations of the timelessness of being, of happiness of an extraordinary love to his young and wonderful wife Marina. The author's peculiarity is quite remarkable; it is based on bright contrasts that are traced throughout the entire book: every sad story is always ended in hope, warmth and cordiality. One of them is strikingly remarkable; it is a dramatic story (threat to collide with a bunch of wild dogs) described at the end of the passage from Tiraspol to Gradieshti. But the contrast worked, the horrific event was resolved, the feelings softened and the outcome became nostalgically touching because the only thing that stayed in the memory was the description of the road itself, and you could really smell the bitterness of the roadside grasses and enjoy the bright sun rays that glittered in the midsummer sky. Another beautiful story so vividly described in the book speaks for itself and shows, what a good doctor and truly kind person the author is, when he portrays a sad story of illness of a gypsy boy, the doctor attempts to save him and a bitter death of the boy. The last chapter splendidly concluded this series of stories and best described what kind of happiness it was to be a

doctor. This is one of the attractions of this sarcastic by nature book. I do not know why, but when I finished the book, I felt sad in my soul. I felt sorry for this wild, harsh country, which knew the best ways of torturing people. But at the same time when reading a book I felt something incredible that was impossible to forget, in other words, it was imprinted youth of the author. So by the same token the book has sort of romantic flavor as well.

The book captures from the first page. It mightily shows a real face of socialism helping to get rid of any delusion in this regard. I was 20 years old at the time described by Dr. Tsesis, but I could not even imagine the level of health care in the village in Soviet state. And this was in 1965! The author wittily describes picturesque scenes of the village, ludicrous party and economic leaders, the life of collective farmers and residents of the rural hospital: doctors, nurses and patients. How often the natural desire to help was obstructed by a shortage of funds, the lack of basic hygiene, medical instruments. Having come to the West, the author realized for the first time that disposable needles and diapers, as well as other miracles of medical technology, were the norm of common practice. As the author points out, even children from Mexico did not have the diseases that he was fighting with in the Moldovan village. Being a young graduate from the Medical School the author was supposed to have a practice restricted only to pediatrics, but in real life he had also be an obstetrician-gynecologist, an ambulance specialist, a venereologist, a surgeon. In other words, he became a general practitioner working in a hospital with extremely limited medical staff. Sometimes, he dealt with the cases which demanded to do immediate reading of the necessary pages from the medical textbooks. Yes, any doctor could wish to gain such a diverse practice, but the author got it for an unimaginable price! The stories told reveal an indescribable joy that stricken young doctor when he managed saving patient's life in unspeakable circumstances. The author shows the inhabitants of the village with great sympathy. Unlike Muscovites, who, according to great Bulgakov, were tormented by the housing issues, the villagers dealt only with one problem: to survive in the conditions of victorious socialism, that resulted in unmeasured domestic backwardness, poverty. At the same time, the book is filled with a great humor, sometime romanticism. All stories presented in the book are bound by one very important and great idea proving that implementation of the Hippocratic Oath may be possible in any life circumstances.

Communist Daze in another of the memoirs of Mr. Tsesis that informs and entertains in a manner at once light and cautionary. At this distance from the history he lived it is more important than ever to be exposed to these kinds of first hand reporting, a la George Orwell. This book would be perfect as

a jumping off point for a high school history class providing innumerable hooks for further study. As a quick enjoyable read it is a perfect way to "walk in the shoes" of an able witness to history. Can't recommend it enough!

I love this book. I have lived through the experiences described by Dr. Tsesis, though not as a doctor, but as a patient. And not in the small provincial town in Moldova, but in Moscow, the capital of the former Soviet Union. It was not that much different though. Same lack of medical attention, same shortage of drugs, same crowded rooms, same, same, and same. Dr. Tsesis painted a perfect picture of the government managed health care. The book describes a compassion of a young doctor, who tries to adjust to the harsh reality and to do the best for his patients. It is sad and humorous, realistic and illuminating. Thank you for the book, Dr. Tsesis

Excellent, honest, written from first hand experience description of Soviet reality during 60's. The amazing disregard for human life not just by Party officials, but by (some of) the doctors themselves is appalling, to say the least. I grew up in Soviet Union, but was fortunate enough not to experience these horrors. Must read for those who want to get an idea about life in Soviet Paradise.

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