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"Did anyone here recognize that?"

On Torture Today

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**The [Living History Forum](#) launches its work on subject of “Crimes against Humanity Committed by Communist Regimes” —
Kulturhuset, Stockholm, 10 March 2008**

Seminar I: Documentation, Memory, and Reconciliation. 3rd speaker: MICHAEL SCHOENHALS, Lund University

Good afternoon, all of you. Let me begin by explaining that I am not a cadre with our esteemed host unit today, the **Living History Forum**, but a privileged member of the free intelligentsia. I was invited last year by the **Forum** to give “expert advice” on the China-part of the “Crimes against Humanity Committed by Communist Regimes”. Normally, I am a professor of Chinese at Lund University, in the south of Sweden, specializing in the social and political history of modern China.

My talking points for today, I had originally written in Swedish, some weeks ago. I had not been informed beforehand that we would all be communicating in English. As I sat down on Saturday, the day before yesterday, to translate them, doubts surfaced in my mind as to how well what I had intended to say in Swedish—about documentation, memory, and reconciliation—might actually “work” in a very different language. So I did what I usually do in similar situations. I walked around my library clutching a cup of steaming “Lundablandning” and allowed what’s to be found on desk-, shelf-, and floor space there provide me with inspiration. I stumbled, in due course, across an item of documentation that struck the historian in me as the perfect intertextual point of departure. A transcript, in English, *forged*, of a short speech by a Chinese Communist Party dictator in the year Stalin died and I was born, 1953. The speaker’s subject matter: the practice of torture, although never explicitly referred to as such. Our seminar subject here today including that of memory, I decided I would read it to you. I want to leave you with a memory of something far better than anything I, from my outsider’s perspective, could ever myself have written about crimes against humanity. This man knows what he’s talking about and he is passionate about it, about how right it is, how just it is, how sweet it is...

Good morning. This week, I addressed the Ministry of State Security and thanked the comrades who work tirelessly to keep us safe. Because of their hard work, we have not suffered another attack since Liberation. This

is not for a lack of effort on the part of the class enemy. He remains determined to attack our socialist motherland. Because the danger remains, we need to ensure our intelligence officials have all the tools they need to stop him.

Unfortunately, the National People's Congress recently sent me an intelligence authorization bill that would diminish these vital tools. So today, I vetoed it. And here is why:

The bill the National People's Congress sent me would take away one of the most valuable tools in our class war—the Ministry's program to detain and question hardened counter-revolutionaries and operatives. This program has produced critical intelligence that has helped us prevent a number of attacks. And it has helped us understand the class enemy's structure and financing and communications and logistics.

The main reason this program has been effective is that it allows the Ministry of Public Security to use specialized interrogation procedures to question a small number of the most dangerous counter-revolutionaries under careful supervision. The bill the National People's Congress sent me would deprive the ministry of the authority to use these safe and lawful techniques. Instead, it would restrict the ministry's range of acceptable interrogation methods to those provided in the People's Liberation Army Field Manual. The procedures in this manual were designed for use by soldiers questioning lawful combatants captured on the battlefield. They were not intended for intelligence professionals trained to question hardened counter-revolutionaries.

Limiting the Ministry of Public Security's interrogation methods to those in the People's Liberation Army Field Manual would be dangerous because the manual is publicly available and easily accessible in our bookshops. Shortly after Liberation, we learned that key class enemy operatives had been trained to resist the methods outlined in the manual. And this is why we created alternative procedures to question the most dangerous hardened counter-revolutionary operatives, particularly those who might

have knowledge of attacks planned on our great socialist motherland. The best source of information about the class enemy's attacks is the class enemy himself. If we were to shut down this program and restrict the Ministry of Public Security to methods in the People's Liberation Army Field Manual, we could lose vital information from senior class enemies, and that could cost lives.

The bill the National People's Congress sent me would not simply ban one particular interrogation method, as some have implied. Instead, it would eliminate all the alternative procedures we've developed to question the world's most dangerous and violent counter-revolutionaries.

The fact that we have not been attacked since Liberation is not a matter of chance. It is the result of good policies and the determined efforts of individuals carrying them out. We owe these individuals our thanks, and we owe them the authorities they need to do their jobs effectively.

We have no higher responsibility than stopping counter-revolution. And this is no time for the National People's Congress to abandon practices that have a proven track record of keeping us safe.

Thank you for listening.

Did anyone here recognize that? Save for the forger's substitution of a handful of nouns like "National People's Congress" for "Congress", "Class enemy" or "counter-revolutionary" for "terrorist", and "Public Security" for "Homeland Security", that text documents [Saturday's weekly radio address to his people](#) by the duly elected and re-elected leader of the world's most powerful democracy. That was *not* Chairman Mao. Ponder this for one moment. Ponder what it means.

On **The Living History Forum** website it says "We challenge the customary perceptions of 'us' and 'them' by taking values and opinions to their ultimate consequences." It also says "the day we start lecturing people or grow predictable, we will no longer be interesting." Bold words! "We want," the **Forum** says, "to encourage people to think for themselves." I have taken them up on this and encourage each and every one of you to do so too. Some of you may have come here today simply to see "Communist Regimes" denounced. If so, I believe, you've

missed the point: the purpose of all of this is to encourage you to think for yourselves about the *crimes against humanity* committed by regimes calling themselves communist. Just like on another occasion you may be encouraged to ponder the gravity of the crimes against humanity committed by regimes calling themselves something different. Like fascist. Like democratic.

It has been a privilege for me to be involved in this project and to get to know and work with the staff at **The Living History Forum**. In our Swedish media, they have taken a lot of flak: often unfairly, in my view. These are committed humanists struggling with a very delicate and difficult task. "We want to inspire young people to make up their own minds with new insights," they say. They mean it. To realize, for example, that democracy can no more be reconciled with the practice of torture in the name of -ism A than in the name of -ism B. To inspire young people to make up their own minds, **Forum** says, "requires diverse starting-points, angles and approaches". Including exhibits like the Pavlik Morozov one here today, publications like the [*Factual Study Material*](#), as well as contributions to public seminars by "experts" whose talking points have not been screened for political correctness beforehand. "We move on to the emotional understanding of what these injustices involve," they say. Of course you do.

Thank you!