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Stalinism as I Saw It

by Sergo Mikoyan

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STALINISM AS I SAW IT

by Sergo Mikoyan

To the memory of my father-in-law, Aleksei Kuznetsov, a young, small-town communist enthusiast of the 1920s, hero of the 900-day defense of Leningrad—a man whose very life and untimely, brutal death at the hands of the secret police on Stalin's direct order reflected the light and the dark, the romance and the remorse, the hopes and the despair, of Soviet communists since October 1917.

INTRODUCTION

This paper is an attempt to describe my personal experience of Stalinism and to critically analyze the phenomenon of Stalinism as a whole, as well as to examine the problems of certain theses of historians who are specialists in this area. The reader may think this task is easier for me than for Western historians who undertake to examine Stalinism. In fact, several circumstances make analysis of this period exceedingly difficult for me. In the first place, my professional life as a historian has for decades drawn my attention away from the Soviet Union towards other countries, particularly those across the Atlantic. Perhaps more significant, however, is that Stalinism in its worst features was for me not an object of academic study, but the natural environment of at least the first 24 years of my life. Hence I could not but grow up with certain dysfunctions that prevented me from developing a more or less normal personality. I ask that my readers recall that I lived not just in the heartland of Stalinism, but in the family of one of Stalin's closest associates—I lived inside the same Kremlin walls which seemed to safely isolate "The Great Genius of All Times and Peoples" from some two hundred million people, and not, unfortunately, outside those walls. I often saw at a close distance a short man in the uniform of a marshal, followed or surrounded by a group of people including my own father, although I never even dreamed of meeting Him. But practically every night, or rather, early every morning, my father came home straight from His home.

Could these circumstances—and many others which constraints of space do not allow me to narrate here—leave me any possibility of remaining a calm, objective, and academically-minded scholar of a subject which was the substance of my very existence for many, many years? My existence and non-existence have desperately fought one another around the clock since my birth in that notorious year 1929 right up until the death of the dictator on March 5, 1953.

Readers of this paper need not fear endless recollections on the theme of "Stalin and me," but I wished to prepare you for an approach—for thoughts and arguments—which may appear prejudiced, or, at the very least,

not absolutely objective. Of course, it can always be argued that one can never be absolutely objective, but I emphasize here that no one who is human can examine so unique a phenomenon as Stalinism without emotion. I thank God that computers have not been programmed to play "Stalinism" as they are programmed to play chess. So I wish to state explicitly that I do not claim to be impartial. Moreover, I do not wish to be impartial. Too much in my life has been connected with Stalin, Stalinism, and the *stalinishchina* for me to adopt a sober, balanced approach to such an immense—and emotional—topic.

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STALINISM AS I SAW IT

What is Stalinism? I would prefer to pose the question in the past tense: what *was* Stalinism? But perhaps the present tense remains more correct, otherwise it would be futile to speculate if it was *necessary*. The new term "*stalinshchina*" appeared as Stalinism began to be understood in the Soviet Union as something broader than simply the system which existed under Stalin during his lifetime. "*stalinshchina*" encompasses all that the system implied: brutal, cruel, and senseless mass terror; fear of repression; the almighty machine of the OGPU-NKVD-MVD-MGB; the blindness of millions who were deceived and naive; ideological rigidity transformed into fierce, widespread, and overwhelming fanaticism—subduing the honesty and common sense even of those contemporaries of Stalin who had the reputation of being decent, human, and intelligent. Why did we feel it necessary to introduce a new word? Not only because it has a definite negative sound in Russian, with a strong accent of contempt and disgust, but because many began to express the opinion that it was born not with the dictatorship of Stalin in 1929 or somewhere at the end of 1920s, but much earlier, perhaps in October 1917, under the name of victorious Bolshevism. And, of course, because we understood that Stalinism did not die with Stalin in March 1953. Unfortunately, we cannot celebrate its complete burial even today.

Whatever trend prevails in the future, I remain absolutely convinced that a positive view of the Stalin era will never prevail in the Soviet Union in the future, regardless of pressure from either the public or the ruling elite. The fact is that even the *Pamiat'* society, known for its defiance of democratic and humanistic trends, as well as Russian chauvinists—groups around the journals *Nash sovremennik* and *Molodaia gvardiia*—are trying to overcome their former allegiance to Stalin and his era. An article by Fomenko in *Nash sovremennik* of 1990 (No. 8, 1990) is typical of these groups and sounds like a manifesto of their recent ideological development. (The Ukrainian name of the author has no significance; in Russia there many ethnic Russians with such names.) In the article Fomenko discounts not only Stalin, but Marxism-Leninism and socialism altogether. The idea of the Russian empire (of course without the word "empire"—this is the only disguise they think reasonable to retain) leads

these groups back to Tsarist Russia, to Russia of the Provisional Government, and occasionally—albeit cautiously—to Russia of the Constituent Assembly (disbanded by the Bolsheviks in January 1918 with the notorious words of the Kronstadt sailor Zhelezniakov: "The guard is tired. I ask you to clear out the premises.").

So far as convinced Stalinists are concerned, and I know several among the educated portion of the former Party apparatus and "the Party intelligentsia," they will never be able to openly take a pro-Stalinist posture in the future, regardless of whether or not they temporarily manage to seize the country's political "commanding heights." Let us recall that for a decade following the fall of Khrushchev, even such a Stalinist as the dogmatic, stupid, and almighty ideologist Suslov prevented any *mention* of Stalin. It is suicidal today, and will remain so in the future, for any political figure to call for a more positive view of Stalin. Much can happen in the USSR, but even the saddest scenario of a full triumph of dogmatic and conservative *apparatchiks* (doomed in any case to be short-lived) will not put Stalin back on the pedestal from the dirt to which he was rightly thrown.

So we must ask again, what, indeed, is Stalinism? A more exact formulation of the question would be a series of interrelated queries: What belongs to Stalinism? What constituted a part of it and what remained of it? What survives today as its legacy? It seems easier to arrive at generalizations using this kind of approach.

Surely, the core of Stalinism was the *stalinshchina*, i.e., the Great Terror, the Great Fear. Let us try to understand the logic of those who, after the beginning of *glasnost'*, revitalized the discussions of the post-1956 period. These discussions had been slowed and then suspended by Suslov and his ideological clique after 1964. I mean, of course, public discussions—private discussions and analysis never stopped. More and more people were gradually stimulated by life itself to think about Stalinism, despite the official silence and Stalin's careful, one-sided rehabilitation. (He began to appear in films and books concerned with the Second World War and pre-war industrial and technological achievements.)

I suggest that the reader put him- or herself in the shoes of a common Soviet man or woman, or even those of a teenager interested in

listening to adults, who reads about politics and thinks for him- or herself. (My younger son is proof that young people can think independently even earlier than adolescence.) Why? Because all of them have lived through some periods or aspects of Stalinism. And because they were the people who actually decided the fate of Stalinism as such, although not yet to the very last. Everything depended upon their ability to overcome the brainwashing of previous decades, the breathtaking revelations of the Khrushchev era, and the conspicuous silence of the Brezhnev years.

None of this was easy. Even the work of historians who analyzed Stalinism from abroad reflects ideological battles of their day, not to mention different trends in historical analysis. What distinguishes historical analysis of Stalinism undertaken within the Soviet Union from that undertaken without is the substance and meaning of the respective discussions. For Soviet citizens, these discussions necessarily mean a fierce struggle to understand the most vital issues of their everyday lives, now and in the future. The reader must understand that for us, the past has not receded into the pages of history books.

Beginning with the awakening of 1956, people had a choice between two extreme explanations of Stalinism: a) Stalin alone was responsible for everything bad, just as earlier he had been identified with everything GREAT. Marxist-Leninist ideology, the Communist Party, the socialist system—all these entities were not to be blamed, but pitied for the harm Stalin had done them; or b) Stalinism was predetermined by historical, political, and social circumstances which were the direct outcome of the October 1917 Revolution. Stalin's personality played some role, but an insignificant one. This second interpretation actually works for both for those who defend Stalin and those who are antagonistic to Marxism-Leninism (or at least, antagonistic to Leninism).

Until recently, it was difficult to be totally frank and critical about Lenin in the USSR. (This was no less true of published works than it was of individuals' psychological readiness to analyze the past.) Nowadays this topic, like so many others, is no longer verboten in the Soviet Union. It takes less time to free one's mind, however, than to become determined to make one's thoughts known to the public and, of course, overcome the barriers of editorial and official censorship.

I remember discussions among my friends and colleagues during and after 1956. Cautious critiques of Lenin were psychologically restricted to recalling, for example, "The Resolution About Factions" of 1921. Fearing a split in the Party after its triumph in a bloody civil war and facing the task of ruling a predominantly peasant country surrounded by hostile "capitalist encirclement," Lenin introduced a resolution forbidding factions in the Party. Usually we approached such delicate topics according to the standards of the times: given the difficult situation he faced, Lenin's action could be understood *subjectively*, but *objectively*, the resolution gave Stalin an easy mechanism for destroying any opposition more or less organized against him.

Educated people and the intelligentsia were unsatisfied with the first explanation. At the time, this view was professed by Khrushchev. Despite the fact that he did much to correct history and his own image in his "tapes," Khrushchev reiterated this view in his memoirs, not bothering to consider the consequent trustworthiness of his recollections. This explanation is simply ridiculous.

Here it seems important to note a trend that has not been adequately examined, but deserves to be known. This is the process of thinking about and analyzing the past by our intelligentsia as a whole. By this I mean not only the writers, sociologists, and historians, who have been read, re-read and cited abroad widely, but specifically the scientific intelligentsia, which was often ahead of those for whom the study of our society's history was a profession. When Iurii Afanas'ev was still denouncing "bourgeois historians" and Fëdor Burlatskii was still writing political documents for the CPSU and the government, substituting "black" with "white" (both were considerably more frank, if not cynical, in private talks), physicists and mathematicians discussed essential issues without prejudice.

I am not accusing anyone of hypocrisy. Certainly, I have no right whatsoever to do so. The problem is much more complicated than hypocrisy or profession-hunting. The very minds of people engaged in political science in the Soviet Union were deformed: they needed more time to liberate their minds, to get rid of their "inner censor," to become accustomed to writing what they really thought. The mental processes of

people engaged in the exact sciences was altogether different. Andrei Sakharov is, of course, the best example of these thinkers, but I met many who posed so-called "difficult questions" bluntly, logically, and uncompromisingly. Their advantage was not necessarily a moral superiority—which no doubt was the case with Sakharov himself—but a freedom from dogmas and stereotypes, a lack of professional commitment to any specific ideology, a fresh, unbiased approach, and their search for clear answers. Those in the social sciences and in political practice were accustomed to adjusting common sense and evident facts to THE CAUSE OF SOCIALISM.

Unfortunately my own father, Anastas Mikoyan, who absolutely did not lack common sense, inner honesty, or decency, was fanatical enough to subdue these inborn qualities to the goals of THE PARTY (as formulated and defined by its "collective leadership" or personalized leader). I will have more to say concerning his role as a Party functionary, and later, as one of the leading figures of the Party and State. But as a person, he was simply one who moved within a narrow space—or rather, cage—formed by such sacred things as THE INTERESTS OF THE PARTY, THE ALLEGIANCE TO PARTY DISCIPLINE, THE INTERESTS OF SOCIALISM, THE INTERESTS OF SOVIET POWER. I have met thousands of honest, decent people blinded by these or similar ultra-durable fetters.

The proportion of fanaticism and professional susceptibility, self-denial and hypocrisy, conformism and obsession for power at any price, fear and stubbornness (to the point of stupidity), was different in different people. There were millions of combinations of these and other elements. We would need someone of the stature of Dostoevskii in order to understand the behavior of anyone in the Stalin regime other than a simple butcher of the OGPU-NKVD. Whatever the motivations, they constituted the foundation of Stalinism under Stalin and after his death. It is not accidental that I am drawing a parallel between the behavior of Stalin's *okruzhenie* (his circle)—whether it was comprised of dozens or hundreds or thousands is immaterial—and that of the intellectual *okruzhenie* surrounding Khrushchev and Brezhnev. The latter served dictators who were not murderers. The former dealt with a first-rate murderer. Extenuating circumstances for the latter are evident: they did not serve a murderer.

But "extenuating" circumstances can also be found for those who constantly felt the coldness of a gun barrel on the back of their head. For those who surrounded Khrushchev and Brezhnev, disgrace meant only a less prestigious job, retirement, or even "diplomatic exile"—the kind of career demotion which often follows presidential campaigns in the United States. Under what conditions is it forgivable—if it can be forgiven at all—to sell one's soul?

But let us come back to the idea of common people trying to evaluate Stalinism. Khrushchev's naive intention to put all the blame on one man, even one with such a unique combination of demonic qualities—leaving the theory and "new" practice of the Communist Party to look both correct and innocent—was understandably unconvincing. Moreover, it managed to compromise the process of de-Stalinization itself. The question inevitably arose: Why only Stalin?—perhaps Khrushchev was trying to duck his share of responsibility? And if not Stalin alone, who else? This natural question led official Party documents of the *perestroika* years to use the expression "Stalin and his entourage" (perhaps his "associates" would be the more correct translation of *okruzhenie*?). In 1986-1988, even such independent minds as Anatolii Butenko and Roy Medvedev provided names and characteristics of people who had helped Stalin, assuming that their help played, if not a decisive, then at least a significant, role. Actually, they named members of the Politburo who had somehow managed to survive the Stalin years plus a few satraps of the OGPU-NKVD.

There was some logic in this approach, but not much, as numerous materials documenting the political behavior of many people who were executed or perished in the GULAG afterwards made clear. In any case, the circle was too narrow to make the concept of its guilt an adequate explanation. (Roy Medvedev's book on Stalin was not published in the Soviet Union at that time, so people judged his opinion in 1986-1988 according to his later articles and essays). For a country with almost two hundred million people, the message that one evil genius with a dozen or two accomplices had been a strong enough to impose unprecedented atrocities and total subordination on the population was neither a sufficient nor convincing explanation.

The easiest resolution to the dilemma would be to make the list longer. Easiest technically, that is. One could simply combine the lists of participants of the thirteenth[1] through seventeenth Communist Party congresses. Morally, however, this method poses a problem: most of these people perished in the torture-chambers of the NKVD or on the frozen soil of the GULAG. Besides, making the list longer would only produce two to three thousand more names. "What about the Party?" people began to ask. In the years 1987-1989, I personally was asked this question many times while lecturing in Moscow and Leningrad, Kiev and Odessa, Dnepropetrovsk and Donetsk, Gor'kii and Kirzhach, Obninsk and Narva, Ivanovo and Novosibirsk, Tallinn and Dushanbe.

The fact is that the Communist Party in the 1920s was the only institution where democracy existed and even flourished, where discussions were hot, open, defiant and straightforward—occasionally given to strong expressions bordering on insult. However, one man was invariably treated with respect by everyone—Lenin. But even Lenin had to explain, to reason, to convince, and very often, to argue. How could such a party permit their leadership to "betray" the Revolution, as Trotsky put it? Was Stalinism a *betrayal* of the revolution at all? Or was it a logical, possibly over-cruel, *development* or *continuation* of it? In other words, are Stalinism and Bolshevism identical concepts?

Again, let us not forget that for some time the Party was a kind of enclave of freedom in a totalitarian state. True, unjust persecution of different groups was not only tolerated, but recognized as "necessary." Faked trials of non-existent "parties" which led to the imprisonment and death of leading economists, engineers, and others, did not cause significant indignation among Bolsheviks. Certainly, they might have believed the OGPU, but why were they not touched by the repression of former White

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1. At the Thirteenth Party Congress (March 1924), the will of the Politburo was actually imposed on the delegates with respect to Lenin's "Testament:" the text was read to regional delegations separately and no discussion was offered or advised.

According to A. Mikoyan, the unprecedented unity of Trotsky, Zinoviev, Stalin, Bukharin, and others on this decision so impressed the rank and file delegates that they did not object. The text was not distributed, nor was it given to anyone in any form, and of course it was not published. Thus Stalin's use of portions of the document *several years later* for his own personal political goals cannot be interpreted as evidence that Stalin *alone* concealed the document from the Party and the people at a moment when it could have changed the history of the country.

officers, Mensheviks, Socialist Revolutionaries (SRs), and other innocent people? More than anything else, the obvious answer is the logic of the Civil War. The war did not actually stop in the minds of its main belligerents: the Reds, the Whites, the pinks, or even the greens.[2] They retained the harsh feelings of being exposed to death, the habit of solving problems with a Mauser in one's hand, the continuous sense of waging a decisive struggle against an enemy, the idea that the means of the struggle were practically without limit.

A. Tsipko was correct when, in answer to a journalist of *Ogonëk*[3], he said this kind of approach and behavior were immoral, as was the Bolsheviks' readiness to unleash a civil war. He forgot to add, however, that most civil wars are characterized by similar features. Civil wars in France, the United States, Mexico, Colombia, and many countries of Asia and Africa—without the participation of any Marxists!—give us numerous examples that inhuman features appear in general to be necessary characteristics of civil war. And, typically, civil wars do not end after an armistice or peace treaty is concluded—they usually do not end in anything but defeat or capitulation. In the same article, Tsipko incorrectly suggests that in 1917-1918, only the Bolsheviks were ready to unleash such a war in Russia. However, an article by Iurii Davidov in the same issue of *Ogonëk* reminds us that "the Whites" were in no sense better than "the Reds."

Yet the nightmare of collectivization was carried out by local Party activists nine years after the end of the Civil War. The leadership of the ruling party and some of the rank and file members were thus no doubt responsible for the fact that the spirit of civil war remained predominant in the Party. Unfortunately, only a minority of Bolsheviks were able to realize that collectivization was the turning point beyond which the Party's own inner democracy would begin to rapidly and irrevocably disappear. This was "the moment of truth." After collectivization, there was almost no hope of spreading democracy throughout the country in the foreseeable future. The Party was doomed to lose its inner democracy in favor of the rigid, pitiless dictatorship of one man. At the time, no one believed that the vicious

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2. This word, of course, had an altogether different meaning than it bears today. At that time it meant anarchical peasant armies acting mostly in Ukraine.

3. "Ostorozhno: Bol'shevizm!" *Ogonëk*, no. 47 (November 1990).

circle was locked and that the pole-axe would fall on the Party itself. No one imagined that "the Great Purge" would come for those who had dreamed of the happiness of all.

It is obvious to me that the Bolsheviks failed to see the cost of suppressing all dissidence. I lived in a family of such Bolsheviks and met many others like it, both before and after they were sentenced to the GULAG. I disagree with those who look back with hindsight and claim that democracy within the Party was predestined to disappear. As I see it, and I rely here on the thesis of Kliamkin, without a democratic society, a democratic mass party was an impossibility. Two means existed for resolving this contradiction and it is clear which prevailed.

In those days, Bolshevik-idealists hoped that democracy would spill over from the Party to society as a whole as Soviet power stabilized and basic socio-economic reforms were implemented. (I am convinced that Bolshevik-idealists comprised the majority of the "Old Guard" and thus Stalin was compelled to either eliminate them or turn them into obedient associates under the threat of death—and the death of their families—and perpetual pillory as "enemies of the people.") Of course, the Old Bolsheviks would not have permitted "the loss of the achievements of the Revolution," but their interpretation of the socialist path would have differed significantly from that of Stalin. However, the atmosphere of fierce inter-Party struggle, masterfully instigated and manipulated by Stalin, pushed aside and postponed an understanding of the immediate need for democracy for sixty years.

Recall Fëdor Raskol'nikov's devastating, superbly written, open letter to Stalin of 1938. This letter demonstrates ideals which are "utopian by nature," as many say today. Raskolnikov's letter is a manifesto which could have been signed by hundreds of thousands of Bolsheviks. As such, it gives us a far more reliable understanding of the inner world of "Old Guard" Bolsheviks than do the judgments of contemporary authors, whose emotions, no matter how understandable, have grown to the degree of obsession and do damage to their work.

To return to the process of learning about Stalinism in our country, Tsipko gave his answer to millions of people whose intellectual

quest was taking them to the core of Stalinism when he wrote his well-known article in *Nauka i zhizn*. So did Kliamkin, Nuykin, Seliunin, Butenko, Ambartsumov, Latsis, Andreev, and many others. It was not they who posed the question—they simply began to answer the question when the entire country demanded that the truth be sought out and told. The very nature of the path to truth, however, is complex in the extreme and difficult to locate rapidly. Several articles, or even, will not suffice to find it.

If the footprints of Stalinism lead to the October Revolution of 1917—to Bolshevism—then the latter can be traced further back in Russian history. So goes one argument which enjoys common currency both within and without the Soviet Union. In my opinion, however, the farther back we go in history, the more complicated and less convincing are the answers. For instance, it is difficult for me to agree with historians Alexander Ianov and Victor Seliunin (or with the novelist Vasilii Grossman) that Ivan the Terrible, Peter the Great, and Stalin were all enslavers of the people, evil geniuses of Russian history who proved that any modernization in Russia was necessarily combined with the suppression of freedom. I cannot understand how Ivan the Terrible can be connected with any normally understood idea of historical modernization. The triumph of his bloody absolutism was not necessarily modernization. In any case, it was Ivan III, grandfather of the Terrible, who actually became the creator of a united Russian state. On the contrary, Maliuta Skuratov and his *oprichniki*, acting on the instructions of the Terrible, can be regarded as the fathers of the first genocide in Russian history against the most educated, and hence promising, families. And the sad fate of Feofan Grek gives us a clear indication of Ivan the Terrible's attitude toward education and knowledge in general.

Why should Peter the Great should be considered an enslaver? This leads to an analogy with Stalin that, to my mind, is too artificial. The system of Russian serfdom had been in the making for decades before Peter and was completed by his father Aleksei Mikhailovich ("The Quietest"—*tishaishii*). Under Peter, serfs attached to manufactures and metallurgic plants were moved from villages to factories with a view towards a more useful and "modern" type of employment, whereas Stalin turned free farmers into serfs. In addition, Peter's opening of the "window to Europe" (unlike Stalin's "iron curtain!") provided opportunities for fresh winds to

blow through the country and gave freedom to a significant segment of the serf population. Peter was an ardent supporter of those common people who were able to abandon traditional beards and study the sciences. Who can deny that the development of science brings about more freedom of thought? Peter promoted everyone, including aristocrats young and old alike, ready to involve themselves in the process of modernization. Stalin, on the other hand, eliminated those who were dangerous for his personal dictatorial power and so preferred "men from below."

The fates of the sons of Peter and Stalin are incomparable (although that of Ivan's son, killed by his father, is applicable). The first attempted to play a political role and opposed the main cause of his father's life. The second had nothing to do with politics; he was so unhappy that his father, the "Great Leader," openly despised him that he tried to commit suicide before the war. When he returned from the hospital Stalin commented in the presence of my father, "Even this thing you could not do properly!" Stalin's refusal to exchange him for Marshal von Paulus was a foul attempt to conceal his inhumanity behind a pompous phrase: "I do not exchange a field marshal for a captain."

The analogy between Ivan and Stalin is striking, but where in that scheme (modernization-unfreedom) would one place Aleksandr I, without whom the modernization of the Russian society could not have occurred so rapidly? The great Russian poet and amateur historian Aleksandr Pushkin claimed the Decembrist movement, as well as freedom-loving literature, poetry, and historiography, were born in the years of Aleksandr I. One hundred and fifty years later his admirer, scholar Nathan Eidel'man,[4] proved Pushkin's claim by means of thorough historical analysis. Where would one place Alexander II, the great reformer killed by the leftist extremists? Where would one place another great reformer—Stolypin (killed by rightist extremists)—with his wise and important economic and social modernization? I consider the repressions after the Revolution of 1905-1907 insignificant; in any case, they were dictated by Nicholas II. These repressions were counterbalanced, however, by the

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4. Nathan Eidelman was a good friend of mine for decades after our student years at one of the best high schools in Moscow. We spent many nights–Russian nights!–talking before his early death in 1990. He had a rare ability for generalizations about contemporary history, basing his conclusions on "cold," objective study of the past and present.

appearance of the first Russian parliament since the Novgorod *veche* of eleventh through thirteenth centuries. It is significant that, even if the Duma was not particularly effective in real politics, it was democratic enough to have four Bolsheviks as members.

It is easy to explain history if one approaches it selectively and not comprehensively. In our country certain years often become victims of a biased approach, that is, history is used to prove conclusions "necessary" for the present. Pokrovsky would have been satisfied: not only did Stalin and other Soviet leaders look at history as he had advised, but many contemporary authors, including historians (who are not immune to ignoring the basic rules of historical investigation), fail to avoid the temptation of writing partisan history.

Past centuries are useful for an analysis of Stalinism only to some extent, let us not overestimate the analogies they can provide. The real question is: Which features of the system should be regarded as parts of Stalinism and which of Bolshevism? This distinction—if it exists—is crucial for understanding the roots and nature of Stalinism. After we understand this distinction, which in my opinion exists, perhaps it will be easier to explain the *stalinshchina*. Let us agree that the word "Bolshevism" be the term for the political movement which appeared in 1903 within the social-democratic movement of Europe. The main reason for the split between the Bolsheviks and those who became known as the "Mensheviks" within the Russian Social-Democratic (Labor) Party was the difference in their approach to the issues of organization and Party discipline. The differences grew from year to year, but until October 1917, Bolshevism had not yet been corrupted by power and its fanaticism led more to self-sacrifice than the sacrifice of other for the cause...

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Certainly the Bolsheviks created a monopoly of power immediately after October 1917. Lenin and all the other leading Bolsheviks, as well as the vast majority of second-echelon Party members—perhaps the entire Party—saw no necessity to seriously share

power with their allies. But does this mean that a one-party system was at that time considered the only possible option? I do not believe so, although I understand how alone I may remain in my opinion.

The first attempt by Lenin to ignore not only the Mensheviks, who had very little support among the population, but the SRs, who had greater support than the Bolsheviks themselves and were considered comrades in the entire revolutionary struggle, evoked a strong protest from several leading Bolsheviks, who then resigned from the Central Committee. (In those days, the Central Committee was very limited in number and played the role of the future Politburo). Others resigned from the first purely Bolshevik government. In the end, Lenin was forced to retreat and three "left" SRs were introduced into the government. This laid the first cornerstone of a potential "multi-party" system.

As time passed, it became evident that two principal attitudes towards other socialist parties existed among leading Bolsheviks. Unfortunately, Lenin and many of his followers did not understand the importance of a "multi- party" system at the time, and the SRs were too radical to play anything but the nominal role of "co-rulers" to which Lenin had agreed. The SRs began to fight in the non-democratic manner of the Bolsheviks, just as they had once fought the monarchy. Even after disputes with the Bolsheviks, however, the Socialist Revolutionary Party "of the majority" was officially legalized in October 1920, although not for long.

Again, we cannot ignore the absence of democratic traditions in Russia; democracy existed for only a few months after the February Revolution of 1917. Russian political culture had practically no experience of opposition, of the counterbalance of radicals and conservatives, of resolving conflicting points of view in a civilized, parliamentary manner. It was the Mensheviks who understood the vital importance of adopting these traditions to ensure genuine democratic development, but their activity was prohibited immediately after the Civil War and their leaders were either dispersed throughout Russia or advised to emigrate.

As I described earlier, the uncompromising polarization of the Civil War produced intolerance of the opinions of others and an aversion to resolving political differences through discussion. This was true of both the

Bolsheviks and the SRs. The Mensheviks, however, were characterized by a truly social-democratic tendency and were much more prepared for such a system of political coexistence. This was exactly why they were despised by their more radical co-revolutionaries. Yet it is important to note that neither the first government after the October Revolution, nor the first political face of the Bolshevik regime, was that of a one-party system.

More peaceful relations between the Bolsheviks and SRs and, more importantly, the New Economic Policy (NEP), could have brought more meaning to the idea of a "multi-party" system. Both factors nevertheless created great tension within the Bolshevik Party; the Bolsheviks simply could not forget the SR revolt of July 1918 nor the "opportunism" of the Mensheviks. Numerous difficulties, domestic and international, made a "multi-party" system risky for the Bolsheviks' grip on power, and no party is inclined to voluntarily give up power after winning a civil war.

To conclude, Bolshevism adopted a one-party system long before Stalin's dictatorship because of the legacy of the Civil War and the Bolsheviks' fear of losing power during the economic "retreat" of NEP. Imposed on the party by Lenin, NEP demanded insurance against the loss of political power—even though the Bolsheviks secured the economic, as well as political, *komandnye vysoty* (commanding heights) under NEP. Thus the transition to a one-party system did not result so much from an inherent feature of Bolshevism as from a fundamental mistake the Bolsheviks committed during the first years of the Soviet regime. Essentially, they acted out of panic about the existing power situation. On Lenin's part this can also be attributed to an intoxication with power—power he had so easily won ("lying in the streets," as M. Heller writes)[5] and was so worried about losing that he was unable to perceive the consequences of dictatorship. Lenin's actions cannot be justified either by circumstances or expectations of approaching revolution in "civilized" countries.

It can be easily argued that the Bosheviks' monopoly on power *had* to lead to a one-party system. My objection to this argument is that without a bloody civil war, without FORCE having been so decisive and indispensable during the struggle for power between all actors on the

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5. M. Heller, A. Nekrich. *Utopia u vlasti*. London, 1986.

political scene of the Russian empire in 1917-1920, without the reality of hostile and aggressive international encirclement, Bolshevism could have been more tolerant to at least two parties which existed on a national scale: the SRs and the Mensheviks, as well as to a number of local and regional parties. The understanding to which Lenin undoubtedly came in his last years—that Soviet power was threatened by a horrible, mortally dangerous "barracks" system—could have led to more than naive proposals about increased participation of workers *ot stanka* (from the bench) in the Central Committee or increased workers' control of industry. Once Lenin began to see NEP not as a retreat from socialism, but as the path towards the development of socialism, his own approach, had he lived, could have led him to some kind of political NEP.

It's true that Lenin's ideas along these lines were not shared by the majority of higher-echelon Party members. Their opposition explains the secret letter sent to provincial committees in 1923 disavowing Lenin's last proposals and hinting that one shouldn't take the ideas of the mortally sick leader too seriously. But we should see the letter for what it was: a gambit in the struggle between cardinally different tendencies in Bolshevism. The strength of Lenin's prestige would have been enough to overrule the Politburo (as he often did) and change the regime's political direction, despite the stubbornness of those to whom he had become a "hindrance." I am convinced that in this connection, my father was a typical representative of second-echelon Party leaders; we can judge the predominant tendency in the Party according to his way of thinking. Perplexed by a multitude of controversial opinions, fears, gloomy forecasts and recipes, these Party members listened to Lenin. What Lenin said, they would do, because Lenin knew better, looked farther, and understood more deeply. There were hundreds of such people voting in the Central Committee and Party congresses who did concrete Party work on a local level and influenced their respective Party committees in a decisive manner. These people comprised, in fact, the entire Party.

It is easy to guess that as an historian I belong to those who think the role of personality is often decisive. Especially in Russia, and especially during stormy periods in its history.... .

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The NEP is evidence that Bolshevism could have accommodated a multi-sectoral economy. Such an accommodation would have influenced Bolshevism itself, of course, perhaps even altering its ugliest features—those we were to see in later years. Why could this not have happened? Any ideology is interpreted, followed, and implemented by people—usually by a few leaders. I absolutely disagree with the assertion made by certain Soviet historians that the Bolshevik "Old Guard" was poorly educated. Not at all! In their ranks it was considered shameful not to read history, philosophy, political economy—the entire spectrum of studies today known as "political science"—even if they had no opportunity to do so at a university. The first Bolshevik government was perhaps the most intellectual in the contemporary world. The higher echelon of the Party consisted by and large not of semi-literate workers, but of people with college backgrounds (including former students of the best universities of Russia and Western Europe) who read books in two or three languages in addition to Russian.

These people were human and of course, they could change. This thesis is especially important; to think otherwise is, in my opinion, to confine oneself to "political racism." If one denies the possibility that Bolshevik leaders could have changed, not only are the architects of *perestroika* phantoms of history, but the historians of our country now exploiting this kind of "political racism" look rather dubious themselves, considering their past (or at least, the past of the majority of historians).[6]

An additional argument for the possibility of change in Bolshevik practice (true, not a tremendously great possibility) is that diametrically different ideas can be "proven" using the volumes of Marx, Engels, and Lenin. We have done so for decades. Is it impossible to

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6. In 1990, I gave a lecture in Washington about *perestroika*. A Chilean officer in the audience said he would never believe that any communist was capable of turning away from communist dictatorship and "ideological expansionism" towards democracy. The entire process of *perestroika* was only a deception of the West, he continued, and the struggle between "conservatives and democrats" was simply a show staged by the Kremlin. The officer said he would never change his mind that "the best communist is a dead communist."

For a man who participated in the coup d'état of Pinochet and the bloody repressions which followed, this was understandable. I was interested in talking with him in order to better understand the mechanics of brainwashing in Latin American army regimes. This was a classic example of "political racism." It would be rather sad to see such racism, however, in other countries and among other categories of people.

imagine that ideas favorable to the development of society, and not to the interests of successive leaders, could have found legitimacy in Bolshevik theory as the predominantly young Bolshevik revolutionaries matured?

It can be argued that the Bolshevik government was very close to a sound economic policy in the 1920s. In 1926-1927, it may have been just around the corner. In my opinion, however, NEP would never have been preserved. There were debates on the issue, of course, but their outcome was decided by Stalin alone. Leaving aside Stalin's "predilection for spicy dishes" (in Lenin's words) as an explanation, let us ask the question: Why did Stalin alter the course of the ship of state so drastically? Here we necessarily begin to focus on Stalin's main interest: political predominance over other leaders of the Party and total dictatorship within the country.

Let us not forget that Stalin's "year of great change" threw the country's economy so violently backwards that agriculture in the Soviet Union has never recovered. Is it not clear that, in spite of industrialization, the economy as a whole suffered? The very speed of industrialization—the principal justification for ending NEP—was accelerated artificially and shortages of agricultural goods further hampered its progress. There are sound reasons to believe that the speed of industrialization would have been more balanced had more moderate policies been adopted. How can we believe there was no alternative? Can we believe there is no other way of developing one's right hand except by disabling one's left?

Although the principal motive of collectivization was to mobilize a larger agricultural surplus, the result was the complete opposite: any and all surpluses disappeared for decades. Recall the group of economists led by Chaianov—why did the Party apparatus not heed their views? Only because someone decided their views were hostile to socialism. It is just as conceivable, however, that their views could have been regarded as very helpful to the socialist state as it searched for a sound economic policy in the village. Anastas Mikoyan, People's Commissar of Trade after August 1926, was so impressed by the possibilities opened by NEP that he argued with Stalin openly at the Fifteenth Party Congress in 1927 and at other meetings. Mikoyan spoke in favor of *trade* as the key to getting grain from

the village. Only when he realized that Stalin interpreted economic issues not on their own merit, but as means of a *political* struggle, did Mikoyan follow the zig-zags of Stalin's "general line." Those very zig-zags are evidence of the absence of any *one* dominant idea among Bolsheviks in the 1920s; Stalin himself could have defended the Bukharin line on NEP and the peasantry much longer if Trotsky had established a more enduring leftist opposition with Zinoviev and Kamenev.

Although Bukharin was no less a Bolshevik than Stalin, his approach objectively led to a more complex power structure and a greater place for humanism. This is true despite the harsh words which dogmatic historians find in Bukharin's speeches and writings. Writings are often rather deceptive, speeches even more so. When we extract documents from the library dust, we are unfortunately often inclined to ignore the pulse of the past, the purpose and concrete conditions of the moment when a speech was pronounced or an article written. We are often not even interested in knowing to whom the message was intended or how the author meant to be heard and understood. An author might write several fierce paragraphs just for the sake of including a few phrases with an absolutely different, peaceful, human meaning. Many authors whose ideas contradicted the dogma of the Church repeatedly swore by the Sacred Texts—words are given to people not only to express their views, but to conceal them, or even to combine one with the other. This is a feature not just of everyday human behavior, but of political behavior as well—politics is made by human beings. And human beings, unlike robots, have confused thoughts, change or modify their ideas, and undergo unpredictable transformations. Perhaps that is the reason why Cardinal Richelieu once said, "Give me six phrases written by anyone and I shall hang him."...

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Before Stalin acquired the leading role in the Party apparatus, totalitarianism was still in question. Stormy discussions concerning the role of trade unions, for instance, demonstrated that the development of syndicalism was a real possibility at the time, one which would have prevented totalitarian structures from solidifying. This possibility

represented something akin to the Solidarity movement which emerged in Poland 60 years later. Other intra-Party discussions also deter us from looking at Bolshevism as monolithic. The Party lived inside society and was a part of it—it did not exist in isolation from the vital issues of this new, Soviet society, whose every step forward was a step into the unknown. People came up with conflicting ideas as they looked for answers to questions which Marx had not envisioned, but life itself created. Different tendencies could have prevailed, different people could have influenced the direction of developments. I cannot fully agree with the conclusion that the majority of the Party supported the extremist line, eventually declared "the General Line" by Stalin; the general line itself fluctuated according to the needs of the struggle for power.

The theoretical possibility that post-revolutionary Russian society could have developed differently prompts me to consider the ideals of pre-revolutionary Marxists in Russia. An analogy comes to mind with the ideals of early Christians. It is difficult to refute that Christianity and communist theory share certain common utopian features: defense of the poor, the humiliated, and the humble; a preference for rags rather than riches. These were concepts dear to millions. After all, the moneychangers were driven out of the temple by Jesus himself; Martin Luther hated the Catholic Church for openly serving the nobility and the rich; the French Revolution in 1789 proclaimed, "Peace to huts, war to palaces!" Why should the Bolsheviks be blamed for appealing to the "have nots"? This appeal is not deserving of blame; there is a perpetual human aspiration for social justice, equality (let us not forget that "égalité" immediately followed "liberté" in 1789), and dignity for the pariahs of any society. It is simply unjust to assume that all outcasts and "have nots" are rabble possessed by the vile instinct to seize and divide property and accuse the Bolsheviks of having a stake in this instinct. It is an accusation made easily only by those who have never been a member or have successfully managed to leave such a stratum of society. How best to help the poor is another story; certainly the primitive temptation of the poor to divide goods and lands which have been seized should never be encouraged.

To be sure there is a great difference in the methods condoned by early Christians and early Bolsheviks: the latter decisively supported the use of force (although Lenin assumed that force would be unnecessary if the

"ruling classes" gave up their ruling position). As early as the seventh century, however, St. Augustine developed a theory which permitted the use of force for a "just cause." He even introduced the theory of a "just war," which centuries later was attributed to Lenin. For what kind of cause do we see the sacred goals of Christianity used in history? For the Crusades of the Middle Ages, the Inquisition, the mass extermination of Indians in America by the "conquistadores," and so many other events that entire books would be required to describe them all. In my opinion, a struggle has always existed between a humanistic tendency—faithful to the early commandments—and a forceful, aggressive tendency in man. In Italy, St. Francis and the unbridled, unruly papacy; in Spain, Torquemada and Bartolome de Las Casas; in contemporary Latin America, archbishop Arnulfo Romero of El Salvador and the archbishops of Paraguay obedient to Stroessner—everywhere and always there has been struggle between these two tendencies. Unfortunately, the humanistic tendency usually loses. The same fate overtook the idealistic, utopian intentions of early Communists. It should be no surprise that the speed of such transformations, like the speed of historical and technological change, accelerated in modern times.

Let us, however, return to modern times. That is, to the 1920s. Fanaticism finally triumphed. The fear of losing Party unity, as many authors rightly point out, prevailed over the idea of democracy. Let us not just repeat that fact, however, but analyze where, for whom, and for what reason the magic words "unity of the Party" were so important. We can investigate these questions by relying on memoirs, transcripts of Party meetings at different levels, press articles, and so on. My own conclusion is that the unity of the Party as a whole was not in danger, but the "danger" of a fierce fight for power between five persons, each of whom dreamed to some extent of taking on the role of Lenin, did exist. These people mixed their personal ambitions with the fate of the country, their quarrels with one another with the danger of a split in the Party, and their intrigues with cardinal deviations from "Marxist-Leninist thought." These men involved local leaders and "activists" in their struggle by pretending that their theoretical games and personal issues were tremendously important, even menacing, to the future of the country. True, the nation's fate was being determined at the time, but absolutely not in the manner proclaimed by these leaders.

Differences among Politburo members on political and economic issues can only be considered natural during such a historical experiment as the Soviet regime. These differences should have been resolved by peaceful discussion among colleagues who supposedly shared common ideals. The circumstances which in my opinion transformed internal Party discussions into a battlefield, and then a tragedy, for the country as a whole were:

a) *The tradition of intolerance* which can be traced to Lenin's theoretical battles with his opponents, his rejection of "false" ideas, and his tendency to keep the Party theoretically and ideologically monolithic. In Lenin's case, these fights rarely led to extra-polemical, "organizational" outcomes. His successors, however, found it easy to use differences in order to excommunicate opponents and compromise them as "bad Marxists" or "bad Leninists."

b) *The organizational structure of the Bolshevik Party with its principle of "democratic centralism."* Given the discipline imposed by democratic centralism, it was easy for any demagogue to win a majority in the Party and demand the full capitulation of his opponents. The latter, moreover, had to "confess" their mistakes because democratic centralism assumed the majority was always right. Thus people were basically taught to lie—voting did not change their opinions, but they were compelled to pretend it did.

The organizational structure of the Party was superb for underground work and revolution, but completely inappropriate for a Party engaged in the building of a new society. Here we must put the responsibility on Lenin, who did not understand this problem until it was too late and, even when he began to understand, did not see any resolution

other than removing Stalin from the post of General Secretary.[7]

c) *The psychology of the Civil War.* This psychology contributed to the demonization of those who were "mistaken" in their actions or decisions, while the idea of hostile capitalist encirclement was used to expose as "heretics" those people whose actions "objectively" weakened the country during a time of grave international danger.

d) *Fanaticism.* Fanaticism helped the Bolshevik Party before 1917 and was partially understandable during the Civil War (although it led to unforgivable, pitiless, and excessive repressions), but became destructive to democracy within the Party and the country. In the end, there was no salvation from fanaticism either for the Party or the country.

In the first half of the 1920s, the Party still had opportunities to abandon its confrontation with society (with the exception of the working class, Bolshevik ideology viewed Russian society as full of fluctuating, unreliable "elements"). At the time, however, local Party leaders were mostly sincere in their attempts to develop the country, improve people's lives, and "strengthen the alliance with peasants." As an example, I'd like to describe characteristics of the work of Anastas Mikoyan in South-Eastern Russia, or the North Caucasus. Both names were subsequently used for the huge area extending from the Rostov *oblast'* to the frontier with Georgia, from Novorossiisk to Dagestan, with a population of 10 million people. I use Anastas Mikoyan as an example not because my father was better or worse than other local Party leaders, although both could be true; I use him because I believe he was typical.

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7. It is important to note here that Stalin acquired the position of General Secretary thanks to Kamenev and Zinoviev, not Lenin. Thinking Trotsky would be their main competitor in the power struggle after Lenin's death, Kamenev and Zinoviev proposed to create the post of General Secretary. They then endowed the Secretariat with functions it had never enjoyed and named Stalin to the job, certain that a man of such low theoretical talent and non-existent charisma would never create any difficulty for them. Kamenev also evidently still believed that after common exile in Siberia, Stalin was still on his "team."

In "Mikoyan's" area of responsibility lived Cossacks whom Sverdlov had considered inveterate enemies of the Soviet power. In 1919, Sverdlov had demanded that they obey the Bolshevik government or be massacred. Mikoyan arrived in the region in 1922 and immediately began to restore the Cossacks' former status, traditions, right to self-administration, and even the traditional sabres worn during their fancy riding. He convinced the local authorities that the war was over and the Cossacks were citizens like everyone else, with the right to decide the day-to-day problems of their *stanitsi* (Cossack villages). In Moscow, Mikoyan insisted that several thousand Cossacks be permitted to return to South-Eastern Russian from Turkey, where they had fled following the defeat of the "White" armies of Denikin and Wrangel in 1919-1920.

There were numerous ethnic groups in the mountains of the region and not all were friendly to the new order. Mikoyan naturally helped Voroshilov, then Commander of the region's military district, fight those groups that continued to resist the Russians. But his strategy was to incorporate the mountain peoples into the agrarian economy of the area, defend their lands from migrants from Russia, and draw mountain people—young and old alike—into the activities of the local authorities, taking into account their traditional respect for elderly men. He even insisted that the time had come to elect senior representatives of these ethnic groups to local soviets. Tribesmen who accepted Soviet authority were allowed wear their traditional sabres, a concession which proved tremendously important. All this took place between 1922 and 1925—why could such tendencies not have prevailed and developed further throughout the country?

International influence could have become another factor for gradual democratization. Soviet Russia became a Mecca for leftist groups from around the world, especially Europe. These groups played an active, dynamic role in our social and political life and brought European political culture with them. Up to sixty thousand engineers and workers came to the Soviet Union to help develop its industry. These people could have, and should have, become exponents of a civilized approach in different aspects of life.

All this *could* have happened. We actually could have had *perestroika* sixty years earlier. After reading these paragraphs, some readers

will no doubt call this conclusion wishful thinking on my part, or even an attempt to defend Bolshevism. In denying the latter, I would say there is no doubt that Bolshevism bears the responsibility for creating possibilities—incentives, even—for a very different kind of development than that which I have described. In short, Bolshevism created the conditions for a totalitarian system and dictatorial regime—conditions which made the phenomenon of Stalinism possible. However, I do not see that this development was inevitable. E.H. Carr was correct, of course, when he said historians like to call something "inevitable" after it has occurred. Exactly this kind of approach now predominates in Soviet historical studies; the Marxist tradition of looking for a predetermined course (*zakonomernost'* or "law-given development") remains very influential. Perhaps it is natural—all those who are now writing about Soviet history were taught "historical materialism." My own experience tells me how difficult it is adjust the dogmas of that very well-ordered theory to normal common sense....

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The *stalinshchina*, or the Great Terror, has been analyzed, discussed, and described by so many people in so many books, articles, memoirs, letters, and diaries that it is difficult to add anything significant to the record. Although I can add something personal in this connection, I consider it more important to answer the question: "Why?" And perhaps there is not just one, but several "whys." Why was it possible at all? Why were so many political groups friendly to the government destroyed? Why were so many people completely unconnected with politics destroyed? Why were so many "commanders of production" (badly needed for the country's development) destroyed? Why were so many commanders of the armed forces, indispensable for the coming war, executed?

The first question is the "easiest," given everything we now know about the period. The key words are, of course, Bolshevism, the legacy of the Civil War, the fear of hostile capitalist encirclement, the absence of democracy in the country, the absence of law, the absence of a humanitarian tradition among the masses of the people. These were the actual conditions, but the *stalinshchina* was still neither necessary nor

inevitable! Only one man felt it was *necessary*, and he would certainly never have realized his horrible plot in the absence of these conditions. These conditions, however, would not have all materialized without Stalin.

It can be either easy or difficult to imagine alternate scenarios for any given historical development. Easy for those with great imaginations who are prepared to write their own scripts. Difficult for those who wish to take into account all the main actors and the premises of the historical record, disregarding what was impossible under the circumstances, but not overlooking the possibilities which were actually present. I do not know to which category my scenarios are related, but I base them on all that I have heard, read, and contemplated.

Let me begin with Scenario 0: Lenin does not die at the age of 54, but lives 10-15 years longer and remains healthy enough to retain effective control over the situation. I believe I have already expressed my point of view on what he would have done or tried to do. My vision of how Soviet society could have developed differently is based on the ideas of social democracy. The social-democratic trend was still fresh in the memory of Bolsheviks. The alliance with the Second International had been broken only eight to ten years previously and the Bolsheviks would have been unable to disregard the importance of significant social-democratic support in the world. It was Lenin who broke with that trend, both inside and outside the country, and it was Lenin who could have easily turned the political course towards a new alliance with social-democrats. (After writing the first draft of this paper, I found a supporter of this hypothesis in Aleksandr Tsipko. In an article he wrote in *Daugava*, Tsipko says, "...a turn of our revolution towards the realism of social-democracy, drawn by the dying Lenin, could have worked well."[8])

An important "detail" should be added to this scenario: the leadership, the highest echelon of the Party, would not have been the same as it was in 1924. There is no doubt that Stalin would have been pushed aside into an insignificant position. Bukharin would have risen in importance and new faces would have inevitably appeared in the upper echelon of the Party. No one can say who these people would have been,

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8. *Daugava*, no. 7 (1990).

but people such as Kirov and Frunze (who, I believe, would not have died so unexpectedly after an ulcer operation, allegedly due to narcosis) come to mind, as do perhaps younger party functionaries from around the country and representatives of the new "socialist businessmen."

Lenin liked people who could really make things move, who could not only pronounce speeches, but organize concrete work. That is why I believe that Zinoviev and Kamenev and people like them had few chances. A new generation of leaders could have changed for the better the dogmatism, rigidity, and fanaticism which prevailed among the Bolshevik "Old Guard." Unfortunately, however, such a small historical detail as the poor health of one man could not be "corrected" by any kind of *zakonomernost'*. Rather, it doomed the entire society to the next scenario, Scenario 1.

Scenario 1, to the misfortune of the country and many beyond its frontiers, became historical reality. Stalin became head of the Soviet Union, ruler of one-sixth of the globe and slightly less than 200 million people (even after subtracting the *kulaks* and their families).[9]

The Party purges and resultant strengthening of Stalin's dictatorship, as well as the mass deportation of "*kulaks*," prepared the future "harvest of sorrow." Stalin himself understood what was important: *it was possible*. At last he could begin to plan the destruction of the enemies he feared, hated, despised, envied, simply disliked, considered to know too much, or saw as insufficiently obedient. It was not yet easy, but the machinery of destruction—the OGPU—was firmly under his control and he had already achieved the role of dictator. The only element missing was an atmosphere of mass psychosis, when everything impossible becomes simple. The example of Hitler had an extremely convincing effect on Stalin—he realized that even such a politically developed, civilized nation as Germany could become steeped in hatred and hysteria.

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9. The following text is in no sense an imitation of A. Rybakov's work. It is an abridged account of the understanding to which I came in the mid-1950s through talking with my father and other Old Bolsheviks who often came to our home and whom I visited myself: O. Shatunovskaia, L. Shaumian, A. Snegov, my uncles Artiom Mikoyan, H. Toumanian, A. Arzumanian, former member of one of the counting commissions of the Seventeenth Party Congress N. Andreasian (a friend of my father since their school years), and others. Some of these Bolsheviks had the experience of NKVD torture-chambers and the GULAG behind them.

The main reason behind the *stalinshchina* was, of course, Stalin's fear of losing power. Stalin knew his Party well; he was not deceived by the chorus in his honor. He knew the inner strength of the Party even after Trotsky was exiled and Zinoviev, Kamenev, and Bukharin were removed from the leadership. Stalin knew better than anyone just who, in the eyes of the Bolshevik Old Guard and many others, he had been only ten years previously. He knew he could not speak, write, or reason as well as many other well-known members of the Party elite. He knew that Party members thought highly of themselves and their right to elect or not elect a leader. And the votes were secret! Finally, he could not exclude the possibility of a "palace conspiracy" in which a decision of the Politburo would be used against him. Stalin knew how many people hated him or, at the very least, did not consider him the best man for the job.

Stalin was very attentive to the new faces in the Politburo. He was sure of Molotov and Kaganovich. He was unafraid of Ordzhonikidze, Zhdanov, Andreev, and Mikoyan, but was unsure of Rudzutak. The latter was not at all ambitious, but the other Politburo members all knew Lenin had unofficially proposed him as Stalin's replacement as General Secretary. Stalin was also unsure of the Ukrainians: Skrypnyk, Kossior, Postyshev, and Grin'ko. And he was most definitely afraid of the rising star: Kirov. That is why he tried to tame[10] him. A "feuilleton" was published in *Pravda* (edited by Stalin's faithful servant Mekhlis) about a party boss who came from Baku to Leningrad with a big dog, making it desirable for him to have a large flat. ("The name was not used, but everybody understood...," recollected A. Mikoyan). Then an article by Kostrikov (Kirov's real name) which could be interpreted as celebrating the 300th anniversary of the Romanov dynasty was found in a newspaper of the North Caucasus of 1913. Who was looking for something compromising about Kirov, secretly scrutinizing everything he had ever written, said, or done? And on whose orders? The issue was even discussed in the Politburo: after a few questions were asked by various people, Stalin himself proposed not to make fuss about the episode. "Just his style!" commented Mikoyan.

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10. This was the exact word used by my father. When I did not quite understand, he explained: "to subdue."

Kirov was rather passive during Politburo meetings. He usually did not express his opinion on the matters discussed. Such modest, even strange, behavior could not reassure or deceive Stalin. Was not Kirov emotional and articulate when speaking at mass gatherings, as everyone said? At last a decisive moment arrived—it was now or never! At the Seventeenth Party Congress in spring 1934, Kirov received three votes opposing his nomination for Central Committee membership and Stalin received 282. Of course Zatonskii, who was responsible for the dozen or so counting commissions, and Kaganovich, who oversaw the commissions on behalf of the Presidium of the Congress, consulted secretly with Stalin and the official number of votes against Stalin was also declared to be 3. Moreover, two dozen local Party leaders approached Kirov and offered to nominate him for General Secretary. True, Kirov himself told Stalin about the proposal and said he had rejected it, but...

On December 1, 1934, Kirov was shot by a certain Nikolaev. Weeks before, Nikolaev had been arrested for several days for possessing a gun and a self-drawn map of Smolny Palace. But Yagoda's newly appointed deputy chief of the Leningrad OGPU set Nikolaev free. Once the assassination occurred, the organizers of the murder were named in the press even before any investigation commenced: "the Leningrad and Moscow centers of the Trotsky-Zinoviev block." Mass indignation is very easy to transform into mass hysteria. The "Great Purges" had begun.[11]

In my opinion, other scenarios could have taken place. For instance, Scenario 2: Trotsky becomes the leader of the Party and the country. He is not tremendously enthusiastic about democracy in the country, although he is satisfied with his authority within the Party, confident that he is the Party's most well-known and the eloquent leader. The extermination of Party members does not take place, with the rare exception of corrupted elements. (He confines himself to expelling from

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11. As an historian, I share the wish of Western historians who would like more substantial, concrete evidence of Stalin's guilt in Kirov's murder. Until today, such evidence has been attainable only through some kind of spiritualist talk with the dead. We must not forget, however, that a thick volume of interviews with people Stalin was not provident enough to kill, together with many other documents complied by the Party Control Committee at the end of the 1950s, exists in the archives of the Central Committee of the CPSU . A former member of the Control Committee, Olga Shatunovskaia, told me the volume was very convincing about Stalin's guilt. Aleksandr Yakovlev wanted to publish the volume on the 100th anniversary of Kirov's birth, but in 1986 it was politically still too difficult. Let us wait; the opportunity will come.

the Party only those who are especially dangerous to his personal power.) He is less scrupulous where non-Party members are concerned. NEP is curtailed, but not as rapidly or forcefully as under Stalin due to opposition within the Party led by Bukharin, whose popularity grows. The peasantry receives no real special attention; force rather than economic incentives continues to be used whenever the regime encounters problems with grain requisitions. The peasantry again becomes the principal source of capital required by industrialization, but the scale of the anti-peasant offensive is incomparable to that of Scenario 1 due to opposition within the Party. Trotsky himself is unable to condone repressions of such unlimited scale and nature and opposition within the Party compels him to be more or less restrained. After several years in power Trotsky is no longer elected General Secretary and a far more moderate "general line" is adopted. (I disagree here with Aleksandr Tsipko, who believes Trotsky never would have allowed himself to be removed by means of a regular Party procedure.[12]) The next leader is most likely Nikolai Bukharin.[13] It may be, however, that the next General Secretary is from the next generation of Party leaders, as in Scenario 0.

Scenario 3: In 1926, when Stalin for the second and last time offers his resignation, the leadership, instead of fearing Trotsky and a split, recalls Lenin's unofficial advice and elects Rudzutak General Secretary. His election leads to the *de facto* restoration of factions. A soft politician, with no particular obsession about a "general line," Rudzutak is inclined to hold as many discussions as possible before adopting any significant measure. Local party leaders become accustomed to less emphasis on command from above and more on the search for sound compromises. The most intelligent among them—those close to the interests of common people—remain, dogmatists lose prestige and elections. An atmosphere of tolerance of differing opinions spreads throughout Party ranks. The press informs the entire country about Party discussions—*glasnost'* makes its contribution. New, active leaders of local and central importance appear. They are

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12. *Daugava*, no. 7 (1990).

13. I read Aleksandr Tsipko's above-referenced article in *Daugava* only after I had almost completed this paper. Thus I was astonished and pleased to see that my colleague and friend expressed serious hope that, had Bukharin become leader of the Party, our country would have had a good chance of avoiding those catastrophic cataclysms which caused its development to deviate and result in an ugly society.

educated, articulate, and free from dogma and fanaticism. The struggle between these Party members and the bureaucracy is not easy, but far easier than it will be 60 years later.

Why could Kirov not have become the Gorbachev of his time? Why could he not have begun *perestroika* when the search for new roads towards socialism remained unresolved? When it was a hundred times easier to change the "general line" than was the case in the 1980s and 1990s? Let us recall those early years: all matters discussed within the Party were in turn discussed openly by the press, intellectuals, active representatives of the peasantry, nepmen, and others. NEP could have remained government policy and evolved into a stable direction for development. A mixed economy with a growing private sector in light industry and services would have developed. It could not have but affected political developments as well. Party factions would have begun to play the role of opposition parties, attracting influential non-Party groups and individuals. A social-democratic tendency would have appeared, rather cautiously at first, then gradually emerging more and more into the open.

Scenario 4: Bukharin becomes the leader of the Party and NEP is officially declared the "general line." Developments within the party, the economy, and society are the same as under Scenario 3 (Stalin's resignation and Rudzutak's election). I'd like to note that such a development could have influenced the international context as well. The Comintern would not then have alienated the social-democrats in Germany. Instead of fiercefully attacking them, E. Thalman and the German Communist Party would have understood the real source of danger. Here we reach a problem I do not dare discuss because of my poor knowledge of Germany in 1931-1933: in this scenario, could the Nazis have risen to power?

Excepting the first, these scenarios are undoubtedly vulnerable. Yet it is equally unsound to declare that there were no alternatives whatsoever to Stalinism. I cannot believe that there is ever only one "alternative." With respect to Stalinism, it is impossible to imagine a worse alternative. Thus I exclude the possibility of the *stalinshchina* without Stalin. A *trotskyshchina* can be imagined, but it would have never compared with "the harvest of sorrow" our country actually experienced.

The question remains, however, why that harvest was so enormous, so mad, so excessive—even from the point of view of Stalin's interest in attaining absolute dictatorial power and exterminating those he meant to destroy. (Here I can offer a contribution to the statistics of the Terror. My father told me that just before the Twenty-Second Party Congress in 1962, the KGB submitted to the Party Control Committee the figure of *7 million* as the number of people shot between January 1, 1935 and June 22, 1941 and *12 million 700 thousand* as the figure for the number of people arrested, sent to GULAG, etc.)

One can describe many reasons for the enormity of the terror, but the weight of each in the final outcome is impossible to determine. We must remember that no one—neither Marxists, Leninists, Stalinists, "Communist-democrats," Russian patriots, nor even fierce enemies of Marxism—feels comfortable stressing one factor exclusively. There is no doubt that without Marxism there would have been no Bolshevism, and without Bolshevism and its leader—Lenin—there would have been no October Revolution. Without the October Revolution there would have been no Soviet regime and no ruling Communist party in Russia. Without that foundation, Stalin would never have been able to order a single person shot.

Unfortunately, all this proved to be possible *in Russia*. Russia's history has a direct relation to the *stalinshchina*. Plekhanov was absolutely right when he insisted that the flour for the cake of a Russian revolution had not yet been ground. Despite having admitted the truth of Plekhanov's claim, Lenin wrongly wrote about the possibility of Russian society becoming "prepared" for socialism under the leadership of his party. Thus the October Revolution was premature. After the revolution led to civil war, the Bolsheviks naturally tried to win and having won, they were confronted with the contradiction of a premature revolution. The growing dilemmas of Soviet society could have only been resolved by victorious revolutions in Germany, Hungary, and other *civilized* countries.

If Marxism is to blame, why in some countries did Marxism produce social-democratic parties capable of achieving many of Marx's ideals without spilling the blood of a single individual, while in others it produced Pol Pot (Cambodia), Mao Tsetung (China), and Kim Il Sung

(Korea)? And what of the cases of Hitler in Germany, Duvalier in Haiti, Stroessner in Paraguay, Pinochet in Chile, Idi Amin in Uganda, Saddam Hussein in Iraq, "Jakarta 1964" in Indonesia? Perhaps the human race lacks an important gene, one which prevents animals—even beasts of prey—from killing their own species.

Leninism is even more to blame. Lenin himself, to be more exact. Lenin began the "Red Terror" even before F. Kaplan shot him and the terror was proclaimed as official policy. Recently, the official journal of the CPSU published documents which show that Lenin gave orders to organize the court-martial and capital punishment of 15,000 priests.[14] True, the Orthodox church was at the time an obedient servant of the monarchy and the most conservative, ruthless "Whites." The activity of priests could have seriously endangered the new regime, but this consideration cannot justify capital punishment for one and all without the most scrupulous investigation of the guilt (if any) of each. And Lenin was a lawyer by training!

Still, Leninism cannot be reduced to the "Red Terror." To argue that the Stalin of the 1930s (in his reality, not according to his slogans) was the "Lenin of his day" is to simplify the term and to underestimate Stalin as a personality. Terror during a civil war, when a new regime is in mortal danger, is one thing (although I still consider it unjustified), but the Great Terror, which occurred when no real danger threatened the regime, is absolutely another. It is incorrect to deduce from the Great Terror that the Soviet state in the 1930s was still weak. Leninism, or Bolshevism (I believe the two terms mean *almost, but not exactly* the same thing) was a political tendency in the Russian Social Democratic (Labor) Party—known by its Russian acronym RSDRP—which gave birth to different strains of thought concerning the future development of the Soviet state. Lenin's last actions and writings were intended to encourage the more "liberal" version of this development.

Lenin wrote in August 1921 to G. Miasnikov, "Yes, whoever does not understand the substitution of the slogan 'the civil war' by the

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14. *Izvestiia TsK KPSS*, No.4, 1990.

slogan 'the civil peace' is ridiculous if not worse."[15] Between December 1921 and February 1922, Lenin proposed and realized the transformation of the Cheka into the OGPU, a reorganization which imposed important restrictions on the arbitrariness of the secret police. The OGPU could no longer imprison people for interrogation for more than a month, it was obliged to pass prisoners to the courts, and it could not implement capital punishment without a decision of the court. Perhaps this appears to be simply a naive, elementary respect for the basic demands of law, but in those times it signified the beginning of a very important process, one which Lenin intended to continue. It was the beginning of a path towards a legal order, a path that was finally reached only after six more decades.

I believe Soviet society and its ruling elite were prepared for different versions of political development. Why did the Russian Communist Party permit the most horrible to triumph? Stalin began his paranoid hunt for the lives, happiness, and dignity of human beings without considering the "danger" to the country. To the contrary, his actions brought more harm to the country in one decade than any foreign or domestic danger, or both, could have ever caused in a century. Why did Russia permit Stalin to create conditions in which a human being was no more precious than an insect? Why did so many people participate in the bloodbath, trampling on human dignity and turning human beings into something far worse than cattle? (Cattle, after all, are cared for, but human beings were doomed to starve to death in the GULAG.) Why did Russia easily manage to exist for decades without a semblance of law, human rights, or respect for the "sacred" word *narod*? Why did almost everyone think (and I am afraid many still do) that they had the right to decide the future, the life, the freedom, and the disposition of the property of

15. V.I. Lenin, *Complete Works*, V. 44, p. 78 (Russian edition).

others?[16] These questions are the real answers to Kozhinov and other "Russian patriots."

In my opinion, Nikolai Chernishevsky was much more of a patriot when he exclaimed with bitterness: "A miserable nation! A nation of slaves... From top to bottom—all of them are slaves." Lenin cited these words as an example of positive patriotism, full of determination to change the conditions which had created such a society. Anton Chekhov said that he had "squeezed the slave out of himself."

Perhaps the most important question at present is: Why did so much of Stalinism outlive Stalin for decades? One possible answer is the legacy of Bolshevism, but this is an unsatisfactory answer. For instance, why, after six years of *perestroika*, under conditions in which higher authority was practically non-existent and everything became possible for the determined and dynamic, did such elements of Stalin's legacy as the *kolkhozy* and *sovkhozy* (collective and state farms) continue to exist? Why are village populations predominantly against the few private farmers who are desperately trying to work, give the country food, and earn money? Why does the rural population mostly support the *kolkhoz* chairmen, who are far worse than the landlords of tsarist Russia? The spirit of collectivization must be rooted in certain features of the Russian peasantry; it is difficult to believe that the resistance of conservatives alone could stop local mass movements today.

There are, of course, other instances of the legacy of Stalinism. The apparatus is still connected with the local Communist Party committees. Yet the assumption that Stalinism and Bolshevism are one and the same does not explain anything. Few people are eager to defend Bolshevism in matters where it is equated with Stalinism. People are more determined to

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16. Allow me to cite one very simple example in this respect. A year or two ago at a public discussion I received a note with the following text: "You and the son of Khrushchev should not write articles or speak at any gathering; instead, both of you should be imprisoned for the crimes of your parents." I read the note aloud–as I always do with notes–and asked the audience if they perceived any difference between that thought and Stalin's policy of killing and/or imprisoning the wives and families of "enemies of the people"? The majority of the audience advised me not to pay any attention to such opinions and I would not if they did not reflect the reality of the times which supposedly disappeared with Stalin. I could not but recall published accounts of eyewitnesses and victims which described nurses in maternity clinics who refused to help give birth to mongrel off-spring of enemies of the people!

be independent actors in the political life of the country today than they were after the Civil War. The Russian people are often conservative, but once they begin to move, they often know no limit. This may explain many things past and present, regardless of whether or not such an explanation is pleasing to "Russian patriots."

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CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I will offer certain arguments to those which have gained popular currency in the West. I cannot agree, for example, that Stalin succeeded because he had mass support for his extremist policies. I'd like to point out something few historians have noticed. Stalin began to gain credibility by repeating how humble he was in theory (which was true), that he was simply a loyal follower of Lenin (which I believe was untrue). His stake in the game was the name of Lenin, which secured him the initial support of the Party and that of the part of the population which was impressed by Lenin, a truly outstanding personality in Russian and world history. According the standards of those times, however, Lenin was no longer an "extremist" after the Civil War. Surely extremism was strong, but only within certain Bolshevik groups—NEP had begun the process of pacifying those belligerent to anything "private."

Neither can I believe that Stalin gained the support of the Party by remaining true to the elementary propositions of Marxism. Stalin used numerous "inventions" or "developments" of Marxist theory which would have made Marx turn in his grave. One must also emphasize that Stalin was never terribly careful about matching what he said or wrote with what he actually did. As a matter of fact, one usually didn't coincide with the other. It is as easy to find contradictory phrases in the classic texts of Marx as it is in the sacred books of Christianity—Stalin simply defied Lenin's attitude towards NEP. And we must remember that Lenin in all respects was much nearer and dearer to the Party than was Marx.

Nor can I accept the proposition advanced by certain historians that Stalin took note of Engels' or Lenin's ideas concerning socialist "cooperative production" or Lenin's thesis that competition between socialism and capitalism would be decided by the productivity of labor. We know very well that Stalin saw better prospects in compelling people to work than in encouraging them to work better, that he stressed the quantity, not quality, of those employed. This is additional proof that Stalin cannot be called socialist in the strict sense of the term. If it is difficult to understand the term "feudal capitalism" (to my mind, only Japan before 1945 represents

something of the kind, but I do not know enough about the country to judge), it is even more difficult to understand how "feudal socialism" can be reconciled with Marxist-Leninist theory.

A general problem with many theories on Stalinism is that of defining the "Bolshevik Old Guard." In one case, the expression means the Politburo of 1922, in another, it includes all pre-revolutionary members of the Party. These definitions are vastly different! Yet another theory would define the "Old Guard" as including the Central Committee of the immediate post-revolutionary years, or the Central Committee plus several hundreds (or thousands?) of local and central Party "activists." These varied interpretations call for a concrete explanation of the term each time it is used.

Concerning the question of whether Stalin led from below or from above, I think this answer is exceptionally clear. Without a doubt, members of the Party (or just the Politburo?) could express their opinion, but could act in important matters only with the express permission of Stalin himself. Any attempt to do something significant without his permission, even making a decision which fell within one's authority as a People's Commissar (or Minister), was regarded by Stalin as evidence of a dangerous independence of thought and action. Perhaps this tradition was not yet formed in the beginning of the 1930s; the worst years for this kind of total subordination were, of course, 1937-1939, the easiest, 1941-1945. In general, however, until the very death of Stalin no one could do anything important on his own without suffering some kind of punishment.

Allow me to cite an example of the subordination required by Stalin. In the winter of 1944-1945, the Belorussian authorities asked A. Mikoyan to loan the republic seed grain from the state reserves for the coming spring. The republic had just been liberated from German occupation and was experiencing a scarcity of seed. The Belorussians promised to return 30% more grain than they borrowed. At the time Mikoyan was responsible for such matters. He thought it necessary to give the grain first, because the republic would have a much better harvest, and second, because the state grain reserves would increase as a result. He did not tell Stalin—perhaps hoping Stalin would never know; anyway, the case was clear enough. Stalin was informed by someone, however, and became

furious. He cancelled Mikoyan's decision and personally wrote the government decree which took grain matters out of Mikoyan's hands due to his "squandering of state property." True, sometime later Mikoyan was again made responsible for grain resources because Molotov, who had replaced him, "of course could not deal with such matters." (Mikoyan's opinion of Molotov as a *rabotnik*, or worker, was rather low.) Another example of this tradition is the speech Khrushchev made about "agro-gorods" at the beginning of 1950s (a rather utopian idea, but still his own idea); Stalin ordered *Pravda* to publish an article severely criticizing the speech.

A. Mikoyan remembered that until the death of Ordzhonikidze, both of them were able to decide many important issues together. Stalin demanded only to be informed of their decisions. But as the years passed, he showed less and less tolerance for independent action on the part of anyone. However, when he was duly informed, "he generally did not hinder us from working," remembered Mikoyan.

Another area which has not always been clearly examined in historical works on Stalinism is the place of "specialists" in the Soviet regime. I would say that two attitudes towards specialists (*spetsi*) existed: on the one hand, neglect, jealousy, and even envy; on the other, respect for and attention to their opinions, even occasional defense from the "revolutionary phrases" (to use Lenin's words) of their critics. There is no doubt that the vast majority of the "commanders of production"—Ordzhonikidze, Mikoyan, Zaveniagin, Mikhail Kaganovich (Lazar's brother, People's Commissar for the Aviation Industry, who committed suicide on the day he was to be arrested for "espionage"), Vannikov, Tevosian, Ginzburg, Malishev, Serebriakov, Mil'chakov, Klimov, Tupolev, and many others—shared the latter attitude. The former attitude was largely that of the *vidvizhentsi*, new people who were often promoted to high positions without serious consideration of their ability or knowledge. Their attitude can be understood as stemming from an inferiority complex. Instead of being apprenticed and learning their trade (the necessity of which some of them understood), many preferred to criticize the *spetsi* for lack of decisiveness, slowness, and their inability to understand the "demands of the Party." This attitude made many excellent specialists the victims of repression.

In his unpublished memoirs, A. Mikoyan speaks about the considerable help he received from older specialists when he came to Moscow to replace L. Kamenev as People's Commissar of Internal and Foreign Trade in 1926. He was 30 that summer and had stubbornly resisted Stalin's wish of promote him to the position and made him a candidate member of the Politburo at the same time. For about six weeks he exchanged angry letters and cables with Stalin and Rykov, who argued that his name had been proposed by many Central Committee members. The reason for his resistance was obvious: Mikoyan did not think that he would be able to handle work on an all-Union, even international, scale; his experience, although extensive in itself, had been limited to one area. When he was finally forced to obey the nomination (and then only after it was published in the newspapers!), he understood that without constant advice and teaching on the part of specialists, he would be unable to work at the level he had been accustomed to working. This attitude concerning specialists continued long afterwards, extending to include all of Mikoyan's future work.

Another episode, also connected with Stalin, is of particular note. At the end of 1945 or the beginning of 1946, Mikoyan, then Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Trade of the USSR, was expecting the new Trade Minister of the Attley government, Harold Wilson, in Moscow. They were scheduled to discuss the Soviet war debt to Great Britain. The interest on the loan was fairly high and my father painstakingly researched what could be done about it. Prior to important decisions or negotiations, he always invited specialists to consult with him; they were free to discuss absolutely anything in these sessions. This time Mikoyan asked the following questions: "How can we trade for better conditions? What can be done, what issues can be raised in talks with the British minister?" Among his group of consultants on such matters was an old professor by the name of Mai. Mai told Mikoyan, "I don't know the political aspects of the debt problem, but the interest on France's debt to England is much less than ours. The difference will reach several hundred million pounds." Mikoyan succeeded in getting such ideas in the air. Specifying that "the political aspect will be my job," he demanded all the exact calculations. He then went to Stalin's office and told him everything about the matter.

Stalin was skeptical and did not even advise Mikoyan to put the interest question on the table; he did not believe for a moment that Great Britain would agree to step back from an agreement signed at the beginning of the war. Mikoyan nevertheless insisted that he would try, maintaining that he could not spoil anything by trying. "Well," said Stalin, "do try, but you will see that I am right." The talks then took place. (The story behind these negotiations was told to me not only by my father, but by Mr. Harold Wilson, who came to Moscow in 1960s and 1970s as the British Prime Minister. Wilson publicly declared that Mikoyan had been his teacher in trade negotiations, but the Soviet press of the Brezhnev years was not allowed to publish these words. Even Wilson's television interview was "edited" to his admission about Mikoyan.) Mikoyan's principal argument at the negotiations was that the Soviet contribution to the defeat of Hitler had been incomparable to that of France, so why did such discrimination exist between England's loans to her two allies? Wilson argued for several days, flew back to London to report to Attley and the Cabinet, came back to Moscow, and finally said "yes." Stalin was amazed. And satisfied, of course.

The Wilson episode, together with Mikoyan's unwillingness to be promoted in both 1926 and 1938 (when he resisted his appointment to the post of Deputy Premier), help us to understand in part why Mikoyan survived the purges. Obedience to Stalin was absolutely obligatory at the time, but cannot alone account for Mikoyan's survival. I do not believe that Mikoyan was Stalin's "satrap" or that he felt it necessary to prove his faithfulness to Stalin by direct participation in the repressions. In fact, Stalin directly involved him only once in the repressions, when he sent Mikoyan and Malenkov to Armenia with his letter to the Central Committee of the Armenian Party organization. Beria joined them a day later, travelling from Tbilisi. These very circumstances are grounds for suspecting that Stalin did not consider Mikoyan an ardent supporter of the repressions. (Although Mikoyan had to put his signature on a list of "proven enemies of the people" provided by the local NKVD, he dared to cross out several names on the list. Unfortunately, his action failed to save those people). Perhaps the same reason explains why Mikoyan had to deliver a speech on the 20th anniversary of the Cheka-OGPU-NKVD.

Obedience to Stalin in economic and other professional matters did not preclude discussion if one was brave enough to argue. True, some

preferred not to argue. Malenkov, for instance, never argued with Stalin, although he was very close to him (he suffered a constant, panic-stricken fear of the man). Mikoyan argued even over serious matters. When the Marshall Plan was announced, for instance, Gunnar Murdal, then executive secretary of the U.N. Economic Commission for Europe, came to Moscow to discuss the possibility of Soviet participation in the plan. Mikoyan told Murdal that he supported the idea completely and then remarked, "But you understand that such a question cannot be decided by me alone, so let us meet in a couple of days." Speaking with me in Stockholm in 1978, Murdal told me Stalin's name was not mentioned, but that he had understood with whom Mikoyan would have to talk.

My father had told me the same story earlier, explaining that he had spent hours trying to convince Stalin to join the Marshall Plan. I quote him: "[Stalin's] only reaction was: 'We shall be dependent on the West.' In vain I argued that we were independent enough politically and that with the help of the United States we would be able to restore the economy of the European part of the country—which was in ruins—much faster and on a new technological level. Which would have only made us more independent! But Stalin, being a clever man, capable of understanding economic issues when one explained them to him, could also be stubborn as a donkey—to the extent of being a fool."

Stalin's stubbornness is equally apparent in another example recounted by Mikoyan in his unpublished memoirs. Mikoyan tells how Stalin made him sell a network of gasoline stations in Austria which the USSR had received in reparations after WWII. Mikoyan was then in charge of all foreign economic ties, including the impressive Soviet Property Abroad Administration (among whose assets the uranium mines in Germany and Czechoslovakia were the most important). He argued that the gasoline stations in Austria, acquired through sheer luck, would speedily reap growing annual profits in hard currency for the USSR; to lose such an opportunity meant never to have it in the future. But Stalin evidently resented any ties with foreign countries which could be avoided.

Let me cite one last example. In July 1941, Mikoyan ordered several trains that were escaping German occupation with grain and other food products to be directed to Leningrad. Informed of Mikoyan's order,

Zhdanov protested to Stalin directly, not bothering to discuss it with Mikoyan. Zhdanov argued that the city had no warehouses and, indeed, already had sufficient reserves of food. This was only two to three months before the 900-day blockade of the Leningrad! My father told me that of course he had not foreseen the blockade. He had simply thought that such a big city could use many buildings, such as movie theaters, in-door stadiums, museums, and palaces, as warehouses. If Leningrad hadn't the slightest need of food reserves, he reasoned it would easy to distribute reserves to other locations from Leningrad. When Stalin called him and told him of Zhdanov's objections, Mikoyan explained what he had in mind. But Stalin refused to agree to his order, saying, "Zhdanov knows his city and its needs better than you do. Direct those trains to other places."

Here I must add several words about "Yakovlev's Stalin." The memoirs of the well-known aviation designer are considered pro-Stalinist. At least, such was the opinion of both Mikoyans, including Yakovlev's colleague, the MiG fighter designer Artiom Mikoyan. Let me repeat that although Stalin was capable of understanding sound arguments and making good decisions, but was just as capable of not listening to sound opinions and making bad decisions. Concerning the atmosphere of fear and intrigue surrounding Yakovlev, Artiom Mikoyan related a notable episode in which Yakovlev's very fate was at stake. At a meeting in Stalin's office, the Air Force command informed Stalin that the new Yak-3 fighters continued to be knocked out of order in the air because the fabric covering the frame split and broke.[17] This was not the first report on the problem. Yakovlev was unable to explain why all his attempts to obviate the difficulty had been unsuccessful.

After hearing the report, Stalin said in the most menacing tone (after which people usually lived in freedom for only minutes or hours): "For whom do you work, comrade Yakovlev, for our country or for Hitler?" The group remained completely silent and Yakovlev turned as white as snow, unable to utter a word. The situation—and the fate of Yakovlev—was

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17. The aluminum industry in the Northern Urals was being hurriedly created at that time under the guidance of my father. He was overseeing the industry on direct orders from Stalin. Mikoyan had been surprised by the order, objecting that he knew little about metals. Stalin's argument was simple and short: "You will cope with it." "Generally, he believed that I would cope with anything," added my father musingly.

saved by Artiom Mikoyan, who stood up and loudly said: "Comrade Stalin, we give you our word that we shall find out what is happening. Give us two weeks." To say "we" meant first of all that, in the case of failure, guilt would automatically fall on him as well. Stalin remained silent, still angry. Then he said, "You have only two weeks. Remember this." After which a group of designers flew to the main plant and scrutinized every stage of production of the Yak-3. They worked like rank and file controllers for 18 hours every day, finally discovering that the khaki paint used on the upper part of the body was covered by a lacquer which could not weather the extreme frost of the 1941-1942 winter, especially at high altitudes during flight.

After Stalin's death, only the degree of menace changed in such situations. "The voluntarism" of the first man continued, intrigues did not disappear, and the habit of destroying political opponents and their clienteles was simply usurped by Khrushchev. The important difference was that no one was arrested or shot. Decisions, however, were often taken unilaterally. Those who flattered Khrushchev triumphed, while those who maintained their views in spite of his anger either lost factories and design bureaus to their competitors, were moved to other jobs (*naznachenie!*), or retired. The "space adventurer" Vladimir Chelomey, for example, managed to undermine the prestige and authority of Sergei Koroliov, father of the Soviet space breakthrough. Chelomey employed Khrushchev's son Sergei, then a young and credulous engineer, at his "firm." By making Sergei a Hero of Socialist Labor, Chelomey simply charmed Khrushchev. And let us not forget that such a man of principle as Admiral Nikolai Kuznetsov was demoted from the rank of full admiral twice: once by Stalin at the end of 1940s and once by Khrushchev in the 1950s. These incidents are the direct legacy of Stalinism.

The strength of this legacy can also be clearly detected in Soviet agricultural policy. Keep in mind that in 1953, Khrushchev was the first to remember the grave fate of the peasants under Stalin and implemented important measures which made possible a rise in agricultural production and liberated peasants from their virtual state of serfdom. (Many Western specialists make a mistake when they attribute these changes to Malenkov, who simply pronounced the speech at the Supreme Soviet.) Nevertheless, seven or eight years later Khrushchev attempted to deprive the peasants of

their household plots, a restriction even Stalin had never attempted to impose. Such was the strength of the Stalinist approach, both with respect to important decisions and towards the long-suffering Russian peasantry.

I must also discount the theory that Stalin personally was unaware of the scope and brutality of collectivization. One must not underestimate the role of Stalin in accelerating forced collectivization. His article "Dizzy with Success" was nothing more than his usual hypocrisy. We have hundreds of examples of this hypocrisy. "Dekulakization" demanded so many soldiers, so many military units and other means of coordinated transportation throughout the country, and involved so many areas of the country on a grand scale (areas not only where collectivization was implemented, but where "kulaks" and their families were resettled), that it is absolutely fantastic to believe that Stalin was unaware of the scale of the "operation." A.V. Snegov, whom I had an occasion to mention above, worked in the Ukraine and was eyewitness to a conversation between Ordzhonikidze and a local Party leader. The Ukrainian had known Sergo in the past, so he confessed that he had not tried to implement all the tough measures ordered by Moscow or speed up the process and was submitting inaccurate reports. Ordzhonikidze responded, "You are right. Do not pay much attention to commands of people who are faraway and know the situation on the spot worse than you do."

I admit that Stalin used populism intensively, but find it difficult to accept that traditional passive peasant resistance to Stalin's system was in any way significant. I cannot see how peasants overtook Stalin's power. Even less believable is the theory that the system created by Stalin as he wanted it to exist and serve him, as well as to benefit the entire party-state apparatus, was in the end more powerful than Stalin himself. Stalinism included Stalin and the system. Lastly, how can one use the explanation of "technological conservatism" for Stalinism? Technology has its own laws and a human being cannot overcome them. With the exception, that is, those who would attribute even earthquakes to their "Great Leader."

One more episode provides a psychological explanation of Stalin's feeling about his power. Once, in August, while walking with Mikoyan in the park at his "Blizhniaia dacha" in Kuntsevo, Stalin pointed to the open ground and said, "I want a lemon tree to grow here." Mikoyan

responded, "It cannot grow here, the first frost will kill it." Stalin said stubbornly, "No, it *will* grow." Mikoyan thought, "Strange. He looks like a clever, a very clever, man. How can he talk such nonsense?" I believe this episode reveals Stalin's inner conviction that nature obeyed him, or *should* obey him. In the end a lemon tree was planted and by late fall began to die. Stalin ordered a green house be built around the tree in order to save it (or perhaps a new, healthy tree was planted without his knowledge). Is this not proof of Stalin's battle with nature and his wish to believe that he always won such battles?

Finally, I categorically disagree with the thesis that Stalin remained "aloof" from the inter-Party conflicts of 1934-1937. For me, it is crystal clear that Stalin created these conflicts himself behind the scenes, organizing and orchestrating the conflicts as a preparation for the coming blow. Neither will I ever accept the thesis that Stalin is not to blame for the terror. Certain scholars maintain that although Stalin is to blame in some sense, his personal role no more explains the Great Terror than the role played by Mao explains the Cultural Revolution in China. I know my country and I know Stalin. As for China and Mao, I can only judge only by implication. I do know, however, that Stalin easily manipulated the masses thanks to the very system of "communist" dictatorship which he himself perfected, a system which gave him unique opportunities to enslave people not only politically, but ideologically and psychologically as well.

Since I was once such a slave myself, I can testify that people could be made to do anything in that era. Yet they sincerely believed that they were acting on their own– fulfilling their duty and behaving according to an inner readiness to implement everything that the PARTY, e.g. HE, THE LEADER, wanted them to do. They did not sell their souls, they presented them as gifts with pride and joy. This kind of behavior can be considered a "clinical case" of mass psychosis, with an entire country serving as one huge clinic. Perhaps this sounds like a paradox or a gloomy joke to the reader, but no one can convince me today that I was normal; my thinking and behavior were predetermined by historical circumstances. We in Russia are now able to look back and evaluate our thoughts, feelings, and obsessions of decades past. We know, even without the false consolation of textbooks or research monographs, that we as a nation were raped by an evil genius of a dictator.

Today at least, the general public in the USSR possesses more and more information about Stalin and his regime. (Information that, alas, only a few people in the West would bother to read.) Denouncing Stalin has ceased to be the purvey of approved, "official" authors; the process has grown beyond the control of any one person. Certainly the process of de-Stalinization is leading to mistakes, such as emotional and/or ideological interpretations which perpetrate fantasies instead of facts. Advocacy of one particular historical personage or policy, as well as the assignment of blame, are often the goals of many authors who are currently writing about Stalinism. As a result, readers and reviewers often worry more about the intentions of an author than the sources or methodology of his or her work.

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AFTERWORD

Stalinism continued to exist without Stalin for many years. This fact alone seems to overrule my emphasis on the role of personality in history and to support determinist interpretations of those decades of Soviet history under discussion in this paper. My opinion remains, however, that the long life of the system is not necessarily proof of its historical inevitability. To be sure, the Soviet system was exactly what the new ruling class created it to be and functioned in exactly the manner they wished it to function. Having become an inseparable part of the system, this class painstakingly cherished, attempted to develop, and stubbornly defended it. Without a doubt, the system was based upon the vested interests of this new class. Yet I would still argue that the formation of this ruling class could have been stopped and its young leaves could have mutated into a different kind of flora.

One of the paradoxes of Stalinism can be seen in the Khrushchev era; the *stalinshchina* was vehemently rejected by the ruling elite after the dictator's death, but the system of Party rule—the main cornerstone of Stalinism—was strengthened. Why? The Party's power was reinforced because without direct fear of mass repression, execution, and torture on the part of the everyday citizen, new guarantees for the longevity of the system were needed. Thus Khrushchev's principal failing was his inability (or unwillingness) to understand the need for rapid revolution from above in 1956. Instead of moving to destroy the Stalinist system, Khrushchev preserved practically all of its key elements, even adding new instruments to keep the system strong in the absence of His Majesty.

Yet neither a leader nor the party-state apparatus could prevent the advent of revolution from above—the next reformer became a revolutionary against the very system he headed. This historical fact cannot be seriously denied, despite theories which claim Gorbachev attempted to save a rapidly disintegrating system by means of cosmetic reforms. To my mind, such allegations are more personal opinion than objective scientific analysis or depictions of reality, a reality all of us remember well. In 1985-1987, the Soviet system was still sufficiently strong so that small liberal

gestures on the part of Gorbachev would have given hope and a certain peace of mind to many politically important social groups. Gorbachev would have then acquired the reputation of an intelligent young statesman of broad intellectual horizons. Such an image, combined with the memory of the long years of Brezhnev gerontocracy, would have positively assured Gorbachev and his team a stable leading role for some time to come. My only concession to historical determinism would be my assumption that sometime in the third millennium the system would have died anyway.

The strength of the Stalinist system and the ability of its mechanisms to remain intact (or at least, continue to function) after several years of *perestroika*, was amazing. How long could the system have lasted had the coup of August 1991 not intervened? I doubt much longer, but we cannot forget that Stalinism outlived its creator for almost 40 years.

In the end, the fate of the system was decided by the behavior which typified it and, indeed, typifies any totalitarian system. By this I mean the absurdity of actions based on presumption and belief—the absurdity of actions brought to life by the system's own propaganda, wishful thinking, and inability to evaluate reality correctly. An overestimation of the power of the Soviet system has always caused behavior among the elite which justly appeared idiotic (to those within the system, however, the behavior appeared dictated by secret enemies who had made their way to the top).

The August coup proved once again the law of totalitarian structures. In trying to halt the dismemberment of the Union, those who led the coup produced powerful new centrifugal forces; hoping to save the ruling role of the Communist Party, they brought about its immediate end; dreaming of a backlash against the democratic movement, they gave the strongest possible momentum to that movement; expecting to reimpose the old pervasive fear on people, they liberated people from the relics of that fear once and for all.

The second revolution of the twentieth century in that vast area once called Tsarist Russia and subsequently, the Soviet Union, will probably be named the August Revolution by historians. It was a very unusual revolution, almost peaceful and without bloodshed. To the extent that the

August Revolution was easy, we can cite the main contribution of *perestroika*: turning the system into a living corpse while destroying the FEAR which it had instilled for decades. That fear made even the fatal convulsions of the system look menacing and dangerous. The loss of that fear could be seen around the Russian "White House" and elsewhere in Moscow during the notorious three days of the coup. An unprecedented degree of unity and determination were evident in the people who defended democracy against the last convulsions of Stalinism. Their determination could be detected by all who participated in the events of those three days, among whom I had the honor and luck to be.

It would be natural to be optimistic under such circumstances, but I have doubts about the "triumphant march of democracy" (to use the phraseology of *A Short History of the CPSU*) in Russia. Why? A Russian writer of our times recently said, "Bolshevism is a certain condition of the Russian soul." Until we fully understand this, he added, we will be unable to understand anything in our past and even, perhaps, our present.

Our society was sick for many, many years—too many years. Even prior to the October 1917 Revolution, Russian society was not free of the viruses of extremism, intolerance, and despotic inclination. These traits together allowed Bolshevism to assume its ugly features, triumph, and last for several decades. The real question is how free is today's society from these same viruses? Were they cured to their root by democratic development, the growth of political culture, and the bitter experience of the past? Did the illness result in some sort of immunization, as happens in the human body? If the answer is "yes," we may look forward with optimism. Nevertheless, the future development of the country—and of the new-born states appearing in the area—is still unpredictable. Thus it is prudent to restrict any analysis to Russia proper.

Even though it greatly facilitated separatist trends in the former republics and autonomous regions, the August Revolution was most important for Russia. The outpouring of democratic aspirations and the disappearance of fear are signs that Russian society is ready for cardinal change. With respect to political leadership, however, the situation remains difficult. Political leadership in Russia has simply not yet reached the level of responsibility and wisdom needed in order for Russian society to recover

from the Soviet experiment. History itself staged this unique experiment on one-sixth of the globe. Now that the streams of East and West have intersected, this one-sixth of the globe has the chance to make a great and positive contribution to human civilization as a whole. Socialist ideas, although deformed and often only caricatures of socialism, have left behind something important in Russia. These ideas will, I hope, lead Russia along a path different from a mere repetition of those paths explored by other nations long ago and will inevitably shape the nature of the society now emerging from the abyss of Stalinism.

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