

## Marxists Behaving Badly: Anti-Stalinism on the “Left”

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**Abstract:** In theory, Marxists are materialists. Materialists decide the truth or falsehood of hypothesis on the basis of evidence. But with regard to Joseph Stalin and Soviet history during the time of his leadership, many Marxists are in fact idealists, ignoring evidence in favor of their preconceived ideas. This essay discusses: the need for objectivity in historical research; the dialectical relationship of practice and theory; and six words or phrases that are hallmarks of idealism and anticommunism on the pseudo-Marxist “Left”: Totalitarianism; Stalinism; Stalin the “Dictator;” “The Great Terror;” the GULAG; Democracy. The anti-Marxist nature of the Trotskyist website Marxists.org. is exposed and critiqued. The essay concludes that a true Marxist Left must reject the errors examined here.

*Note: The initial draft of this essay was completed on International Women’s Day, when we celebrate the struggles of working-class women. Founded in 1910, it was long a holiday only in the Soviet Union and, after World War 2, in the pro-Soviet socialist countries. It was primarily a communist holiday until the 1960s. It stands as a reminder to us both of the struggles of working women worldwide, and of the achievements of the communist movement.*

In 1843, in a letter to Arnold Ruge, Karl Marx wrote these words:

... it is all the more clear what we have to accomplish at present: I am referring to **ruthless criticism of all that exists**, ruthless both in the sense of **not being afraid of the results it arrives at** and in the sense of being just as little afraid of conflict with the powers that be.<sup>1</sup>

Marxists are supposed to be materialists. Dialectical materialism is a *science*. But few Marxists act like materialists. Most Marxists “believe” – believe Khrushchev, believe Gorbachev, believe Trotsky, and believe the Western anticommunist academics who write about Soviet history.

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<sup>1</sup> Marx to Ruge, September, 1843. At <[https://wikirouge.net/texts/en/Letters\\_from\\_the\\_Deutsch-Französische\\_Jahrbücher](https://wikirouge.net/texts/en/Letters_from_the_Deutsch-Französische_Jahrbücher)>. Please note that I do not cite this letter from the Marxists.org site. All boldface and italic type in this article is by me.

## Objectivity

The only way to arrive at the truth in any investigation is to proceed with objectivity. A scientist tries to be objective – meaning, to question her own biases, and not permit those biases – which everyone possesses – to predetermine the results of her analysis.

Therefore we have to recognize our own preconceived ideas and prejudices, and then take definite steps to doubt them, to question them, lest they fatally bias our investigation.

We have to work out a method of looking with particular skepticism upon evidence that tends to support our own prejudices and preconceived ideas. We also need to give especially generous consideration to any evidence that tends to contradict our own prejudices and preconceived ideas.

If we fail to do this, we will do the opposite. Inevitably, we will give an especially generous reading to evidence that tends to support our preconceived ideas, and be quick to reject any evidence that tends to disprove our preconceived ideas.

We will fall prey to confirmation bias.<sup>2</sup> Then we will have no chance at all of discovering the truth, for even if we stumble upon it we will not recognize it.

Anticommunists and Trotskyists cannot afford to be objective because the evidence does not support their falsehoods and fabrications. Very few of the academic scholars who write about Stalin-era Soviet history make any attempt to practice objectivity.

## Practice and Theory

Lenin wrote that “without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement.”<sup>3</sup> But what makes theory scientific, and so potentially revolutionary? That the theory is tested by an accurate understanding of the world, which is gained through practice.

Lenin understood that practice is indispensable for Marxist theory:

Replying to Dühring, who had attacked Marx’s dialectics, Engels says that Marx never even thought of “proving” anything by means of Hegelian triads, that Marx only studied and investigated the real process, and that **he regarded the conformity of a theory to reality as its only criterion.**

From living perception to abstract thought, and from this **to practice** – such is the dialectical path of the cognition of truth, of the cognition of objective reality.

... man by his *practice* proves the objective correctness of his ideas, concepts, knowledge, science.

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<sup>2</sup> See the article at <[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Confirmation\\_bias](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Confirmation_bias)>.

<sup>3</sup> Lenin, *What Is To Be Done?* (1902), Chapter 1, Section D.

Life gives rise to the brain. Nature is reflected in the human brain. By checking and applying **the correctness of these reflections in his practice and technique**, man arrives at objective truth. Truth is a process. From the subjective idea, man advances towards objective truth through “Practice” (and technique).

**Practice is higher than (theoretical) knowledge**, for it has not only the dignity of universality, but also of immediate actuality.

The unity of the theoretical idea (of knowledge) **and of practice** – this NB – and this unity precisely in the theory of knowledge,

Testing by facts or **by practice** respectively, is to be found here in each step of the analysis.<sup>4</sup>

To the extent that Marxist theorists are divorced from practice, they are, in reality, not Marxists at all.

Marxists who are ignorant of the history – that is, the practice – of the first socialist state, the USSR, during its most dynamic period, the “Stalin” period from 1929 through 1953, who have based their interpretation of the Soviet Union on anticommunist lies, cannot learn from the communist movement of the past because they are ignorant of what the practice of that movement really was. They have uncritically ingested a false and slanderous version of that practice from the writings of Leon Trotsky, from Nikita Khrushchev and his hired historical liars, from Gorbachev and *his* hired historical liars, and from Western anticommunist writers and academics.

Such self-styled “Marxists” do harm by claiming the status of “Marxist” or “communist” while spreading falsehoods within the Left about Soviet history. In doing so they fatally mislead younger or naïve persons who, disgusted with capitalism, want to learn how to fight for communism.

In a review of Phil Slater, *Origin and Significance of the Frankfurt School*, Terry Eagleton wrote:

As a Marxist himself, Slater puts an accurate finger on the central, devastating disability of the whole [Frankfurt] School: its chronic inability to bring its theorizing into any productive relationship with political practice.<sup>5</sup>

This includes all Trotskyists, because their understanding of history is based on “belief” in anticommunist lies about Stalin and the USSR of his day and on their devotion to what amounts to a cult around Leon Trotsky.

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<sup>4</sup> These quotations are from Howard Selsam and Harry Martel, *Reader in Marxist Philosophy* (New York: International Publishers, 1963), pages 108, 341, 346, 349, 352, 353, 364.

<sup>5</sup> Eagleton, Terry. Review of Phil Slater, *Origin and significance of the Frankfurt School* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977), *New Blackfriars*. Cited from inside title page of Slater’s book.

## Six Words

In my years of researching Soviet history of the Stalin period I have discovered a number of false concepts that characterize non-objective, non-scientific research in this field, some of which is indeed dishonest but some of which is simply misguided. I will discuss six of the most important falsehoods here. They are: “totalitarianism;” “Stalinism;” “dictator;” “terror;” the “GULAG;” and “democracy.”<sup>6</sup>

### 1. “Totalitarianism”

“Totalitarian” is defined in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) as follows:

Of or pertaining to a system of government which tolerates only one political party, **to which all other institutions are subordinated**, and which usually demands **the complete subservience of the individual to the State**.

The OED quotations show that it has been applied to Christianity, to Italian fascism, and to “total” war. But it has also long been used by anticommunists to claim that communism is similar to fascism.

Yuri Fel’shtinsky and George Cherniavsky, very pro-Trotsky writers and very hostile to Stalin, are the authors of the latest comprehensive Russian-language biography of Trotsky in five volumes. According to them, Trotsky was the first to use the term “totalitarian” about Stalin.

Trotsky ... became the first author to include the Stalin period under the general theme of totalitarianism, and, unprecedented for a communist, went so far as to compare three dictators: the Bolshevik leader Stalin with the fascist Duce Mussolini and the national socialist Fuhrer Hitler.

... in the vocabulary of Trotsky and in the book “Stalin” the term “totalitarian power” was entered to denote the nature of Stalin’s political rule.<sup>7</sup>

In political language since Trotsky the term has been used to yoke the Soviet Union together with Nazi Germany, thus to efface the fact that Hitler was a capitalist, imperialist, and anticommunist more similar to the Western Allies than different from them.

And here is the Trotskyist Marxists.org: “**Stalin’s regime is probably the most effective totalitarian regime in history....**”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> I use scare quotes to emphasize the false nature of these concepts as applied to Soviet history.

<sup>7</sup> Iurii Fel’shtinskii, Georgii Cherniavskii, *Lev Trotskii. Vrag No. 1 1929-1940*. Moscow: Tsentrpoligraf, 2013, 380, 383.

<sup>8</sup> At <<https://www.marxists.org/glossary/terms/t/o.htm>>.

## 2. “Stalinism”

Just as Leon Trotsky was the first to apply the term “totalitarian” to the USSR during the period of Stalin’s leadership, so he was the first to use the term “Stalinism.”

The Oxford English Dictionary identifies the first use of the word “Stalinism” in the English language:

1927 *Daily Tel.* 22 Nov. 10/3 A violent denunciation of ‘Stalinism’ and its ‘terrorising of the party’.

This is reference to an article about the activities of Trotsky and other Oppositionists during and after the November 7, 1927, celebrations of the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution. The scare quotes indicate that the paper is quoting the Oppositionists.

The Trotskyist site Marxists.org joins overtly pro-capitalist writers in stating:

... Stalinism lasted longer and **was more total than fascism**. But **fascism and Stalinism shared in common ... that they rested on absolute terror ...** (ibid.)

Marxists.org recognizes that “Stalinism” does not have any fixed meaning:

... **getting at the core definition of “Stalinism” [is] difficult, but not impossible.**<sup>9</sup>

The political tenets of Stalinism revolve around **the theory of socialism in one country—developed by Stalin to counter the Bolshevik theory that the survival of the Russian Revolution depended on proletarian revolutions in Europe**. In contradistinction, the Stalinist theory stipulates that a socialist society can be achieved within a single country.

This is false. Marxists.org continues [emphasis mine]:

In April 1924, in the first edition of his book *Foundations of Leninism*, Stalin had explicitly rejected the idea that socialism could be constructed in one country. He wrote: “Is it possible to attain **the final victory** of socialism in one country, without the combined efforts of the proletarians of several advanced countries? No, it is not.”

... by November 1926, Stalin had completely revised history, stating: “The party always took as its starting point the idea that the victory of socialism ... can be accomplished with the forces of a single country.” (ibid.)

Note that in this last quotation Stalin spoke of “the victory of socialism,” not “the *final* victory of socialism” as he did in the quotation from 1924.

<sup>9</sup> At <<https://www.marxists.org/glossary/terms/s/t.htm#stalinism>>.

Lest this appear as “hair-splitting,” an example of my own confirmation bias, note that in the “Short Course,” published in Russian in 1938 and in English in 1939, we read [emphasis mine]:

... **the victory of Socialism in the U.S.S.R.**, as expressed in the abolition of the capitalist economic system and the building of a Socialist economic system, **could not be considered a *final* victory ...**<sup>10</sup>

The Marxists.com writers include this text on their site but they are ignoring it. Either they are intentionally deceiving their readers, or this is an example of their own confirmation bias. Their conclusion, therefore, that Stalin had abandoned “the Bolshevik theory that the survival of the Russian Revolution depended on proletarian revolutions in Europe” is invalid, a sign of prejudice rather than objectivity.

The Marxists.org article claims that Lenin rejected the idea of “socialism in one country.” This too is false. In reality, Lenin clearly stated that socialism *could* be achieved in one country.

Uneven economic and political development is an absolute law of capitalism. **Hence, the victory of socialism is possible first in several or even in one capitalist country alone.** (“The United States of Europe Slogan,” 1915)<sup>11</sup>

The development of capitalism proceeds extremely unevenly in different countries. It cannot be otherwise under commodity production. From this it follows irrefutably that **socialism cannot achieve victory simultaneously in all countries. It will achieve victory first in one or several countries**, while the others will for some time remain bourgeois or pre-bourgeois. (“The Military Programme of the Proletarian Revolution,” 1916)<sup>12</sup>

Indeed, the power of the state over all large-scale means of production, political power in the hands of the proletariat, the alliance of this proletariat with the many millions of small and very small peasants, the assured proletarian leadership of the peasantry, etc. ... **Is this not all that is necessary to build a complete socialist society? It is still not the building of socialist society, but it is all that is necessary and sufficient for it.** (“On Co-operation,” dated January 6, 1923; published in *Pravda* May 26, 1923)<sup>13</sup>

These citations of Lenin, and the works from which they are taken, are all on the Marxists.org site. The Marxist.org writers have access to all these quotations, but their anti-Stalin paradigm acts as an obstacle keeping them from integrating these texts into their thinking – assuming they are not being deliberately dishonest.

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<sup>10</sup> *History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks). Short Course.* (New York, 1939). Chapter Nine. At <<https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1939/x01/ch09.htm>>.

<sup>11</sup> At <<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1915/aug/23.htm>>.

<sup>12</sup> At <<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1916/miliprog/i.htm>>.

<sup>13</sup> At <<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1923/jan/06.htm>>.

They should know that Lenin supported the theory of “socialism in one country” and that it was Stalin, not Trotsky, who was following Lenin’s theory in this regard. Once again, either the Marxist.org writers are victims of their own confirmation bias, or they are deliberately lying to their readers.

Do the Marxists.org writers rely on any evidence? Well, Trotsky claimed that Lenin rejected the idea of “socialism in one country.” That’s it! Just a claim by Trotsky, which is sufficient to reinforce their pre-existing prejudice against Stalin, and which takes the form that “Stalinism had uprooted the very foundations of Marxism and Leninism.”

In reality, in light of Lenin’s endorsement of “socialism in one country” it was Trotsky, not Stalin, who had “uprooted” Leninism! Most readers of Marxists.org know little or nothing about Soviet history, and so are vulnerable to anti-Stalin, pro-Trotsky falsifications.

Of course Lenin’s writings should not be worshipped and regarded as errorless. In this case Marxists.org try to employ Lenin’s writings in a dishonest charge against Stalin.

### 3. “Stalin the Dictator”

There is a great deal of evidence that Stalin was *not* a dictator, and *no* evidence that he was one. In 2004 Stephen Wheatcroft, a leading academic specialist in the Stalin period, published an article titled “From Team-Stalin to Degenerate Tyranny.”<sup>14</sup> Wheatcroft’s whole article concerns Stalin’s dedication to collective leadership.

The system was dominated by Stalin, but despite the popular image of the dictator imposing his will on others, the record of his private meetings indicate that in the 1930s and early 1940s, Stalin had a very broad circle of acquaintances and he spent a considerable time meeting and working with others ... His working style was as part of a working collective or editorial team, rather than as a ‘loner’. (90)

In a review of the volume in which Wheatcroft’s essay appears Gabor T. Rittersporn concludes:

... one can also agree with Rees’ comment that, when all is said and done, hardly any government lives up to the standards of collective decision-making, even in democratic states, and that this circumstance must be taken in account when writing about the Soviet system.<sup>15</sup>

But wait a minute – what about that “degenerate tyranny” part? This is only mentioned in **the last few sentences**, with **no evidence**. Wheatcroft ends his article this way:

But at the same time, he [Stalin] grew increasingly unhappy with this dependency, and began to take erratic and tyrannical decisions. (104)

<sup>14</sup> Stephen G. Wheatcroft. “From Team-Stalin to Degenerate Tyranny.” In E.A. Rees, ed., *The Nature of Stalin’s Dictatorship. The Politburo, 1924-1953*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004, 79-107.

<sup>15</sup> *European History Quarterly* 36 (2006), 332.

What decisions? In 2004 Wheatcroft failed to identify even a single act of “dictatorship” or “tyranny” by Stalin! Nor can anyone else do so today.

In a secret report dated March 2, 1955, the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency stated:

**Even in Stalin's time there was collective leadership. The Western idea of a dictator within the Communist setup is exaggerated.** Misunderstandings on that subject are caused by lack of comprehension of the real nature and organization of the Communist power structure. **Stalin, although holding wide powers, was merely the captain of a team** and it seems obvious that Khrushchev will be the new captain.<sup>16</sup>

In his infamous “Secret Speech” to the XX Party Congress on February 25, 1956, Khrushchev made a number of claims about strange decisions that Stalin supposedly made during his last years. In my book *Khrushchev Lied* I showed that every such statement by Khrushchev in that speech is false (except for one, that I can’t prove either true or false).<sup>17</sup>

There have been a few attempts by Western anticommunist “scholars” to argue that Stalin was a “dictator.” All rely on asserting that the Moscow Trials defendants were innocent; that the famine of 1932-33 was caused by collectivization, if not actually desired by Stalin; that the Tukhachevsky Affair defendants were innocent; that “the Great Terror” – discussion to come below – was indeed planned by Stalin.

None of this is true, as I have shown from primary-source evidence in my books and articles during the past decade. But in the politically-charged field of Soviet history, it is obligatory to call Stalin a “dictator.”

#### 4. “The Great Terror”

A more accurate term, one used mainly in Russia, is *Yezhovshchina* – “bad time of Yezhov.” The term “Great Terror” was invented by anticommunist British intelligence agent and propagandist<sup>18</sup> Robert Conquest, who applied it to virtually all of Soviet history during the 1930s.<sup>19</sup> Few mainstream historians of the Stalin period have dared to reject it. It misleadingly implies, just as the Trotskyist Marxist.org site falsely asserts, that the USSR was ruled by “absolute terror.”

Under this heading, Marxists.org cites a list of worthless anticommunist material from the 1930s plus Trotsky’s own lies.<sup>20</sup> They lead off with the following words in small print:

<sup>16</sup> <<https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP80-00810A006000360009-0.pdf>>. Accessed 02.22.2022.

<sup>17</sup> Grover Furr. *Khrushchev Lied: The Evidence That Every “Revelation” of Stalin’s (and Beria’s) Crimes in Nikita Khrushchev’s Infamous “Secret Speech” to the 20th Party Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union on February 25, 1956, is Provably False*. Kettering, OH: Erythros Press & Media LLC, 2011.

<sup>18</sup> For the evidence that Conquest was a British agent see Grover Furr, “Response to the Death of Robert Conquest.” At <[https://msuweb.montclair.edu/~furr/research/furr\\_conquest\\_obit.html](https://msuweb.montclair.edu/~furr/research/furr_conquest_obit.html)>.

<sup>19</sup> Robert Conquest. *The Great Terror. Stalin’s Purge of the Thirties*. London: Macmillan, 1968. A new but equally dishonest edition was published in 2008 as *The Great Terror. A Reassessment*. 40th Anniversary Edition. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008.

<sup>20</sup> At <<https://www.marxists.org/history/ussr/events/terror/index.htm>>.



Statistics based on archival sources, but nonetheless approximate numbers  
 Executed (1930-53): 786,098  
 Imprisoned: 3.5 million  
 Death in prison and exile: 2 million

3.5 million “imprisoned” for the period 1930-1953 – 24 years – is a small figure. More than 2 million persons are imprisoned in the USA *today*. But Russia and the USSR went through catastrophes during these years that have no parallel in American history: World War I; the Civil War, 1918-1921; four famines during the 1920s alone; the devastating famine of 1932-33; the conspiracies of the 1930s; World War II.

“Death in prison and exile” is misleading. Sixty per cent of prisoners who died in the GULAG lost their lives during the great famine of 1932-33 or during World War II, in 1942-44.

During these periods a great many Soviet citizens were also dying prematurely. For example: during World War II Soviet workers sickened and died of starvation *at their work*, far from any fighting.

The high intensity of work at the factory and the inadequacy of the food make it a matter of urgency that [workers receive their rightful days off], as witnessed by the frequency with which workers are dropping dead from emaciation right on the job. On some days you see several corpses in the shops. During the two months December 1942 and January 1943, they observed 16 bodies just in the factory shops. Those dying from emaciation are mainly workers doing manual labor. (Shliaev, Chief Prosecutor of Cheliabinsk province, to Bochkov, Prosecutor General of the USSR, March 29, 1943)

This is from an article by Donald Filtzer, “Starvation Mortality in Soviet Home Front Industrial Regions During World War II.”<sup>21</sup> Filtzer is a conventionally anticommunist scholar who specializes in studying the Soviet working class. He states:

During 1943 and 1944, starvation and tuberculosis – a disease that was endemic to the USSR and is highly sensitive to acute malnutrition – were between them the largest single cause of death among the nonchild civilian population.

Filtzer continues:

The USSR did not have enough food to feed both its military and its civilians, even with the arrival of Lend-Lease food aid. The state therefore had to engage in a grim calculus and decide how it could most efficiently use its limited resources – that is, how many calories and grams of protein it could allocate to different groups. In these circumstances it was **inevitable** that some people would not obtain enough to eat and many would die. **No matter what regime had been in power in the**

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<sup>21</sup> Wendy Goldman and Donald Filtzer, ed. *Hunger and War. Food Provisioning in the Soviet Union during World War II.*, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2015.

**USSR—Stalinist, Trotskyist, Menshevik, or capitalist—it would have faced the same set of choices.**

A more recent book by Filtzer and Goldman is *Fortress Dark and Stern. The Soviet Home Front during World War II* (Oxford University Press, 2021). Based on primary-source documentation from the Soviet organizations in charge of transportation, housing, labor, and food distribution during the war, it is a truly harrowing account of the massive suffering, hunger, disease, and starvation among the civilian working class who, in the face of all this deprivation and under the leadership of the Communist Party, moved and reassembled the factories, manned the machines, and produced the vehicles, weapons, ammunition, clothing, and foodstuffs without which the Red Army could not have smashed the fascist invaders and mass murderers.

For those arrested and imprisoned we can turn to Arkadii Roginskii. He was the founder of the “Memorial Society,” a strongly anticommunist group that calls itself a “human rights” organization. It gets funding from Western NGOs. It also has a contradictory relationship with the Russian government, which has given it privileged access to a lot of materials while also trying to restrict it (as of April, 2022, Memorial has been closed in Russia).

Here is what Roginskii, who died in 2014, stated in an interview about the so-called “terror”:

In the early 90’s I did a lot of statistics on Soviet terror. I studied a huge number of reporting “sheets” about terror for all years, from different regions of the Soviet Union. The statistics we have seriously begins from 1921, until 1921 only fragments remained. And, since 1921 – huge folders. In 1994 I studied everything, transcribed everything and put it away. Later, it should be published. I looked at the numbers I had obtained . . .

There are people around me in the outside world, whose opinion is important for me: there is the traditional intellectual public opinion, and, most importantly, the opinion of former prisoners who were still very much alive in 1994. And they measured our victims in the whole history of terror by some absolutely inconceivable figures, tens of millions.

And yet, according to my calculations, **in the entire history of Soviet power, from 1918 to 1987 (the last arrests were in early 1987), according to the surviving documents, it turned out that 7 million 100 thousand people were arrested by security agencies across the country. At the same time, among them were arrested – and quite a lot – not only for political crimes.** Yes, they were arrested by security agencies, but security agencies arrested people for banditry, smuggling, counterfeiting. And for many other “general-purpose” crimes . . .

And here is the final figure – 7 million. This is for the whole history of Soviet power.

What to do about it? Public opinion says that we have almost 12 million arrested only for 1937-1939. And I belong to this society, I live among these people, I am a part of them. Not the Soviet government part, not the Russian democracy, but these

people. **I just knew for sure that, first, they would not believe me. And, secondly, for the circle to which I consider myself to belong, it would mean that everything that we were told about the figures until now quite respected by us people is not true.**

**So I put all my calculations aside. For a long time. After years, it may be possible to publish them. But not now. Later!**<sup>22</sup>

This prominent anti-Stalinist agreed that anticommunists like himself – “his people” – have vastly overstated arrests by the OGPU-NKVD. But his calculation is still incomplete.

- Roginskii failed to add that 7.1 million *arrest folders* do not mean 7.1 million different *people*. Many people were arrested more than once, or under two or more identities. The real number of persons arrested – not convicted, not imprisoned, executed, etc. but *arrested* – has to be much lower than 7.1 million. And this was over a period of 67 years – 1921 to 1987.
- Roginskii failed to separate out the 1 million plus arrests by Nikolai Yezhov and his henchmen, in the course of their anti-Soviet conspiracy. The year 1939, Lavrentii Beria’s first year as head of the NKVD after Yezhov, saw the release of at least 110,000 persons who had been wrongfully arrested by Yezhov and his henchmen.<sup>23</sup>

Marxists.org’s “exile” figure implies that these persons died *because* they were in exile. In reality, it simply means that people – mainly former kulaks and their families, but also anticommunists – eventually died at the places to which they had been exiled, normally to work on collective farms (“exile” did not mean confinement in a labor camp). These deaths must have been natural, due to old age, the normal run of diseases, famine and the war, causes that killed a very large number of Soviet citizens.

Concerning executions, according to the “Pavlov Report”<sup>24</sup> made to Khrushchev in December, 1953, and the recent research of Oleg V. Mozokhin,<sup>25</sup> an expert in the NKVD archives, the figures of persons executed from 1936 through 1939 are as follows:

1936 – 1118  
 1937 – 353,074  
 1938 – 328,618  
 1939 – 2552 / 2601 (Pavlov/Mozokhin)  
 1940 – 1649 / 1863 (Pavlov/ Mozokhin)

<sup>22</sup> “Arsenii Roginskii o molchanii istorika” (Arseny Roginsky about the silence of a historian). At <<http://old.memo.ru/d/124360.html>>.

<sup>23</sup> *Lubianka. Stalin i NKVD-NKGB-GUKR “Smersh”. 1939 – mart 1946*. Moscow: MDF, 2006, 564 n.11; Okhotin and Roginskii in Danilov, V., et al., ed., *Tragediia Sovetskoi Derevni vol. 5 No. 2*. Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2006, 517. These two passages are translated into English in *Yezhov vs Stalin* 113-4.

<sup>24</sup> One Russian-language publication of these figures is <<https://www.alexanderyakovlev.orgfond/issues-doc/1009312>>.

<sup>25</sup> For Mozokhin the most accessible are on the Internet. 1939, at <<http://istmat.info/node/290>>; 1940, at <<http://istmat.info/node/291>>.

The total for 1937-1938 is 681,692 or 86.7% of the total of 786,098 executed between 1930 and 1953. Note that in 1939 and 1940, Beria's first and second years as head of the NKVD, executions were *less than one per cent* of the number killed by Yezhov in 1937-8. Many of these were Yezhov's henchmen, who had committed the mass murders – and, of course, Yezhov himself, who was tried and executed for his monstrous crimes on February 4, 1940.

As most of the executions took place during the *Yezhovshchina* which Stalin opposed when he learned of it,<sup>26</sup> we should briefly note what did happen in 1937-1938. Nikolai Yezhov, Commissar (head) of the Commissariat of Internal Affairs<sup>27</sup> or NKVD, was killing as many people as he could in order to stir up anger and resentment among the Soviet population. His plan was to seize power in the USSR for himself by recruiting an army, or at least rebel bands, from the discontentment so created, when the Japanese and/or German rulers attacked the USSR. I briefly discuss Yezhov's deliberate mismanagement of the GULAG, or labor camps, below.

The primary-source documents that demonstrate these facts have been available for more than a decade. In 2010 I published an online article summing this up in much more detail. To it I attached *all* the confessions of Yezhov in 1939 and 1940, in both the original Russian and in English translation.<sup>28</sup> In January 2017 I published a full-length book on this same subject.<sup>29</sup> I have also published an article in which I summarize the main points of my book.<sup>30</sup> The book includes evidence that corroborates the confession statements by Yezhov and some of his accomplices.

The Trotskyist site Marxists.org, and most anticommunists, start the “Great Terror” at the 1936 Moscow Trial, and carry it through either the March, 1938, Moscow Trial (Marxists.org) or to the end of the *Yezhovshchina* in November, 1938. In reality, the defendants at the Moscow Trials, plus the “Tukhachevsky Affair” military commanders, were all guilty. In my books *The Moscow Trials as Evidence, Stalin Waiting for ... the Truth* and, most recently, *Trotsky and the Military Conspiracy*, I have identified, located, and studied the primary source evidence, of which we now have a great deal.<sup>31</sup>

## 5. The “GULAG”

Every country has a penal system. In my view the only sensible questions to ask about the “GULAG” are these:

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<sup>26</sup> This issue is fully discussed, with primary-source evidence, in *Yezhov vs. Stalin*.

<sup>27</sup> NKVD is the abbreviation for “Narodniy Kommisariat Vnutrennikh Del,” People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs.

<sup>28</sup> Grover Furr, “The Moscow Trials and the ‘Great Terror’ of 1937-1938: What the Evidence Shows.” At <[https://msuweb.montclair.edu/~furr/research/trials\\_ezhovshchina\\_update0710.html](https://msuweb.montclair.edu/~furr/research/trials_ezhovshchina_update0710.html)>.

<sup>29</sup> Grover Furr. *Yezhov vs. Stalin: The Truth about Mass Repressions and the So-Called ‘Great Terror’ in the USSR*. Kettering, OH: Erythros Press & Media, LLC, 2017.

<sup>30</sup> “Yezhov vs. Stalin: The Causes of the Mass Repressions of 1937–1938 in the USSR.” *Journal of Labor and Society* 20 (September, 2017) 325-347. It is also now linked on my Home Page at <[https://msuweb.montclair.edu/~furr/research/yvs\\_jls2017.pdf](https://msuweb.montclair.edu/~furr/research/yvs_jls2017.pdf)>.

<sup>31</sup> A list of my published books is at <[https://msuweb.montclair.edu/~furr/research/thirteen\\_book\\_flyer.pdf](https://msuweb.montclair.edu/~furr/research/thirteen_book_flyer.pdf)>.

- Were the persons confined in the penal system actually guilty of the crimes of which they were accused?
- What were the conditions of life and work in the penal system?

The GULAG – really the name of the penal administration (it means “Main Directorate of Camps”) – included prisons, labor camps, and exile settlements. Many of those in the exile settlements were former kulaks, peasants rich by comparison with their neighbors who employed labor. Others were those who opposed collectivization with force, active anticommunists, and ordinary criminals.

Concerning the collectivization of agriculture: as the objective research of Mark Tauger has shown, collectivization was essential to put an end to the cycle of devastating famines that had occurred every 3-5 years in Russia and, particularly, Ukraine, for a millennium. Tauger’s research articles are now available on the Internet.<sup>32</sup> I have summarized them in Chapters One and Two of *Blood Lies* (2014) and, more recently, in Chapter One of *Stalin Waiting for ... the Truth* (2019).

Today we have a great deal of primary-source evidence about the GULAG. For the sake of brevity we will focus here on mortality rates. The highest mortality rates were 15.3% in 1933, 24.9% in 1942, and 22.4% in 1943.<sup>33</sup> 1933 was the year of the great famine in which about 3 million persons died, either of starvation or, more frequently, of diseases caused or made worse by poor nutrition. 1942 and 1943 were the hardest years of the war, when millions of Soviet citizens were dying either in the military, at the hands of the Nazis and their allies, or from overwork and undernourishment behind the lines.

Prisoners in the labor camps were paid for their work both in money and in “time off” their sentences. They were encouraged, but not forced, to remain as regular workers once they had been released, and many did.

Here are some facts about conditions of work in the GULAG.

From the Dmitrovskii Correctional Labor Camp, or “Dmitlag,”<sup>34</sup> regulations of October 9, 1932:

Wake-up: 5:30 a.m.

Breakfast: 5:45 – 6:30 a.m.

Travel to work 6:30 to 7 a.m.

Work: 7 a.m. to 5 p.m. (10 hours)

Dinner: 5 p.m. to 7 p.m.

From 7 p.m. to 10 p.m. – cultural and education activities (KVCh, *kul'turno-vospitatel'naia chast'*)

From 10:05 p.m. – retreat and sleep.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>32</sup> At <[https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Mark\\_Tauger](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Mark_Tauger)>.

<sup>33</sup> See <[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gulag#Mortality\\_rate](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gulag#Mortality_rate)>. The Russian source is A.I. Kokurin and N.V. Petrov, eds., *Gulag (Glavnoe upravlenie lagerei) 1917-1960*. (Moscow: MDF, 200), Dok. No. 103, pp. 441-2.

<sup>34</sup> Also called “Dmitrovlag.”

<sup>35</sup> A.I. Kokurin, Yu.N. Morukov, eds. *Stalinskie stroiki GULAGA. 1930-1953*. Moscow: MDF, 2005, 61.

The following quotation is taken from the Russian Wikipedia page on Dmitlag:

In the place of the House of Culture of the Dmitrov Excavator Plant, on Bolshevik Street, until the end of the 1950s there was a club called “Dmitlag.” ... The club held festive celebrations and meetings of the leading workers. Here, in August 1934, Maxim Gorky spoke at a meeting of the leading workers of the construction of the Volga-Moscow canal. Nearby is the beautiful building of the Dmitrovsky electric grids of the Moscow Canal Management, which was built during the construction of the canal.

In Dmitlag, up to ten newspapers and magazines were published simultaneously, including several different languages of the peoples of the USSR. A library fund and its own film studio functioned. There were sports and educational sections and divisions, as well as its own brass bands and theater. Construction teams engaged in non-mechanized heavy physical work and performing scheduled tasks were provided with a five-day rest in February-April 1935, and the fight against parasites (lice and nits) was conducted.<sup>36</sup>

Nikita Petrov, a fire-breathing anticommunist and anti-Stalin writer and top officer of the “Memorial” Society (see above), nevertheless writes as follows about the recreational facilities in one labor camp:

1935: On January 14, Order No. 39 declared the composition of the sections of the Dynamo camp society: rifle, ski, speed skating, hockey, auto-section, horse, gymnastic, “defense and attack” (wrestling), hunting, chess and checkers, medical control, campaign propaganda sector.<sup>37</sup>

Of course, abuses occurred, as they do in every penal system. We know about these abuses from the materials compiled during the investigations of abuses by central authorities.<sup>38</sup>

As discussed above, during the period between July 1937 and November 1938 Nikolai Yezhov was leading a conspiracy aimed at overthrowing the Soviet government and Party. In his confessions of August 2 and August 4, 1939, Yezhov admitted putting his men in charge of the labor camps and creating good conditions for criminals and anyone loyal to himself, and bad conditions for other prisoners.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> At <<https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Дмитровлаг>>.

<sup>37</sup> Nikita Petrov, “*Istoriia GULAGA – 2.*” At <<https://web.archive.org/web/20081231111957/http://vif2ne.ru/nvk/forum/arhprint/228541>>.

<sup>38</sup> An example is the Nazino Island affair of 1933, sensationalized by anticommunist French author Nicolas Werth as “Cannibal Island.” Werth’s documentation is that of the contemporary Soviet investigation. The English Wikipedia page carries a picture of Stalin, to suggest that he was responsible. The Russian Wikipedia page has no such picture.

<sup>39</sup> For Yezhov’s interrogation of August 2, 1939, see <<https://msuweb.montclair.edu/~furrgr/research/ezhovinterrogs.html>> (Scroll down to “Ezhov interrogation 08.02.39 by Rodos.”) For Yezhov’s August 4, 1939 confession go here: <<https://msuweb.montclair.edu/~furrgr/research/ezhov080439eng.html>>.

Yezhov's confessions have long been available. I have reproduced them as an appendix to my 2010 article. I also discuss this and other confessions in Chapters 13 and 14 of my book *Yezhov vs Stalin*. However, I have never yet encountered a book by a mainstream scholar of Soviet history who mentions, let alone quotes, any of these passages from Yezhov's confessions about his use of the GULAG in his conspiracy. The camps are simply assumed to be evidence of "Stalinist terror." But this is incorrect, a result of the confirmation bias that attends what I have termed the "anti-Stalin paradigm" in Soviet history.

Accounts of the GULAG agree that conditions in the camps were bad during 1937-1938 and improved immediately when Lavrentii P. Beria's took over the NKVD from Yezhov in November, 1938. Arch Getty, a respected mainstream scholar of the Stalin period, writes:

Evgeniia Ginzburg, who was in Iaroslavl' Prison and who saw no newspapers, said that the prisoners could tell when Yezhov fell: The draconian regime in the prisons (frequent solitary confinement and deprivation of all privileges) was relaxed one day. The timing was confirmed a few days later when Beria's name began to appear on official prison notices.<sup>40</sup>

## 6. "Democracy"

We are constantly being told that the Soviet Union was "not democratic," while the Western capitalist and imperialist societies were "democracies." This is misleading.

Neither the United States nor any other capitalist country is today, or ever has been, a democracy in the sense that working people understand. No matter which party wins the voting, the ruling class continues to rule and little changes. Reforms are incremental at best, and then only when there are massive, militant reform movements such as have rarely existed in American society.

In 1917 Lenin described capitalist democracy as follows:

Marx grasped **this essence of capitalist democracy** splendidly, when, in analyzing the experience of the Commune, he said that **the oppressed are allowed once every few years to decide which particular representatives of the oppressing class shall represent and repress them in parliament!**<sup>41</sup>

Lenin simply stated, with a class analysis and from a revolutionary Marxist standpoint, what many in the capitalist world had already realized: there is no democracy in the self-styled, so-called, "democratic" capitalist countries. Walter Lippmann, Harvard-educated advisor to presidents, acknowledged this. In the first sentence of his 1925 book *The Phantom Public* Lippmann wrote:

<sup>40</sup> J. Arch Getty. *Origins of the Great Purges. The Soviet Communist Party Reconsidered, 1933-1938*. New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985, 189.

<sup>41</sup> V.I. Lenin, *The State and Revolution. The Marxist Teaching on the State and the Tasks of the Proletariat in the Revolution*. Peking: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1970. Chapter 2, p. 105. Cited from the copy at the site "From Marx to Mao," <<http://www.marx2mao.com/Lenin/SR17.htm>>.

The private citizen today has come to feel rather like a deaf spectator in the back row, who ought to keep his mind on the mystery off there, but cannot quite manage to keep awake.<sup>42</sup>

Media historian Michael Schudson describes Lippmann's dissection of the fallacies of democracy:

A problem arises only if someone objects to current policy – insofar as there is general agreement, the public has no interest in politics and should have no interest. The people do not govern and should not govern; at most, they support or oppose the individuals who do rule.<sup>43</sup>

The process of effecting ruling-class rule in the United States has become more subtle since Lenin's time. Persons who begin a political career as honest working-class people become corrupted by the political process. "The squad" of social-democratic congresspersons are themselves constrained by their misunderstanding of capitalism and by the limits of what is possible in the context of a political process that is out of their control. This same process was occurring in Lenin's day in the British Labour Party, where blue-collar workers were sometimes elected to Parliament.

G. William Domhoff of UC Santa Cruz has applied the research methods of academic sociology to the study of how the United States is ruled. Domhoff has shown the specific mechanisms whereby the American ruling class, the wealthiest financial, industrial, mercantile, etc., capitalists control not only elections but the policies of the government no matter what party is in office. He continues to publish updated versions of his groundbreaking work *Who Rules America*, most recently in 2021.<sup>44</sup>

For decades Domhoff has studied this class and the methods it uses to frustrate anything remotely like democracy and has published many books that describe the ruling class's methods of domination in subtle detail. Here is one quotation:

Today, a majority of people think that big corporations and the big rich run everything, and that government does not care about the average person.<sup>45</sup>

Just as clear as the analysis of how the ruling class rules at home is the record of the imperialism of the so-called "democratic" capitalist countries. The European imperialists and the United States could have instituted democracy in the countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America that they ruled. They never did so. On the contrary: wherever it looked as though something like Western-style democracy might be forming in countries like Nicaragua, Haiti, Iran, Argentina, Brazil, or Chile, US rulers stamped it out with force and installed fascist-type dictatorships. On the other hand, US

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<sup>42</sup> Walter Lippmann, *The Phantom Public. With a New Introduction by Wilfred M. McClay*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1993 (1927), p. 3.

<sup>43</sup> Michael Schudson, *Discovering the News. A Social History of American Newspapers*. New York: Basic Books, 1978, p. 124.

<sup>44</sup> See a list of the editions of this work on Domhoff's Wikipedia page at <[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/G.\\_William\\_Domhoff#Who\\_Rules\\_America?>](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/G._William_Domhoff#Who_Rules_America?>).

<sup>45</sup> "State and Ruling Class in Corporate America (1974): Reflections, Corrections, and New Directions." *Critical Sociology* 25, 2 (1999), p. 264.



rulers also *oppose* fascism when it has outworn its usefulness to them, as in Greece (1974) and Haiti (1986).

Western imperialists used massive violence to plunder their colonial possessions for cheap raw materials, as markets to dump their overproduction, and as sources of cheap labor. When people in the colonial countries, sometimes led by communists but often not, fought for independence, or even for reforms, they were suppressed by force. Often this massive violence was described as “fighting communism.”

Mahatma Gandhi fought British imperialism and knew it for what it was. He wrote:

Imagine a Hitler in occupation of England and successfully dividing Englishmen as Indians are divided in India and then mocking at them by saying, ‘I will ratify an agreement among you.’ **I assert that in India we have Hitlerian rule however disguised it may be in softer terms.**

And,

Hitler was “Great Britain’s sin”. Hitler is only an answer to British imperialism  
...<sup>46</sup>

### **Don’t Use Marxists.org Uncritically**

I have already quoted from Marxists.org’s falsehoods about Stalin, “totalitarianism,” and “terror.” Here are a few more that can’t be discerned from the rhetoric alone. To recognize them as falsehoods you have to know something about Soviet history. But few users of Marxists.org do, which leaves them vulnerable to the falsehoods propagated on this site.

Here’s the Marxists.org entry on Lavrentii Beria:

**... leader of NKVD from 1938 until Stalin’s death. Responsible for countless murders on his own initiative as well as on Stalin’s orders ...**<sup>47</sup>

This is completely false. In reality,

(a) Beria was People’s Commissar of Internal Affairs from December, 1938 until December, 1945, and again – now his title was “Minister” of Internal Affairs – from March 15 until June 26, 1953. not “from 1938 until Stalin’s death.”

(b) There is *no* evidence that Beria – or, for that matter, Stalin – *ever* ordered *anyone* murdered; *executed* after legal convictions on the basis of evidence of heinous crimes, yes, but never murdered.

<sup>46</sup> M.K. Gandhi. *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, New Delhi. “Answers to Questions [April 25, 1941],” Vol. 80, p. 200; “Interview to Ralph Coniston, Mahabaleshwar [Before April 25, 1945],” Vol. 86, p. 223.

<sup>47</sup> At <<https://www.marxists.org/glossary/people/b/e.htm#beria-lavrenti>>.

Marxists.org does not mention even one single murder, much less “countless murders.” Nikita Khrushchev and his men, who had themselves murdered Beria in 1953, claimed that Beria was a murderer and rapist. But they never cited any evidence of these or any crimes by Beria and none has come to light since the publication of tens of thousands of documents from former Soviet archives after the end of the USSR in 1991.

Here’s Marxists.org on Sergei M. Kirov:<sup>48</sup>

In the summer of 1932 Joseph Stalin became aware that opposition to his policies were growing. Some party members were publicly criticizing Stalin and calling for the readmission of Leon Trotsky to the party. When the issue was discussed at the Politburo, Stalin demanded that the critics should be arrested and executed. Kirov, who up to this time had been a staunch Stalinist, argued against this policy. When the vote was taken, the majority of the Politburo supported Kirov against Stalin.

In the spring of 1934 Kirov put forward a policy of reconciliation. He argued that people should be released from prison who had opposed the government’s policy on collective farms and industrialization. Once again, Joseph Stalin found himself in a minority in the Politburo.

After years of arranging for the removal of his opponents from the party, Joseph Stalin realized he still could not rely on the total support of the people whom he had replaced them with. Stalin no doubt began to wonder if Kirov was willing to wait for his mentor to die before becoming leader of the party. Stalin was particularly concerned by Kirov’s willingness to argue with him in public. He feared that this would undermine his authority in the party.

As usual, that summer Kirov and Joseph Stalin went on holiday together. Stalin, who treated Kirov like a son, used this opportunity to try to persuade him to remain loyal to his leadership. Stalin asked him to leave Leningrad to join him in Moscow. Stalin wanted Kirov in a place where he could keep a close eye on him. When Kirov refused, Stalin knew he had lost control over his protégé.

*Every single assertion in these paragraphs is false.* None of this happened at all. There has been plenty of research on Kirov since 1989. Marxists.org ignores all of it.<sup>49</sup>

Marxists.org has many important texts. These texts give credibility to the site as a whole. The non-text sections – the so-called “encyclopedia” and historical sections – are pervaded by anticommunist falsehoods. Indeed it would be appropriate to use the word “lies” in reference to those fact-claims that are unsupported by any evidence, since this shows flagrant disregard for the truth. Leon Trotsky and professional anticommunists are usually the ultimate sources.

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<sup>48</sup> At <<https://www.marxists.org/glossary/people/k/i.htm#kirov>>.

<sup>49</sup> For a critical examination of this research, plus my own research and conclusions, see Grover Furr. *The Murder of Sergei Kirov. History, Scholarship and the Anti-Stalin Paradigm*. Kettering, OH: Erythrós Press and Media, LLC, 2013.

I urge everyone, whether Marxist or not, to be very wary – skeptical – of Marxists.org, except when seeking a text that can't be found on alternative sites such as Marx To Mao<sup>50</sup> or Wikirouge.<sup>51</sup>

## Conclusions

1. All Marxists and others who wants to learn the truth about Soviet history of the Stalin period should reject as propaganda any account that, by its rhetoric, moralizing, loaded language, vituperation, etc., shows that the author is not objective.

2. Reject as propaganda all accounts that refer to the USSR as “totalitarian;” that use the terms “Stalinist” or “Stalinism;” that call Stalin a “dictator;” that claim the USSR was ruled by “terror” or use the term “Great Terror;” that refer to the GULAG as “death camps” or the prisoners as “slaves;” or that claim that capitalist, imperialist states are “democracies.”

3. Reject as propaganda any work that in any way attempts to compare the Stalin-era Soviet Union to Hitlerite Germany, or Stalin to Hitler.

Leon Trotsky's secret collaboration with the Nazis and Japanese was exposed during the Moscow Trials of the 1930s. This collaboration has been denied, under the influence of Khrushchev's and Gorbachev's lies about Stalin. Now, however, we have a great deal of evidence of Trotsky's collaboration. We should first inform ourselves, and then inform others whenever we can.<sup>52</sup>

4. Reject as propaganda any writing that affirms the “Holodomor” or “man-made famine;” that the Moscow Trials were “frame-ups;” that Stalin “had people shot;” that collectivization was not necessary or “didn't work;” that industrialization was “brutal”.

5. Avoid all Trotskyist accounts about the USSR, including about Lenin, Stalin, “socialism in one country,” or about Trotsky himself. No Trotskyists question the “cult of personality” around Trotsky himself. By definition Trotskyists do not strive for objectivity, and therefore fall prey to confirmation bias.

6. Be aware that the “Encyclopedia” section of the site Marxists.org falsehoods about the Stalin and the Stalin period of Soviet history – statements that the editors either did know, or should have known, to be false – are refuted by the evidence, such as the entry “Kirov, Sergei (1886-1934)” and the discussion of “socialism in one country” discussed above.

7. Reject any so-called “Marxist” theory that is not based on evidence. All “theory” that rests on the Khrushchev and post-Khrushchev falsehoods about Soviet history of the Stalin period

<sup>50</sup> At <<http://www.marx2mao.com/>>.

<sup>51</sup> At <<https://wikirouge.net/texts/en/Special:BrowseData/Text>>.

<sup>52</sup> See Grover Furr, *Leon Trotsky's Collaboration with Germany and Japan: Trotsky's Conspiracies of the 1930s, Volume Two*. Kettering, OH: Erythros Press & Media, LLC, 2017, *New Evidence of Trotsky's Conspiracy*. Kettering, OH: Erythros Press & Media, LLC, 2020; and Grover Furr with Vladimir L. Bobrov and Sven-Eric Holmström, *Trotsky and the Military Conspiracy. Soviet and Non-Soviet Evidence with the Complete Transcript of the “Tukhachevsky Affair” Trial*. Kettering, OH: Erythros Press and Media, LLC, 2021.

has nothing to offer. Sure, there may be a needle of truth in the haystack of empty verbiage – but it will take too much time to find it, if it's there at all.

Only theory based on an accurate understanding of the history of the USSR during the Stalin years can possibly have anything beneficial to offer those of us who want to learn from the successes and the failures of the Soviet Union.

8. Remember why all this anticommunist, anti-Stalin propaganda exists in the first place. It exists because of the achievements of the Stalin years in the USSR. To name just a few: collectivization of agriculture, ending the thousand-plus year cycle of devastating famines as well as poverty among the peasantry; industrialization, accomplished in little more than a decade and entirely without foreign investment, relying solely on the Soviet working class and peasantry; the defeat of the Nazi hordes and their allies; the worldwide spread of the communist movement; the fight against racism; the fight against discrimination against women; provision to all workers of inexpensive housing, inexpensive public transportation; free education; free higher education; annual vacations; universal medical care; retirement and old-age pensions; the successful fight against the imperialism of the so-called “democratic” capitalist countries; the big boost to unionization of workers in industrial countries; forcing the capitalist states to provide some degree of social welfare benefits for working people, in order to blunt the attraction of the communist movement. And one must ask why it is that to this day when older Russians are surveyed as to which historical figures they admire the most, Stalin always heads the list.

These are just a few of the reasons why pro-capitalist writers falsify, distort, and just plain lie about Soviet history of the Stalin period. No one who considers her/himself a leftist or, particularly, a Marxist should subscribe to or purvey this false narrative.

The Bolsheviks under both Stalin and Lenin also made many errors. Error is inevitable in all human endeavor. In fact, “trial and error” is the heart and soul of the scientific method. In this sense, “error” is not a mistake – it is an essential part of the study and mastery of reality.

Unfortunately, while the actions of the Bolsheviks resulted in great accomplishments, their errors also resulted in the blunting and aborting of these accomplishments, in their only partial fulfillment.

In the end, these errors resulted in the advent to power of people like Nikita Khrushchev and those who followed him, who abandoned the fight for communism. Finally, they resulted in the reversal of the gains of the October Revolution, and the reversion to exploitative capitalism in all the countries that had once been socialist, or that had been striving, however imperfectly, towards socialism and communism.

We have to learn from both the successes and from the tragic – but perhaps inevitable – failures of the communist movement of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, if we are to do better in the future.

Because of my research, communists from many countries contact me. I know that there is a great hunger among millions of working people, students, intellectuals, and others, all over the

world, for freedom from the horrors of capitalist exploitation, for another international communist movement.

If we are to play a role in bringing that new international movement into existence, and then in moving forward to defeating capitalism and winning a classless, communist world, we must discover the real history of the Soviet Union during the Stalin period. Only then will we be able to learn the lessons that the Bolsheviks' successes and failures can teach us. Only then can we have a revolutionary theory worthy of the name.

### **Author**

Grover Furr has written many books on Soviet history of the 1930s. His book *The Mystery of the Katyn Massacre: The Evidence, the Solution* (Kettering, OH: Erythros Press) was published in July, 2018.



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