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“When comrade Stalin sends us to the battle”

2013



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...If anyone had told me 15 years ago, or even 10 years ago, that the portrait of Iosif Vissarionovich Stalin would be hanging on the wall of my room, I would certainly have not believed this person, even if I would not have made a mockery of him or her aloud. But today, this portrait is really hanging in my room.

This is just a small example to illustrate the profound transformation that the minds of people of my age or even younger have undergone in such a short time – in relation to the role and place of Stalin in our country's history, and in the history of the world's revolutionary movement. I can say that my personal way to Stalin was not an exception. [1] Today, the Russian bourgeois media is panicking because “the citizens of Russia are more and more positive about the role of Stalin”. Even according to the official pro-bourgeois polls, 45% of the population considers the role of Stalin in our history as positive. The number increased immediately by 6 points as soon as President Medvedev announced the need for a “de-Stalinization” campaign. “The name of Russia” – a project launched in 2008 by the “Russia” TV channel – set out to choose important personalities associated with Russia, by a vote of Internet users, viewers and listeners. It was an analogy of the English “100 Greatest Britons” or the Ukrainian “Great Ukrainians”. [2] Despite the desperate efforts by the authorities and sponsors, Stalin entered the top three leading names. For a long time Stalin was leading by a wide margin, so that the organizers of the project barely managed to push him away from the first place by means of the “administrative resources”, so that a more secure (for the bourgeois regime of Russia) Alexander Nevsky came to the top. *“Of course, those were not the old and retired who crushed the Internet with their sympathies to the totalitarian regime or just to the time when they were young. I can not imagine veterans massively owning computers and hanging online. Hence, what we see is a choice by the middle generation and the young.”*[3]

The degree of fear and panic by the present Russian authorities in front of Stalin is a highly significant indicator. And this is happening almost 60 years after his death! The campaign of “de-Stalinization” launched today is the most important way to discredit socialism, a desperate attempt to deter socialist ideas from becoming more and more popular with the people. But what happened to be successful for the capitalists and opportunists in the late 1980's, is not working today.

The very reality that surrounds us made us to reconsider the importance of the role of Stalin - better than any books, films, or other means of propaganda. After comparing the results of Stalin's leadership with those of the disastrous "activities" by the entire clique that has been ruling Russia for the last 20 years [4], it was just impossible not to come to a positive attitude towards him.

In childhood and early youth, the vast majority of my generation simply never thought about Stalin. For us, he was a historical figure, an integral part of the history of our country, just like Peter the Great, but we never gave particular attention to the role that Stalin played in the construction of socialism in our country, in the creation of our society, as we saw it at the time of our childhood. Little by little, even in the Brezhnev years, we had been indoctrinated with the same idea that they are trying to instill now - that the people built the Socialism, or the Victory in the Great Patriotic War, "by themselves". Of course, the victories and achievements have been carried out by the people, but none the less, those people had very specific leaders. One must not downplay their role.

On the TV screen of the Brezhnev era, Stalin appeared only in the context of World War II – both in the documentary and the feature. He was shown with enough respect for his role in that period of our history, but almost nothing was said about the pre-war and post-war period of his activity, as if in those periods, as opposed to the War, our people did not have any specific leaders other than the generalized "government and party." Our history textbooks of that period also contributed to this half-way perception of Stalin. On the one hand, they moved away from the extremes of Khrushchev's times. On the other, there were the remaining provisions of the "cult of personality" and "repressions" – but only in one paragraph: on the death of Stalin. Overall, the role of Stalin in the building of socialism in the Soviet Union was evaluated positively in the Brezhnev era, but it was preferred to talk about it as little as possible. "The cult of personality" and "the repressions" were attributed, same as in the Khrushchev era, to "costs of the period" and "personal features of Stalin", - without any attempt at a class analysis of the events of those years. For us living in the Brezhnev era, it looked real because we found it difficult to imagine that people can really, truly love and respect their leader. Leaders like the Politburo of those days did not cause any feelings other than grinning, when someone tried to "force" us to "love" them, e.g. Leonid Brezhnev himself (although my present attitude towards him could be without love, but with enough respect). And that

had an impact on our attitude to Stalin and also, for example, to DPRK magazines containing stories about Kim Il Sung. To us, the “cult of personality” seemed as something deeply humiliating for the “modern thinking man”: based on our own experience of the Brezhnev period, we felt that it had been something that is “forced upon” and not the real, popular love. But the older generation knew what it was saying. It was not at all “brainwashed” - it just caught, by their experience, leaders of a type and scale incomparable to Brezhnevites and Khrushchevites. I began to realize it fully only after my trips to North Korea, where I was fortunate enough to see and feel the genuine people's love for their leader in practice.

I think that the blame for the fact that “perestroika” worked in the late 80's, on the basis of anti-Stalinism, rests largely upon the Soviet leaders of the 1970s. It was their innuendo, half-heartedness and amorphous position on Stalin that contributed to the fact that the people gained impression that something had been missing in their stories of the Stalinist era.

This ashamed and ambiguous attitude of the authorities of the Brezhnev era to Stalin has created not only a feeling that not everything had been told, but also a form of protest by the people. Among the long-distance truck drivers, it was very common to have a portrait of Stalin in their truck's cabin, and they put it at the front window facing outward, - that is, to show to others. It seems that such tradition began with Georgian drivers, but it quickly spread allover the country. It was, of course, impossible to prohibit having a portrait of the head of the world's first socialist state in their cabins, but at the same time it felt like something was semi-legal about it (portraits were bought on the black market from handicraft photographers, as stores never sold them) as a challenge to the authorities. It was a form of protest against the rising corruption, the deviation from socialist norms, the separation between the party leadership and the people.

“In essence, it was a form of protest, often unconscious, against the moral decay and bourgeois degeneration of the party, soviet, and economic apparatus of the USSR. The process of degeneration and bourgeois reincarnation was in full swing – the harbinger of “perestroika” that would transform into counter-revolution and the “renaissance” of capitalism. “[5]

Stalin's image and the attitudes towards him had also passed to us through another channel – memories of his time in the stories of our relatives and the loved ones.

I must say that in my family, there had been ones who would be called “repressed” at the moment - two of my grandmother's brothers, both of them party workers, one a party member since 1917 (he was 17 at that time), and even a co-worker of S. M. Kirov in Leningrad. In 1937, they were arrested and sent to exile in the Urals, but later they were rehabilitated when Stalin was still alive, and stayed there. But there was no negative attitude to Stalin in our family, although the time when the two brothers were arrested was remembered as a very bad period in my grandmother’s life and in the lives of her family members. From my grandmother, they inherited fear of involvement into politics, but nothing more than that.

The “repressed” ones also had no negative attitude to the Soviet government or Stalin personally. Vasiliy Vasilyevich Nikiforov recollected his arrest with humor: “What we had been fighting for, ran against us!” He knew that in politics, in the struggle between different political lines, especially at a time when the country was in danger, everything could happen. But he always remained a communist, because the country with its people and the work of socialist construction were central to his life, and not the small personal grievances that are so important for the so-called “creative intellectuals” who cannot see the forest beyond single trees.

My grandmother's sister, Tamara Vasilyevna Nikiforova, was fired from her job because she was “a member of the family of the enemy of the people”, but later she wrote a letter of complaint to Stalin about the injustice. She was then reinstated, and even granted a “compensation”, as one would say now: a ticket to a Black Sea resort. She liked to recollect this, and I was sure that Stalin personally assisted in her case.

Accordingly, I personally have not been brought up in hostility to Stalin. The period from 1930s to 1950s was seen by me – both in the books and in the stories of the family – as the time of spiritual flight, the time of the impossible, the great time.

Negative attitude toward Stalin was kept primarily in the circles that retained petty bourgeois consciousness. Their exaggerated and full of personal insults vision of “repressions” was passed to their children and grandchildren, even though most of them, in the end, gained much more from socialism than they lost because of it. Children and grandchildren are not even trying to understand whether their relatives were really guilty or not - they just do not even want to admit such thoughts. For them, the main thing is that it was about THEIR parents, THEIR grandfathers and grandmothers, and not about whether they had actually caused any damage to the building of socialism through their actions. Here is one small example – there is a woman who screams everywhere how the “bad communists” destroyed her grandfather, a guerrilla during the war, having “rot” him in a camp. But when you start to go into details of her case, it appears that her grandfather, even though he had been subjected to arrest, died naturally; at the same time, he had been arrested for taking part in a “guerrilla” unit created by the Nazis from our citizens! So, was he supposed to be praised for that? When one reports these facts to his granddaughter, she screams hysterically that her grandfather “did not know which side he is fighting”. Let us leave aside the quite reasonable observation that “ignorance is no excuse” when it comes to the law. How, I wonder, one could not “know” which side he was fighting in a combat? And today her grandfather, a Nazi henchman, has been rehabilitated by the Russian authorities, followers of general Vlasov; his heirs receive compensation as “the descendants of victims of political repressions”.

But during the Brezhnev years, this attitude to Stalin - as a “tyrant” - did not go beyond the intelligentsia (mainly from the capitals, Moscow and Leningrad). Only in fiction, such thoughts were expressed aloud in the “Aesopian language”. And it was not so much about censorship, but about the fact that people themselves would not accept any works expressing such things in clear text.

For the first time (since Khrushchev's times that my generation did not witness) the public interest in the personality of Stalin rose (or rather, was fired up) in the second half of the 1980s, when we were 20 years-plus. It was during the so-called “perestroika”. I remember how (I was in Moscow in the Historical Archives Institute at the time) one of such lectures was announced in our institution. We were promised a “New Word in the Science of History” based on “sources that had been closed for the public”. Unknown folks wandered around the institution and whispered that the lecture would be “truly historic”. At the

moment, I do not even remember who the lecturer was. But the whisperers did succeed – the public interest was heated up to such extent that it was virtually impossible to get into the lecture hall. People were hanging on the windows and banisters, the door was crowded... So, what was the lecture made of? Of hysterical and unsubstantiated accusations against Stalin who was blamed for all kinds of sins and for all of our past and present troubles. But at first, we really thought that it might contain some truth - most of all, because of that feeling that “something had been silenced” – the feeling that I have already mentioned. For a while, we did believe that this was a “breakthrough in the Science of History”.

For a long time, the restoration of capitalism in our country was performed under the slogans that called to “return to the Leninist roots”, restore a mythical “true socialism”, which in fact had never existed. The aim was to convince people that we had a socialism that was “not the same as needed”, and that the blame lied personally upon Comrade Stalin, and no one else. For this purpose, it was important to detach Stalin from Lenin, oppose him to Lenin (after all, the authority of Lenin was still indisputably high). The fact that almost none of us was familiar with the theoretical works by Stalin, and the overall shallowness of knowledge of him, contributed greatly to the success of this plan. But as we learned later, the end was bound to come, and the authority of the leader of the world proletariat was bound to be undermined through the destruction of the authority of Stalin.

People were subjected to the powerful bombardment by the anti-Stalinist publications in press, the quickly mass-manufactured political plays by those personally offended by Stalin, like the then fashionable libel “Go on! Go on! Further!» by Michail Shatrov. [6] Many of the authors of those libels had been feeding on “Leniniana” throughout their life, and therefore people did not immediately think that, in fact, they were dealing not with ideological communist writers, but rather with the ordinary opportunists, “hangers at the trough”, who had finally received (thanks to Gorbachev) the opportunity to show their true face. I happened to know somebody [7] (who is, by the way, a pupil and friend of Shatrov), who in Soviet times fed exclusively on Leninist opuses, but after the counter-revolution in our country suddenly became a “Wizard and Magician “, “Master”, “Fortuneteller”, and a supporter of the “Union of the Right-Wing Forces”. So, this “ardent Leninist” also happened to be one of the “personally offended by Stalin”. When you see the activities of

such people today, it is very hard to escape the conclusion that their ancestors got what they deserved in the 1930's. If only they were in the least bit similar to their descendants.

Stories about spies and saboteurs in the 30s were ridiculed by the spies and saboteurs of the 80s as “fantasies” and “means to crack down on political opponents”, as self-serving “means of establishing personal power”. But similarly, we were told that NATO countries were no enemies to our country, that they were no less than our friends and “partners”, as the problem only lied with the “bad communists” who did not want to be friends and “partners” with them. Leaders of “perestroika” had been prudently silent about the price of such “friendship”. Yet, today we are paying this price, and the very reality around us convinces us that the vigilance of our grandfathers, alas, was not based on fantasy...

Trying to convince us that we had the “wrong socialism” (just like Winnie the Pooh tried to convince himself that the bees he could not get honey from were the “wrong bees!”), the “superintendents of perestroika” treated the history of our country deliberately apart from the concrete historical situation of the period, in light of the so-called “universal values”, which in practice always lead to forgiving “crooks and thieves” of all kinds, and also to the fact that the victim always has less rights than the criminal whose values are never “universal” but always the class, bourgeois values.

The hysteria around the name of Stalin then reached such a point that to mention Stalin in a positive light (even in the Great Patriotic War context), was to be instantly derided as “reactionary,” “Stalinist”, someone who cannot be listened to or taken seriously.

But I started to feel that something was wrong here, when I began to read through the lists of the massively rehabilitated countrymen that were published weekly in our local newspaper. I noticed that among the “repressed”, virtually no one was a worker, very few belonged to the peasant class, but the vast majority were members of the same group that constituted the ranks of “superintendents and flagships of perestroika” - professional party apparatchiks and salespersons. Yet, no one tried to understand whether they had been punished deservedly or undeservedly - all of them constituted a crowd that was

supposed to be justified and mourned. Those who asked questions, were immediately and hysterically accused of “supporting authoritarianism”.

My mother had a job that let her know a very large number of people in the city – a total of not less than 2000. And of those 2000, only 3 families had their relatives repressed (one of them was our own family). After all, it was hard to believe in the extent of “repressions” that was fiercely imposed on us by the “perestroikists”.

However, it was for a while that the perestroika’s anti-Stalinism poisoned to a certain extent my mind, too. For a long time I did, despite my continuing positive attitude toward socialism, revolution, the USSR, feel some awkwardness when dealing with those who unambiguously expressed a positive attitude to Stalin. This unease was expressed in my mind by thoughts like “a good man, but a Stalinist”. The distrust toward those “duped by Stalinist propaganda” that had been hammered into my brain at the subconscious level, prevented me from turning to the works of Stalin himself, to reading them in order to judge them by myself and not by something written with a pitchfork on the water. My personal contacts with the Belgian Party of Labor and, as I mentioned, a trip to North Korea helped me to correct the situation.

Looking around nowadays, looking upon the Russian reality, seeing how violently, by all the possible means, capitalists are clinging to what they have looted from the people, I understand clearer than ever that in the construction of socialism, one can never do without “repressions” whether he or she likes it or not. It is time for the intellectuals to stop fearing for their own skin. If it is really the “people’s intelligentsia”, it can not think only about itself, the loved one. Look, what enemies we have – so powerful, arrogant, treacherous, ready to resort to any bloodshed for the sake of the capitalist “status quo”. Do you really believe that they will surrender without a fight, give the loot back, and become good little boys and girls? Future revolutions cannot do without oppressive measures. “If the enemy does not surrender, it gets destroyed”. Golden words!

If it is not destroyed, it will destroy the revolution. This is what happened in our country in the late 80's, when eyes were “humanely” closed on too many things, usually because the almost uncontrolled party bosses themselves had a skeleton in the cupboard. Here is what to think about, - how to ensure continuous and effective operation of the mechanism of public control in future revolutions, and

not to endlessly practice kicking the “non-Soviet” USSR or Stalin who cannot say anything in return.

Just only a couple of years ago, I stopped to be shy of the word “Stalinist”, realizing that Stalinism is our Soviet socialism in our particular circumstances of the time. Revival of “Stalinism” cannot be feared – in new circumstances, socialism will be different in any case. But the denial of Stalin leads logically to the denial of both Lenin and the Soviet legacy. Stalinism is not only about the “cult” and the “repressions”, but also about everything good, kind and wonderful in the USSR that would not be possible without the relentless work of Stalin and his associates. It is namely for these and not some “humanitarian” reasons that Stalin continues to be a subject of violent attacks by capitalists of all colors, nations and peoples.

Why is it so, that only today people come back to Stalin, just like me? Because they look at the current gross inequalities, suffering by the millions and impunity of the narrow minority that loots them, and wonder: “Would this be possible under Stalin?”

This was my thought when I began my acquaintance with Stalin's works and books about Stalin. And I was going to discover something that had not been available in the history textbooks of the Brezhnev era – the textbooks that implicitly inspired neglect of Stalin in minds of a young generation. I am not alone in this process. Stalin's popularity among people is growing like a snowball. His portraits appear in public transport, in graffiti painted by the youth; new monuments are being set up on voluntary funds raised by people (try to force someone to donate on such things today!). New poems are dedicated to Stalin. Even some fantastic stories are written about him.

Today, these are the authors of anti-Stalinist horror stories a la 1980's who are ridiculed and ostracized. As soon as they open their mouths, a deafening whistle is heard in response. People automatically stop listening - “ah, here is one more liberal talker!” What they were fighting for, is running against them, as my ancestor-communist once said.

Stalin does not need to be a perfect historical figure, neither he needs any monuments or odes. He does not even need us to justify him. What justifies him today is the reality itself.

My answer to the liberalling nitwits and the state power that fully agrees with them, is following: “The reason of coming to Stalin is being reasonable”. This is the reason why people have “started to distinguish between the socialist movement and creativity, and the capitalist alive decay”. [8]

We discover Stalin, because we see the panic of the rich the powerful in front of Stalin. This is how the worms are afraid of Wormil, so we know – this is something that we need!

[1] <http://polit.ru/news/2011/04/26/stalin/> («Russian citizens are more and more positive about Stalin»)

[2] <http://russian-bazaar.com/ru/content/12981.htm>

(«Authentic, real choice of the people, without administrative pressure or propaganda – this is who he is, Stalin-Vysotsky-Lenin»)

[3] Ibid

[4] Statistics can be found in the «White book» by S. Kara-Murza and many other open sources, including the Internet.

[5] <http://www.rusproject.org/node/679>

[6] For M. Shatrov’s biography, see http://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D0%A8%D0%B0%D1%82%D1%80%D0%BE%D0%B2,%D0%9C%D0%B8%D1%85%D0%B0%D0%B8%D0%BB_%D0%A4%D0%B8%D0%BB%D0%B8%D0%BF%D0%BF%D0%BE%D0%B2%D0%B8%D1%87

[7] <http://shapiro-tulin.ru/>

[8] <http://www.rusproject.org/node/679>