

THE NEW REPUBLIC



The Problematic Pages

To understand Vladimir Putin, we must understand his view of Russian history.

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In memory of Alexander Solzhenitsyn

I.

On June 18, 2007, a national conference of high school historians and teachers of social sciences was convened in Moscow. The agenda called for the discussion of "the acute problems in the teaching of modern Russian history," and for "the development of the state standards of education." It soon became clear that the real purpose of the gathering was to present to the delegates--or, more precisely, to impress upon them--two recently finished "manuals for teachers." One of them, to be published in a pilot print run of ten thousand, was called *Noveyshaya Istoriya Rossii, 1945-2006 GG: Kniga Dlya Uchitelya*, or *The Modern History of Russia, 1945-2006: A Teacher's Handbook*. It was the work of a certain A.V. Filippov, and it was designed to become the standard Russian high school textbook of Russian history, scheduled to be introduced into classrooms this month.

Unusually heavy artillery was deployed in the textbook's support. Speaking at the conference were Andrey Fursenko, the minister of education and science, and Vladislav Surkov, the Kremlin chief ideologist and first deputy chief of staff. Surkov is the inventor of the concept of "sovereign democracy," which became the centerpiece of the Putin regime's worldview, justifying authoritarianism in politics, re-centralization in economics, and anti-Western truculence in foreign policy. (As Russian wits like to say, "sovereign democracy" and "democracy" are as different as "electric chair" and "chair.")

The project's origin and the author's provenance were soon disclosed by liberal websites, which these days are looking more and more like a kind of cyber *samizdat*. The textbook's editor, Alexandr Filippov, who is listed as the sole author on the cover, is a deputy director of the "National Laboratory of Foreign Policy," which, in his own words, "assists the state organs, including the presidential administration, in the development and implementation of foreign policy decisions." He later confirmed the rumor that it was the presidential administration, along with the ministry of education, that had "invited" him to assemble the manuscript, making the textbook nothing less than an expression of Vladimir Putin's view of Soviet history.

The author of one of the chapters turned out to be Pavel Danilin, the editor-in-chief of the Kremlin.org website and deputy director of the Effective Politics Foundation, which is headed by the top Kremlin propagandist Gleb Pavlovsky. Danilin--who is also affiliated with the "Young Guard of the United Russia," the Komsomol-like helper of the United Russia "ruling" party--was quoted as saying that "our goal is to make the first textbook in which Russian history will look not as a depressing sequence of misfortunes and mistakes but as something to instill pride in one's country. It is in precisely this way that teachers must teach history and not smear the Motherland with mud." Addressing on his blog teachers and scholars who might be less than enthusiastic about such an approach, Danilin, who is thirty years old and is not known to have ever taught anything, wrote:

"You may ooze bile but you will teach the children by those books that you will be given and in the way that is needed by Russia. And as to the noble nonsense that you carry in your misshapen goateed heads, either it will be ventilated out of them or you yourself will be ventilated out of teaching.... It is impossible to let some Russophobe shit-stinker (govnyuk), or just any amoral type, teach Russian history. It is necessary to clear the filth, and if it does not work, then clear it by force."

The official promotion of the history textbook resumed after the summer vacation, when the ministry of education and science scheduled teachers' conferences in seven Russian regions, at which the authors and

the government functionaries were to be joined by the "representatives of the president's administration" and those local governments. To show how it should be done, a meeting took place last September at the Academic Educational Association for the Humanities, with Moscow's top education functionaries, university presidents, and directors of research institutes on hand, including the director of the Institute of General History and the rector of Moscow State University. Representing the Kremlin was Dzhokhan Pollyeva, secretary of the Presidential Council for Science, Technologies, and Education, who called on historians and education administrators to wish the textbook's authors a great success, and assured the audience that there would be sufficient funding for all the seminars and courses required for the training of teachers to support the curriculum.

In fact, the clearest expression of the Kremlin's goodwill toward the textbook came two months earlier, with an invitation to the conference participants to visit President Putin at his residence in Novo-Ogaryovo, outside Moscow. In a long introduction to the discussion that ensued, Putin complained that there was "mishmash" (*kasha*) in the heads of teachers of history and social sciences, and that this dire situation in the teaching of Russian history needed to be corrected by the introduction of "common standards." (Four days later, a new law, introduced in the Duma and passed with record speed in eleven days, authorized the ministry of education and science to determine which textbooks be "recommended" for school use and to determine which publishers would print them.) There followed some instructive exchanges:

"A conference participant: In 1990-1991 we disarmed ideologically. [We adopted] a very uncertain, abstract ideology of all-human values.... It is as if we were back in school, or even kindergarten. We were told [by the West]: you have rejected communism and are building democracy, and we will judge when and how you have done.... In exchange for our disarming ideologically we have received this abstract recipe: you become democrats and capitalists and we will control you.

Putin: Your remark about someone who assumes the posture of teacher and begins to lecture us is of course absolutely correct. But I would like to add that this, undoubtedly, is also an instrument of influencing our country. This is a tried and true trick. If someone from the outside is getting ready to grade us, this means that he arrogates the right to manage [us] and is keen to continue to do so.

Participant: In the past two decades, our youth have been subjected to a torrent of the most diverse information about our historical past. This information [contains] different conceptual approaches, interpretations, or value judgments, and even chronologies. In such circumstances, the teacher is likely to ...

Putin (interrupting): Oh, they will write, all right. You see, many textbooks are written by those who are paid in foreign grants. And naturally they are dancing the polka ordered by those who pay them. Do you understand? And unfortunately [such textbooks] find their way to schools and colleges."

And later, concluding the session, Putin declared:

"As to some problematic pages in our history--yes, we've had them. But what state hasn't? And we've had fewer of such pages than some other [states]. And ours were not as horrible as those of some others. Yes, we have had some terrible pages: let us remember the events beginning in 1937, let us not forget about them. But other countries have had no less, and even more. In any case, we did not pour chemicals over thousands of kilometers or drop on a small country seven times more bombs than during the entire World War II, as it was in Vietnam, for instance. Nor did we have other black pages, such as Nazism, for instance. All sorts of things happen in the history of every state. And we cannot allow ourselves to be saddled with guilt--they'd better think of themselves."

II.

Since a great deal is at stake in the understanding of history in Russia today, a few things need to be said about the Russian president's view of Russia's past. For Vladimir Putin's reading of the Soviet Union's record represents nothing less than a repeal of glasnost and its accomplishments in the cause of truth. "Fewer," he says; and "not as horrible"; and others are "even more" terrible. And also that there was no terror before 1937. So the old version, the Soviet version, of the "repressions" perpetrated by the Soviet

regime, according to which they were confined to the slaughter of the party nobility, the top military commanders, and the intelligentsia during the "Great Terror" of 1937-1938, has now been officially reinstated.

In 1988, the Marxist historian and Soviet dissident Roy Medvedev attempted to add up the number of those "repressed" (that is, arrested) prior to 1937. His estimate was seventeen million to eighteen million people, of which "no less than" ten million perished. Oleg Khlevnyuk's definitive study of the OGPU-NKVD-KGB archives, in *The History of Gulag: From Collectivization to the Great Terror*, puts the number of people convicted between 1930 and 1936 at twelve million (or one-eighth of the adult population of the Soviet Union, based on the January 1937 census). This is far more than the estimated 8.6 million that were convicted in the Great Terror and its aftermath in 1937-1940. Medvedev could have added that the first "special designation" (*osobogo naznacheniya*) extermination camp was set up on the Solovki Islands in the White Sea in 1923. One of the methods of execution there was to tie the doomed victims to a log and push it down "a long and steep staircase." Half a minute later, witnesses remembered, a "shapeless bloody mass" reached the foot of the steps.

The defendants in the first show trials in 1928-1930 were not former party leaders, but the "wreckers" from among mining engineers, economists, historians, agronomists, and veterinarians. A third of a million people were arrested in 1930, of whom 20,000 were shot and 100,000 sent to camps, where their chances of surviving a ten-year sentence were very slim. (When we were college students together in Moscow in the mid-1970s, I heard Khrushchev's grandson, Lyosha Adzhubei, tell his grandfather's story of a German delegation that came to Russia in the 1930s to learn about the organization of the Gulag.)

And in another deviation from the official Putinist myth, of the five to seven million arrested in the "Great Terror" of 1937-1938--by Medvedev's estimate, at least one million were shot--three to five million were "ordinary people," not Party members. At Kuropaty, near Minsk, one of the hundreds and perhaps thousands of Soviet mass execution sites, people were shot daily from 1937 to 1941. The exhumation of unmarked (and carefully hidden) mass graves by local activists in 1987-1988 revealed holes in the skulls made by handgun bullets shot point-blank into the back of the head. Judging by the things found around the site--wallets, shopping bags--and by the clothes and shoes found on the bodies, many appeared not to have spent any time in prison, which means that they had not been given any judicial proceeding but were taken to the forest directly from their homes. Altogether, 510 mass graves were found with an average of 200 bodies in each: 102,000 people. That is probably more than all the people in the top layers of the Party.

When they were suddenly allowed to be heard in 1987-1988, the voices of victims and, occasionally, of their tormentors filled the Soviet media and meeting halls. Sometimes, according to witnesses' testimony, the victims were made to stand on the edge of the ditch, their hands tied and mouths gagged, while the executioners aimed more powerful rifles at the sides of the heads of those on either end of the row, attempting to kill at least two people with one bullet. "They were saving ammo," a witness explained, and also "showing their professionalism." Were they still remembered, they, too, could add precision to Putin's "no less-even more" moral calculus.

It is true that there was no "Nazism" in the Soviet Union, and no Auschwitz. But six weeks in the Kolyma camps, in northeastern Siberia--with temperatures reaching negative 50 Celsius, and sixteen-hour workdays of chipping off gold ore with pickaxes or hauling it in wooden wheelbarrows on four hours of sleep, and 400 grams of bread (for those meeting sadistic daily work quotas that even two men working together could not always achieve), and the tepid greasy water passed as soup, and a sliver of salty herring--all this, Mr. President, turned a healthy adult man into a walking skeleton, dying of dystrophilia, wracked by the bloody diarrhea of pellagra, and oozing pus and blood from frostbitten fingers and toes. (The great Russian writer Varlaam Shalamov, who miraculously survived Kolyma, tells the story in his beautiful and unbearable *Kolyma Tales*.) Hundreds of thousands more perished from overwork, disease, starvation, and accidents at the various "canalization" and "industrialization" sites of the first Five-Year Plans. To recall Solzhenitsyn's grim refrain in *The Gulag Archipelago*: we did not have the gas chambers, very true, we did not....

During the "collectivization" of 1929-1932, an estimated one million peasant households were herded into boxcars, driven for days often with little food or water (the dead, mostly babies and the elderly, were thrown off the moving trains), and then unloaded to "special settlements" (*spetsposeleniya*) in the frozen tundra, the swamps of the Russian Northeast, the Urals, or the bare Kazakh steppes. Most peasants--

between six and eight million--died in what may well have been the greatest demographic catastrophe to hit Europe since the Middle Ages: the man-made famine of 1932-1933, following the "requisition" by the state of all grain, including seed. The precise number of the collectivization's victims may never be known, with estimates ranging from the very conservative seven million to eleven million villagers, mostly in Ukraine, Kazakhstan, southern Russia, and the North Caucasus. (Ten years later Stalin would tell Churchill that ten million had died.) In 1988, the leading Kazakh writer Olzhas Suleymenov told a party conference that out of six million of his compatriots before the collectivization, three million remained. (This year Ukraine officially commemorated the seventy-fifth anniversary of the "Hlodomor," or "death from hunger," designated as genocide. How long will it be before Kazakhstan does the same?)

For the survivors, there was the edict of August 7, 1932, personally drafted by Stalin, which meted out "the highest measure of social defense"--that is, shooting--with the confiscation of all property or, in "extenuating circumstances," ten years of camp, for "theft of kolkhoz property." The decree became known as "the law on five ears of wheat," because its most conspicuous victims were starving peasant children and their mothers, who ate or tucked into their pockets a few grains while collecting wheat or rye left on kolkhoz fields after reaping. (Grain found in mouse burrows was to be counted kolkhoz property as well.) To make sure that peasant children (and those of the "enemies of the people") did not get away with anything, another decree in 1932 lowered the legal age of defendants to twelve years. The children were to be tried as adults and to be "subject to the entire range of sentencing." When the comrades in the provinces asked for clarification, the Politburo affirmed that "entire range" included execution.

And--right you are, Mr. President--no bombs were dropped in 1939-1941 on western Ukraine, western Belorussia, Bessarabia, northern Bukovina, Latvia, Estonia, or Lithuania, which were all deeded to the Soviet Union in 1939 under the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, or in 1944-1945, when they were re-conquered, or "liberated." Instead there was a "knock on the door" at two in the morning, to recall the title of a fine novella about the arrests and deportations in formerly Romanian Bessarabia. The total number of people arrested and deported (again, an estimate) was at least two million in 1939-1940 and two to three million in 1944-1945. How many were executed or died in camps? Two hundred thousand? Three hundred thousand? Half a million?

There were also no bombings of the Volga German Republic in 1941, nor of Chechnya, Ingushetia, or the Tatar villages in the Crimea in 1944. Like the "kulaks" ten years before, all these victims were arrested and deported--again, as with the "kulaks," to the last pregnant woman and suckling baby--and dumped in the wilderness. The total of the "re-settled" is estimated at three million, of which as many as a million may have died in the first few years of exposure, starvation, and disease. Of the entire Chechen nation of 489,000, an estimated 200,000 perished.

Scoring points in his obsessive and never-ending debate with the United States was not the sole goal of Putin's declaration at Novo-Ogaryovo. His remarks were also designed to establish guidelines for the new Russian historiography embodied in the textbook. The first axiom appears to be this: although there were "mistakes" and "dark spots," what mattered was the survival and strengthening of the state--by whatever means necessary. And, by that standard, the Soviet Union was a glittering success, and the costs were justified--especially, as we have already seen, since the main victims of Stalinism were the elite, not the ordinary people. The second axiom of modern Russian history according to Putin is that the Soviet Union was a "besieged fortress," forever under threat of attack by the West, and that the machinations of the West were responsible not only for Soviet foreign policy but also for a great deal of domestic misfortune. Finally, and most importantly, the overarching aim of this and all future historical narratives is the "normalization" of the monstrosity of Soviet totalitarianism, the manufacture of justifications and excuses for its crimes.

While pages and pages of *The Modern History of Russia* overflow with official statistics attesting to the dazzling achievements of Soviet economy--the production of mineral fertilizers grew six-fold; of electricity, five-fold; of steel, double--or with positively loving recitations of the quality and quantity of Soviet military hardware, the Gulag is mentioned by name once. And this sole mention is by way of cautioning the reader against the "exaggeration" of its "contribution" to the economy: after all, there were only 2.6 million prisoners (in 1950), compared with 40.4 million in the country's workforce outside the barbed wire.

Among the many eyewitness accounts inserted into the textbook's narrative under the rubric "How It Was" (*Kak eto bylo*), there is not a single one from the flood of memoirs published in the late 1980s about the hell of the camps or "investigative prisons," where "testimony" was beaten out of the arrested; not a

single quotation from *Kolyma Tales*, or Solzhenitsyn's *A Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, or *The Department of the Useless Things* by Yuri Dombrovsky (another splendid Russian writer who miraculously survived three stints, amounting to a quarter of a century, in the Gulag), or from the brilliantly imagined prison and camp chapters in the greatest Russian novel of the twentieth century, Vassily Grossman's *Life and Fate*. The "Doctors' Plot" of 1953 merits a paragraph--but not the next step, which only Stalin's death thwarted: the planned public hangings of traitorous Jews on Red Square and a countrywide pogrom to be followed by the exile of more than two million Soviet Jews to the Far East.

And, speaking of pogroms, the textbook has this to say about inter-ethnic relations under Brezhnev: "The degree of consolidation of Soviet nationalities and their yearning for mutual closeness were especially pronounced in comparison with other multi-ethnic states. In the USA, for instance, Ku Klux Klan-like organizations were operating almost openly [and] every now and then bloody mass confrontations occurred on racial or national grounds." This, about a society in which one's ethnicity was the defining characteristic of the individual in his relations with others; in which the Azeri hated the Armenians, and the Abkhaz hated the Georgians, and the Uzbeks hated the Kirgiz (and would start killing one another as soon as the totalitarian controls were relaxed, while others, such as Moldovans, Lithuanians, Latvians, Estonians, and Georgians, bolted out of the happy union even before it collapsed); in which ethnic Russian "masses" seem to despise all other nationalities and commonly use slurs and derogatory terms for the Ukrainians, the Armenians, the peoples of Central Asia and the Caucasus. There is also not a word about state anti-Semitism under Brezhnev and anti-Jewish discrimination in employment, travel abroad, and university admissions; or about the internal passports in which "nationality" followed name and address; or about Moscow State University's admissions policies in the second half of the 1970s, when the applicants had to put down not only the last names of their parents but also those of their grandparents, so as to help the university detect the Jews. Those with only one Jewish grandparent, it was widely believed, had a chance.

III.

The sections on foreign policy in *The Modern History of Russia* could have come directly from Soviet textbooks. The origins of the Cold War are covered in three sentences. The United States was bent on "world domination." The Soviet Union's might was in America's way. A "serious confrontation ensued." Churchill's Fulton speech on March 5, 1946, the "Iron Curtain" speech, was a declaration of war, and the reliable Stalin is cited at length from a *Pravda* interview to that effect. Since there is no analysis, no alternative view, and certainly no refutation of Stalin's words, the Russian schoolchildren are supposed to accept what he said at face value:

Pravda: May Mr. Churchill's speech be considered as damaging the cause of peace and security?

Stalin: Undoubtedly so. In essence, Mr. Churchill has taken the position of a warmonger.... It must be noted that in this regard Mr. Churchill and his friends are remarkably like Hitler and his friends.... Undoubtedly that Mr. Churchill's viewpoint is a viewpoint of war, a call for a war with the USSR."

Nor did the planning of war against the Soviet Union stop at "concepts." Russian high schoolers will learn from this textbook that already in May 1945 Churchill was reviewing a war plan against the Soviet Union, and by November 1945 the targets for the nuclear attack on the Soviet Union had been selected. (Why, then--one hopes a bright Russian girl or boy will ask--was the Soviet Union not bombed by the bloodthirsty warmongers, given that it would not explode its own nuclear charge until four years later?)

The text does not dwell on what might have made its "former allies" suspicious of Moscow's intentions in Soviet-occupied Eastern Europe and thus shaped what became known as the "Cold War mentality": the arrest and trial (on charges of "sabotaging the Red Army") of the sixteen leaders of the Polish anti-Nazi underground, loyal to the London-based government-in-exile, after they were promised immunity and presented themselves to the Soviet headquarters; the squeezing out of non-communists from the governments of Eastern Europe; the rigged election in Poland, in direct contravention of the Soviet Union's pledge in Yalta that there would be a free election there in which all "anti-Nazi and democratic forces could participate"; the later installation of murderous totalitarian satrapies in Eastern Europe, and the arrests of hundreds of thousands of "members of the bourgeoisie," the intelligentsia, and local political notables (firstly of the non-communist left), and the show trials and the executions, after horrible torture, of local communist leaders such as Traicho Kostov in Bulgaria, Laszlo Rajk in Hungary, and Rudolf Slansky in

Czechoslovakia.

Instead, Russian students will learn how regimes of "people's democracy" were established "with assistance of the Soviet military administration" in Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria, and how, as a result, "the communists came to power," and how "overall, the population, which wanted social reforms, supported the communists' coming to power." The Sovietization of Eastern Europe is explained by the need to defend vital and perfectly legitimate national security interests:

"It was impossible to sacrifice the security of the USSR. No Russian government could have afforded to do so. Stalin could not possibly agree to U.S.-British demands for the return of the pre-war governments to Poland, Czechoslovakia, or Yugoslavia. For such a return would have restored the cordon sanitaire [a stretch of pro-Western, 'bourgeois' 'buffer' states along Bolshevik Russia's western borders] erected against the USSR in those lands. Stalin wanted to create a broad band of communist-led states, which was to stretch between the Soviet Union and Western Europe. The 'Polish gate' cost the USSR huge sacrifices, and the Soviet government could not simply hand over the key to it to Washington."

From the beginning, then, the Cold War was a one-sided affair: the West attacking, the Soviet Union defending itself as best it could. Among the main lines of this gratuitous assault on Russia was ideological warfare: "having failed to dislodge the Soviet regime by force," *The Modern History of Russia* explains, the United States "unleashed an ideological war" whose "main tool" was Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. (And yet Radio Moscow had broadcast in every language under the sun for decades before and after the war, not to mention the thousands of pro-Soviet--and often Soviet-funded--newspapers and magazines around the world, and the incessant "peace" "congresses," "conferences," "movements," and "appeals" of the 1940s and early 1950s.) A few pages later the textbook acknowledges the ruling Soviet doctrine of the "impossibility of peaceful co-existence between of the socialist and bourgeois ideology," that is, the permanent ideological war on the West until the bitter end--without recognizing, of course, the implications of this admission.

The Cold War--and, by a very short extension, the United States--was to blame even for the reversal of the very mild "liberalization" allowed by Stalin during the Great Patriotic War. For, as far as the textbook's authors are concerned, it goes without saying that no "democratization of the domestic regime" could be allowed by Stalin. The "conditions of hostile encirclement," the reconstruction of the economy, and "the forging of military capability necessary to resist the U.S. and its allies" required the "ideological consolidation of the population" and thus the "strengthening of the state's ideological control over society."

And whatever problems the Cold War may have caused along the way, the Soviet Union--until Gorbachev, of course--marched from victory to victory in world affairs. Even the withdrawal of nuclear-tipped missiles from Cuba in 1962 ended in a "defeat" for the United States. Another victory was won in the Vietnam war, which had been caused by the "U.S. aggression against North Vietnam" aimed at the "liquidation of the communist regime in North Vietnam." In its capacity as "the guarantor of world stability," the Soviet Union had no choice but to "state its readiness to render North Vietnam the assistance necessary to repulse the aggression."

The account of the Soviet role in the Arab-Israeli conflict in *The Modern History of Russia* has nothing about the Soviet Union's massive shipments of armaments and material to Egypt and Syria in 1966-1967; and not a word about the Egyptians' massing troops in Sinai, and Syria doing the same on the Golan Heights, in May 1967; or about the blockade of the Gulf of Aqaba by Egypt; or of the Soviet representative at the United Nations blocking any possibility of the Security Council's addressing Israel's grave concerns (and thus the resolution of the crisis by peaceful means). Instead, the textbook repeats the canard of Israel's imminent attack on Syria--the same lie that Moscow communicated at the time to Egypt and Syria, thus pushing Egypt still closer to war.

The Six Day War segment of the story concludes with Israel condemned as "aggressor" by "Resolution 247 of the Security Council" and, peace-loving to the core and unwilling to keep company with warmongers of any kind, the Soviet Union's breaking diplomatic relations with the Jewish state. In fact--but how could any Russian high school student know this?--U.N. Security Council Resolution 247, adopted in March 1968, re-authorized the U.N. peacekeeping force in Cyprus. The textbook's authors must have meant Resolution 237, of June 14, 1967--except that there was nothing in that resolution about Israel's being an "aggressor." And the Yom Kippur War of 1973, when Soviet-armed Egypt attacked Israel, is not mentioned at all.

The nuclear arms race was also America's fault. No mention is made of the Soviet Union's annual churning out of more tanks than the rest of the world combined, to add to the tens of thousands that were already deployed in Eastern Europe. There is nothing about the deployment of the mobile intermediate missiles SS-20 armed with three nuclear warheads and targeted at western Europe; and nothing about the shooting down of Korean Airlines Flight 007, with 269 passengers and crew, by the Soviet Air Force on September 1, 1983.

When all is said and done, the "rigorously centralized character of the political and economic system of government of the Soviet era"--the word "totalitarian," which became virtually inseparable from the definition of the Soviet regime during the glasnost revolution of the late 1980s, and made its way into Gorbachev's and Yeltsin's speeches, is not used once in the Putinist textbook--is not to be understood as a product of the deadly ideology of a "utopia in power," to recall the marvelous title of an "alternative" Soviet history by two expatriate Russian scholars in the 1980s. Nor were the "psychological peculiarities of Stalin's personality," as the authors coyly phrase it, among the primary causes. No, the responsibility for the bestial regime rests with "objective conditions": historical, social, economic. The Russian national tradition is that of "centralization" in the service of "modernization," and Stalinism was no different, except that the constant threat of invasion necessitated that "modernization" be especially speedy, which had the consequence of making the regime "tougher." Nothing unusual about that. Stalin was no more "tough and merciless" than Bismarck, who united the German lands by "iron and blood." Why, even such allegedly "soft" and "flexible" political systems as that of the United States--the quotation marks are in the original--tend to evolve toward "hard forms of political organization" under threat, as happened after September 11.

As for the "measures of coercion"--the word "terror," like "totalitarianism," also does not seem to be in the authors' vocabulary--the "expedited modernization" called for a "corresponding system of power" and an apparatus capable of the "realization of the course." Producing such an "apparatus" and making it "effective" were tasks that may be accomplished "by a variety of means, which included political repression." The pursuit of the "maximal effectiveness of the governing apparatus" explained the fact that, "according to Russian and foreign historians," the "primary victim" of the "repressions" between 1930 and 1950 was the ruling class.

In the "plus" column of its "on-the-one-hand, on-the-other-hand" assessment of Stalin, the textbook declares him "the most successful leader of the USSR," responsible for industrialization, the "cultural revolution," the world's best "system of education," the "elimination of unemployment," and also for the ultra-effective "machinery of power." Conversely, Brezhnev's inability to forge an equally "effective" elite management--notwithstanding his achieving nuclear parity with the United States, the feat that forever secures his place in the pantheon of greatest Russian leaders and the nation's undying gratitude--"played a fatal role" in the Soviet Union's demise.

IV.

There is nothing new, of course, in these distortions of Russian history, or in the czar acting as historian-in-chief. "Like Providence in reverse, the Russian government seeks to arrange for the better not the future, but the past," wrote Alexander Herzen, Russia's first true (and still rather lonely) liberal. Count Alexander von Benckendorff, the first head of the infamous Third Department of His Majesty's Chancery--the secret political police, or the Gendarmes, set up by Nicholas I in 1826--gave this instruction to Russian historians: "Russia's past was wonderful, its present is more than superlative, and when it comes to her future, it is above anything that the most daring imagination could conjure. This is the point of view from which Russia's history must be viewed and written." (Putin has added a portrait of Nicholas I to the busts and portraits of Peter the Great, Catherine the Great, and Alexander II in the antechamber of the president's office in the Kremlin.)

Stalin began, in 1934, with question marks and exclamation points in the margins of a high school history textbook, and four years later produced extensive editorial notes and insertions into the drafts of the *Short Course History of the VKP(b)*--the acronym stands for the Russian equivalent of the All-Union Communist Party (the Bolsheviks)--which established the guidelines for the writing of Soviet history for the next fifty years. (Stalin's notes and interpolations, in small but perfectly legible round letters in black pen, may soon be viewed on the site of Yale University's "Cold War Archives" project, led by the indefatigable Jonathan

Brent.) A comparison between Stalin's and Putin's interventions in Russian historiography seems obvious. The first time as tragedy, the second time as farce? But there is nothing farcical about the new round of mendacity in the narrative of Russia's past. The stakes are too high.

The important point about Putin's reactionary revisionism is that this time the lies are appearing *after* the rehabilitation of the truth. With the advent of glasnost--a genuinely moral revolution, and a fearless society-wide soul-searching, and an outburst of decency and courage, and an explosion of journalistic and intellectual excellence, which almost redeemed the previous seven decades of cruelty and lies--an accurate account of Russia's history was established as a condition of Russia's revival. The previously taught version of the country's history was found to be so "monstrously distorted," in *Izvestia's* phrase, that the national high school examination in history, required for graduation and the diploma, was abolished in 1988. The exam was restored the following year, but the old textbooks remained invalid and new ones were being readied for the ninth and tenth grades.

First and foremost, in the great glasnost moment, it was deemed imperative to create the political and social mechanisms that "would firmly block any tilt toward [our] self-extinguishing past," as the leading literary magazine *Znamya* put it in the fall of 1987. Such mechanisms would not work without moral and cultural reform, which would consist in unflinching self-reckoning and self-discovery. Above all, the renewal of Russia required a sober and remorseless burning away (*vychiganie*) of any self-delusion. What we conceal and what we fear is one and the same, wrote a contributor to perhaps the finest collection of glasnost essays, *Inogo ne dano, or There Is No Other Way*, in 1988. If hiding the truth is a sign of fear, then the revelation of truth is a sign of the conquest of fear. The road toward a society in which the free individual flourishes, suggested a literary historian, lies "only through truth, through really honest self-learning (*samopoznanie*) and self-awareness (*samosoznanie*)." Could it be that all our misfortunes--including, of course, the horrors of Stalinism--are "because we have not learned to respect the truth, the truth of our history?" asked a leading political philosopher. If so, "we must stop deceiving ourselves.... We can no longer evade truth, engage in myth-creation. We must trust the truth."

The passionate quest for such a history began with the recovery of the true dimensions of the devastation wrought by Stalinism. This national act of acknowledgment and commemoration was thought to be more than a tribute to the dead. The horrors that Stalinism visited on Russia had to be recognized in shame and remorse, shuddered and wailed over, and, most importantly, redeemed by the creation of a state and a society that would never again allow the country to be ruled by terror. One must be "horrified to become brave enough" to condemn and forever break with the past in which most of one's life was lived, declared a letter to the flagship of glasnost, the weekly newspaper *Moskovskie novosti*, in 1988.

It was not too long ago, then, that what Anatoly Rybakov, the author of the immensely popular anti-Stalinist saga *Deti Arbata, or The Children of Arbat*, called "moral cleansing" was the order of the day. Confronting Stalinism was a matter of the "spiritual health of the country," its "spiritual hygiene." The troubadours of glasnost seemed confident that Russia would emerge from this merciless self-examination as if from a *banya*, a sauna: bleary-eyed and with red marks left by the birch twigs, but--at last!--clean, light, sober, serious, and ready for hard and honest work. The time "of societal penitence and moral cleansing is come," declared one of the Soviet Union's most beloved film actors, Georgy Zhzhonov, himself a former prisoner in Stalin's camps. "What a wonderful, capacious word is 'repentance!'" seconded Russia's finest eye surgeon, Svyatoslav Fyodorov, whose innovative techniques returned sight to thousands of Russians (and whose father, too, perished in Stalin's purges). "How fitting it is for our times! To repent, to tell all without holding anything back in order to begin a better life!"

The full tale of the nightmare had to be recovered and retold not only as credible and accurate history, but also as a parable to be read anew by every man and woman, every boy and girl. The memoirs of survivors, which schoolteachers were instructed to read to students, were thought by a literary critic at *Ogonyok* magazine, that other engine of glasnost, to be the moral equivalent of "inoculations against cholera, smallpox, or plague." Insofar as Stalinism justified violence in pursuit of an ideal society, and offered absolution of guilt in exchange for blind faith, or complicity, or acquiescence, in terror and lies, de-Stalinization heralded the end of Soviet history's exclusion from ethical judgment, the end of an "extra-moral" (*vnemoral'noe*) attitude to history, as a young woman instructor in the humanities put it. De-Stalinization meant a re-moralization of Soviet history and a return to normal historiography, which, in turn, promised to return to the Soviet people their country's true history. And so the eventual publication of the first honest textbook of Russian history, a veteran schoolteacher wrote in *Izvestia* in July 1987, would be an event of national significance.

As usual in the greatest Russian debates, the classics were deployed to excellent effect. One of Russia's finest poets, Fyodor Tyutchev, was invoked: "For society, as well as for an individual, self-knowledge is the first condition of any progress." And then the uncannily wise Chekhov, by way of Trofimov's soliloquy in Act II of *The Cherry Orchard*: "We don't have a definite attitude toward the past. We only philosophize, complain of ennui, or drink vodka. But it is so abundantly clear that to begin living in the present we must first redeem our past and be done with it, and we can redeem it only by pain and by an extraordinary and constant labor." And Tolstoy, in a magnificent essay on the sadistic punishment of soldiers in the reign of Nicholas I and the moral imperative of remembrance:

"We are saying: why remember? Why remember the past? It is no longer here, is it? Why should we remember it? Why disturb the people? What do you mean: why remember? If I was gravely ill and I was cured, I will always remember [the deliverance] with joy. Only then will I not want to remember, when I am still ill, in the same way or even more seriously, and I wish to deceive myself.... Why remember that which has passed? Passed? What has passed? How could it have passed--that which we not only have not started to eradicate and heal but are even afraid to call by its name? How could a brutal illness be cured only by our saying that it is gone? And it is not going away and will not and cannot go away until we admit that we are ill. In order to cure an illness one must first admit that one has it."

And now, to turn all this back, to reverse this great movement of honesty, to dash this splendid hope and retard this amazing transformation, comes the cynicism and the corruption of the past eight years--and this wretched war in Georgia, in which, for the first time, post-Soviet Russia appears determined to resurrect invasion and occupation as tools of its foreign policy. When Russia's historians come to compose their indictment against Putinism, as they surely will, the charges will prominently include Vladimir Putin's unforgivable interruption of his country's renaissance and the subversion of its attainment to moral maturity.

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