

Thoughts about the past, or fragments of memories with attempts at synthesis¹

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I was born in Leningrad on 20 November 1927 into a family of doctors: my mother was a pediatrician and my father was a venereologist. My maternal grandfather was a merchant of the first guild. My father came from a large family in Zhmerynka and was the only one of 12 brothers and sisters to receive a higher education. My mother's cousin, also a doctor, lived with us; she was a therapist. In 1933, my brother Leonid was born.

Looking back on my childhood, youth and adult years, I can say that the adults in my family belonged to the ordinary Soviet intelligentsia. They were Soviet patriots, rejoiced in the successes of the Soviet Union, were proud of its policies based on the principles of social justice and internationalism, and were deeply saddened when the actual actions of the authorities contradicted these principles.

One of my vivid childhood memories is from 1934, when I was not yet 7 years

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old. My uncle and namesake, my mother's brother Joseph Gerasimovich Eliasberg, a metallurgical engineer, returns from vacation to Kuzbass, where he helps Academician Bardin implement a project to further expand the Kuznetsk Metallurgical Plant. Accompanying him was his wife, Aunt Lelia, Elena Georgievna, who had become a patriot of Kuznetsk (then Stalinsk, now Novokuznetsk). Of course, I could not remember the content of Uncle Osi's story. But I still cannot forget the burning eyes of this Bolshevik-Leninist, who enthusiastically described the construction of a new socialist garden city: "I know the city will be, I know the garden will bloom, when there are such people in the Soviet country" (Vladimir Mayakovsky). I. G. Eliasberg was one of the leaders of the party organisation of the Kuznetsk Combine and was a member of the West Siberian Regional Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks). In 1937, he was shot along with a group of communists led by the first secretary of the regional committee, Robert Eiche.

Two more episodes from the same year, 1934, remain etched in my memory.

7 November. Aunt Manya takes me to a festive demonstration in honour of the 17th anniversary of October. The column from the October district, which includes employees of her polyclinic, marches across Uritsky Square (renamed Dvortsovaya Square in 1944), third from the main tribune near the Winter Palace. In the centre of the column, very close to us, stands Sergei Mironovich Kirov, the head of the city's party organisation, who has gained enormous authority among the townspeople over the past few years, smiling and greeting the demonstrators. He often appeared in factory workshops, sometimes with little or no security, talking openly with workers and engineers, and was also open to scientists and cultural figures.

And then, on 1 December, the city and the whole country were shaken by terrible news: Kirov had been killed in Smolny. I remember the day in Leningrad when Kirov's body was laid to rest: five minutes of factory sirens, people stopping in the streets (I watched from the window). Stalin arrived in the city along with other leaders of the country. He walked behind the coffin. The anger of the people of Leningrad, especially the workers, and indeed the entire Soviet people towards the murderer and the organisers of the crime is difficult to describe. But to this day, the mystery surrounding it has not been fully revealed. Not only was a certain Nikolayev, who was recognised as the murderer, shot, but also the leaders of the Leningrad special services at that time; under various strange circumstances, almost everyone who could be considered a witness died. Twenty-nine years later, those in the United States who could have known something or who sought information beyond what was officially reported about the assassination of President Kennedy were eliminated in much the same way. In light of what happened in the USSR afterwards, it can be said that Kirov's murder was the starting point for the launch of the Great Terror campaign, which reached its peak just over two years later, in 1937.

But if the assassination was a monstrous provocation (the most common and still unrefuted version), why was S. M. Kirov chosen as the victim? In 1926, during a heated internal party debate, Stalin defeated the Leningrad party organisation led by the chairman of the Leningrad Soviet, the prominent Bolshevik Grigory Zinoviev, who was removed from all his posts and expelled from the party in 1927 (later reinstated for a time). So, in his speech at the 17th Congress of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) in early 1934, Kirov said that Zinoviev's supporters "are not lost to the party; they can still be of considerable use." Further. During the preparations for the 20th Congress of the CPSU (February 1956), the surviving delegates of that "congress of victors" in 1934 said that many delegates had asked Kirov to agree to be nominated for the post of general secretary. Kirov not only refused, but also told Stalin about this proposal himself. Finally, the same comrades said that in the Central Committee elections, about 300 votes were cast against Stalin and only 3 against Kirov. The officially announced results "equalised" these votes. Archival data that could confirm these stories, used by N. S. Khrushchev in his famous report on the cult of personality at the 20th Congress, have not been found. However, indirect confirmation can be found in the fact that during the Great Terror of 1937–38, more than 70% of the delegates to the 17th Party Congress were shot.

I return to my childhood. I went straight to the second grade at school. My parents sent me to a German-language school. There I became an Oktyabrenok (a pre-Pioneer organisation for children of primary school age), receiving my first lessons in collectivism. It was the autumn of 1936.

The country was filled with enthusiasm. Radio and newspapers glorified workers and collective farmers who set labour records in factories, mines, construction sites, fields, and in all republics of the Soviet Union. The party encouraged the education of the masses in the spirit of internationalism. There was widespread support for the Soviet government's policy of providing moral and military-economic assistance to the Ethiopian people's struggle for liberation against fascist Italy and, in particular, comprehensive assistance to the Spanish Republicans in their fight against the Francoists, who were backed by Nazi Germany and fascist Italy. The Soviet Union welcomed Spanish children who had been taken out of their country, which was engulfed in civil war. At the same time, spy mania was gaining momentum in the USSR. The German school, where I studied for only one year, also fell victim to it. The school's management and several teachers were accused of spying for Hitler's Germany.

From the third to the sixth grade, i.e. from the autumn of 1937 to the spring of 1941, I studied at a regular secondary school. Here I became a pioneer, a member of the squad council. We were very active, easily and enthusiastically absorbing the basics of general knowledge and the fundamentals of political knowledge. The

spirit of collectivism permeated our daily lives. This was helped by various clubs at the Leningrad Palace of Pioneers, cultural trips to theatres, and a variety of pioneer activities. We were all quite politicised. From adolescence, we were well educated as Soviet patriots and internationalists. We deeply sympathised with the Spanish Republicans, the Chinese people, especially Mao Zedong and Zhu De's People's Liberation Army, who were fighting back against Japanese imperialism, and rejoiced at the successes of the Red Army, which drove the Japanese aggressors out of Mongolia and struck them at Lake Khasan. We were proud of the successes of our polar explorers, who established the world's first drifting scientific station in the North Pole region, and proud of our pilots, who made the first non-stop flights across the North Pole to America. And it was not only schoolchildren; most adults associated the country's successes with the advantages of the Soviet social system and with the correct, and even wise, as it was proclaimed at the time, leadership of the party and its leader, Comrade Stalin, "the faithful disciple and comrade-in-arms of V. I. Lenin" (later the wording was modified from "faithful" to "closest comrade-in-arms"). Agitation and propaganda were masterfully executed. Outstanding works of Soviet literature, cinema, music, and theatre also contributed to this effort.

On the other hand, during those same years, high-profile trials were held against prominent party and military figures, after which the country plunged into the terrible months of the "Great Terror," a kind of new St. Bartholomew's Day massacre that lasted a year and a half. In history textbooks, portraits of heroes of the October Revolution and the Civil War, who suddenly turned out to be "enemies of the people," were blacked out. The hysteria reached ridiculous proportions. At one time, pioneer ties were fastened with a badge depicting a bonfire. An order came to schools to remove these badges. Someone thought that the logs in the bonfire were arranged to look like the letters L and T, referring to "Lev Trotsky." Fear hung in the air. The obvious questions — how could it be that the most prominent Bolsheviks surrounding Lenin, who had made an enormous contribution to the victory of the October Revolution and its defence in the Civil War and were members of the first Soviet government, suddenly went over to the enemy — were met with answers like this: we are surrounded by capitalism, and global capital spares no expense in corrupting the Soviet leadership, exploiting the careerism and inflated self-esteem of individual leaders. Stalinist propaganda was able to convince even some left-wingers in the West of the justice of the Moscow trials. An example is Lion Feuchtwanger's *Moscow 1937*.

The Anschluss of Austria, the criminal policy of appeasement of Hitler by England and France (Munich, 1938) with the surrender of Czechoslovakia to him meant that World War II was inexorably approaching. During this period, the Soviet government's foreign policy, aimed at curbing Nazi Germany, enjoyed the full support

of the people. Anti-Nazi films such as *The Oppenheim Family* and *Professor Mamlock* were successful at the box office, and newspapers were filled with exposés of Hitler's racist crimes and misanthropic ideology.

The sluggish negotiations of 1939 with England and France on organising joint action to suppress possible German aggression ended in failure due to the frankly unequal terms offered by the Western partners to the Soviet Union. It became clear that British and French capital sought to channel German expansion eastward in order to exhaust both Germany and the Soviet Union through mutual conflict.

In order to delay the start of the war for as long as possible and to prepare for it as best as possible, the USSR leadership agreed to conclude a non-aggression pact and even a friendship treaty with Nazi Germany. This was not only a sensation for the West, but also a shock for the citizens of our country. Although the real reasons for such an unexpected decision were explained (not in the official press, of course, but to work collectives through representatives of party committees), I remember well how eerie it was to see photographs of V. M. Molotov shaking hands with Hitler and J. V. Stalin receiving Ribbentrop on the front pages of Pravda. On 23 August 1939, the Soviet-German pact was signed. On September 1st, with Germany's attack on Poland, the Second World War began to reap its terrible harvest.

As early as 1939, with the annexation of the eastern territories of Poland – Western Ukraine and Western Belarus – to the Ukrainian and Belarusian SSRs, respectively, the territories inhabited by the Ukrainian and Belarusian peoples were reunited and moved away from the borders of the capitals of these republics, Kiev and Minsk. With a similar goal – to distance Leningrad from the border with a possible ally of Germany (in the absence of any serious formal justification) – the USSR started a war with Finland. My father spent the entire Finnish campaign, which lasted three and a half months, from 30 November 1939 to 12 March 1940, on the front lines as the chief medical officer of a medical battalion, and it was very difficult for the Soviet Union. Our country suffered disproportionately high losses in terms of human lives and reputation. The weakness of the Soviet command in tactical training became apparent. In 1940, the Baltic republics of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia became part of the USSR. It is not true that the broad masses of the people in these economically backward republics initially regarded joining the USSR as a Soviet occupation. People of my age remember well the film footage of the Red Army's arrival in Vilnius, Riga and Tallinn. The Lithuanians were grateful for the return of their historic capital and the port city of Klaipėda, and, together with all their Baltic neighbours, for their liberation from the social injustices of capitalism. But the truth is that shortly after joining the USSR, all the Baltic republics began deporting "class enemies" beyond the Urals, a term that was interpreted very broadly in many cases. Together with the equally clumsy collectivisation of the countryside, this

large-scale deportation served as one of the main arguments in favour of leaving the USSR during the years of perestroika. This outweighed in the mass consciousness the obvious gigantic growth of the economy, higher than the average for the Union, with the emergence of previously non-existent industries and very high investments in the development of science, education, health care and culture. This harsh policy, like a time bomb, took effect almost 50 years later: the republics that were the last to join the USSR were the first to leave it.

Blindly believing in his own foresight, Stalin thought that Hitler would not dare to break the pact too quickly – at least not in 1941 – and that the Soviet Union would have time to get everything ready to fight back and crush the enemy. He did not believe the numerous intelligence reports that the invasion was planned for the second half of June. It was only on 13 June that TASS published a report in which the frequent violations of land and water borders by German aircraft were described as possible mistakes and it was suggested that everything necessary should be done to prevent them from happening again in order to avoid dangerous provocations. If my memory serves me correctly, this document confirmed the Soviet Union's loyalty to the 1939 treaty. It became clear to everyone that war was imminent.

Hitler outmaneuvered Stalin. At 4 a.m. on 22 June, troops of Germany and its allies crossed the western border of the USSR along its entire length, and Kiev, Minsk and several other large cities were subjected to the first air raids. At 11 a.m., First Deputy Chairman of the Government Molotov gave a speech on the radio. It was not until 3 July, on the 13th day, that Stalin addressed his "brothers and sisters". By that time, the enemy had already advanced deep into Soviet territory and inflicted enormous damage, including casualties, wounded and prisoners, military-technical and other material losses and, most importantly, moral and psychological damage. In his well-thought-out speech, Stalin emphasised the mobilisation not only of Soviet patriotism, but also of broad, non-class patriotism. This line of propaganda resonated well with the mood of the people.

My mother, younger brother and I were evacuated from Leningrad on 21 August, 18 days before the city was completely blockaded. In the cities of Krasnovishersk and Berezniki in the Molotov Region (now Perm Krai), Western Urals, I studied in grades 7–9 and joined the Komsomol. In the summer of 1943, along with other kids from Krasnovishersk who had moved up to Year 9, I worked on a timber raft for a month. My dad served as a military doctor in the active army from the first day to the last day of the Great Patriotic War, ending the war with the rank of major in the medical service.

When I recall the war years, I immediately feel the atmosphere of unity among the entire population around the central task of surviving and defeating the enemy. The atmosphere of fear in the pre-war years was replaced by a mobilisation atmos-

phere of concentrating all forces to accomplish this central task. In this connection, it is worth mentioning the fulfilment of the functions assigned to the party, the State Defence Committee (GKO) and the Supreme Commander-in-Chief.

Stalin's *History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks): Short Course*, published in 1938, ends with the word "end". Stalin was right. After the purges and the "Great Terror" of 1937–38, the party as a Bolshevik, Leninist party ceased to exist. It was transformed into a different structure under the same name, into the party of Stalin's dream, openly expressed by him at the time, – into a kind of Order of the Sword (its members unquestioningly obeyed the decisions of their leader). But the ideology of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) remained, at least formally. Both ordinary members and leaders of party organisations at various levels, being convinced supporters of communist ideology, showed true everyday heroism at the front and in the rear. Influenced by their example, many joined the party at the front. It was largely thanks to the work of the communists that Hitler's propaganda attempts to use the multinational composition of the USSR's population to stir up internal conflicts failed. On the contrary, the friendship between peoples became one of the factors of the country's strength.

Most members of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) joined the State Defence Committee, which was formed in the early days of the war. The tasks of this body included the transition to a war footing and maintaining the entire economy of the country at the level necessary to repel the enemy. Each member of the GKO had their own area of responsibility: the production and supply of tanks, aircraft, artillery, ammunition, transport, etc. to the army. I would particularly like to note the enormous difficulty of relocating many large enterprises from the western regions to the Urals and Siberia and quickly putting them into operation in their new locations. This work was coordinated by the GKO chairman of the State Planning Committee, N. A. Voznesensky.

Of course, the main figure who coordinated, controlled and directed the multifaceted struggle of the Soviet people and their armed forces against Nazi Germany and its allies was J. V. Stalin, Supreme Commander-in-Chief and Chairman of the GKO. In those years, he enjoyed absolute trust (largely, but not only, thanks to excellently organised propaganda) and was the object of worship for the overwhelming majority of Soviet people. As a teenager and young man, and indeed until 1950–52, I was among them. But starting at the age of 23–25, I gradually began to recover from my conformism. So, what can be said about Stalin's leadership during the war years? The first two years, 1941–42, were years of the heaviest defeats, human, material and territorial losses. Ukraine and Belarus were completely surrendered to the enemy, Hitler's troops advanced to the North Caucasus and the Volga, established a blockade of Leningrad and approached the outskirts of Moscow (although

in December 1941 they were pushed back 100–250 km from the capital, which was psychologically important as the first major victory of the Red Army). A huge amount of military equipment was lost in the retreats of 1941–42. Most importantly, the overwhelming majority of the 27 million victims of the Great Patriotic War fell during these years. The reason is that *less than three years before the start of the war, the armed forces of the USSR were practically decapitated*: almost the entire high command and more than two-thirds of the commanders of divisions, brigades, squadrons and regiments *were* physically *destroyed*. Thus, the main blame for the losses and disgrace of the first two years of the war lies personally with Stalin. But Stalin, according to the disgraced (in the last years of the leader's life) Marshal G. K. Zhukov in his memoirs, “knew how to learn.” Marshal Zhukov noted the well-organised work of the Supreme Command Headquarters, the serious attitude towards the proposals of the General Staff and the opinions of the front commanders. And, starting with the Battle of Stalingrad (19 November 1942 – 2 February 1943), the largest battle of World War II, there was a series of outstanding victories, culminating in the capture of Berlin and the surrender of Nazi Germany.

The victory over fascism was a triumph for the Soviet Union, an alternative social system to capitalism, communist ideology and, of course, Joseph Stalin.

I celebrated Victory Day in Leningrad, where I had returned from Berezniki in August 1944 and enrolled in the second year of the Construction Technical School. After passing my external exams for a secondary school leaving certificate, I was admitted to the Physics Department of Leningrad University in September 1945. And on 9 May 1945, we, a group of second-year students from the technical college, strolled along the festive Nevsky Prospect, which had not yet completely recovered from the traces of the blockade, caught leaflets scattered by aeroplanes with the texts of the Supreme Commander-in-Chief's victory order, ate ice cream and admired the fireworks salute. The joy was long-awaited.

Many people at the time believed that the pre-war atmosphere of harsh restrictions, barracks discipline and fear would disappear from everyday life. The Soviet people deserved it, and Stalin had consolidated his position as leader to such an extent that he had no one to fear. But these hopes proved to be in vain. The atmosphere of fear was necessary not only for Stalin, but also for his entourage, who were thinking about their own future after the natural departure of the “Master”. Democracy, including within the party, posed a certain danger to the top nomenclature. There was much talk of criticism, but the highest acceptable target for criticism from below was the regional leadership.

The October Revolution gave a powerful impetus to the free development of all forms of culture. Soviet literature, theatre, cinema, visual arts and music made a significant contribution to world culture in the first 10–15 years after the end of the

civil war, striking with their diversity of styles and genres. Soviet culture suffered a barrage of unjust blows from Stalin's nomenclature during the years of the "Great Terror," when many of its outstanding creators perished and thousands of writers, artists, and musicians spent many years in camps. Russian cultural figures worthily reflected the collective feat of the people in the Great Patriotic War and supported the steadfastness and fighting spirit of the soldiers with their topical works. But just a year after the great Victory, in 1946–47, the Central Committee issued a series of decrees on literature, cinema, theatre and music, in which the state of affairs in these areas was subjected to scathing criticism. By accusing creative workers of formalism, the country's leadership was in fact prohibiting the search for new forms, techniques and styles, i.e. closing off the paths of development for literature and art. World-renowned artists were subjected to persecution. For several months, it was forbidden to play the works of Shostakovich, Khachaturian, and other composers who had been accused in a completely unprofessional manner on the radio.

In 1948, the infamous session of the All-Union Academy of Agricultural Sciences was held under Stalin's personal, albeit invisible, patronage. Ignoring Lenin's well-known warning about the inadmissibility *of imposing* certain conclusions on specific sciences based solely on philosophical ideas, instead of a dialectical-materialistic *interpretation of the scientific results obtained*, the organisers of this session and Stalin himself, based on their illiterate attitude towards classical genetics, destroyed Soviet biology, which had previously occupied a leading position in world biology. Many world-renowned scientists lost their laboratories and the opportunity to continue their research. This was not only a blow to biological science. In the eyes of scientists, the authority of communist ideology and materialist dialectics, which were discredited by the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks), fell sharply.

In 1949, a campaign against cosmopolitanism was launched in the USSR, which in fact masked the transition to state anti-Semitism, especially in the humanities. It should be noted that the slide towards national isolation began during the war years. In this context, we should consider the dissolution of the Third International in early 1943 – a tsarist gift to the Anglo-American allies – and the rejection of "The Internationale" as the national anthem (although it remained the party anthem in ritual terms). And in the text of the national anthem, written by poets Sergei Mikhalkov and Gabriel El-Registan, Stalin was placed alongside Lenin: "Through the storms, the sun of freedom shone upon us, and Lenin illuminated the great path for us, Stalin raised us, inspired us to be loyal to the people, to work and to perform feats." The Cold War accelerated the resurgence of great power chauvinism in the policies of the Central Committee.

In contrast to all this, at the university, in the physics department until gradu-

ation in 1950, and in other departments until 1948, relations were imbued with socialist democracy. Komsomol (Communist Youth League) work was creative, free from any formalism, and literally flourishing. Here are just three examples. In 1948, the Komsomol bureau of the physics department (of which I was a member) proposed holding a broad conference on science, literature and art in the current five-year plan. This proposal was supported by other departments. The organising committee, of which I was also a member, was headed by the rector, Professor Alexander Voznesensky, an economist (and brother of a member of the Politburo). He was loved by the entire university, professors, teachers, students and technical staff, and deservedly bore the nickname “Papa”. So, the best halls in the city were given over to discussions during the winter holidays as part of the conference. I particularly remember the discussion of Konstantin Simonov’s controversial political play *The Russian Question*, which was staged in three theatres in the city. We talked with the directors and actors who played the leading roles (the setting was the United States at the beginning of the Cold War and McCarthyism), visited some of them at home, and then had a general discussion. There were also lively discussions with musicians at the Conservatory and with scientists about the latest scientific developments. Moscow celebrities also came to visit us. Another example is our active involvement in the upcoming discussion in Moscow (under the auspices of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks) on the teaching of physics in higher education. Inspired by the defeat of biological science, reactionaries from philosophy and physics set about preparing a similar execution of Soviet physics under the pretext of the dominance of “physical idealists” and “anti-patriots” in it. At forty-two meetings of the Organising Committee for the planned conference, Soviet physicists fought hard against the reactionaries and defended modern physics, preventing a repeat of the shameful destruction of biology. During those months, at meetings of the philosophy seminar of the physics faculty, the renowned Leningrad scientists Vladimir Fok, Alexander Alexandrov, and Lev Gurevich, armed with materialist dialectics and magnificent sarcasm, put the fighter against “physical idealism” Vl. Lvov in his place. Their speeches inspired us, the students of that time. For example, following Vl. Lvov’s article “Troubadours of Idealism in Physics” in *Literaturnaia Gazeta* on 20 November 1948, a brilliant satire appeared in the faculty wall newspaper – an article entitled “Meistersingers of Idealism in Arithmetic,” signed by Bl. Tigrov. Four days later, on 24 November, *Literaturnaia Gazeta* published the second part of Vl. Lvov’s “dilogy” entitled “Against Idealism in Physics.” And, accordingly, the same wall newspaper published an equally angry statement by Bl. Tigrov entitled “Against Idealism in Arithmetic.” The author of both works by Bl. Tigrov was a fourth-year student, Oleg Grossman, who would later become a prominent employee of the

Central Shipbuilding Institute.

Third example. We were taught philosophy well at the physics department. And so we at the Komsomol bureau decided to hold a competition for essays on topics chosen by the fifth-year students themselves, using the works of the classics of Marxism. And many people took up this proposal. The philosophy teacher headed the jury. Nowadays, it is difficult to imagine such an initiative coming from the bottom up.

In 1949, a movement was launched to organise student construction brigades to help the countryside. The movement was initiated by students of the Polytechnic Institute. Leningrad State University supported it, and in the summer of 1949, students from various departments went to remote areas of the region to build inter-collective farm hydroelectric power stations. A couple of weeks before departure, I had hepatitis and was forbidden from doing physical labour for some time. But I could not stay on the sidelines, so I insisted that they take me. Once there, I was put in charge of a mobile group to help the district Komsomol committee. We travelled around the villages, gathered young people, told them about the situation in the country and the world, and helped to set up primary organisations where there were none.

In 1949–50, the country, and Leningrad in particular, faced a real-life repetition of the horrors of 1937. As a result of the intrigues of Beria and Malenkov, the members of the Politburo closest to Stalin at the time, a group of Moscow leaders headed by Politburo member N. Voznesensky and the entire Leningrad party leadership were accused of a “separatist conspiracy.” The “conspiracy” allegedly consisted of an attempt to create a second centre by declaring Leningrad the capital of the Russian Federal Republic. What followed was a scenario that had been rehearsed in 1937–38: the execution of the group of “conspirators,” long prison terms for a large number of Leningrad party activists, and the replacement of the leadership of virtually all significant enterprises and institutions in the city. After a year and a half as Minister of Education of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic, our remarkable rector Alexander Voznesensky was shot, just like his all-Union famous brother...

The early post-war years are remembered in the collective consciousness for the rapid recovery of the economy, the systematic reduction of prices, the noticeable improvement in living conditions and the revival of a stifling atmosphere of oppression.

December 1950. I graduated from university with a degree in nuclear physics. However, I was not assigned to work at one of the nuclear centres, but in Vorkuta, a polar centre of the coal industry and, at that time, a centre of mass imprisonment and subsequent settlement. For two years, from 1951 to 1953, I taught physics and

heat transfer theory at the Mining Technical School, and for the next two years, from early 1953 to May 1955, I worked as a researcher at the Vorkuta branch of the All-Union Coal Institute. In Vorkuta, I was actively involved in the Komsomol and was elected to the city Komsomol committee. In September 1953, I was accepted as a candidate member of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

In 1952, the publication of Joseph Stalin's last major work, *Economic Problems of Socialism in the USSR*, had a wide resonance. It contained some important judgments about the existence and role of the market in the Soviet national economy, about its subordinate position in relation to the state plan. At the same time, however, this work demonstrated a break with Marxist ideas about the transitional socialist phase of communism. Formulating the basic law of socialism as "ensuring the maximum satisfaction of the ever-growing material and cultural needs of the whole society through the continuous growth and improvement of socialist production on the basis of advanced technology," the author does not mention the need to develop self-organisation and self-government of labour collectives, to organise a gradual process of transferring state functions to various types of production and public associations, or to promote internationalist cooperation between the countries of the socialist community and with revolutionary and national liberation movements. This work served as the basis for the anti-scientific view of socialism as an independent socio-economic formation that emerged in left-wing circles.

Stalin's last and relatively short speech, delivered at the 19th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1952, was addressed to foreign guests. He called on communists in capitalist countries and countries that had not yet freed themselves from colonial dependence to take up the banner of the struggle for bourgeois-democratic freedoms and national liberation abandoned by the bourgeoisie. Apparently, with this speech, Stalin was distracting the attention of foreign communists, and not only them, from the new horrors of Soviet "socialist" totalitarianism.

The last surge of Stalinist terror was the so-called Doctors' Plot, fabricated at the end of 1952. A group of well-known medical professors who served the country's top leadership was accused of malicious activity – killing, through improper treatment, the leaders of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the Soviet state. They allegedly acted on behalf of the American Zionist organisation "Joint" (the majority of the "exposed" group were ethnic Jews). Shortly after Stalin's death, all those repressed in this case were fully rehabilitated (although not all of them survived the ordeal).

Stalin's death was perceived by most of the people as a great collective grief. Knowing or guessing about the atrocities he had committed, people nevertheless perceived him as a harsh but wise father of the Soviet people. This was the result of centuries of paternalism, Stalin's propaganda skilfully exploiting this tradition,

his acting skills, and an objective assessment of Stalin's undoubted strength of will.

I am grateful to fate for giving me Vorkuta as the starting point of my professional career. In addition to acquiring important skills in teaching (at a technical college and the educational and consulting centre of the All-Union Correspondence Polytechnic Institute) and in scientific research (studying the characteristics of heat transfer processes in various soils in the permafrost zone), in my relationships with my colleagues, my four years in the Arctic were filled with the luxury of meeting, communicating, and then forming long-lasting friendships with remarkable people of high principles and morals. I will mention only three names: chemist and science historian Naum Rodny, mathematician Dmitry Redozubov, and diplomat and literary scholar Artur Moiseevich Dribinsky. All of them, like thousands of honest communists and non-party members, spent years in prison camps, and after serving their sentences and being released from the camps, they remained in Vorkuta, holding fairly high positions: for example, Dmitry Redozubov headed the laboratory at the Vorkuta branch of the Coal Institute, and Artur Dribinsky was elected chairman of the trade union committee of the Mechanical Plant. The young specialists who arrived from Leningrad and Moscow were most charmed by Artur Dribinsky and his wife Natalia Ivanovna, who came to him as soon as he was released from the camp. In January 1924, he was among those who stood guard at the coffin with the body of V. I. Lenin. He worked in the apparatus of the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs when it was headed by Chicherin, was consul in Harbin, and worked in the consular department of the USSR representation in Turkey. He was arrested in 1938, while working at the Literary Museum in Moscow and as a lecturer for the Moscow City Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks), for "friendly contacts with Trotskyist elements." (After his full rehabilitation and return to Moscow in 1957, he became the scientific secretary and secretary of the party organisation of the Leo Tolstoy Museum.) I think that communicating with such people helped us to overcome the conformism that dominated the minds and behaviour of most active communists and Komsomol members at the time.

I cannot fail to mention that I am also grateful to Vorkuta for the fact that in 1953, Sofya Galperina came there to marry me. In 2012, we celebrated 59 years of married life.

In September 1954, my probationary period as a party member was coming to an end. I received the necessary recommendations and awaited the decision of the city party committee on my admission to the CPSU. But at that time, a conflict was growing in the VUGI (All-Union Scientific Research Coal Institute) branch between the Komsomol members and the branch's new leader, Tkachev, the former head of one of the Vorkutugol coal trusts. The Komsomol members were outraged that Tkachev systematically appropriated the inventions of the talented engineer

Umalatov, a special settler from Dagestan, taking advantage of his dependent position. As a member of the city Komsomol committee, I supported the young employees of VUGI. At the time my question was considered by the city committee bureau, Tkachev was the secretary of the party bureau of the VUGI branch. Not only was I not transferred from candidate to full member of the CPSU at the city committee bureau, but I was also excluded from the list of candidates. Not only for my alleged participation in the campaign to discredit the secretary of the party bureau, but also for concealing in my autobiography the fact that my father had been tried for currency speculation in the early 1930s. My appeal was considered by the Audit Commission of the Komi Republican Party Organisation. I travelled to Syktyvkar in early 1955 to deal with this matter. There, in the Komi Republic, I was told that I had committed no offences against the party and that my father was also not guilty of anything. The Vorkuta leaders had received a reference from Leningrad about my father's namesake. I was reinstated as a candidate member of the CPSU, and the secretary of the Vorkuta City Party Committee was dismissed from his post. I still have a copy of the Komi republican newspaper *Krasnoe Znamya*, which covered this story in detail. This episode reflects the uncertain three-year (1953–56) transition period between Stalin's death and the proclamation of a break with his cult and his methods.

In May 1955, after the closure of the laboratory where I worked at VUGI, I returned to Leningrad and soon got a job at the large complex institute Giprocement. There, I worked my way up from engineer (1955) to senior engineer, team leader and then head of the laboratory (1968), which by the time of the general collapse (1991) had a total of 33 employees in Leningrad and Novosibirsk. In November 1967, I defended my master's dissertation, and in January 1995, my doctoral dissertation. A year after starting work at Giprocement, in July 1956, I became a member of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. By the time the Communist Party was dissolved, I had been secretary of the party bureau of the scientific section of the institute for a number of years.

The 20th Congress of the CPSU (February 1956) brought catharsis and a surge of new energy. The Thaw (as Soviet writer Ilya Ehrenburg called the period that followed the 20th Congress) stimulated a powerful rise in creative forces in a wide variety of fields. This was most vividly and symbolically expressed in the Soviet Union's breakthrough into space: the first satellite on 4 October 1957 and the first cosmonaut on 12 July 1961.

But the 22nd Congress (October 1961), having approved a new programme proclaiming the "exhaustion of the functions of the dictatorship of the proletariat within the country" and the transformation of the dictatorship of the proletariat into a "people's state," showed that Stalin's anti-Marxist and metaphysical ideas about

socialism and communism had not been outgrown by the leaders of the CPSU. They had not grasped that the dictatorship of the proletariat, to the smallest degree and only at the initial stage after the proletariat had seized power, was violence against the resisting overthrown class, that it was mainly, as the political content of the transition period from capitalism to communism, is a dictatorship of the proletariat over itself, a kind of Kantian “categorical imperative” to learn in everyday practice to gradually transition from managing people to managing technological processes, to live and create in a self-governing association.

The shooting against a workers’ demonstration in Novocherkassk in 1962 marked the end of the thaw and predetermined the end of Khrushchev’s political career. He was not “one of their own” in the nomenclature, which had already become detached from the working people, and when he made ill-considered impromptu remarks, the bureaucratic elite not only failed to help him correct his mistakes, but provoked him to make new ones. This was the case when the heads of the Central Committee’s ideological departments openly set him against artists and writers. Khrushchev became an increasingly unpopular figure in society, thereby facilitating the success of his opponents, who wanted quiet rule under ritualistic speeches.

However, Khrushchev’s removal in 1964 did not yet mean the complete victory of bureaucratic deadness over living, albeit error-ridden, work. Brezhnev’s ascension to the post of First Secretary of the Central Committee was accompanied by the appointment of Alexei Kosygin as Chairman of the Council of Ministers. He obtained the consent of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union to carry out a major economic reform. Its essence, based on the proposals of Kharkiv professor Lieberman, consisted of a system of economic calculation, starting with production brigades and workshops. The plan was largely indicative, specifying *what* needed to be produced and, approximately, in what quantities, while the primary production team decided *how*, organisationally and technologically. Socialist competition combined, quite organically, moral incentives with the principle of material interest. Freedom of manoeuvre and initiative was given to enterprise managers: the interference of district party committees in the current production process was practically eliminated. The effect of the reform was almost immediate. The press began to feature new names of enterprising workers, foremen, masters, workshop managers, innovators and entire factory teams. Self-organisation of teams developed, starting with brigades, self-management skills were mastered, the energy of social and engineering creativity was unleashed, and, accordingly, the shackles of nomenclature-bureaucratic control were weakened (or completely removed). The results of the eighth five-year plan (1966–70) are striking. In 1970, industrial production was almost twice as high as in all the pre-war five-year plans combined. Agricultural production grew by 21%

in the eighth five-year plan, compared to 12% growth in the seventh. Retail trade turnover grew by 48%. Science and culture showed great success in the generally positive atmosphere of those years. Let us take, for illustration, only the last year of that five-year period, 1970, and only some scientific fields. Important results were achieved in all areas of theoretical and applied mathematics. In atomic physics, the 105th element was synthesised and studied for the first time. The Institute of Atomic Energy continued its comprehensive research into the pride of domestic science – the tokamak device, accepted by the global scientific and engineering community as the best reactor design for controlled thermonuclear fusion, ideally retaining high-temperature plasma particles. The creators of spacecraft and cosmonauts continued to delight the Soviet people with their great achievements. Considerable funds were invested in science. New scientific institutions were put into operation. Kosygin's five-year plan can safely be called the "second thaw". Alexander Zinoviev defined these years as the period of the country's highest rise in its history.

The bureaucracy instinctively sensed that it was gradually losing its leverage. And the events in Czechoslovakia, which could have been the start of a process of purifying socialism of its distortions and injecting new energy into the global labour movement, which was as anti-capitalist as it was anti-bureaucratic, terrified the long-since reborn majority of the leadership of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact countries. And the signal was given for a general retreat. All the leaders of the Prague Spring were declared right-wing revisionists or direct agents of imperialism, and Dubček was labelled a "conciliator" who did not understand the situation. In the USSR, the reform that had begun so successfully was quickly rolled back. Market economists, who in fact did not absolutise the market but considered it necessary to use market mechanisms for the effective implementation of planned production development plans, were treated as alleged renegades from socialist principles. And from 1971, a retreat to real stagnation in politics and economics began. Here is just one example. In 1970, at the end of the "Kosygin" five-year plan, 202,000 metal-cutting machines of various types were produced. That was the peak. In 1980, only 118,000 were produced, and in 1985, less than 100,000.

The years of stagnation foreshadowed the collapse of the USSR, becoming the final fatal blow to it. The root cause lies in unresolved Stalinism. This point of view is explained in detail in the analytical section of the Russian Communist Party's programme.

But today in Russia, we are convinced that those years favourably and radically distinguish the state bureaucracy of that time from the current Russian one, which is thoroughly corrupt. A striking example is the radiation-thermal technology of energy-intensive products. It is based on the phenomenon of radiation-thermal (RT) activation of solid-phase reactions in inorganic systems, discovered by a group

of authors representing industrial and academic institutions in Leningrad, Novosibirsk, Yerevan and Alma-Ata. The energy source in RT technology is a powerful beam of accelerated electrons. In cement production, RT activation results in the formation of high-quality cement clinker in 5–15 seconds, which is more than 300 times faster than in modern rotary kilns. The basics of RT cement technology were developed by Giprocement (Leningrad) in collaboration with NIEFA (Leningrad) and the Institute of Nuclear Physics of the Siberian Branch of the Academy of Sciences (Novosibirsk). The work was financed under a special programme of the USSR Ministry of Building Materials. At the end of 1991, the launch of a pilot semi-industrial line was planned. However, it was in 1991 that funding was discontinued, indefinitely delaying the implementation of the technology, whose main advantages are the elimination of hydrocarbon fuel use and a dramatic reduction in harmful emissions into the atmosphere. This unfinished project clearly demonstrates the difference in modernisation capabilities between planned and market-based management systems

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Some conclusions from a brief overview of the history of the USSR against the backdrop of the impressions of one Soviet citizen's long life can be summarised as follows:

The undeniable successes in the economic, social, scientific and cultural development of the Soviet Union, despite the far from Leninist methods of leadership of the party and the country after the bureaucratic, essentially counter-revolutionary coup of 1927–34, can be explained by the powerful impetus of October and the proletarian internationalist ideology that prevailed in the country. Bureaucratic, essentially counter-revolutionary coup in 1927–34, can be explained by the powerful impetus of October and the proletarian internationalist ideology that prevailed in the country. The energy of October overcame the pressure of fear and the heavy superstructure.

Many people now yearn for the “happy Soviet past,” when certain elements of communist social relations were achieved—the opportunity to receive education, including higher education, *according to need*; medical care, limited mainly only by the level of medicine achieved; *and the development of* technical, artistic, and athletic abilities of children and adults, etc. Today, when people nostalgically recall the Soviet era, they often come to the conclusion that its main fault was that it led to the advent of the current repulsive era. The distortions of socialism facilitated the restoration of capitalism. There is also a concise aphorism: 1991 is the price we

pay for 1937.

Could the coup of 1927–34 have been avoided? Or was Plekhanov right in considering the defeat of the proletarian revolution in a country with underdeveloped capitalism a foregone conclusion? The answer to this far from simple question is very difficult. Let us recall Marx's opinion, expressed in a letter to Vera Zasulich: A revolution may begin in Russia, but its success is only guaranteed if it is supported by proletarian revolutions in countries with developed capitalism. Lenin proceeded from the same premise when he came to the conclusion that the imperialist chain would first be broken by a revolution in its weakest link, and then the stronger links would fall away... Unfortunately, the proletarian uprisings in Germany, Hungary, Finland and Bulgaria that followed the Russian Revolution were drowned in blood. Left alone, the Bolsheviks faced a complex set of problems. It was hardly possible to solve them without making mistakes. In the context of the well-known stabilisation of European and American capitalism, meticulous (a term first coined by A. Magdushevsky) political, economic and ideological work was required to consolidate the successes of 1917–20 and create an attractive image of socialism for the world proletariat.

Recognising the meticulous nature of the extremely difficult work that the Bolsheviks had to carry out after the end of the Civil War in the circumstances that had arisen, we will try to identify their decisive mistakes. Two of them were made during Lenin's lifetime. Four months after the Russian working class seized power, at the first party congress after the historic October victory – the 7th Congress of the RCP(b) – a decision was made to develop a new, Second Party Programme. It was adopted a year later, in 1919, by the 8th Congress. With the overthrow of the power of the landlords and capitalists, the First Programme, adopted in 1903, had been fulfilled. A new historical period was about to begin – a transitional phase from capitalism to a global classless society. The tasks of the RCP(b) in its implementation became the content of the party's Second Programme (the general tasks of the other parties – sections of the Third International, created in the same year, 1919, in achieving the same goal were defined by its Programme). Thus, in connection with the radically changed situation after the seizure of power, the Communist Party of the RSFSR adopted a new programme. This was historically quite correct. Its charter, however, remained virtually unchanged. Was this correct? After all, in the transitional phase, the state gradually transfers its functions to self-organising and self-governing associations of manual and intellectual workers. And the party, as the leading force in this process of the withering away of the state, must at the same time be a model association. This means that in the basic organisational principle –

democratic centralism – the emphasis must be shifted from the second word to the first: *democratic* centralism. This means, in particular, ensuring guarantees for the rights of minorities. This, incidentally, is the issue that greatly concerned the great revolutionary and Marxist thinker Rosa Luxemburg and was the subject of her discussions with V. I. Lenin. All this means that the charter of the proletarian party *after* the seizure of power must be different than *before*. Alas, this was not done. And this was the first mistake of the Bolsheviks and... Lenin. The second mistake, derived from the first, was the decision to ban factions, adopted at the 10th Party Congress in 1921. At the 10th Congress, the party passed the test of history by adopting the New Economic Policy. At the 10th Congress, the party failed the test of history by banning factions. In 1921, a way was found to develop the basis of the transitional phase. In 1921, a superstructure that negated it was simultaneously conceived. The proviso about the temporary nature of the ban remained empty words. Later, Stalin skilfully used this ban on factions to crack down on everyone who had been part of Lenin's Bolshevik Party leadership. After Lenin's death, it is no longer a question of mistakes, but of the struggle between democratic and bureaucratic tendencies within the party. It ended with the victory of the bureaucratic tendency. This was reflected in the disregard for the basic requirements of Lenin's political testament: workers' control of state and party bodies was not introduced, collectivisation in the countryside was carried out with massive violations of voluntarism, and in national policy, the principles of proletarian internationalism were effectively superseded by great-power chauvinistic and petty-bourgeois nationalist tendencies encouraged from above. The party and the Soviets became objects and subjects of bureaucratic degeneration. From 1937 onwards, an atmosphere of fear prevailed in the Soviet Union that was contrary to the interests of the socialist transition phase. *History does not forgive its creators for the mistakes they have made.*

Book launch

In the Tracks of Marx's *Capital*

Authors:

Sungur Savran

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Publisher:

Palgrave Macmillan



"A masterly work... A passionate and intelligent application of Marxist categories."

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This book provides an accessible introduction to Marx's seminal work *Capital* and explores the core ideas of Marxian political economy relevant for modern day economies. The first part gives an overview of *Capital* based on the authors' original thinking in the methodology of *Capital*. The second part discusses the application of these ideas to some understudied questions of measuring profit on alienation, the rate of exploitation, the reconstruction of input-output tables, and the role of the welfare state and social wage. The third part sets forth new research in Marxian analysis in the 21st century, facing the challenges brought about by digital labor and the deep crisis of the global economy. The last part discusses the Marxism/Neo-Ricardianism controversy.