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Reason in Revolt Now Thunders!

I am Carl Miller, a radical who believes in creating a new world, and otherthrowing the system of oppression which rules this world. I wish to continue the revolutionary tradition of people like Karl Marx, V.I. Lenin, Bob Avakian, and Mao Tse-Tung. Let the oppressors tremble as the workers and oppressed people of the world take power!

Friday, May 12, 2006

Inteview with Grover Furr

Recently I had the oppurtunity to interview college Prof. Grover Furr. David Horowitz attacked Prof. Furr in his new book because he has defended Stalin. So, I thought it would be good to hear how Prof. Furr viewed things. I do not agree totally with what Furr has said, but I am also very grateful to him for granting me this interview, and people like him can be useful in setting the record straight about the Soviet Union, at least in my view.

Q: You do something not many people, even among the leftists of the world, will do, that being upholding Joseph Stalin. Why do you think it is important to do so?

A: Before beginning, I'd like to thank you for asking me to answer these questions. They are important issues, and ought to be of concern to everyone who is disgusted with capitalism and wants to study the experience of those who have struggled for a world free from exploitation.

I don't "uphold Stalin" as such. I try to uphold the truth.

In the Communist Manifesto Marx and Engels said that the proletariat "has nothing to lose but [our] chains." I take that to mean that we cannot afford to let any prejudices, personal preferences or biases, etc., stand in the way of our search for the truth.

We can't hope to overcome capitalism unless we base ourselves on objective reality - something that the capitalists cannot possibly do, because objective reality exposes the horrendous exploitation and brutality of capitalism.

So I try to be objective, and study the history of the USSR by the light of the best evidence available.

Q: The common story of Joseph Stalin is that he was a paranoid, power hungry mass murderer, Those who oppose Stalin will point to the purges and "great fear" as evidence of this. What is your attitude toward this period?

A: If the evidence supported this view of Stalin, then I'd agree with it. But the evidence doesn't support it at all.

This view of Stalin stems from two sources, both of them utterly unreliable: Trotsky and Khrushchev, with the latter being far more influential. Both of them lied, to an extent that is hardly imaginable!

Documents from the Soviet archives published since the end of the USSR (or, in fact, a little before) allow us to be certain of this now, though many suspected as much earlier.

In Russia since the end of the USSR there has been a huge resurgence of interest in Stalin. For the first time some objective scholarship on Stalin has begun to appear.

The evidence is that Stalin was a truly remarkable man - something that a great many of his contemporaries recognized too.

The Trotsky-Khrushchev portrait of Stalin, popularized during the Cold War and still the dominant - in fact, the required - view in Soviet history today, is a complete fabrication. It can be sustained only by utterly dishonest work that does not deserve the name of scholarship.

Right now I'm finishing a lengthy study of Khrushchev's infamous "Secret Speech" that he made at the 20th Party Congress on February 25, 1956. In this speech Khrushchev made many statements blaming Stalin for terrible crimes. The speech shattered the communist movement, and of course delighted anti-communists and Trotskyists.

During the past couple of years of research I have discovered a shocking fact. Every single "revelation" Khrushchev made about Stalin and Lavrentii Beria is a lie! So far, I have not discovered a single instance in which Khrushchev told the truth.

I recently wrote a bit more about this in an article titled "(Un)critical Reading and the Discourse of Anti-communism," which the good people at The Red Critique were generous enough to publish, despite the fact that their journal is mainly theoretical, and my article mainly historical. It is at

<http://www.redcritique.org/WinterSpring2006/uncriticalreadingandthediscourseofanticommunism.htm>

My detailed study of the falsehoods of Khrushchev's "Secret Speech" should be out before the

end of 2006.

Q: Another attack on Stalin is that he carried out a man-made famine in which he forced millions to starve in the Ukraine. Is this in any way an accurate account of what happened during that period?

A: This is completely false.

This tale actually stems, ultimately, from the Nazis, who began spreading it in the mid-30s. In the USA it was picked up by the Hearst newspapers, which were extremely anti-communist.

The late Doug Tottle nailed these facts in his book *Fraud, Famine and Fascism. The Ukrainian Genocide Myth from Hitler to Harvard* (Toronto: Progress Books, 1987). Tottle was affiliated with the Canadian Communist Party, and some of his statements are apologetic. But he did his homework on the fraudulent nature of this myth.

After WW2 the "man-made famine in Ukraine" myth became the credo of the pro-Nazi Ukrainian Nationalist groups, many of whose leaders were settled in the US by the CIA, and were funded to carry on their anti-Soviet propaganda. Until the early 1960s these fascist Ukrainian nationalist groups had terrorist cells within the USSR as well.

Today this myth is an integral part of the nationalist ideology of the state of Ukraine. The reactionary capitalists and former CPSU members who rule it have to construct a history that legitimitizes Ukrainian nationalism.

This myth of the "man-made famine" is an integral part of the project of historical formation for Ukraine. Since Ukrainian nationalism has been fascist from the beginning, the only way it can be "legitimized" is by ferocious anti-communism.

There are some very good books, written by Cold War anti-communists who were nevertheless good historians, that demonstrate how fascist Ukrainian Nationalism has always been. I recommend:

John A. Armstrong. *Ukrainian Nationalism*. NY: Columbia University Press, 1963.

Alexander Motyl. *The turn to the right : the ideological origins and development of Ukrainian nationalism, 1919-1929*. NY: Columbia U.P. 1980.

The excellent research by Prof. Mark Tauger, of the University of West Virginia, and others, has thoroughly exploded this Nazi-born myth of the "Man-Made Famine." His research is now available online at his own website,

<http://www.as.wvu.edu/history/Faculty/Tauger/>

In addition I recommend the following article by two professional demographers:

Barbara Anderson and Brian Silver, "Demographic Analysis and Population Catastrophes in the USSR." *_Slavic Review_* 44, 3 (Autumn, 1985), pp. 517-536. Available through JSTOR.

Robert Conquest, the most famous anti-Soviet phony "scholar" during the past half-century, was paid \$80K by Ukrainian Nationalist groups to write *Harvest of Despair*, the main English language book that spreads this notion. He drew heavily upon Nazi propaganda as his so-called "evidence."

There are a couple of good reviews of his book, and of this issue. They are:

- Jeff Coplon, "In Search of a Soviet Holocaust," Village Voice Jan. 12, 1988. At <http://chss.montclair.edu/english/furr/vv.html>
- Jeff Coplon, "Rewriting History: How Ukrainian Nationalists Imposed Their Doctored History on our High-School Students". Capital Region magazine (Albany, NY), March 1988. At <http://chss.montclair.edu/english/furr/essays/coplonrewriting88.pdf>
- "The Hoax of the Man-Made Ukraine Famine of 1932-33." Six-part series originally published in Challenge-Desafio, the newspaper of the Progressive Labor Party, beginning on February 25, 1987. At http://www.plp.org/cd_sup/ukfam1.html and following.
- In addition, I recommend Arch Getty's review of Conquest from the London Review of Books, January 22, 1987, pp. 7-8. I do not have permission to put it on line, but will be happy to email a PDF copy to anyone who asks.
- Doug Tottle's book also analyses both Conquest's work and the fraudulent Ukrainian nationalist film "Harvest of Despair." It is well worth reading. As it's long out of print, I can provide a PDF copy to anyone who wishes one.

Q: David Horowitz, the right-wing intellectual, has recently mentioned you in his book *The Professors*. What is the significance of this to you? What do you think of the state of affairs here in the United States of America?

A: It's to be expected. Horowitz is an apologist for exploitation, as are all conservatives - and liberals too, for that matter.

What is known as "conservatism" is simply an ideological defense for a more open, authoritarian, and violent version of capitalist exploitation. Every ideological position that "conservatives" advocate - and Horowitz is among them - is a crude justification for authoritarianism; making labor cheap and wages low; reducing social services to a minimum; empowering employers and reducing employees to powerlessness.

Some time ago I wrote a couple of short essays that briefly explain how this works. They are at

<http://chss.montclair.edu/english/furr/conservatives1.html>

and

<http://chss.montclair.edu/english/furr/conservatives2.html>

With all its weaknesses the communist movement was, during the 20th century, by far the major force for human liberation and the empowerment of working people. The communist movement was the only bright spot of hope in a century of capitalist horrors.

So it is axiomatic that all defenders of capitalist exploitation, and of the various ideologies that sustain it, will be strongly anti-communist, and will not hesitate to lie about the history of the communist movement - as, indeed, they lie about almost everything else.

Horowitz is doing the bidding of his right-wing sponsors - trying to direct attention away from the huge de-funding of higher education in the United States with the absurd claim that the "left" has taken over the colleges!

Q: What is your opinion of Trotsky, his criticism of Stalin, and the overall attitude of Trotskyists in general regarding the Soviet Union?

A: Trotsky was a very intelligent, but also very limited, man. His ideas combined Bolshevik and Menshevik positions, and he was on the right - the economic determinist - pole of the Bolshevik Party.

That in itself would not have been sufficient for his expulsion. After all, the debate among holders of different ideas was healthy and strong in the 1920s.

But Trotsky was dishonest. Since his ideas were defeated again and again in the Bolshevik Party Congresses and Conferences during the '20s, he kept forming factions to try to get power by other means. After his exile from the USSR in 1929 he spent the rest of his life scheming to get back into power.

Documents from the former Soviet archives provide good evidence that the charges leveled against Trotsky in the three public Moscow Trials of 1936-8 were true. Trotsky's followers certainly did form a "bloc" with Rightists to plot to overthrow the Soviet government and assassinate Stalin and others.

There is also good evidence that Trotsky was in touch with German military leaders and with the Japanese, as charged in those same trials. By "evidence", I don't mean the Trial testimony - though I think it is truthful and accurate -- but additional evidence, from the former Soviet archives. This evidence confirms the basic charges made against the Trial defendants, and against Trotsky as an absent co-conspirator.

Trotsky was extremely arrogant and dictatorial. He seldom listened to criticism even from his closest followers. He created the "cult of personality" around himself which characterized the Trotskyist movement during his own lifetime, and still does.

There's a pretty good article about Trotsky in Communist, the Progressive Labor Party's journal, for Spring 2004, at

<http://www.plp.org/communist/communistspg04.pdf>

Q: Do you consider the Post-Stalin Soviet Union to be Revisionist, Social-Imperialist, Socialist, Social-Fascist, or anything similar to that, and if so why? Or was capitalism restored in the Soviet Union prior to Perestroika?

A: All the post-Soviet states are capitalist of an especially predatory kind. Since the end of the USSR the new rulers have made sure that the standard of living of workers, and employees generally - the vast majority of the population - has fallen catastrophically.

This was obviously the main motive of Gorbachev, Eltsin, and the CPSU leaders who privatized the publicly created and owned wealth of the USSR - to drastically increase the rate of exploitation of labor and thereby create great wealth for a few capitalists.

This process had begun under the old USSR. Introducing overt capitalism and privatization was a qualitative step in greatly accelerating the process.

Q: What writings do you recommend for those who want to know the truth about what went on during the time of Stalin?

A: The truth is still emerging. There are a number of good works in Russian, but only a few in English.

For a list of what I have found to be the best to date, see the bibliography and notes in my two-

part article "Stalin and the Struggle for Democratic Reform" in the on-line journal Cultural Logic in 2005:

<http://eserver.org/clogic/2005/furr.html>

and

<http://eserver.org/clogic/2005/furr2.html>

You can always find links to my own research on my Home Page,

<http://chss.montclair.edu/english/furr/>

Q: What political group in America do you see as having the most correct line in regards to Stalin?

A: The Progressive Labor Party - <http://www.plp.org/>

They have a pretty good four-part series, though rather old now: "Review of PBS Series: Stalin (May - June 1990)." It starts at

http://www.plp.org/cd_sup/pbsstal1.html

Q: What is your impression of Project "Set the Record Straight"?

A: I'd like to answer by saying something about the "cult of personality."

The history of the Bolshevik and Chinese revolutions is a great textbook for all those who want to fight for an egalitarian communist world. But it's up to us to learn those lessons. Specifically, we have to recognize the serious errors they made - errors that resulted in the defeats of these revolutions from within.

Among these serious errors was the "cult" of individual leaders. The lesson of the communist movement is unequivocal. Cults of "great leaders" are fatally incorrect. There can't be any progress until they are decisively rejected.

One of the things I respect most about the Progressive Labor Party is that they have done this. They studiously avoid building a "cult" around any party leader. Neither the party chairperson nor any other leading members are ever named in any of their literature. They have no "spokespersons." Every party member has to learn to represent the organization.

Stalin always strongly opposed the exaggerated praise and adulation that eventually poisoned every aspect of Soviet politics and culture. He pointed out many times that it was a "socialist-revolutionary", not a Marxist, notion, and should be rejected.

If he had really been the "all-powerful dictator" the anti-communists falsely claim he was, he would have done away with it. Of course he never was an "all-powerful dictator," and was not able to squelch this disgusting "cult."

This "cult" did tremendous harm. It enabled careerists, saboteurs, and conspirators to remain hidden. Khrushchev dishonestly denounced the "cult" in his "Secret Speech" of 1956. But everything Khrushchev said about it was wrong.

And Khrushchev himself was second to none in creating the "cult." When he was dismissed in October 1964 he was denounced for his own "cult" by the Central Committee members who removed him.

The Chinese Communist Party learned exactly the wrong lesson from this. They deliberately built up a "cult" around Mao that dwarfed that around Stalin.

And it contributed tremendously to the reversal of workers' power in China. Under the cloak of "loyalty to Chairman Mao" right-wingers and anti-communists confused and subverted the Left forces, and took over the CCP before Mao's death.

Disguised by their participation in the "cult" of Mao, the pro-capitalist forces within the CCP leadership were able to gain key positions. When Mao died, it took them little time to seize power and reverse all the gains of the heroic Chinese revolution.

The difference was this: Stalin opposed this "cult." We can see today that, if anything, he should have done so even more fiercely. But Mao deliberately encouraged the "cult" around himself.

Mao and the CCP had sharply, and rightly, criticized the Khrushchev leadership of the Soviet Union. But in this case Mao deliberately chose to imitate one of the worst features of Soviet socialism, and one that had helped Khrushchev get into power and sabotage the struggle for communism.

Mao was a great revolutionary thinker and leader in many ways - one of the greatest! But in the case of the "cult of Mao" he acted in an unprincipled way.

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He supplied the following statement to introduce himself:

I don't have any formal criteria that would qualify me to do research on the history of the Soviet Union during Stalin's time. I can't imagine what such qualifications would be!

As a graduate student from 1965-69 I opposed the US war in Vietnam. At some point somebody told me that the Vietnamese Communist Party had to be bad, because they were "Stalinists", and "Stalin had killed millions of innocent people.

I read the first edition of Robert Conquest's book *The Great Terror* when it was published - around 1974 or so. I was shaken! But I could read the Russian language, because I had already been studying Russian literature for a long time.

So I studied Conquest's book carefully. I discovered Conquest was dishonest in his use of sources. His footnotes did not support his anti-Stalin conclusions! Basically, he used any source that was hostile to Stalin, regardless of whether it was reliable or not.

Eventually I decided to write something about the so-called "Terror." It took a long time, but in 1988 I finally published "New Light On Old Stories About Marshal Tukhachevskii : Some Documents Reconsidered.

<http://chss.montclair.edu/english/furr/tukh.html>

During the 1980s and 1990s I studied the research being done by the new school of historians on the Soviet Union that included Arch Getty, Robert Thurston, Roberta Manning, Sheila Fitzpatrick, Jerry Hough, Lewis Siegelbaum, Lynne Viola, and others. At that time they were sometimes called the "Young Turks" or "revisionists."

By carefully studying the evidence already available, and - most important - by trying hard to be objective - they were already showing that all the Cold-War, Trotskyist, Khrushchevite, and later the Gorbachev-Eltsin "history" was fatally compromised by political bias. They proved it

was not history but anti-communist propaganda.

In 1999 a Moscow-based researcher, Vladimir Bobrov, emailed me. He told me about the publication of documents from the former Soviet archives, sent me some, and pointed me towards others. These documents provided evidence that demanded a complete rewriting of Soviet history, including the role of Stalin.

Since then I have been trying to make some small contribution towards discovering the true history of the Stalin period. I am glad that you too think this is an important project!

I wish you success!

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Though I do not agree with some of his statements, I am glad I was able to conduct this interview and give a voice to those defending the history of Socialism in the Soviet Union.

posted by Carl Miller @ 6:55 PM [0 comments](#)