

**Stalin's Ghost:
the Legacies of Soviet History and the
Future of Russia**

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Foreword

Since the year 2000, the Telders Lecture is organized by the Telders Foundation, the think tank that carries out research for the benefit of liberalism in general and for the Dutch Liberal Party VVD in particular. The Telders Foundation publishes books with the results of its research, and it organises meetings: conferences, seminars, an annual liberal summer school, and a regular Telders Lecture. The purpose of this lecture is to stimulate public debate in the Netherlands by inviting a leading scholar or politician to provide us with profound, well-based ideas and insights. The lectures may cover a broad spectrum of relevant issues concerning science and politics.

The Telders Foundation organises the lecture regularly as a tribute to Professor B.M. Telders after whom the foundation is named. During his short life (1903-1945), Professor Telders was highly respected in various capacities: as a lawyer, a philosopher and as a liberal politician. This combination of science and politics is also very characteristic for the Telders Lectures. Professor Telders showed great courage as a politician throughout the German occupation of the Netherlands during World War II and it was this courage that eventually cost him his life. He died of typhus in the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp, just a few days before the camp was liberated by the Allied forces.

The first lecture, in November 2000, was on the 'new economy'. Unlikely as it may now seem, at the turn of the century the idea had become widely popular that we had reached a modern, completely different economy, one without the usual detriments like inflation, unemployment and recession; let alone an economic depression. In that first Telders Lecture, almost eight-and-a-half years ago, Gerrit Zalm – then the liberal vice Prime Minister and Minister of Finance in the Netherlands – punctured this 'new economy'-balloon. Subsequent Telders Lectures have dealt, amongst others, with the influence of mass culture on the future of liberal democracy and with the future of European integration from a classical liberal perspective.

Tonight, our guest is Orlando Figes, a notorious Professor of History at Birkbeck College, University of London. Figes is famous for his well-documented books on Russian history, in particular:

- *A People's Tragedy: The Russian Revolution, 1891-1924*
- *Natasha's Dance: A Cultural History of Russia*
- *The Whisperers: Private Life in Stalin's Russia*

All of these three books have been translated in many languages, including Dutch. What probably strikes every reader of Professor Figes' last book, *The Whisperers*, besides all the horrors he describes, is that in Stalin's Russia there hardly was any private life at all. As Professor Figes makes abundantly clear, this certainly was no coincidence. The state's invasion of the private lives of its citizens, was the product of a deliberate policy of the communist leadership from Lenin on, to destroy every form of individualism as well as every aspect of family life. The state's pervasiveness was not uncommon for Russians – indeed, the communists elaborated on a tradition of anti-individuality and brutality in the country – but in a perverse way the communist leadership took this tradition to its extremes.

Like in so many other aspects, in operating thus they showed that communism is the very opposite of liberalism. Liberals typically do not entertain any Utopia's, but Soviet Russia provided them with a convincing Anti-Utopia. After all, for liberals the ultimate political goal is the pursuit of the largest feasible freedom of individuals. Liberals deem a private life for an individual and his or her family, to be of the utmost importance, and therefore they display a due – I would almost say: 'holy' – respect for a private sphere in which the individual is free from public interference. For Lenin, Stalin, and their successors – on the contrary – trampling private lives of individuals and families was vital to establish the victory of communism.

In the end, fortunately, communism did not triumph in Russia. But the question remains what damage has been done to Russian society by more than seven decades of communism. Will the dark spots that have been left by the ruthless policies of Lenin and Stalin, ever be erased? Or is it

not feasible that one of the future Russian leaders will ever have even the *intention* to make a clean sweep? What about Putin's policies to strangle the rule of law and democracy and to reassert Russian claims in the world with an assertive foreign policy? Are these to be considered as almost inevitable outcomes of history? And how should we in the West deal with the new Russia, haunted by the ghost of Stalin? Very few people would be more fitted to shed an authoritative light on such questions as Professor Orlando Figes.

The Board of the Telders Foundation
Prof.mr.dr. F. Bolkestein, March 2009

Stalin's Ghost: the Legacies of Soviet History and the Future of Russia

Orlando Figes

Tomorrow, 5 March 2009, is the 56th anniversary of Stalin's death. He died on the fifth of March 1953. Stalin is dead, but the ghost of Stalin is still alive. In fact it is more alive now than probably at any other time in the last fifty years. He is very much alive as a political figure. There is a popular nostalgia for Stalin at the moment. A very positive image of Stalin is being presented in the mass media in Russia. According to a survey in 2005 42% of the Russian people and 60% of those over the age of 60 wanted the return of a leader like Stalin. You could say they got what they wanted: mister Putin.

Putin is rehabilitating the image of Stalin. No one near the Kremlin or the Russian government is trying to deny Stalin's crimes – that would be too difficult: by *conservative* estimates 25 million people were repressed. By which is meant: people executed, sentenced to the Gulag, deported as members of nationalities, people sent to administrative exile. To deny 25 million people's repression would be difficult. What the regime is doing is emphasizing Stalin's so-called positive achievements – building a great country, the Soviet Union, winning the war against Hitler. This is obviously an alarming development.

This lecture poses the question how this could have happened. How especially could it have happened after the victory of the so-called Russian democracy in the 1990s? How could it have happened after the collapse of the Soviet system so recently in 1991, after a decade in which the Russians were supposedly denouncing their violent past? And what does this rehabilitation of Stalin mean for the future of Russia? So the story of tonight is not the story of Stalin as such or the story of the people who lived under Stalin, which is the story of *The Whisperers*. Here will be told the story of Stalin's afterlife. The story of Stalin's ghost.

After his death there was a great outpouring of mass grief. What were that grief and the scenes of mass hysteria about? Throughout this evening's lecture I will draw from the project that I carried out for *The Whisperers*. That was a large-scale oral history project conducted between 2003 and 2006 with the Memorial society.

The Memorial organization began in the late 1980s as a human rights and historical research centre to represent the victims of oppression in the Soviet Union. Memorial carried out many oral history projects, helped victims of oppression trace missing relatives by representing their interests and applying for documents from the KGB archives. It is a civic organization. It has got commemoratives, statues and plates put up at sites of mass repression and in city centres to mark the destination of the Soviet population.

For the oral history project – which recovered from private homes across Russia several hundred family archives – over a thousand interviews with people who were survivors of the Stalinist system were conducted. Among the questions asked to everyone, because it was the one thing people could remember, was: what were you doing the day that Stalin died? His death was announced the sixth of March 1953. Until the funeral three days later his body lay in state in the Hall of Columns near the Red Square. And that is where you got – what you might have in your mind now – a huge crowd to file past the body to pay respect, and the massive crush of people outside the Hall of Columns wanting to see their Great Leader. We do not know how many, but well over a hundred people were killed in the crush. In a way those were perhaps some of his last victims.

How are we going to explain this hysteria? Many talk about people with floods of tears. Was this genuine love of Stalin or was it a release of emotion, some sort of catharsis? Someone who had a good close-up view is the writer Konstantin Simonov, who features prominently in *The Whisperers*. I worked with his families archive. Simonov was Stalin's favourite writer. He stood guard over Stalin's body, so he saw people filing past from close range. He wrote in his diary on the sixteenth of March: 'I do not know how to give an accurate description of the scene – or even how to put

it into words. Not everybody cried, not everybody sobbed, but somehow everybody showed some deep emotion. I could sense a kind of spiritual convulsion inside every person filing past at the very moment they first saw Stalin in his coffin.'

Now lots of people undoubtedly did grief at Stalin's death, and they were not just Stalinists. There were many victims of oppression who grieved at his death. Mark Laskin, who is a relative of Simonov's, certainly had no reason to love Stalin: his whole family had been repressed by Stalin. Nonetheless, he broke down into tears when he heard the news. Surprised by his own emotional reaction, he thought it was connected to his own biography. Many years later he wrote in his memoirs: 'I had spent my entire adult life in Stalin's shadow – I was sixteen when Lenin died in 1924 – and all my thoughts had been shaped by the presence of Stalin. I waited on his words. All my questions were addressed to him, and he answered all of them, laconically, precisely, without room for doubt.' For many of Laskin's age or younger – we just heard he must have been born in 1908 – Stalin was a moral reference point. A sort of hidden figure in the background of everybody's lives. Their grief was perhaps a natural reaction to the disorientation which they were bound to feel on his death, almost regardless of the experience they had undergone in his reign. Although probably for the older generation whose views perhaps had been formed at an earlier age, before the revolution, the death of Stalin was less likely to be a cause for rejoice.

Svetlana Sbitneva was born in 1937 in the Altai region of Siberia. Her father had been arrested when she was born and shot shortly afterwards in 1938. This family came from Omsk, where they had been active in the social-democratic movement before 1917. No less than sixteen of her mother's relatives were arrested in the Great Terror. It shows how some families can be affected. All but one of them, Svetlana's grandmother, were either shot by the Bolsheviks or perished in the camps. Svetlana herself, who was told very little about her family and who grew up to be a model Soviet schoolgirl, like all schoolgirls of course loved Stalin. On the day his death was announced she came home from school with black ribbons in

her hair. There had been a mourning ceremony at her school, as there were in all institutions. The children had decorated Stalin's portrait with palm leaves and white lilies. A semi-Christian veneration of the leader. This left her deeply moved. 'We were all crying', she recalls, 'we thought that it was the end of the world'. As soon as she got home, Svetlana climbed up on the roof of the house where she liked to be alone. There she found her grandmother. In an interview Svetlana said about her grandmother: 'She was sitting there crying quietly and crossing herself in a way I had never seen before. She saw that I had been crying and said: "Do not worry, dear, I am crying from happiness. Because he killed my family: my sons, my brothers, my husband, my father." This was the first time Svetlana had been told: 'Stalin killed them all – leaving only me and your mother.' 'That was the first time I heard any of this', said Svetlana, 'and then the two of us sat down and cried together, one from joy, one from grief'.

But in this older generation, and even among dire victims of oppression, there were also those who grieved from Stalin's death. Zinaida Bushueva had lost her husband in the Great Terror of 1938. She herself was arrested shortly after it, and spent twenty years, first in the ALZHIR labour camp for women in Kazakhstan, and then in various administrative exiles – most of the time with her three children. Her mother had rescued these children from various orphanages, and taken them to be reunited with their mother in the camp in Kazakhstan. Zinaida's daughter Angelina recalls her mother coming home in tears the day she heard that Stalin died: 'They were all crying, my mother and my sister and my grandmother. My grandmother said it would have been better if she had died in stead of him. She was four years older than Stalin. She loved him. She often wrote to him. She believed that it was Stalin who had allowed her to write to her daughter [in the labour camp] so that she could reunite the family [...]. "It would be better if I had died", my grandmother kept saying. I did not contradict her – I loved Stalin too. But today [in 2003] I would say: "Granny, what on earth are you saying?" She herself had suffered so much. Her daughter had been arrested. Her grandchildren sent to orphanages. Her son-in-law had been shot. Even her own husband had been persecuted for being a priest [...]. Yet she was prepared to lay down her life to save Stalin.'

Fear and moral amnesia

Now I think the reaction of Angelina's grandmother perhaps provides some clue in understanding the popular reaction to Stalin's death, because like Angelina's grandmother many people assumed that Stalin did not know about everything that was happening in terms of the mass oppression. This Russian myth – the Tsar is good, the police are bad, Stalin is good, the police are bad, the terror is all being carried out without Stalin's knowledge, and if only Stalin knew everything would be corrected! – was a common assumption. That is why so many people like Angelina's grandmother wrote to Stalin saying: please sort this out, my mother, my father, my husband – or whoever – is innocent, this is all a dreadful mistake.

That belief in Stalin preserved a basic structure of believe in the system. In a way this belief in the system was essential to survive. We carried out an interview with someone called Dmitry Streletsky who had a terrible family history. He was one of fourteen children in a so-called Gulag family sent into administrative exile. He grew up in a labour camp. Dmitry never got a proper job until he was in his fifties. He says in an interview that at that time he believed in Stalin and he believed in the existence of real enemies of the people even though he had been declared one of them. At a point where he is trying to reflect analytically, he says: 'in a way it seems weird, but it may make it easier to survive'. This somehow does make sense. If you do not believe in the system, if you do not believe that there is some logic to the repression of enemies of the people, and if everything that you suffer is for nothing, then all you have left is despair.

For the vast majority of the Soviet people Stalin's death was not a release from fear. People assume that Stalin died, and it was all over. That is not the case. Fear that Stalin's death would lead to a new way of mass arrests, agitated many families, especially those who had lost relatives in the Terror. Elga Torchinskaia says: 'The general reaction in our family was: "what will happen next?" We were afraid of the government, we did not know what to expect from it, and we were scared that it might retaliate Stalin's death by making more arrests.'

It seems to me that the first release from fear is the exposure of the Doctors' plot. The Doctors' plot was the most insane of all the waves of terror. It came up at the height of a general wave of anti-Semitism in late Stalin's Russia, and was connected to Stalin's campaign against elements of the political police. Stalin basically persecuted phantom Jewish doctors accused of trying to poison the leadership. The problem was that there were no Jewish doctors in the Kremlin. So they had to invent a few who under torture confessed they had tried to poison Stalin. The point is that on the eve of Stalin's death it created a mass hysterical wave of fear. People would refuse to go to doctors, just in case they were Jewish. Then suddenly Stalin died. Within a few days the political police who had taken over the collective leadership exposed the Doctors' plot for what it was: a complete fabrication. This was the first psychological moment when people suddenly were released from fear.

For the Torchinsky family – I referred to Elga already – who were a Jewish family, the conclusion of the Doctors' plot was a huge relief. They took it as proof that all the plots by so-called enemies, were fabrications by the state, and that therefore they need not fear new waves of arrest. Released from fear Elga herself became confident, and began to speak out against people who had bullied her because she was Jewish. She worked as an assistant in the ethnographic museum in Leningrad. One of her senior colleagues, who was an ardent Stalinist, had written dozens of denunciations of Jewish workers in the museum – some of whom had been dismissed from their jobs. She knew it was pointless at the time of the Doctors' plot to argue with this woman. But after the exposure of the plot she chose to confront her, and spoke out in a way that would have sent her possibly to the camps before. Elga said: 'I told her [Maria] that she did not know what she was talking about, and that everything she said had been picked up from people in food queues [...]. Maria began to threaten me: "do you know what I can do to you? You shut up!" And then from somewhere, I do not know from where, I found the courage to reply: please do not threaten me, I am not afraid of you.' This is obviously with the benefit of hindsight for her psychological relief she felt no fear.

It seems the second and most obvious release from fear is Khrushchev's speech from February 1956. Khrushchev denounced the cult of Stalin and exposed the terror within the Bolshevik party of 1937 to 1938 that was anti-Leninist, anti-revolutionary. But of course he did not question the nature of the Soviet system as a whole. Stalin and one or two other leaders were blamed for everything. The rest of the collective leadership was being exonerated.

One wonders what is the reaction then from this second release from fear? Did suddenly everybody speak? Was there suddenly a mass wave of de-Stalinization? This is certainly the impression we might gain by reading the memoirs of the intelligentsia, many who immediately sprang to action and wrote memoirs of the Stalin period and the first period of the fall. One of them, Liudmila Alekseyeva, a graduate at Moscow University who later joined the dissidents and then emigrated to the USA, wrote in the period after 1956: 'The congress [the Twentieth Party Congress] put an end to our lonely questioning of the Soviet system [...]. Young men and women began to lose their fear of sharing views, information, beliefs, questions. Every night we gathered in cramped apartments to recite poetry, read "unofficial" prose and swap stories that, taken together, yielded a realistic picture of what was going on in our country.'

This is certainly a common view of how it was for the intelligentsia. At that moment for ordinary people – not members of the intelligentsia – there was too a sense of release after 1956. For instance, for Lydia Babushkina whose father had been shot in 1938, Khrushchev's speech gave some sort of official sanction to the feelings of injustice she had harboured since her childhood, when her father had disappeared. Before 1956, she was too frightened to talk about her feelings, even to her mother and her grandmother, who were themselves afraid to talk about the arrest of her father. This was mainly due to the fact that they both worked in a munitions factory, where they might be sacked because of her spoiled biography by the fact that this repression was discovered. At times, Lydia said, their silence had made her doubt her father's innocence. After Khrushchev's speech she no longer felt these doubts. At last she had the courage not just to ques-

tion her mother about who arrested her father for the first time, but also to express her views to her fellow workers at the clothing factory where she worked. In Smolensk one night in the dormitory attached to the factory Lydia told the other girls that Stalin had been the real enemy of the people, because he gave orders to arrest innocent citizens like her father. The other girls became frightened. 'Quiet, quiet, they can arrest you for talk like that!', they said. Lydia was not put off and she said: 'Let them. I will tell them loud and clear exactly what Khrushchev said. Let them listen, and they will realize that it is the truth.'

It seems that such talk among ordinary people was very exceptional. Even after 1956, the vast majority of ordinary people was still too coward and frightened by the memory of the Stalinist regime to speak as openly and critically as Lydia did. The accepted understanding of the Khrushchev thaw as a time of nation wide debate and political questioning, was largely shaped by the memoirs of the intelligentsia, not being whole representative. Open talk was possibly the norm among intellectuals who used the thaw to grapple with the history of terror. For the mass of the Soviet population, who remained confused and ignorant about the forces that shaped their lives, stoicism and silence were more common ways for dealing with the past. That silence is one that dominates what virtually everyone told us about what it is like when relatives return from camps.

After 1956, it was a period when millions of people were returning to their families, either from labour camps or cities of administrative exile, with people released from camps with minus fifty. This means you cannot live in any of the fifty listed cities of the Soviet Union which were the most populous. If you came from Moscow, which is number one on the list, and you get minus fifty, the most you can do is live a hundred kilometres from the centre of Moscow. So families are reunited after relatives return from labour camps. It is only after rehabilitation that they return. And families try and patch themselves together again.

What everyone talks about is the silence of returning relatives. People were broken physically, but they were also broken mentally. Many of them

were frightened about talking. On their relief they signed papers stating they will not say what has happened to them in the camps, and many of them take this to mean they cannot talk about anything having to do with their experience. There was also among many people a fear of re-arrest. People literally do live with suitcases packed under their beds in case *they* come again. That fear of re-arrest, many of our people said, continued right through to the 1970s and 1980s. In fact, we have had interviews with people still dealing with a very high level of fear. One woman Nonna Panova, who was 78 at the time of the interview, came from St. Petersburg. She talked for a long time and in the first interview, telling her life story, the story of her family, she suddenly noticed the microphone on the table. She was warned that there was a microphone, that she was being recorded, but she had lost herself in the interview. For this woman a microphone was an instrument for the KGB. She suddenly became hysterical. She said: 'O, do not arrest me! Do not send me back to Kolyma.' Some of her relatives had been sent to Kolyma in Siberia, the worst of the labour camps. I said: 'Do not worry, it is okay', but she broke off the interview. Only days later she came back and said she would like to continue.

So this fear lasts a long time. There was, together with fear among the people returning from the camps, a feeling of inferiority, a sense of shame, a feeling of their being a stigma. Although people officially received their rehabilitation, there is always a little bit of guilt left. Even being cleared of the charges for a lack of evidence as your rehabilitation paper would say, it does not say 'you are innocent'. This stigma of oppression people continued to carry. It means people continued to be silent. Not just out of fear, but in many cases because they were afraid people at home would not understand. People would not understand what they had been through. How can you understand someone when you do not know what it is like to be in a convoy of deportees? This is something which Solzhenitsyn tried to communicate in his *Gulag Archipelago*. No one can really understand what it is like, unless they have been there. Many people felt not even their family was able to understand what they had been through. More importantly perhaps they did not want to alienate their children from the Soviet system by telling them about the Gulag. Their children had to grow up in

the Soviet system, had to make their way. If they told them what they had been through, maybe it would have been more difficult for them.

For all these reasons there was silence in families. Zinaida Bushueva who had been in a labour camp for women in Kazakhstan and was reunited with her children there, never spoke about the camps after she returned. She did tell the children about the circumstances of her own arrest and the arrest of her husband who was shot in 1938. Even in the last years of her life in the late 1980s she would put up defences whenever she was questioned about her past. 'In our family', recalls her daughter Angelina, 'no one talked about the reasons for my mother's arrest, or why we had no father. It was a closed subject. After the Twentieth Party Congress I tried to find out more. But Mama would just say: "The less you know, the easier you live," or "The more you know, the quicker you grow old". She had many of these expressions to close the conversation down.' According to her daughter Zinaida had no interest in politics. She had been quite political before. 'She could not allow herself', Angelina said. The fear she brought back from the camps made her choose a position of uncritical acceptance of everything she was told by the Soviet regime. Zinaida saw the contradictions between propaganda and reality. Although she had directly experienced the injustices of the regime, like millions of other ordinary citizens she never stopped to reflect critically on the reality she observed. Acceptance of Soviet reality was no doubt for her, as it was for millions, a coping mechanism, a way to survive.

If we bear in mind the silence – I hesitate to call it ignorance because it is not ignorance – if we think about this coping mechanism of survival, we begin to understand the lack of reflection on the nature of the Soviet system. Then we begin to understand the avoidance of awkward questions about the system, and about the repression, especially among the younger generation who were protected because they were not told. That, it seems, helps us to begin to approach the main theme of this evening's Telders Lecture which is the paradox of victims of oppression feeling nostalgia for the Stalinist regime.

Let us consider the biography of Nadezhda Maksimova. Nadezhda grew up completely unaware of her family's history. Her father, a peasant from the Novgorod region, worked as a carpenter in Leningrad. He was arrested twice in the 1920s, and was rearrested in 1932 when Nadezhda was only three. He was sent to exile with his family in the Arctic's, where Nadezhda grew up oblivious to the reason why they were living in the Arctic Circle. Her father was arrested, and in prison briefly, again in 1938 – Nadezhda was told he was on a work trip – before the family finally settled in Penza. In 1946 Nadezhda enrolled as a student at the Medical Institute in Leningrad. She went on to become a physician. It was only short before her mother's death in 1992 that Nadezhda found out about her father's multiple arrests and the eight years he spent in various prisons, labour camps and special settlements. At the moment of discovery she saw her father's name in the newspaper along with the names of her grandfather and her uncle. They were on a list of former political prisoners posthumously rehabilitated after the collapse of the Soviet regime. Nadezhda showed the list to her mother who first said: 'Oh that is all so long ago, why drag all that up again?' After Nadezhda insisted her mother told her everything.

Her parents had wanted to protect her by not putting her in a position where she would feel obliged to declare her spoiled biography. Every child going to an institute of high education was obliged to fill out a questionnaire in which there was a mandated question: has any of your family members ever been arrested? 'Throughout my life', says Nadezhda, 'whenever I was asked to complete the questionnaire I was able to write "no", and because I did not know about my father, I was able to say that with a clear conscience, without any of the anxiety which I would have felt if I had been forced to lie. I am sure that is why I always got away with it.' She was genuinely at ease. Her parents had maintained the silence, obviously, after 1956. They, despite Khrushchev's speech, continued to think it was too dangerous to tell Nadezhda about the past, in case she told her friends or the political circumstances changed. As a consequence, until the age of 63, Nadezhda, as she herself admits, had little concern for the victims of Stalinist repression. This indifference was no doubt shared by other Soviet citizens whose lives were unaffected directly by the terror or who perhaps,

like Nadezhda, never knew.

Reflecting on her life in the 1930s and 1940s Nadezhda recalls: 'I had heard about the repressions, but they made no impression on me whatsoever. In 1946, for example, there were mass arrests in the neighbouring village in Penza, but somehow they passed me by, I did not understand or even tried to understand what was going on [...]. Today I find it hard to explain this – that these events took place in parallel with my own life, but did not affect me in the least. Somehow I managed to avoid it all.'

So this ignorance and silence – as I think you will all begin to understand perhaps – worked in complex ways to enforce what I would like to call a moral amnesia, a type of political conformity which passes down several generations. Children brought up in families who had suffered from trauma pick up on that fear instinctively. They are not told what happened, but they pick up codes, behaviour, inhibitions – what some of my interviewers themselves referred to as genetic fear, fear inherited. This creates internal barriers.

At the end of our project we began to carry out interviews with particular cohorts of people born between 1948 and 1956. They were too young to have experienced or remember the Stalin years directly, but they were brought up by parents who had been repressed and they grew up in the age of the dissidents in the late 1960s and 1970s. What we found was very interesting. In this generation they all talked about an instinctive fear. They had been taught not to question authority. This generation had been brought up or had come to understand that they should not talk about certain things outside their homes. They should not even talk about certain things inside their homes. This goes a long way to explain the longevity of the Soviet system. I do not think anyone today would argue that the Brezhnev regime of the late 60s and 70s, and the early 80s went on out of political believe. It went on as a system – people believed in the system, the system worked, continued to work – it seems that above all it went on because there was no opposition. The dissidents were tiny in number, although no doubt millions sympathized with them. But because of this

genetic fear, perhaps because of these internal barriers people may sympathize with the dissidents but no longer step over the barrier to join them.

Collective pride

In the Brezhnev era the unofficial memory of Stalin was overlaid by official myths. So there was a very interesting phenomenon of people unable to make sense of their own experience. They were confused by the traumas they had suffered or their families had undergone, without having a political or historical context in which to place those direct experiences. In the Soviet myths of the Great Patriotic War or the building of socialism they found a collective narrative in which they could place their meaning and link their own experience to the experience of millions of others.

Although everybody's individual experience of Stalinism may be traumatic and therefore extraordinary and unique to themselves, in some way these collective myths became powerful forces of political mobilization and political unity. They enabled people to place their extraordinary individual experience in an ordinary context shared by others. No one wants to carry through life something of a burden, a suffering which is unique to them. They want to give meaning to their suffering in some higher narrative. That was what these official myths, which became very powerful in the Brezhnev era, enabled people to do.

The collective memory of the Great Patriotic War was the most potent in this respect. It enabled veterans to think of their pain and losses as having a larger purpose and meaning. Represented of course by the victory in 1945, in which they could take pride. My colleague Catherine Merridale conducted interviews with veterans in Kursk for her book on the Soviet army in the war. She found that these veterans did not reflect on their experiences with bitterness or self-pity. They accepted their losses stoically. Merridale tells: 'rather than trying to relive the grimmest scenes of war, they tended to adopt the language of the vanished Soviet state, talking about honour and pride, of justified revenge, of motherland, Stalin and

the absolute necessity of faith.' As she explains, this identification with the Soviet war myth was a coping mechanism for these veterans, enabling them to live with their painful memories and give them some higher meaning. Similarly obviously the people who returned from the labour camps often found consolation in Stalin's idea that this Gulag labouring was a contribution to the Soviet economy.

It seems paradoxical, but many of the people who had been in the labour camps look back with enormous pride at the factories, dams, and cities they built. This pride stems from their continued belief in the Soviet system and its ideology despite the injustices they had undergone, and in part perhaps from their need to find a larger meaning for their suffering.

We carried out interviews in Norilsk. It is the most awful place on earth I have ever seen. It is on the 69th parallel, sees very little sunlight, has a temperature of minus 60 degrees, and the toxic atmosphere is such that no vegetation can grow there. It is a city entirely populated and colonized from the beginning by Gulag workers. The population of 130.000 people who continue to live there are all either former prisoners or their descendants. They are all immensely proud of Norilsk. At the first sort of open meeting we had with about 30 Norilsk veterans of the labour camp, they burst spontaneously into the Norilsk song, saying how people of a special type had to be there to survive. Many of them showed up with the medals they had won as Gulag workers. They tried to convince us that the place was beautiful. They compared it to Leningrad or pointed to buildings built by slaves in the centre of Norilsk.

A similar paradox seems to underlie the popularity of Stalin. As suggested at the beginning this is a powerful movement particularly among the elderly people. 60% of those aged 60 or older and 42% of the population in general would like the return of a leader like Stalin. So Stalin is also popular among the younger people. Why do younger people like the idea of a person like Stalin?

For the older generation this nostalgia seems to be only loosely linked

with politics or ideology. For those who recall the Stalin years it has more to do with emotions invested in remembrance of the past. They remember the legendary period of their youth. When the shops were full of groceries. When there was social order and security. When their lives were organized and given meaning by the simple goals of ideal plans. Everything was clear in black and white because Stalin did the thinking for them and told them what to do. For these people the good old days of Stalin perhaps reflect uncertainty of their lives as pensioners particularly since the collapse of the Soviet regime in 1991. The rise in prices of many goods beyond their means made them feel nostalgic to the old days. The loss of their savings by inflation. The rampant criminality that keeps old people frightened in their homes. All these factors obviously play a part in their feelings of nostalgia.

Those who succumb to this nostalgia were not just those with a certain status in the Stalinist system – the vast army of Soviet officials and petty functionaries, camp guards, policemen, chauffeurs, and so on, who were little Stalins in their own world. It applied also to ordinary citizens – people with no special place in the Stalinist regime, but who somehow became entangled in its destiny. It was also not unknown to Stalin's victims and their descendents. We interviewed many of them, Leonid Saltykov for example. He was the son of a priest who had been shot in 1938. Leonid virtualized conceiving the arrest of his father, as did many who had relatives who had been enemies of the people. He said nothing about his father when he became a factory worker and then an engineer. In 1965 Leonid joined the party and ended up as secretary of the party committee in the factory where he worked. He was a fanatical supporter of Stalin all his life. He mourned Stalin's death, and kept a picture of Stalin on his desk until his retirement from the factory in 1993.

During interviews Leonid denied that Stalin was responsible for the mass arrests in the 1930s, including the arrest of his father. This is what he said: 'Yes, my father suffered, and so did many others too, but Stalin was still better than any of the leaders that we have today', he is thinking of Yeltsin. 'He [Stalin] was an honest man, even if the people around him

were not [...]. Do not forget, thanks to him we won the war, and that is a great achievement. If today someone tried to fight a war like that, there would be no guarantee that Russia would win it, no guarantee. Stalin built our factories and our railways. He brought down the price of bread. He spurred us all to work because we knew that if we studied hard, and went on to an institute we were guaranteed a good job, and could even choose the factory we worked in. Everything depended on how hard you worked.' That sense of hard work gets its rewards. That work, loyalty, gets you a place in the system, gets you security is really quite key to this sense of nostalgic for the certainties of the Soviet and Stalinist system that you find among the older generation.

Many may remember one of the few protests against the Putin regime. It was in 2003. Protesters were objecting to the payment of their benefits in money. They still wanted their benefits to come as they had come in the Soviet days: a basket of goods given to them every month, and subsidized rents on their apartments. This is the Soviet place they get for hard work and loyalty: they get the security within the system. This was very common. Listen for example to another victim of repression who is nostalgic for Stalin: Iraida Faivisovich. She was four years old and lived with her parents who were hairdressers in Osa. They were arrested and both sent to the Gulag in 1939. In interviews in 2002 she argued that life had been better under Stalin: 'People did not kill each other in the streets! It was safe then to go out at night.' Like Leonid she believed people in those days were honest: 'Of course, there were sometimes shortages of food or clothes, but on the whole they delivered on their promises.'

Like many people, Iraida had grown up in a communal apartment – where families sometimes even had to share a room, and children were running around in the corridors. When you grow up with playmates everywhere in the corridor and in the yard, you remember the communal apartments as a place of warmth and comradeship. For older people, who fear what people might hear in the next room about their conversation, and fear denunciation by a neighbour, it was not so funny. But for people like Iraida, growing up in a communal apartment gave a sense of nostalgia for a time in their

lives which was warmer and more spiritual. She says: 'Life under Stalin was spiritually richer – we lived more peacefully and happily. Because we were equally poor, we did not place much emphasis on material values but had a lot of fun – everything was open, everything was shared between friends and families. People helped each other. We lived in each other's rooms, and celebrated holidays with everyone together on the street. Today every family lives only for itself.' For people like Iraida this comradeship is what gave meaning to their lives.

Rehabilitating Stalin

This nostalgia for the Soviet way of life goes a long way to explain the politics of the Putin regime, and the return of Stalin's ghost to Russia in the past few years. From the start Putin understood the importance of historical rhetoric for his national politics particularly to play the popular nostalgia for the Soviet Union. The collapse of the Soviet Union was a humiliation to most Russians. In a matter of a few months they lost everything – an empire, an ideology, an economic system that had given them security, superpower status, national pride, and an identity forged from Soviet history. Within months they had to beg for relief from the West, which lectured them about democracy and human rights. They had to confront their past, because after 1991 suddenly the television screens and the public media were having discussions about Stalin's pride. It was very much part of the goal of Russian democrats in the 1990s that Russian society should confront its past. It was only by confronting this past that Russia could democratize.

This was a time when an organization like Memorial was at the height of its authority, and often appeared in public media discussions about Stalin's pride. The general message they put across was that it was not just Stalin who was to blame, as Khrushchev had said. They said that there was connected responsibility for what had happened under Stalin, and that for Russia to renounce the authoritarian past or the authoritarian habits of the Soviet past there had to be a genuine cultural and moral reform of the

nation. This reform could only start with an unflinching recognition of the crimes committed collectively in its name. It was an act of national repentance. The real power and lasting legacy of the Stalinist system and the structures of Stalin's power, as Russian historian Mikhail Baitalsky once put it 'was the Stalinism that entered into all of us'. Many Russians felt uncomfortable about that. They had been brought up with the Soviet myths of the great mission of the Soviet Union: the achievements of Soviet science and technology, the achievements of five year plans, and the victory in the war.

They did not understand why they suddenly had to feel guilty about that past. Many Russians felt resentful about being lectured, that this was suddenly imposed on them by a regime – the Yeltsin regime – which was basically turning to the West. They felt that this was somehow a capitulation, and above all a humiliation. Perhaps they felt resentful or awkward about having to confront this genuinely. People had lived in the Soviet system without thinking about uncomfortable questions. They lived their lives without questioning their parents, without questioning their bosses, without questioning people in power. That is how they were brought up to live. They did not ask discomfiting moral questions for themselves. Suddenly, they had to confront all these awkward questions about the moral compromises they had to make, perhaps the questions they had never asked, perhaps the people they had lost, forgotten or renounced. All those questions were very awkward for people to suddenly face.

Putin understood this as a humiliation for the Russian people. He shared the sense that Russia had nothing to apologize for – a nationalism which was at the centre of his ideology from the beginning. The restoration of something of the Soviet Union, necessarily entailed a change of historical politics in the politics of history. From the beginning Putin built up his own historical mythology. Combining, if you like, the Soviet myths with above all the victory of 1945, but clearly stripped of their communist symbols, their communist packaging. Stalin is not revered as a communist but as a national leader. Linking this Soviet heritage with a long continuing of statist traditions of authoritarianism in Russia. Going back to the Tsars,

right back to Peter the Great, the founder of Putin's own city St. Petersburg. Through this mythology, Putin fostered the idea that Russia's own traditions of authoritarian rule are somehow morally equal to the Western democratic tradition, and that Russia will follow its own path of sovereign democracy without lectures from the West. Indeed, you often hear his supporters say that Russians value a strong state, economic growth and security more than the liberal concepts of human rights and democracy which have no roots in Russian history.

The rehabilitation of Stalin is central to this. Stalin features prominently now in mass media which are all controlled by the Kremlin. There has recently been a television drama *Stalin's life* in which an elderly Stalin reflects on his achievements in the past and it was all given a very positive gloss. And then of course, you might have read in the newspapers about it, a poll in which Stalin was voted the third most popular Russian in history. Interesting that the man who won was Alexander Nevsky, a semi-mythical figure in Russian medieval history. The Russian producer Sergej Eisenstein made a famous film of Nevsky fighting the Teutonic knights who fell into the ice. Again, this is the image of the Russian patriotic leader who fights the foreigners.

The point then is not that the regime is trying to deny Stalin's crimes, but that it is trying to emphasize Stalin's achievements as the builder of the country's glorious Soviet past. The unofficial memory of Stalinism as a history of oppression is increasingly pushed to the margins of the national consciousness. The regime has been very careful to create this patriotic myth of Stalin, of the Soviet system generally as a part of Russian history in which Russians can take pride.

At the national conference of high school teachers in Moscow in June 2007, Putin complained about the mess and confusion he sees in the teaching of Soviet history. He called for common standards to be introduced in Russian schools. He wanted a more positive message to be given to Russian schoolchildren about their Soviet past. One of the participants, a schoolteacher, said during a discussion: 'In 1990-1991 we disarmed ideo-

logically. [We adopted] a very uncertain, abstract ideology of 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.' And Putin said: '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 for 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.' Then the teacher says: 'O my god, what a confusing ideas [...]'. And he is not allowed to speak as then Putin interrupts him and says about people writing the Western influenced ideas on Soviet history: 'Oh, they will write, alright. 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.'

Four years before there was already a textbook – *National History of the Twentieth Century for the 10th and 11th Grades* – written by Igor Dolutsky which was a model of a modern democratic textbook teaching Soviet history. It had lots of documents from the archives and invited students to ask questions at the end of each chapter and presented different points of view. But what Dolutsky did was to compare the victim of oppression under Stalin with the system of oppression under Hitler. Because of that, the Ministry of Education banned the book which had been used in hundreds of schools.

Four days after the conference, the Duma passed a law giving power to the Ministry of Education to decide what textbook should be published and what textbook should be used to teach history in Russian schools. I have never seen the Duma act so quickly.

I can talk for hours about Russian textbooks, but I need to come to a conclusion. I want to tell you about what has happened in the last year – the battle over the teaching and presentation of history. At the conference

in June 2007, mentioned earlier, the Kremlin began to promote its own textbook. In fact, the Minister of Education turned up at the conference along with the senior administrator of the presidential administration to promote it. It actually turned out that the textbook had been commissioned by the Ministry of Education. Indeed by the president himself, Vladimir Putin. Putin had sent out personal instructions to the authors of this textbook on how they could present the leaders of the Soviet Union and post-Soviet world. It basically went like this: Stalin – good (strengthened vertical power, but no private property); Khrushchev – bad (weakened vertical power structures); Brezhnev – good (for the same reasons as Stalin); Gorbachev and Yeltsin – bad (destroyed the country, but under Yeltsin there was private property); Putin – the greatest leader in Russian history (strengthened vertical power structures, with private property). That is the view that you will find in a textbook called *The Modern History of Russia 1945-2006: A Teacher's Handbook* which was written by two of the closest advisors on foreign policy and ideology in the Kremlin administration. One of them, a man called Pavel Danilin, has no history degree, no experience in teaching anything. In an interview he made it clear that: 'Our goal is to make the first textbook in which Russian history appears not as a depressing sequence of misfortunes and mistakes but as something to instil pride in one's country. It is in precisely this way that teachers must teach history. They should not smear the motherland with mud.'

On his Kremlin-blog (where he goes by the name Leteha) he warned history teachers – pardon me for my language, Russian administrators are not always very polite – that: 'teachers will be made to teach children by those books that you will be given in a way that is needed by Russia. It is impossible to let some Russophobe shit-stinker, 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.' This is the language of 1937.

The first use of force came on the fourth of December 2008. A group of masked men from the investigative committee of the Russian general prosecutor's office forced their way with police strengths in the St. Petersburg offices of Memorial which, as you now know, has for twenty years

pioneered the research of Stalin's repression and the Soviet Union. After a search they took away on eleven hard drives, the entire archive of St. Petersburg Memorial, databases with biographical information of victims of repression, details about burial sites in St. Petersburg area, family archives, recordings and transcripts of interviews including all the materials I collected in St. Petersburg for my book *The Whisperers*. Two days ago my Russian publisher cancelled a contract to publish my book in Russian. Most sadly of all they took from the St. Petersburg offices of Memorial all the materials for what the St. Petersburg division was trying to create, a virtual Gulag museum. It may astonish you, but in Russia there is only one Gulag museum. It is not big. It is called Perm36, and it is about a three hours drive outside of Perm in the Ural. Not many people go there. There are about hundred much smaller exhibits, mostly organized by victims of oppression themselves, with an artifact from a prison camp, and an old document. The idea of the virtual Gulag museum is to put them all on the web. But now all that material is gone, and it remains still in the hands of the police.

For me, there is no mistaking the intention of the raid. They tried to connect it with a criminal investigation of an article in a newspaper, but that is an absurd charge. For me, the meaning of the raid is in its consequences, which is the loss of this archive. Not coincidentally, the raid took place at exactly the time when a large conference was being organized in Moscow on the history of Stalinism. The biggest conference on such a subject ever to take place in Russia. It was organized by Memorial and other organizations. At the conference all the delegates were given a copy of a special issue of a magazine which is run by one of the think tanks of the Kremlin called *Ruski Journal* – the *Russian Journal*. In it there was a special issue published to coincide with the conference on the politics of memory which contained two articles with vicious attacks on Memorial and other so-called anti-patriotic elements that had tried to weaken Russia by burdening a sense of guilt over its history. I quote one of these articles: 'Russia has ceased to be sovereign over its own historical memory which is now in danger of being taken over foreign inventions.'

Whatever the intentions of this worrying campaign, it seems to me unrealistic that the current regime in Russia will alter the historical records of Stalin's crimes. Too much is now known. But as long as the regime tries to suppress the collective memory of repression, and replace it with this patriotic myths of the Soviet past in schools and universities, there seems to be little hope that Russia will come to terms with its Stalinist inheritance. Then it will not become a genuine democracy, and it will not live in peace with itself, with its neighbours, and with the world. For the moment all the West can do is to show support for Russian institutions trying to preserve the unofficial memory of repression.

Every year I go to Russia to run a summer school for historians, where we try and expose young Russian history teachers to Western techniques and ideas, and give them the resources they need to develop new courses of history teaching in Russian universities. Perhaps we can do something else, it is just a last passing thought: for the past three years Memorial has each year been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize. I think this year it is time Memorial won.

Outline of the discussion following the Telders Lecture by Orlando Figes

After a few words of gratitude towards Orlando Figes for his brilliant and provocative speech on the awful history of Soviet Russia and its aftermath, Frits Bolkestein – president of the Telders Foundation – invites the public to take part in the discussion.

Under Stalin there was without doubt a great deal of terror, much more than nowadays, but at least there was less corruption. This might be one reason, why Stalin is remembered more positively. Another reason can be found in sheer numbers. In his speech, Figes mentioned that under Stalin there were 25 million victims of repression, which means that 175 million people did not suffer from direct repression.

Figes agrees that the corruption might be worse nowadays, but he disagrees on the smoothing over of the impact of 25 million victims of repression. This number of suppressed is only by *conservative* estimates. In fact there were 35 million sentences to the Gulag, but as many people got several sentences during Stalin's regime it is hard to figure out the exact number of victims. This is why the actual number of victims is estimated on 25 million, which means that one in eight of the Soviet population in 1940 had been repressed. Statistically, Figes states, this involves virtually every family in Soviet Russia in some sort of repression, if not directly than through their mother, grandfather, brother etc. This makes it even more dazzling that Russian textbooks only mention 3 million sentences. Imagine a German textbook in which people could read about 600.000 people who died in the Holocaust.

How did the Soviets gain control over all Russia? Their bureaucratic machine seemed to have worked quite well.

Although a good answer to this question would take another lecture, Figes tries to explain it in short. Many people would say centralized power did not work, as it does not work in Russia nowadays. The October Revolution was based on a mass movement of soviets who had grown up in 1917. In the beginning this was a revolution of workers taking over

factories and villages being run by peasant committees. They just happened to call themselves soviets. Soviet doesn't mean anything Bolshevik, it just means council. This trend and these movements became increasingly controlled by the Bolshevik party during the civil war. In the 1920s the Bolsheviks had control over parts of the cities, but the countryside remained way beyond their real control. There was a lot of opposition in the countryside. Stalinism is about crushing independent organizations, crushing the village. The collectivisation was a war on the peasants. It was not primarily about economic control, but about crushing the village as an independent political entity. Stalinism is very much about seizing control of the country, and terror was an important and inherent mean to achieve that.

Why is the civil war veiled with so many uncertainties? Why did the whites loose in 1919, when in fact they were only 100 kilometres away from the capital, and they were in so large numbers?

Figes explains that he spent quite some time doing research on the number of desertions on both sides. Normally, peasants flee from the battlefield as soon as they have to take care of their harvest, to make sure they survive the winter. What happened in October 1919 is remarkable. Large numbers of peasants voluntarily came back to fight on the side of the red army against the whites. This was not because they only hated the whites; on the contrary, they hated both the red and the whites. But they chose the side of the reds, because they were afraid that the whites would take away their land. Unfortunately for the peasants they helped the Bolsheviks to win the civil war. Then followed the massive uprisings in 1920-21, that forced the Bolsheviks to retreat.

Asked about the role played by the Russian Orthodox Church in reshaping collective memory, Figes explains that the church has mainly been active for repressed priests and believers. Besides, the church was concerned with the reconstruction of their sacred sites and the church buildings. In the beginning the Yeltsin regime tried to separate church and state, but already in the late Yeltsin years the Russian Orthodox Church (re)gained a privileged position. Although the church has its own victims of oppres-

sion to lament, it is very compromised by its involvement in the nationalism of the Putin-regime. It was during this regime that the link between church and state grew stronger again, and Putin is very visible as a devout orthodox believer.

There is some hope that under influence of Western television and the internet the attitude of the Russians towards their national history will change. In fact Russian society is opening up, as a growing number of people is now connected to the internet which gives them the opportunity to learn about Western ideas – also on their own Russian history. More Russians also start to travel abroad, which brings them in contact with the world outside Russia. There are possibilities enough for Russians to reevaluate their history, apart from the information they receive in Russia. The problem, however, is that young Russians are not interested in history at the moment; they just want to make a living.

If you look on the way the continuing of history is represented in the public media, you see that there is an authoritarian, statist tradition. This is in fact the Russian way with the concept of sovereign democracy. This tradition is different from the traditions in the West, but this does not necessary have to abide the principles of liberal democracy. In a sovereign democracy there are so-called democratic institutions, but meanwhile the authoritarian tradition of the state as the main manager of history is preserved. The very symbol of this was a poster in the election campaign of Russia. On this huge poster was the map of Russia with in its borders pictures of everyone the leaders wanted to claim as part of a positive inheritance Russia could build upon. So there were the faces of Peter the Great, Catherine the Great, Alexander Nevsky, Lenin, Putin and also Stalin. This was a shock, Figes recalls, it would be like a German election poster with Hitler on it as positive part of German history.

Asked whether he can draw something positive from Soviet history, Figes admits that he himself once was an optimist in that respect, but not anymore. After many visits to the country and making many friends with Russians in the last twenty-five years, he cannot think of something in the

Stalin era we can look at as a positive development. Especially in the last six months he never heard so much pessimism from people who otherwise are optimistic like himself. In his book *Natasha's Dance* Figes writes about the positive elements in Russian history. These are mainly found in the Russian culture, the creative spirit and the endurance of its people, but that time unfortunately belongs to the past before the Soviet regime. Figes is not so pessimistic as to see the current administration becoming fascist in the future. Although the system is corrupt, statist, and succeeds in keeping its neighbours weak, Figes cannot imagine that the massive waves of terror will return, nor the threatening of large minorities.

In Figes' opinion the future importance of Russia on the world stage will diminish in comparison to the last 60 years. The prospects for the country are worrying under the present regime. Although there has been a massive exploitation and export of the countries natural resources, there has not been much development of high-tech industry or infrastructure. Besides, Russia has huge demographic problems, caused by the combination of a very low birth rate and an alarmingly high death rate. This mortality is very often alcohol related and mainly affecting the male population. Two other problems Russia is facing are the brain drain and the flight of capital. The current administration finds itself confronted with serious and alarming concerns for the future. With the enormous promotion of nationalism the regime tries to counteract these trends a bit.

Asked about the popularity of Stalin among the non-Russians living in Russia, Figes states that the picture is mixed. Some groups like the Georgians – Stalin was born in Georgia – and eastern-Ukrainians have a positive view of Stalin. On the other hand, groups from Chechnya or the Baltic states have a negative view of the dictator. For a large part the identification with Stalin is not just a Russian thing, but a Soviet thing. In former Soviet states like the Baltics, where the regime is not trying to preserve some positive image, you get an entire different picture.

At the end of the evening Figes said that now it would not be possible anymore to do the project for *The Whisperers*. Most of the people that were

interviewed are now dead and this was the last generation that could speak with any authority about their experiences during the Stalin period. But the project also could not have been done before. People probably would not be prepared to speak to the researchers as they did now, because they would feel too frightened with the memory of communism still vivid. Notwithstanding all the problems Russians and organisations like Memorial are facing nowadays, Figes expects to continue working in Russia.

Prof.mr. B.M. Teldersstichting

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The fifth Telders Lecture – organised by European Liberal Forum and the Telders Foundation – was given by Orlando Figes, professor of history at Birkbeck College, University of London. In his lecture Figes elaborates on the destruction of individualism by the cruel Soviet regime, and its impact on the private lives of citizens in Stalin's Russia, as well as the long aftermath of Stalin's regime. During his dictatorship (from 1928 until his death) the communist leader Joseph Stalin (1879-1953) terrorized the lives of Russians to the point where their fear was internalized, and he became their moral reference point. Many people even believed that Stalin didn't know about the mass oppression, and thought that if he would know, he would stop it immediately. Although people were filled with fear during his regime, their believe in Stalin and his system survived, even after his death.

In modern-day Russia Stalin's legacy is still omnipresent, as can be seen in the growing pressure on liberal constitutionalism and democracy. Putin works hard on the rehabilitation of Stalin, not by denying his crimes, but by underlining his so-called positive achievements as builder of a great and powerful Soviet-Russia.



Telders Lecture

2009

Stalin's Ghost: the Legacies of Soviet History and the Future of Russia

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