

Despite all the violence committed by Red Army soldiers, it would have been a much greater tragedy for the Jews had the counterrevolution been victorious. The author of this remarkable book warns us never to forget this.

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doi:10.1017/S0020859020000462

MARTIN, BARBARA. *Dissident Histories in the Soviet Union. From De-Stalinization to Perestroika.* [Library of Modern Russia.] Bloomsbury Academic, London 2019. xv, 293 pp. Ill. £85.00. (E-book: £73.44.)

The task of incorporating an assessment of Stalin, Stalinism, and Stalin's crimes into a historical narrative that is acceptable to the ruling regime in Russia has long been daunting. The story of Soviet repression can prove unsettling, even to the fundamentals on which the present government rests. Included in the instrumental questions such histories have addressed, or circumvented, is whether the system of repression – even beyond the Gulag – was the *modus operandi* of Soviet rule, or were Stalin's crimes an aberration of the ideals of Leninism? Furthering that, what were the limits of this discussion in the post-Stalin period, and how much were they determined by the ideology of the historians themselves?

In a well-written, timely micro-history of the careers and fates of four chief protagonists, Anton Antonov-Ovseenko, Roy Medvedev, Aleksandr Nekrich, and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, historian Barbara Martin chronicles the determined struggle to disseminate stories of repression, along with the evolution of the state's responses to these alternatively accepted and proscribed themes. The legitimacy of the anti-Stalinist narrative was established by the 20th and 22nd party congresses; each of these authors would test its limits in different ways.

All four historians were prominent voices in the campaign for de-Stalinization, but some, notably Medvedev, tried to insulate the Party itself from rigorous criticism. His hope was that the exercise of exposing the Stalinist past would strengthen the Party. When attacked by opponents who feared “rubbing salt into wounds that are still bleeding”, Medvedev argued that analysing “the causes and the nature of the terrible disease that our Party and our movement have suffered” (p. 104) would promote healing. Medvedev gathered indispensable histories from eyewitnesses – many of them Old Bolsheviks – who trusted this son of repressed parents to accurately record their narratives. He was true to his word, and he incorporated their stories into an interpretation of history that came out in favour of the October Revolution, one that essentially justified a culture of violence and repression as an acceptable means to an end, which was the success of the Revolution.

Solzhenitsyn, on the other hand, on the basis of his own incarceration and the recording of numerous witness accounts, condemned the crimes as part and parcel of a system rotten to the core, the ideology of communism being the source of its evil (p. 162). Solzhenitsyn insightfully argued that the line between good and evil runs through every man's heart. Despite having identified this grey zone, Solzhenitsyn had no tolerance for official

justification of past crimes. Through extensive archival research, which includes these historians' correspondence, Martin takes the reader through the polemics that emerged between these prominent political dissident voices.

Antonov-Ovseenko, son of a famous revolutionary who was executed in 1938, collected numerous testimonies from other sons and daughters of repressed orthodox communists. Antonov-Ovseenko had long believed in Stalin, even after his father's arrest. He continued to revere Stalin until his own arrest and years of camp, during which he ultimately grew to revile him. One of Antonov-Ovseenko's chief motivations for writing was to rehabilitate his father's reputation in Soviet history. Much of his work, including his biography on Stalin, was thus aimed at obtaining his father's full rehabilitation. Martin describes how Antonov-Ovseenko placed Lenin on a pedestal, and made it his goal to re-write his father and other rehabilitated revolutionaries into Soviet history. Antonov-Ovseenko persistently lobbied for justice and recognition of the falsifications of history through official channels, but he met considerable frustration in the post-Stalin years. Antonov-Ovseenko ended up spending much of the Seventies researching and writing on Stalin's henchmen, a manuscript that he smuggled to the West and published with the help of Stephen Cohen in 1979. Antonov-Ovseenko's work brought yet another perspective to the table: his focus was not on the evils of Stalinism, but on *Stalinshchina*, or state banditry (p. 176).

Aleksandr Nekrich, the only professional historian of the group, felt sufficiently empowered by what Khrushchev critiqued as Stalin's wartime "mistakes", to thoroughly investigate them. Nekrich had defended his country in the "Great Patriotic War", joined the Communist Party afterwards, and went on to work at the Institute of History at the Academy of Sciences. Despite difficult years in the late Stalin era, its end was liberating for Nekrich as a historian. Khrushchev's Thaw gave him the space to produce a number of books about the war. This historian went from focusing on the scale of war casualties to posing the critical question of why they were so high. This research eventuated in the publication of *June 22, 1941*. Though still rather orthodox in his views, Nekrich's ideas were provocative to the Party. His desire to not just look at "the way it ended but how it started" led Nekrich to focus on initial defeats, and not the preferred narrative of victory. Even in the wake of the 20th Party Congress, Nekrich's inquiry was bold. And it would be bold once again today. Fifty years later, and thirty years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, triumph is being instrumentalized as a unifying narrative; the focus is on what was built in the 1930s and Russia's (Stalin's) contribution to defeating Nazi Germany.

Nekrich's book was well received under Khrushchev, but hotly debated after his fall. Still, many professional historians supported and praised Nekrich. In Martin's words, he was "accidentally propelled [...] to the status of figurehead of the struggle against Stalin's rehabilitation" (p. 59). Among the "mistakes" he was later attacked for was his description of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact as a "deft political maneuver" (p. 76) of Hitler. His critics argued that the pact helped avoid a war on two fronts and broke up the "Munich front". In August 2019, on the eightieth anniversary of the pact, as the present Russian government hailed the pact as a "feat of Soviet diplomacy", this discussion has once again gained timeliness.

Nekrich's book and a short transcript of the debates at the Institute of Marxism and Leninism surrounding it reached the West, eventually leading to the historian's exclusion from the Party in 1967. Despite Nekrich's numerous appeals in protest of this exclusion, all were rejected. Nekrich retained his professional position, but was increasingly limited in what he could publish, and only barely survived being stripped of his doctoral degree. Increasingly isolated, Nekrich left for the West during Brezhnev's wave of Jewish emigration in 1976.

Martin has employed a broad range of sources, incorporating archival research and personal interviews into her narrative. She also brings in the views of some (in the West) lesser known but important historians, such as Vladlen Loginov, who were active in shaping both Khrushchev's and Gorbachev's policies. Additionally, along with the prominent voices of her four chief subjects, Martin points to some other pivotal initiatives of that time, notably the courageous historians of the next generation who gathered materials for and wrote in the journal *Pamiat'* (Memory), among them, Arsenii Roginskii. For their work, they landed in the Gulag under Brezhnev and survived to organize and lead the anti-Stalinist organization Memorial and the human rights movement. Their role was instrumental in moving the discussion of history from past violations of human rights to present violations of human rights (which include repressing discussion of the past). It is a somewhat missed opportunity that this examination did not reflect more on this implicit question, which has long influenced historical inquiry in Russia. Along those lines, Martin's otherwise thorough study would have been well-positioned to devote somewhat more attention to the evolution of this cohort, since it emerged on the tail end – and partly in consequence of – her protagonists' experiences.

These caveats aside, Martin's important examination of the development of history writing and research on the crimes of Stalinism has unfortunate contemporary resonance. Indeed, being a historian in today's Russia can be a dangerous profession, as manifested in the harassment and even arrests of researchers, and the attempts at liquidating Memorial. Deprived of foreign funding as a consequence of the 2012 Foreign Agent Law, and once again – like their predecessors – forced to look over their shoulder when it comes to pursuing “sensitive” topics of research, professional historians regularly find themselves pushed into a corner. Martin's study of the experiences of some of the pioneers helps us understand that today's beleaguered historians are not alone in their plight. It has long precedent, because a comfortable place in the national narrative for an uncomfortable history has not yet been found.

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doi:10.1017/S0020859020000474