Javier Sethness-Castro
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Iran that was given by the Syrian pro-democratic activist Samir Twair, whose 39-year old brother was murdered by Assad's forces in the notorious Sednaya prison, and hosted by LA Jews for Peace. While these "tank" trolls' aggressive booing, hissing, and intimidation of the speaker during his presentation and the discussion which followed was lamentable enough, the sign one of them brought to the event (shown below) itself speaks volumes to the naked opportunism, ruthlessness, and atrocity-denial that today grips a part of the Western so-called left, reflecting the persistence of the shameful Stalinist legacy.

As Theodor W. Adorno observed correctly, "the past that one would like to evade is still very much alive."

Totalitarian Propaganda that Fails in Rationalizing his World-Historical Crimes

> "*Today [in 1958], everyone knows Russian Communism as the greatest barbarism on earth. Stalin is the name which symbolizes this.*" – Raya Dunayevskaya[1]

Breht Ó Séaghdha's much-anticipated, "big," and supposedly *"spicy"* interview on "Revolutionary Left Radio" with Justin and Jeremy from the "Proles of the Round Table" about Josef Stalin and the historical record is a sustained, nearly three-hour long fraud that above all insults the memory of Stalin's millions of victims. Unfortunately for the host Ó Séaghdha, who misleadingly presents his guests Justin and Jeremy as following an *"empirical and statistical approach"* to the history of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), the reality is that he platformed neo-Stalinist propagandists on this episode, and either could not or would not challenge them on their myriad lies covering for what the Marxist-Humanist Raya Dunayevskaya rightly terms "the greatest *counter*-revolution in all history."[2] Given the friendly tone between Ó Séaghdha and his guests during this interview, as reflected in his admission at the outset of his *"love and respect"* for his *"comrades and friends"* Justin

[1] Raya Dunayevskaya, *Russia: From Proletarian Revolution to State-Capitalist Counter-Revolution,* eds. Eugene Gogol and Franklin Dmitryev (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2018), 317 (emphasis in original).

[2] *Ibid.*

and Jeremy, his identification of the "Proles of the Round Table" as being *"one of [his] go-to podcasts"* represents a dangerous concession which reveals that he is following his guests' lead when it comes to historical events.

Before analyzing and correcting the numerous distortions presented by Justin and Jeremy on this particular episode of "Revolutionary Left Radio," I must express a very fundamental concern for Ó Séaghdha's profession in the introduction of the need for leftists "always to show solidarity with our Jewish comrades," given that ***not once*** in this three-hour interview does either the host or the guests discuss or even ***mention*** the Molotov-Ribbentrop, or Nazi-Soviet, Pact signed on August 23, 1939. Following in the wake of Hitler's annexation of the Sudetenland in Czechoslovakia and the *Anschluss* with Austria, the terms of this non-aggression treaty, agreed initially to ten years, represented a 'honeymoon' for the two totalitarian dictators Hitler and Stalin, setting forth the terms by which Poland, Finland, and the Baltic regions were to be divided after the Nazi invasion a week later.

In *Tinísima,* Elena Poniatowska depicts even so hardened a Stalinist as Tina Modotti, a nurse who worked in the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939) with Red Aid International, affiliated with the Third International (Stalin's Communist International, or Comintern), as reacting to the news of the Nazi-Soviet Pact by refusing food, desiring death, and considering this *"the betrayal of everything for which we've fought."* Arguing with her partner Vittorio Vidali, himself a high-ranking Comintern agent responsible for numerous assassinations of non-Stalinist supporters of the Spanish Republic, Modotti asks:

> *"And the dead? And the relatives of the dead—who will calm them down? You know how much I love and admire the Soviet Union; you know how I revere*

infant daughter in a bomb shelter in Homs in early 2012—sheltering, of course, from the Assad Regime's indiscriminate bombardment of civilian areas. While we would consider it very difficult to deny human solidarity to this oppressed Syrian mother, just the same as an oppressed Palestinian woman, neo-Stalinists are *"quite prepared to sacrifice everybody's vital immediate interests to the execution of what [they] assum[e] to be the law of History."*[54] Everything else, from mass-death in Assad's dungeons to mass-imprisonment of Uighurs in Chinese concentration camps, are details to them, whether historical or contemporary. Decisively, the CCP's rationalization of its mass-internment of Muslim Uighurs very closely echoes Stalinist propaganda about and policy toward the supposedly "backward" Muslim peoples of Central Asia and the Caucasus Mountains: note that Uighur Muslims have been cut off from the *Ummah,* just as Soviet Muslims were in Stalin's era, and that the CCP, in seeking to forcibly divorce the Uighur youth from Islam, has consciously sought to suppress Uighur nationalism and the related possibility of independence for Eastern Turkestan, as Xinjiang is also known.

In the U.S., it is the ill-named Party for Socialism and Liberation (PSL) and the Workers' World Party (WWP), together with their front-groups, such as the Act Now to End War and Stop Racism (ANSWER) Coalition and the International Action Center (IAC), that propagate neo-Stalinist and campist approaches to international relations, which inevitably end up translating into passive and/or active support for pseudo-anti-imperialist executioners. Yet it is not only the PSL, the WWP, ANSWER, or IAC which do so in the U.S.: just on Sunday, November 11, 2018, in Los Angeles, members of the similarly ill-named Peace and Freedom Party picketed a presentation about the Syrian Revolution and the occupation of Syria by Russia and

[54] Arendt 461.

As such, they lend their support to neo-fascist and genocidal ruling classes, such as the Assad Regime, or as the neo-Stalinist propagandist and "Revolutionary Left Radio" veteran Ajit Singh does with regard to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP): in August 2018, he co-authored with Ben Norton an infamous article on the campist disinformation site *Grayzone* which denies the well-documented mass-internment of indigenous Muslim Uighurs. It is simply a nonsensical piece, given that the official Chinese State newspaper, *The Global Times,* had already defended the suppression of the Uighurs two weeks before the *Grayzone* article was published by alluding to the supposed need to prevent the Xinjiang province from becoming "China's Syria" or "China's Libya." Moreover, in early October, the Xinjiang government legalized the camps. To date, the *Grayzone* article's fraudulent title continues to be "No, the UN Did Not Report China Has 'Massive Internment Camps' for Uighur Muslims," and it does not appear that either Singh or Norton has published an update or a correction; indeed, the article is still live. How telling that these Stalinist 'journalists' are comfortable with legitimizing the neo-fascist war on truth, as reflected in Donald Trump's belittling of "fake news."

Whereas for most neo-Stalinists, support for Palestinian self-determination against Israeli settler-colonialism is a matter of principle, Hensman clearly identifies their opportunism when she asks:

> *"How can anyone who feels anguish when Palestinian children are targeted and killed in Gaza not feel anguish when Syrian children are targeted and killed in Aleppo?"*[53]

This pointed question is implicitly raised in the new film *A Private War* (2018), which shows the American journalist Marie Colvin interviewing a Syrian mother with her young

[53] Hensman 284.

> *Stalin. Everything you say is fine, Toio [Vittorio], but an alliance with Hitler—never!"*[3]

Indeed, as historian Catherine Evtuhov relates,

> *"The agreement stunned leftist intellectuals and workers, who had believed that Moscow was the vital center of international revolution and anti-Nazism. As Arthur Koestler recalled, the sight of the swastika flying at the Moscow Airport [to mark Ribbentrop's visit] destroyed his allegiance to communism."*[4]

The Hitler-Stalin Pact not only carved up Poland and much of the rest of Eastern Europe, but also involved the NKVD and Gestapo exchanging political prisoners, including Communists, and Polish prisoners of war; trade in oil, wheat, and weaponry between the two hegemons; and Stalin publicly praising Nazi victories.[5] Furthermore, between 1939 and 1941, Stalin's regime deported a million and a half Poles, Ukrainians, Belorussians, Jews, Estonians, Latvians, and Lithuanians to the Far North, Siberia, and Central Asia; approximately one-fifth of those deported perished. Stalin's forces were also responsible for executing at least 17,000 captive Polish officers in 1940.[6]

With Stalin thus neutralized, Hitler received the green light with which he infamously launched World War II and, shortly thereafter, the Holocaust, or *HaShoah*, which accelerated in June 1941 when Hitler turned on his erstwhile ally by invading the Soviet Union. Alongside the estimated 25 million Soviet

[3] Elena Poniatowska, *Tinísima* (México, D.F.: Ediciones Era, 1992) 595–596 (my translation).

[4] Catherine Evtuhov et al., *A History of Russia: Peoples, Legends, Events, Forces* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2004), 700.

[5] *Ibid* 702.

[6] *Ibid* 710.

people who died in the war, at least 1 million Jews in Ukraine and five million other Jews were murdered in Poland, the Soviet Union, and other territories of Eastern Europe which were conquered by the German Wehrmacht for Hitler's pathological, ultra-nationalist concept of *Lebensraum* ("living-space").[7] In fact, in January 1948, Solomon Mikhoels, chair of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee, was executed on Stalin's orders by the Soviet Belarusian State police before he could bring to light documentation of the Nazi genocide of over 1.5 million Soviet Jews in these same territories conquered by the Wehrmacht *"from the retreating Soviets"*—territories which previously had been occupied by the Red Army, following Hitler and Stalin's mutual agreement.[8]

When it came to actual war with Hitler, Stalin's myopic incredulousness about the reported 84 intelligence warnings he received about German preparations for invasion led to the immediate destruction of one-fourth of the Soviet air force, effectively granting the Nazi Luftwaffe aerial supremacy during the beginning of "Operation Barbarossa."[9] Whereas the Red Army had *"approximately the same number of men on the Soviet western order as the Germans and significantly more tanks, guns, and aircraft,"* the USSR's security was endangered for two important reasons: the Red Army was comprised of peasants who were often demoralized by collectivization and famine, and it was led by inexperienced officers who had effectively been promoted through Stalin's devastating Purge of an estimated 90 percent of *"the highest army commanders, all the admirals, about 90 percent of corps commanders,"* and several *"divisional and brigadier generals"* just a year to two years before the start

[7] *Ibid* 705; Serhii Plokhy, *The Gates of Europe* (New York: Basic Books, 2015), 269–274.

[8] Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin* (London: Vintage, 2010), 340–345; Plokhy 269.

[9] Evtuhov 702–703.

tionary, pseudo-anti-imperialist regimes represents relative to Stalin's own attitude toward *"fifth columns"* and putatively *"disloyal elements."*

Indeed, substituting formulaic scripts for actual investigation, many neo-Stalinists of today completely fail on an analytical level to understand U.S. policy toward Syria. They ignore clear collaboration between the U.S. and the Assad Regime, from Hafez al-Assad's deployment of 1500 Syrian troops to fight in Desert Storm against Saddam Hussein's forces to Bashar al-Assad's torture of 'terror suspects' detained by the U.S. in the 'War on Terror.'[52] Since the beginning of the Syrian Revolution in March 2011, the U.S. has not been committed to overthrowing Assad and does not appear ever to have supported the democratic opposition against him. Yet prominent "tankies" in the media, including Ó Séaghdha himself, continue to hold that the U.S. empire seeks Assad's downfall and his replacement with "Salafi-jihadists." Yet this is the opposite of what the U.S. or Israel want. The "tank" zeal to blame the Syrian catastrophe on Western imperialism quite clearly overlooks the very obvious imperialist role played there by Russia, especially since September 2015, when Putin intervened decisively to save Assad's Regime. Neo-Stalinists have nothing to say about the estimated 18,000 Syrian victims of Russian aerial bombardment, or the destruction of entire cities by the Russian air force. To accord with their campist perspective—and, indeed, continuing in their denialist pedigree regarding Stalin's world-historical crimes—they deny Assad's vast atrocities, from the extermination of detainees to the numerous occasions on which the Regime has resorted to using chemical weapons.

[52] Reese Ehrlich, *Inside Syria: The Backstory of Their Civil War and What the World Can Expect* (Amherst, Massachusetts: Prometheus Books, 2014), 71, 146–149.

of another" and *"understand that socialist internationalism demands solidarity with democratic revolutions, not with the counterrevolutions trying to crush them,"* contemporary neo-Stalinists very typically adhere to a "campist" analysis, following Stalin's identification of "the two camps" at the Potsdam conference of July 1945: the British and U.S. vs. the USSR.[50] Overlaying the various complexities of international relations with a manichean worldview, Western neo-Stalinists prioritize Karl Liebknecht's identification of *"the main enemy [being] at home"*: whereas U.S. imperialism certainly must be opposed, their excessive attachment to this principle leads them often to the fallacious conclusion that popular uprisings against putative enemies of the U.S.—such as the Syrian Revolution, the Iranian revolt of late 2017 and early 2018, or the Ahwazi struggle for justice and self-determination—must be "CIA," "Gulf," or "Zionist" conspiracies. Given this framing, which is ideological rather than empirical or materialist, neo-Stalinists will implicitly—and evermore so recently, overtly—provide passive *and/or active support* for despots such as Bashar al-Assad, (the overthrown and now-defunct) Mu'ammar al-Gaddafi, Vladimir Putin, Xi Jinping, and the leaders of the Islamic Republic of Iran. As such, they side with executioners, hence violating the basic responsibility Howard Zinn and Noam Chomsky assigned to intellectuals—however much Chomsky himself appears to have violated this principle when it comes to the 1995 Srebrenica massacre of thousands of Muslim Bosniak men and boys by Serbian ultra-nationalists.[51] In light of Stalin's mass-deportation of Muslims during World War II, and considering also the vile, potentially genocidal anti-Semitic campaign launched by the General Secretary toward life's end, it should be clear how much of a continuity the neo-Stalinist "analysis" of popular uprisings against reac-

[50] Hensman 15 (emphasis in original); Evtuhov 717.
[51] Hensman 283.

of World War II.[10] That the General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union had ordered his troops to occupy the new territory gained through the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, which lacked any defensive fortifications, was not helpful, either.[11]

Moreover, Stalin's disagreement with and overriding of the *"leading Soviet military strategist,"* General Georgii Zhukov, led to multiple disasters. To name just a couple: first, in August 1941, when Stalin refused to withdraw Red Army divisions from Kyiv (Kiev), the Wehrmacht proceeded to encircle and imprison more than 3 million Soviet officers and troops by the end of the year;[12] and second, when, following the successful December 1941 counter-attack to rescue Moscow, Stalin hubristically enjoined offensives across the entire western front that *"exhausted his troops and exposed them to Germany's new campaign, this time aimed at the Caucasus and its oil fields."* Once Kyiv fell, the Nazis systematically murdered its Jewish population—some thirty-thousand men, women, and children—in the massacre known as Babi Yar.[13] Beyond this, Stalin's refusal to sign the Geneva Conventions (1929) governing the treatment of prisoners of war (POW's) arguably greatly harmed his officers and troops captured by the Nazis, who, in contrast to Western POW's, were initially generally refused food and medical treatment, if they were not summarily executed. In point of fact, it was on Soviet POW's that the Nazis first "tested" Zyklon-B gas in the Auschwitz death-camp (September 1941). An estimated three million Soviet POW's died in Nazi captivity.[14] Hitler's regime did not think to exploit Soviet POW's as forced labor until November 1941, alongside the millions of Ukrainian and Polish *Ostar-*

[10] *Ibid* 673.
[11] Plokhy 264.
[12] *Ibid* 264–265.
[13] Evtuhov 703.
[14] *Ibid* 704–705.

beiter slave laborers, though it had no reservations leaving intact collectivized farms in occupied Ukraine, thus *"taking advantage of the Soviet invention for extracting resources from the rural population."*[15]

In light of these incredible omissions about the nearly two-year period of collaboration between Hitler and Stalin, the Holocaust, and the General Secretary's numerous strategic blunders during World War II itself—which Jeremy and Justin outright ignore, mischaracterizing Hitler's military defeat in May 1945 as Stalin's *"accomplishment"*—it becomes clear that no one on this show has any credibility discussing the historical record.

To put it lightly, it is extremely problematic for anyone appealing to history to uncritically champion the genocidal and imperialist state-capitalist monster known as Stalin in 2018. As Rohini Hensman rightly points out, and as we shall explore more in part II of this response, *"Stalin [...] in his time had rehabilitated tsarist imperialism."*[16] In 1927, Alexander Berkman identified Stalin's rule as being equivalent to *"Tsarist Socialism,"* perhaps following Nestor Makhno's lead in denouncing the *"Bolshevik tsars"* the previous year.[17] According to Hannah Arendt's analysis, class struggle and internationalism were absent within the politics of Stalinist totalitarianism, beyond merely opportunistic use as legitimating ideologies.[18] Dunayevskaya correctly identified the Stalinist bureaucracy as

[15] Plokhy 267–274.

[16] Rohini Hensman, *Indefensible: Democracy, Counter-Revolution, and the Rhetoric of Anti-Imperialism* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2018), 47.

[17] Alexander Berkman, "A Decade of Bolshevism," in *Bloodstained: One Hundred Years of Leninist Counterrevolution,* eds. Friends of Aron Baron (Chicago, Calif.: AK Press, 2017), 122; Nestor Makhno, "The Idea of Equality and the Bolsheviks," in *Bloodstained: One Hundred Years of Leninist Counterrevolution,* eds. Friends of Aron Baron (Chicago, Calif.: AK Press, 2017), 58.

[18] Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (San Diego: Harcourt, 1968), xv, 362.

USSR, which was based on the mass-diversion of water for irrigation from the Syr Darya and Amu Darya rivers that supply the Aral Sea, together with the Chernobyl nuclear catastrophe and the legacy of mass-chemical pollution.[47] These lamentable realities provide a stark reminder that "[s]ocieties that have abolished or statized private profit have not escaped the most brutal dimensions of the ecological crisis."[48] Furthermore, a landmark 2013 study regarding historical responsibility for global warming which blames a sum total of 90 companies for fossil-fuel extraction holds investor-owned capitalist energy firms responsible for about one-fifth (21%) of carbon emissions since the Industrial Revolution, and Soviet State-owned oil, gas, and coal corporations responsible for just under 9% of total emissions.

Neo-Stalinist International Relations: Siding with Executioners Globally

> *"The Nazis were well aware of the protective wall of incredulity which surrounded their enterprise."* – Hannah Arendt[49]

Besides peddling historical lies to rehabilitate genocidal totalitarians of the past, neo-Stalinists notoriously run interference for authoritarian, neo-fascist, and (sub)imperialist States of today, if they judge them to be sufficiently "anti-imperialist"—by which these opportunists do not mean opposed to imperialism *as such* , but rather U.S. imperialism. Instead of internalizing Hensman's critical points that *"anti-imperialists [must] oppose* ***all*** *oppression by one country*

[47] Evtuhov 755.

[48] Jean-Paul Deléage, "Eco-Marxist Critique of Political Economy," in *Is Capitalism Sustainable: Political Economy and the Politics of Ecology,* ed. Martin O'Connor (New York: Guilford, 1994), 45.

[49] Arendt 437n124.

backlash resulted not only in the reveiling of unveiled women but also the spread of veiling among women who had not previously been veiled. Even some men who had benefited from Soviet land redistribution turned against the regime after this imposition of sexual equality. Soviet authorities then doubled down against the emergence of such male-supremacist resistance, reconstituting crimes against women as counter-revolutionary, carrying the obligatory penalty of execution; outlawing not only the Islamic veil but all other forms of traditional dress; and beginning to exclude veiled women from Soviet programs. The result of such intensification proved to be rather counter-productive, as many men tended to become more resistant to efforts to emancipate women, more violent, and less cooperative with overall Soviet policy. Ultimately, Soviet officials realized that deeply embedded cultural norms could not be eradicated merely by decree, such that this policy of *"feminism from above"* was promptly reversed, with accommodation and stability coming to replace the pursuit of fundamental social changes in gender relations.[46]

Stalinist Ecocide

Though this critique of a "Marxist-Leninist Perspective" on Stalin is focused primarily on history and politics, I would be remiss not to at least mention some of the environmental depredations resulting from Stalinist industrialization and the USSR's self-assertion as a superpower. Against Ó Séaghdha's characterization of Soviet mass-industrialization as representing "proletarian beauty," these ecological ill-effects range from persistent radioactivity resulting from Soviet nuclear tests, particularly in Kazakhstan, to the near-collapse of the Aral Sea as a viable ecosystem and natural-resource provider secondary to the industrial-scale expansion of cotton production in the

[46] *Ibid* 284, 316, 320–325, 351–354.

"the most deadly, the most insidious, [and] the most dangerous enemy because it springs from the proletariat and cloaks itself in Marxist terminology." So why on Earth would revolutionary leftists want to promote the legacy and supposed continued relevance of such decidedly counter-revolutionary distortions of socialism?

There is clearly something rotten in the heart of the Western left, for both neo-fascism and the red-brown alliance are on the rise. Indeed, *"[t]his alliance between neo-Stalinists [...] and neo-fascists [...] is a twenty-first century version of the Hitler-Stalin pact."*[19] It should not be surprising, then, to contemplate that Ó Séaghdha uncritically interviewed the pro-Assad propagandist and *Russia Today* correspondent Rania Khalek six months ago. Amidst such stark realities, I concur with Hensman that we must pursue and tell the truth as well as seek to bring morality and humanity into politics, among other critical tasks,[20] and it is in the spirit of these maxims that I respond critically to Ó Séaghdha's "Stalin podcast."

What Did Stalin Do Wrong?

> "*The struggle for total domination of the total population of the earth, the elimination of every competing nontotalitarian reality, is inherent in the totalitarian regimes themselves; if they do not pursue global rule as their ultimate goal, they are only too likely to lose whatever power they have already seized.*"

[19] Hensman 52.

[20] Hensman adds the political goals of struggling for democracy, centering internationalism, and advocating for the promotion of human rights and democracy through global institutions (279–302). Beyond this, reorganizing society toward popular power through self-organization in the labor, educational, and territorial sectors (on the social level) is an equally pressing task.

– Hannah Arendt[21]

As if the host and his guests could be forgiven for covering up the Hitler-Stalin Pact—which they cannot—Jeremy and Justin's 'homage to Stalin' comes through very clearly in their responses to Ó Séaghdha's opening question, regarding which criticisms (if any) the "Proles of the Round Table" have of Stalin's rule over the former Soviet Union. Still, even before responding here, Jeremy and Justin already have denied that Stalin was a dictator, instead suggesting that certain *"people"* could criticize him without fear of retaliation. Which people do they mean? Surely, they are not referring to M. I. Ryutin, the first Communist to openly denounce Stalin's personal dictatorship and war on the peasantry in his 1932 appeal to the Central Committee, requesting Stalin's deposition and an end to forced collectivization. Stalin responded by demanding Ryutin's execution, yet, due to the objection of members of the Politburo (the highest-ranking body within the Communist Party), this renegade Communist was banished and only murdered five years later in the Purges. In addition, Stalin executed Ryutin's sons, banished his wife to a prison camp, and temporarily exiled the Jewish Politburo members Lev Kamenev and Gregory Zinoviev for their supposed complicity in the affair—thus foreshadowing their ultimate fate in the Purges.[22]

Evidently, the "Proles of the Round Table" rely on a misunderstanding of what dictatorship is—that is, centralized and effectively absolute power over the State and military apparatus. They miss Voline's point that *"dictatorship [...] being universal and universally embraced, the way is open for fascist psychology, ideology and action."* With their comment on Stalin's openness to criticism, they would consciously eliminate from history all the artists, intellectuals, dissidents, workers, and peasants who

[21] Arendt 392.

[22] Evtuhov 671.

humilation.[41] When the Red Army entered Germany, moreover, toward the end of World War II, Soviet troops engaged in mass-rape of *"thousands of females of all ages."*[42] Additionally, in the wake of M. I. Ryutin's appeal to depose Stalin in 1932, and following the General Secretary's reprisals against Ryutin, Kamenev, and Zinoviev, his second wife, Nadezhda Allilueva, reportedly became very disillusioned with him; when Stalin rudely insulted her one evening at a dinner party, she was found dead the next morning of an apparent suicide.[43]

In Central Asia, otherwise known as Turkestan, Stalinist high modernism coupled with a paradoxical mix of Soviet feminism, imperialism, and Orientalism led authorities to attempt to promote sexual equality in the region beginning in the late 1920's. This campaign *"threatened a total abrogation of the primordial status system*," and in promoting it, Soviet officials *"meant to pose a fundamental challenge to the structure and life style of local communities."*[44] Soviet family legislation in Turkestan sought to outlaw polygamy, allow women to divorce their husbands, establish a minimum age for marriage, and prevent arranged marriages, among other things; yet in response, many Muslim men divorced their wives, forcing them onto the streets. When some women employed the new rights afforded them by divorcing their husbands and publicly unveiling themselves, many Muslim men *"responded with an explosion of hostility and violence apparently unequaled in scope and intensity until then on any other grounds."*[45] Prompted by clerics, many men began persecuting, assaulting, and murdering unveiled women, female activists and their families, and those related to these figures. This conservative

[41] *Ibid* 686–687.

[42] *Ibid* 711.

[43] *Ibid* 671.

[44] Gregory J. Massell, *The Surrogate Proletariat* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), 250.

[45] *Ibid* 275

than self-determination and democratic self-rule followed the end of the war for millions of Eastern Europeans.[38] Stalin's end-of-life anti-Semitic campaign, then, noxiously spread to several of these "People's Democracies," particularly Poland and Czechoslovakia.[39]

Stalinist Patriarchy

Ó Séaghdha begins this interview on an actually promising note: he emphasizes that he wants to get away from the "Great Man of History" narrative when discussing Stalin. As with his parallel introductory comment about combating anti-Semitism, however, this is a purely opportunistic assertion, given that he provides the "Proles of the Round Table" nearly three hours to espouse historical lies that are framed within this very same narrative about the singular importance of the General Secretary.

As a putative "Great Man of History," it should not therefore be surprising that Stalin was quite a sexist and a traditionalist on the woman question: he was after all responsible for advancing an *"authoritarian and patriarchal political culture that [...] pervaded social relations."*[40] In 1930, the Zhenotdel, the women's section of the Soviet Communist Party, which had been established by Alexandra Kollontai and others to promote female literacy and knowledge about marriage and property rights, was shuttered, and the perspectives of Communist feminists marginalized; in 1936, Stalin's regime restricted divorce and abortion. Whereas the regime publicly recognized "Heroines of Motherhood" for bearing several children to serve the State, his officials engaged in rape campaigns in the GULAG camps and detention centers as a means of torture and

[38] Evtuhov 716–720.
[39] Szaynok 305–315.
[40] Evtuhov 729.

were imprisoned, tortured, and murdered in the Stalinist Terror, including the writer Isaac Babel, the renowned poet Anna Akhmatova's son Lev Gumilyov (imprisoned in the GULAG slave-labor camps) and her husbands Nikolai Gumilyov, who was murdered by the CheKa (precursor to the NKVD, or Soviet Interior Ministry: Stalin's secret police), and Nikolai Punin (who died in the GULAG), as well as the Russian Makhnovist Peter Arshinov, who was executed in the Terror in 1937 or 1938 on the charge of organizing to resurrect the anarchist movement in the Soviet Union—to say nothing of all the "Old Bolsheviks" killed in the Moscow Show Trials.

Jeremy and Justin therefore reject the historical reality that, following the expulsion in 1927 of his primary rival Lev Trotsky from the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, *"there is little doubt that Stalin and a narrow circle of aides made all the historical decisions of the period."*[23] Kamenev and Zinoviev, who had joined with Trotsky (also Jewish) in 1926 to form a "United Opposition" to Stalin, quickly recanted following Trotsky's forced exile in 1928. Lacking a base among either workers or peasants, these rivals of Stalin were outmaneuvered by the General Secretary's construction of a vast bureaucracy.[24] The "Proles of the Round Table" thus omit Stalin's internal liquidation of factions, his utter subordination of foreign Communist Parties to his arbitrary rule, and his war on the remnants of intellectual freedom in the USSR.[25] Like other authoritarian socialists, Justin and Jeremy misleadingly conflate the Communist Party bureaucracy with the proletariat and peasantry it exploited and dominated—a notion with which Ó Séaghdha concurs, insisting as he does that historical Stalinist bureaucracies have represented *"mass-proletarian movements."* This is a classic exposition of "substitutionism," whereby élites of

[23] Plokhy 245.
[24] Evtuhov 641–644.
[25] Arendt 379; Evtuhov 663.

intellectuals and/or bureaucrats rule over the working classes by proxy and in their supposed interests, though without any democratic participation on the part of workers and peasants. The ill-named concept of "democratic centralism" expresses the same dictatorial idea.

Therefore, rather than reflect thoughtfully on the history of the Russian Revolution and the Soviet Union, Jeremy and Justin vigorously defend Stalin's technocratic and genocidal legacy of authoritarian high modernism, whereby the centralized power of the totalitarian State is employed "scientifically" and expeditiously to transform society not in the interests of humanity or the working classes, but the Party bureaucracy and state-capitalism.[26]

According to the "Proles of the Round Table," these were the three greatest mistakes or crimes for which Stalin is responsible during his three decades as General Secretary of the Soviet Union, from 1922–1952:

1. Justin argues that Stalin should have supported the Spanish Revolution more, although Jeremy is quick to clarify that he did not *"betray"* it. The pair detail the extent to which Stalin supplied arms and ammunition to the Republican forces in the Spanish Civil War—yet Jeremy suggests that, had Stalin provided greater assistance to the Republic, the Soviet Union might not have been able to resist Nazi and Japanese expansionism during World War II. Of course, he fails to mention the Hitler-Stalin Pact here; neither does he seem to consider that, had the Nationalist forces been defeated in Spain, Hitler may have been checked before even launching World War II. Jeremy and Justin contend that Stalin's intervention in Spain was benign, and that it's *"patently*

[26] James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999).

between his regime and the Tsarist Empire for legitimation: as such, Stalinist historiography *"virtually ignored the history of Ukrainians and Belorussians, not to mention other, non-Slav peoples of the USSR."*[34] This was the age of 'socialist realism,' when Soviet novels were written without any conflict, and it was understood that music should be melodious, optimistic, exuberant, and nationalist: hence Zhdanov's attacks on the composers Dmitri Shostakovich and Sergei Prokofiev for their putative "formalism," which was supposedly related to an imitation of Western modernist styles.[35] Indeed, Sergei Eisenstein's 1938 film *Alexander Nevsky,* which depicts the medieval war in the Baltic region between Nevsky's forces and the German Teutonic Knights, incorporates classic Stalinist tropes regarding the *"urgency of strong leadership, the courage of the Russian people, and the purported sadistic impulses of the German invader."*[36] As the historian Sheila Fitzpatrick observes, this ideological transformation from a discourse of internationalism to national-Bolshevism reflected Stalinism's *"shift in emphasis from the workers as the vanguard* ***class*** *of the Soviet experiment to the Russian people as its vanguard* ***nation****."*[37]

In addition to the invasion and occupation of Georgia; forced collectivization, "*dekulakization,*" and Holodomor in Ukraine; and counter-insurgency, famine, and the imposition of ethno-linguistic divisions in Central Asia, Stalin was also responsible for occupying and then subordinating the ill-named Eastern European "People's Democracies" following the Yalta Conference of February 1945. Though these countries remained formally independent of the USSR, they essentially were (with the exception of Yugoslavia) "Sovietized" after WWII, such that Purges and dictatorship rather

[34] *Ibid* 879.
[35] Evtuhov 722–723.
[36] *Ibid* 693.
[37] Brandenberger and Dubrovsky 882 (emphasis in original).

conservative structure of privilege for a ruling class that rejected many of the utopian ideals of the [Russian] revolution."[30] The emergence of "national Bolshevism" as Stalinist ideology in the 1930's owes much to nationalism within the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the revision of Marxist principles—as reflected in the catastrophic Comintern policies not only to facilitate Hitler's rise but also, in seeking to protect the Soviet Union by destabilizing imperialism, to order the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to ally with the nationalist-feudalist Guo Min Dang (GMD), led by Chiang Kai-Shek, who promptly and murderously suppressed the Shanghai and Canton workers' communes upon taking power with the CCP's aid in 1927.[31] Mao bitterly noted Stalin's refusal to seriously assist the CCP during the Civil War against the GMD.[32]

In 1934, Stalin, Kaganovich, and Zhdanov mandated nationalist revisions to the Soviet history curricula which would do away with what the General Secretary and his colleagues saw as an excessively *"sociological"* understanding of history that had, in promoting internationalism since 1917, supposedly failed to promote a unified sense of Soviet identity. Stalin and co. demanded a narrative emphasis on the *"progressive interpretation"* of centralizing and *"state-building"* Tsarist heroes such as Ivan IV ("the Terrible"), and an attendant de-emphasis on historically insurgent rebels such as Yemelyan Pugachëv and Stenka Razin; a focus on medieval Rus' while excluding consideration of medieval Western Europe; and the communication of the *'lesser evil theory'* to explain Russia's colonization of Ukraine and Georgia, among other questions.[33] According to this rationale, Stalin essentially appealed to a continuity

[30] Evtuhov 729.

[31] D. L. Brandenberger and A. M. Dubrovsky, "'The People Need a Tsar': The Emergence of National Bolshevism as Stalinist Ideology, 1931–1941," *Europe-Asia Studies,* vol. 50, no. 5 (1998), 873; Liu 8–13.

[32] Evtuhov 721.

[33] Brandenberger and Dubrovsky 874–881.

false" that his Comintern agents *"maliciously murdered anarchists [...] in the streets."* Both claims are ***complete lies.*** Firstly, Stalin effectively looted the Republic's gold reserves by vastly overcharging for the arms sold to it, as historian Gerald Howson has shown, and the Soviets would often send dysfunctional weapons that lacked ammunition. In addition, Stalin treated Spain as a colonial possession, dispatching NKVD and GRU (military-intelligence) agents there who reported to and acted under him, not the Republican government.[27] Even so pro-Soviet an historian as E. H. Carr recognized that the Republic ultimately had become "the puppet of Moscow."[28] Secondly, the "Proles of the Round Table" appear willfully ignorant of the "Tragic Week" of May 1937, otherwise known as the "May Days," when Stalinists from the Comintern-affiliated *Partit Socialista Unificat de Catalunya* (PSUC) in Barcelona struck out against the *Confederación Nacional de Trabajo* (CNT), the *Unión General de Trabajadores* (UGT), and the *Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista* (POUM), in an effort to uphold "antifascist unity" while crushing the ongoing social revolution. In effect, the May Days *"guaranteed the armed victory of the Stalinist-led counter-revolution,"* which in turn allowed for the victory of Nationalist forces, following the rationale that *"Stalin feared his leftist rivals in Spain more than he did Franco."*[29]

2. The deportation to Irkutsk and Siberia of *"10,000 Soviet citizens"* from the Volga region who were ethnic Germans beginning in 1941, supposedly for fear of

[27] *Spain Betrayed: The Soviet Union in the Spanish Civil War,* ed. Ronald Radosh (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011), xvii-xviii.

[28] E. H. Carr, *The Comintern and the Spanish Civil War* (London: Pantheon, 1984), 31.

[29] Agustín Guillamón, *Ready for Revolution: The CNT Defense Committees in Barcelona, 1933–38* (Oakland: AK Press, 2014), 189; Evtuhov 698.

their being a "fifth column" vis-à-vis the invading Nazi military. For Jeremy, the error was that Stalin deported these Germans on an *ethnic* basis, though he definitely implies that the General Secretary would have been justified in deporting or exiling his opponents on a "class" or political basis—because, of course, for Jeremy and Justin, any political opposition to Stalin is "counter-revolutionary," no matter its actual content, given their absurd view that the General Secretary represented the epitome of the Russian Revolution. In uttering such words, Jeremy unwittingly expresses his support for Stalin's GULAG system of slave-labor camps on principle. He also underestimates the number of Volga Germans deported by Stalin's regime by a factor of between 40 and 70.

3. Stalin's imposition of Article 121, which criminalized male homosexuality with hard labor, following the Bolsheviks' earlier suspension of Tsarist-era penal codes against homosexuality after October 1917. Though they criticize Stalin for this reactionary move, Justin and Jeremy try to contextualize the reversal by pointing out the supposedly perceived affinities between homosexuality and fascism at that time, and between homosexuality and pederasty, or pedophilia—thus unironically recalling today's criminalization of homosexuality under Vladimir Putin. Ó Séaghdha assists by claiming such criminalization to have been standard practice "all over the world" at the time. Yet a fact check shows this not remotely to have been the case.

What's the problem, then, with these supposed criticisms? For one, they reveal that Jeremy and Justin are not remotely arguing in good faith. To begin with, the guests chuckle when discussing the *"shady"* actions of NKVD agents *"murdering*

whereby dozens of physicians, many of them Jewish, were accused of having conspired with Britain and the U.S. to murder Zhdanov by medical malpractice, and of planning to similarly murder Stalin.[28]

Thankfully, Stalin died before this vile campaign could escalate into another Purge, this one exclusively targeting Jews. There is ominous evidence of orders for the construction of new concentration camps in the Soviet Far East from early 1953, confirming that *"Soviet authorities were preparing for a large influx of new political prisoners at a time when few remained after World War II."* For Arendt, this shift from accusing Soviet Jews of Zionism to implicating them in a putative Jewish world conspiracy ultimately signals the true affinities between Hitler and Stalin:

> *"The open, unashamed adoption of what had become to the whole world the most prominent sign of Nazism was the last compliment Stalin paid to his late colleague and rival in total domination with whom, much to his chagrin, he had not been able to come to a lasting agreement."*[29]

Stalinist Ultra-Nationalism

We have just seen how, toward the end of his life, Stalin contemptibly promoted open anti-Semitism and may well have been preparing another Holocaust. Yet even before this, as examined in parts I and II, Stalin combined Great Russian chauvinism, authoritarian high modernism, and a continuation of Tsarist imperialism from the beginning of his rule to "stabilize" his control over the Soviet Union and pursue its becoming a superpower. As such, *"Stalinism was a deeply*

[28] Evtuhov 728–729; Syaznok 305.
[29] Arendt xxxix-xl.

demand for the fetishization of nationalism in culture, his regime launched an anti-Semitic campaign that was first announced in *Pravda* in January 1949 against the *"emissaries of rootless cosmopolitanism,"* meaning Soviet Jewish artists and intellectuals, for their supposed Zionism and attendant lack of pride in the Soviet Union, leading often to their being replaced in the State sector by non-Jews, expelled from the Party and their professional organizations, and having their works censored;[24]

- Stalinist repression against Yiddish-language newspapers and institutions in the Jewish Autonomous Region (JAR) located in Birobijan in the Soviet Far East, together with prison and death sentences for JAR leaders, accused of *"anti-State activity, espionage, and attempts to create a Jewish state in the USSR"*;[25]

- In parallel to the shuttering of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee, the Jewish Labor Bund was dissolved in Soviet-occupied Poland in 1949;[26]

- Whereas Stalin's regime was the first country to recognize Israel in May 1948—in an attempt to undermine British imperial power—Soviet authorities regarded the Rosh Hashanah celebrations in Moscow in August 1948 which coincided with the visit of Israeli envoy Golda Meyerson (later Meir), who was received enthusiastically, as highly disloyal;[27]

- The announcement in January 1953 in *Pravda* of the *"discovery"* of the supposed *"Kremlin doctors' plot,"*

[24] Evtuhov 722–723; Szaynok 302–303.
[25] Evtuhov 723; Szaynok 303.
[26] Szaynok 310.
[27] Evtuhov 723; Szaynok 304.

anti-Soviet communists in the background" in Barcelona after Ó Séaghdha questions them about this. They are, moreover, quite dishonest about the overall meaning of Stalin's intervention in the Spanish Civil War.

Furthermore, regarding deportations, Jeremy ***completely overlooks*** Stalin's far more extensive and systematic ethnic cleansing of over a million ethnic minorities, mostly Muslim, during World War II: Chechens, Crimean Tatars, Kalmyks (Buddhists), Ingush, Balkars, Karachai, and Meskhetians. As there is no mention or discussion of these crimes against humanity on the podcast, neither is there any discussion of precisely *why* Stalin and the Communist Party might have feared these minorities' siding with the advancing Germans: namely, due to their oppression under the Soviet Union. Forcibly transferred by the NKVD to Central Asia, the Far North, and Siberia like the Cherokee people coerced onto the "Trail of Tears," many of these oppressed peoples died either during the journey or in exile—leading to the logical conclusion that Stalin is guilty of genocide here beyond any reasonable doubt. Of course, these atrocious mass-deportations go unmentioned by Jeremy, who rather banally asserts that the Volga Germans *"had it better"* in exile in Russia's Far North and Eastern Siberia than those Germans and German-Americans detained by the Franklin Delano Roosevelt administration in internment camps during World War II. For context, he will later add that he considers Lavrentiy Beria, the successor to the "Purged" Nikolai Yezhov as NKVD chief in 1939—a man responsible for the liquidation of Social Democrats in Georgia and Armenia, Old Bolsheviks in the Terror, and Polish officers captured after the Nazi-Soviet Pact—to have been a *"liberal."*[30]

So beyond proclaiming elitism and substitutionism; arguing in bad faith; and denying atrocities such as the Stalinist dictatorship, the Nazi-Soviet Pact, the May Days, Stalin's

[30] Evtuhov 692.

mass-deportations of oppressed nationalities, and the GULAG slave-labor camp system (see part II of this response); Jeremy and Justin now present the classic argument of "whataboutism," which seeks to distract from the issue at hand—Stalin's totalitarian atrocities—by falsely claiming that that same issue is dwarfed by some similar issue that is ongoing elsewhere. A fact check shows just how dishonest this argument is: 11,000 Germans and German-Americans were interned in the U.S. during WWII, while Stalin's regime deported at least 400,000 Volga Germans to Siberia and Irkutsk.[31] (For reference, the U.S. interned about 120,000 Japanese-Americans during WWII.)

In sum, Jeremy is lying to his audience when he claims that Stalin wasn't *"just f*cking with people just to f*ck with them."*

[31] Ulrich Merten, *Voices from the Gulag* (Lincoln, Nebraska: American Historical Society of Germans from Russia, 2015), 168–170.

totalitarian regimes: with the Hitler-Stalin Pact in mind, it's simply untenable to pretend that Stalin bore no responsibility for the deaths of millions of Polish Jews at the hands of the Nazis, the question of the Comintern's facilitation of Hitler's coup to the side for the moment;

- Tellingly, Hitler clarified that the only man for whom he had *"unqualified respect"* was *"Stalin the genius [*sic*],"* in an echo perhaps of his earlier view (from the 1920's) that *"in our movement the two extremes come together: the Communists from the Left and the officers and the students from the Right,"* and reflected as well in his May 1943 declaration that, *"in this war bourgeois and revolutionary states are facing each other,"* with 'bourgeois' meaning 'Western' and 'revolutionary' [*sic*] referring to Nazi Germany and the USSR;[22]

- The murder of Shlomo (Solomon) Mikhoels in January 1948, as mentioned in part I, and the liquidation of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee (JAC) he had led later that year, resulting in at least twenty death sentences and nearly a hundred others being sent to the GULAG—as the historian Bożena Szaynok confirms, *"Stalin personally supervised all activities directed against [the] JAC"*;[23]

- Gripped by fear and paranoia in the post-war environment regarding the possibility of a third world war, Stalin became increasingly suspicious of all elements considered *"disloyal,"* and, within the context of Politburo member Andrei Zhdanov's triumphalist

[22] Arendt 309n12-13.

[23] Evtuhov 723; Boena Szaynok, "The Anti-Jewish Policy of the USSR in the Last Decade of Stalin's Rule and Its Impact of the East European Countries with Special Reference to Poland," *Russian History,* 29, nos. 2–4 (2002), 302.

Defending an Anti-Semitic, Ultra-Nationalist, and Sexist Legacy

By interview's end, Jeremy, Justin, and Ó Séaghdha all sound quite pleased with themselves. The host praises his guests' uncritical take on the Soviet Union, which he claims to have represented *"a socialist [sic] f*cking powerhouse"* that was *"so successful at so many things."* Right. That's just as ideological as Jeremy and Justin's denial of the charges of anti-Semitism and Russian chauvinism raised against Stalin which Ó Séaghdha meekly poses before the triumphant conclusion. In this section, we will examine Stalin's anti-Semitism, ultra-nationalism, and misogyny—the latter being a category that goes virtually unmentioned by the "Proles of the Round Table" and Ó Séaghdha.

Stalinist Anti-Semitism

Responding to Ó Séaghdha's question about Stalin's anti-Semitism, these "Proles of the Round Table" say that they "don't know where you get the idea that he was anti-Semitic." No? Let us count the ways.

- Vis-à-vis Kamenev, Zinoviev, and Trotsky's United Opposition (1926), Stalin at the least took advantage of the anti-Semitic hatred among Party members directed against these men as Jews to outmaneuver and disarm them and expel Trotsky from the country in 1928;[21]
- The matter of conspiring to assassinate Trotsky (1940), exiled in Mexico;
- The Molotov-Ribbentrop, or Nazi-Soviet Pact, of August 1939, which partitioned Poland, home to Europe's largest Jewish community before World War II, between the two

[21] Evtuhov 642.

What Were Stalin's Real Crimes?

> "It is in the nature of ideological politics […] that the real content of the ideology […] which originally had brought about the 'idea' […] is devoured by the logic with which the 'idea' is carried out."
>
> – Hannah Arendt[1]

What's the biggest problem with the "criticisms" of Stalin raised by the "Proles of the Round Table"? That they are so disingenuous and anemic. One of the three critiques raised—about Spain—in fact ***isn't*** critical of Stalin, while we've seen (in part I) how the "criticism" on deportations is entirely misleading. A related question might be to ask how it looks for two presumably white U.S. Americans to criticize Stalin for *some* (1–2%) of his deportations of ethnic Germans, but ***not*** to do so when it comes to the dictator's mass-deportations of Muslims, Buddhists, and other indigenous peoples. At least Mao Zedong judged Stalin as being *"30 percent wrong and 70 percent right."*[2] For Jeremy and Justin, though, Stalin appears to have been at least 90%, if not 95%, right. Maybe we can soon expect the "Proles of the Round Table" Patreon to begin selling wearables proclaiming that *"Stalin did nothing wrong."*

[1] Arendt 472.

[2] Elliott Liu, *Maoism and the Chinese Revolution* (Oakland: PM Press, 2016), 68).

Besides the aforementioned Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, the May Days, and the mass-deportations of ethnic minorities, let's now consider five of Stalin's real crimes.

1. "Socialism in One Country": Stalinist Ideology

His revision, together with fellow Bolshevik Nikolai Bukharin, of the tradition of socialist internationalism to the reactionary, ultra-nationalist idea of "socialism in one country." Stalin and Bukharin arrived at this conclusion to compete against Lev Trotsky's rival concept of "permanent revolution," which calls first for a European and then global federation of socialist republics. This Stalinist doctrine, which demanded that the interests of the Soviet bureaucracy be considered first within the Third International (or Comintern), can explain both the General Secretary's demand to crush the anarchists in Spain in 1937 and his effective facilitation of Hitler's rise to power by means of the disastrous Comintern policy that considered the social-democratic (that is, non-Stalinist) opposition to Hitler to be "social-fascist." The General Secretary would only reverse course and endorse a "Popular Front" strategy after Hitler had taken power.[3] Stalinist ultra-nationalism finds contemporary purchase among neo-fascist, national-Bolshevik movements, whereas—perhaps ironically—the Comintern doctrine on "social fascism" has echoes today among ultra-leftists disdainful of coalition-building with more moderate political forces (e.g., as in the 2016 U.S. presidential election). Moreover, Stalin's preference for "socialism in one country" can help us understand the Soviet Union's continued sale of petroleum to Mussolini following this fascist's military invasion of Abyssinia (Ethiopia) in 1935.[4] Within this same

[3] Evtuhov 697–698.

[4] Henry Wolfe, *The Imperial Soviets* (New York: Doubleday, 1940).

fusing military service in World War II.[18] Ivan Dragunovsky, another communard whose father Yakov was executed by the State in 1938, elicits the frightful night in October 1937 when NKVD agents came to arrest him and several of his young comrades, most of them never to be seen again, simply because they were Tolstoyans.[19]

Dimitry Morgachëv, a peasant-intellectual from the "Life and Labor Commune," recalls his experiences in the Cheremoshniki transfer prison:

> *"There was terrible despotism in that camp, the kind you might think would be inadmissible in a land of workers and peasants [...]. More than thirty years have gone by, and it still makes my flesh crawl when I remember how we lived, not for hours or days but for whole years, in that savage, inhuman life where people died like flies in autumn from the hard labor, from starvation, from the smarting consciousness of our innocence and our undeserved infamy and punishment [...]. Could this be done by the representatives of Communist power, whose ideal—the withering away of the state, and a society without violence—was dear to them and to me alike?* ***Could all this be perpetrated by the same people who had grown so indignant about the savagery and arbitrary rule of the tsarist authorities over the common people?"***[20]

[18] Boris Mazurin, "The Life and Labor Commune: A History and Some Reflections," in *Memoirs of Peasant Tolstoyans in Soviet Russia,* trans. William Edgerton (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana Univ. Press, 1993), 91–108; Dimitry Morgachëv, "My Life," in *Memoirs of Peasant Tolstoyans in Soviet Russia,* trans. William Edgerton (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana Univ. Press, 1993), 177.

[19] Dragunovsky 252–257.

[20] Morgachëv 166–167, 171 (emphasis added).

eral Secretary as both *"hero and father-protector"*—Jeremy and Justin are fully prepared to falsify history and deny Stalin's world-historical crimes.[15]

Repression of Tolstoyan Peasants

To demonstrate how terribly mistaken this view is, let us briefly consider the testimony of three Tolstoyan peasants who lived and worked in the "Life and Labor Commune," which was founded in 1921 just outside Moscow and then relocated to Western Siberia in 1931. As Tolstoyans, these peasants followed the Christian anarchist Lev Tolstoy, who had proclaimed altruism, humanism, internationalism, anti-militarism, and vegetarianism in his late novels and essays.[16] Yet in 1936, Stalin's regime retaliated against the Commune for what might be termed excessive 'idealism': *"You are building communism too soon [*sic*]; it is too early for you to refuse to support violence and murder,"* declared the judge passing sentence on these pacifist stateless communists.[17]

Boris Mazurin, a Tolstoyan leader of the "Life and Labor Commune," writes in his memoirs that NKVD agents arrested several comrades from the Commune on the arbitrary basis of Article 58 of the Soviet criminal code, which was utilized by the State to suppress anyone considered to be a threat. Between 1936 and 1940, sixty-five Tolstoyans detained by the NKVD for being "counter-revolutionaries" never returned; the loss of so many members destabilized the ability of the Commune to continue operating. In addition, more than a hundred male Tolstoyan communards were executed by the Soviet power for re-

[15] *Ibid* 693.

[16] See for example Tolstoy's *The Kingdom of God Is Within You* (1893), *Resurrection* (1899), or *Hadji Murat* (1912).

[17] Ivan Dragunovsky, "From the Book *One of My Lives*," in *Memoirs of Peasant Tolstoyans in Soviet Russia,* trans. William Edgerton (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana Univ. Press, 1993), 251.

vein, and anticipating the affinity of today's neo-Stalinists for campist "analyses" of international relations, Moscow variously supported the feudalist Guo Min Dang (GMD) in China, the Turkish President Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the Iranian Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi, the Afghan King Amanullah Khan, and Ibn al-Sa'ud (founder of Saudi Arabia) during this time on the grounds that these leaders staunchly opposed the West, despite their great distance from any kind of socialist paradigm.[5]

2. Stalinist Imperialism

His "Great-Russian" chauvinism, as manifested in his brutally imperialist policies toward ethnic minorities—particularly the deportations of Muslims (as mentioned above in part I)—and other subject-peoples of the former Tsarist empire, whose colonial project Stalin enthusiastically embraced. Though Georgian by origin (his birth name was Ioseb Jughashvili), Stalin (whose Russian *nom de guerre* means "man of steel") was *"the most 'Russian' of the early leaders"* who advanced not only *"socialism in one country,' but [...] a socialism built on a predominantly Russian foundation."*[6] According to Dunayevskaya, Stalin's *"national arrogance"* was *"as rabid as that of any Tsarist official."*[7] In contrast to his mentor and supervisor Vladimir I. Lenin, who at least formally supported the right of self-determination for the oppressed nationalities of the Tsarist empire while greatly violating this principle in practice, Stalin was openly imperialist on the national question: according to the terms of this relationship, the colonies were to be *"plundered for raw materials and food*

[5] Alfred Meyer, *Communism* (New York: Random House, 1984), 92–93.

[6] E. H. Carr, *Socialism in One Country, 1924–1926,* vol. 2 (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970), 195–196.

[7] Dunayevskaya 318.

to serve the industrialisation of Russia."[8] It therefore remains clear that, under the Soviet Union, *"Russia was not a nation state but an empire, an ideological state. Any definition as a nation-state would probably have excluded at least the non-Slavs, and certainly the Muslims."*[9] Accordingly, the official history taught in Stalin's USSR rehabilitated the mythical Tsarist narrative that the Russian *"Empire had brought progress and civilisation to backward peoples."*[10]

In Georgia, a former Tsarist-era colony located in the Caucasus Mountains, the social-democratic Menshevik Party declared independence in 1918 to found the Georgian Democratic Republic, otherwise known as the Georgian Commune, wherein parliamentary democracy and a relatively collaborative relationship among the peasantry, proletariat, and political leadership lasted for three years, until Stalin and his fellow Georgian Bolshevik Sergo Ordzhonikidze organized a Red Army invasion in 1921 which crushed this courageous experiment in democratic socialism. The errant ex-colony of Georgia was thus forcibly reincorporated into the ex-Tsarist Empire—by then, the "Transcaucasian Federated Soviet Republic," part of the Soviet Union.[11] Besides Georgia, this "Transcaucasian Federated Soviet Republic" would include Azerbaijan and Armenia, which had also been occupied by the Red Army in 1920.[12]

In the Muslim-majority provinces of Central Asia, otherwise known as Turkestan, the poorest region of the former Tsarist Empire, Lenin and Stalin sided with the interests of the Russian

[8] Hensman 36.

[9] Olivier Roy, *The New Central Asia: The Creation of Nations* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 52.

[10] Hensman 53–60.

[11] Eric Lee, *The Experiment: Georgia's Forgotten Revolution, 1918–1921* (London, Zed Books, 2017). See a review here.

[12] *Ibid* 160–166.

For a more honest perspective, consider that Jean-Paul Sartre had by 1947 in *Les Temps Modernes* identified Stalin's Soviet Union as a class society based on a *"concentration-camp system."*[11] According to Hannah Arendt, within totalitarian regimes, *"th[e] place of positive laws is taken by total terror."*[12] Indeed, the Comintern's efforts to propagate its top-down vision for "revolution" were greatly hindered by the disillusionment of many Western sympathizers in light of the Terror of the 1930s and, ironically, the execution of many foreign communist leaders who had previously taken refuge in the Soviet Union.[13] Alongside killing an astonishing 90% of Soviet trade-union leaders, Stalin ordered the following far-reaching executions:

> *"The entire leadership of the Polish Communist Party fell victim, as did the many other foreign Communists and those who had served in Spain and China. Comintern activists were recalled to Moscow from all over the world and shot. Non-Russian nationalities were assailed; a large segment of the party leadership in Ukraine was annihilated."*[14]

Imagine framing these sweeping atrocities, as Jeremy does, as the *"defense of the Revolution,"* and denying that they served the ends of Stalin's consolidation of power. Imagine unironically claiming that *"Stalin was a critic of Stalin: he was able to self-criticize."* Such naked apologism represents nothing more than the regurgitation of Soviet State propaganda and the worship of power.

To accommodate fetishizing the Stalinist cult of personality in 2018—harkening back to a 1930's view which sees the Gen-

[11] Ian H. Birchall, *Sartre against Stalinism* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2004), 53.

[12] Arendt 464.

[13] Meyer 102.

[14] Evtuhov 675.

"super-industrialization," he and his supporters, known as the 'Right Opposition,' had no plan to institute a participatory form of government in the Soviet Union.[8] Therefore, it would appear that Justin and Jeremy are being rather dishonest about Bukharin's ideology, claiming that he's been *"waging a counter-revolution for years,"* in an attempt to prepare their rationalization of his execution following the Moscow Show Trials of 1938. They make much of Bukharin's confession to the charges of being an agent of foreign, imperialist powers—***but they do not admit the reality that Bukharin confronted credible threats against the lives of his young wife and baby if he failed to confess.*** As Catherine Evtuhov observes,

> *"The question of why the falsely accused confessed to the fantastic crimes is not really an intellectual puzzle: Some feared for the lives of loved ones [...]. Others were subjected to unbearable torture. A few many may have been convinced of the rightness of false confession for a higher good: the future of communism."*[9]

Once again, then, we find the "Proles of the Round Table" lying to their audience: referring to Bukharin, they suggest, *"it's not like he had a gun at his head [...]."* Actually, *he most certainly did.* Yet such spurious 'analysis' of historical events is one with their expressed faith in the official transcripts of Bukharin's trial, which, in being *"thorough,"* are somehow to be considered legitimate evidence against him. They mention how the U.S. ambassador to Moscow endorsed the Moscow Show Trials, but fail to note that the U.S. philosopher John Dewey wrote the report *Not Guilty* in defense of those falsely charged by Stalin.[10]

[8] Evtuhov 642–644.
[9] Evtuhov 674.
[10] *Ibid* 674.

settlers against the Muslim peasantry.[13] In Orientalist fashion, the Bolsheviks considered Central Asia's *"Muslims as culturally backward, not really suitable to be communists and needing to be kept under a kind of tutelage."*[14] Yet in light of the sustained *Basmachi* revolt waged by Muslim *guerrillas* against Soviet imperialism in the first decade after October 1917, Stalin also recognized the significant threat these colonized Muslims could pose to the Soviet Union—hence his active discouragement of pan-Islamism and pan-Turkism by means of cutting off the USSR's Muslims "subjects," many of them ethnically and linguistically Turkic, from the rest of the *Ummah* (Islamic global brotherhood or community) abroad. An early 1930's law punishing unauthorized exit from the USSR made observation of *hajj,* or the pilgrimage to Mecca, quite impossible.[15] The expulsion from the Communist Party (1923) and subsequent imprisonment (1928) of the Volga Tatar Sultan Galiev, a pan-Islamist "national-communist" who envisioned organizing the Turkic Muslims into a fighting force against Western imperialism, followed a similar logic.[16]

In the Stalinist conception, the numerous subject-peoples of the Soviet Union could be classified hierarchically according to their "stage of development," as based on their mode of production and whether or not they had a written language, such that supposedly more 'advanced' peoples would qualify as 'nations' that were granted the status of "Soviet Socialist Republic" (SSR), whereas "less developed" peoples would be granted "Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republics" (ASSR), while those without written languages would be placed in "Autonomous Regions" (AR), or "National Territories" (NT). In 1953, the year

[13] Roy 50–51, 83.
[14] *Ibid* 50.
[15] Evtuhov 692.
[16] Roy 45–46, 52–53, 66.

of Stalin's death, there existed 14 SSR's, 20 ASSR's, 8 AR's, and 10 NT's in the USSR.[17]

This systematic atomization of oppressed nationalities followed Stalin's "principle of the dual bridgehead," whereby the State would favor those minorities that could assist the USSR in expanding its reach while repressing other minorities whose existence could serve as a "fifth column" for the USSR's rivals. In part I of this critique, we saw how this rationale played out in Stalin's mass-deportations: the General Secretary felt justified in forcibly transferring the Turkic Muslim Meskhetian people, among others, because they were supposedly too close to the Turkish State headed by Kemal Atatürk. Furthermore, this principle can be gleaned in the Soviet Communist Party's initial favoring of Uzbeks over Tajiks beginning in 1924, followed by a 180° shift in perspective upon the overthrow of Afghanistan's King Amanullah (a Pashtun) by Bacha-i Saqqao, a Tajik, in 1928—leading to the proclamation of the Tajikistan SSR in 1929.[18] The capital city of Dushanbe was subsequently renamed as *"Stalinabad."*[19] In addition, whereas the Communist Party favored its own Kurdish minority, some of whom included refugees, because it could use them in the future as pawns against Iran and Turkey, it had refused to support Kurdish and Turkmen rebellions abroad against Turkey and Iran in 1925. Above all, Stalin's nationalities policy achieved its greatest "success" in its complex partition of Turkestan by means of the drawing-up of borders that were defined along ethno-nationalist lines: just look at the region's current borders (see map above), which are based on those concluded by Stalin's regime. In thus pitting Central Asia's mosaic of different ethno-linguistic groups against each other, Stalin definitively laid the pan-Islamist specter to rest.[20]

[17] *Ibid* 64–65.
[18] Roy 67.
[19] Evtuhov 692.
[20] Roy 46, 68, 73.

the General-Secretary-to be (as in the Left and United Opposition). Yet tellingly, they will not present the actual content of Trotsky's argument: namely, that Stalin's Comintern policy on "social fascism" facilitated the Nazi takeover of Germany.

Continuing on, Justin states that Zinoviev and Lev Kamenev "recanted" following their joining with Trotsky in the United Opposition to Stalin—but no reason is given as to *why*. Certainly, as in the case of Nikolai Bukharin, Zinoviev and Kamenev feared for their lives and that of their loved ones, particularly after seeing the example made of Trotsky, who was expelled ignominiously first from the Communist Party, and then the Soviet Union altogether (in 1928). Instead of contemplating such factors, the "Proles of the Round Table" begin to attempt to explain *"why [...] the Purge [is] beginning to become a necessity [*sic*]."* Attempting to insert a victim-blaming narrative, Justin and Jeremy suggest that not all the "Old Bolsheviks" were "Communists"—meaning Stalinists—and therefore imply the necessity of their liquidation—and, in many cases, that of their families, who were also murdered so as to prevent revenge attacks against the Party emanating from the "clan" of those executed.[6]

This is a positively ghoulish illogic—one that is reproduced in Jeremy and Justin's distortions about Bukharin, another victim of the Terror, whom they portray as a *"social democrat."* In the first place, Bukharin was **not** a social democrat. Social democracy is incompatible with dictatorship: as Karl Kautsky, the preeminent theoretician of orthodox Marxism and German Social Democracy, insisted, there can be *"no Socialism without democracy."*[7] As a *"believer in party dictatorship, Bukharin was no democrat":* though he disagreed with Trotsky and Stalin in desiring a continuation of the New Economic Policy (NEP) and *"peace with the villages"* in place of rapid

[6] Evtuhov 676.
[7] Lee 236.

their putative *"nationalism,"* and his August 1932 letter to fellow Politburo member Lazar Kaganovich, in which the General Secretary *"set [forth] the goal of turning Ukraine into* a real fortress of the USSR*, a truly model republic."*[4]

Apologism for the Moscow Show Trials and Terror

> *"The insane mass manufacture of corpses is preceded by the historically and politically intelligible preparation of living corpses."* – Hannah Arendt[5]

While we have examined the Purges in parts I and II, let us now focus specifically on Justin and Jeremy's apologism for the infamous Moscow Trials of the "Old Bolsheviks" (1936–1938), which were clearly nothing more than show trials. Justin begins by mistaking the Bolshevik leader Gregory Zinoviev for "Alexander Zinoviev," a Soviet philosopher, and then mentions Trotsky's analysis of "Soviet Thermidor" without in any way clarifying its application to Stalinism in power: that is, with reference to its historical antecedent—the French Revolution—whereby the bourgeois Directory seized power after overthrowing the Jacobin leaders Maximilien Robespierre and Louis de Saint-Just. To be clear, Stalin's counter-revolution is highly suggestive of the legacy of the Directory—which is not to suggest that either Lenin or Robespierre were revolutionaries. In parallel, the "Proles of the Round Table" will mention Trotsky's analysis of Stalin's guilt over Hitler's rise—written years after his expulsion from the party—and somehow consider this as retroactive criminal evidence for Trotsky's supposed conspiracy against

[4] Evtuhov 675; Plokhy 252 (emphasis added).
[5] Arendt 447.

Dunayevskaya's observation here seems apt: it was in Stalin's *"attitude to the many [oppressed] nationalities"* that the General Secretary's *"passion for bossing came out in full bloom."*[21]

Stalin's imperialist assertion of power over Central Asia, which imposed the collectivization of cattle herds and the nationalization of bazaars and caravans managed by indigenous peoples while promoting Russian settlements, resulted in famine and revolt.[22] It involved a high-modernist assault on Islam in the name of emancipating women and remaking traditional patriarchal Turkic social relations, as we shall examine in more detail in the third part of this response.

Regarding Ukraine, see the section on Jeremy and Justin's Holodomor denial in the third part of this response. Briefly, Jeremy's Russian-chauvinist attitude toward all matters Ukrainian comes through at a fundamental linguistical level when he refers to Ukraine as "the Ukraine." This formulation, like the Russian *«на Украине»* ("in the Ukraine"), is an imperialist way of referring to the country, which is not just a colony of Russia or the Soviet Union (as in, "the Ukrain[ian province]"). The proper way is to refer just to Ukraine, as in the Russian equivalent *«в Украине»* ("in Ukraine").

Such attitudes are shared by Ó Séaghdha, who falsely claims Ukraine today to be a *"bastion of the far right and neo-Nazism,"* just as Justin compares *"Ukrainian nationalists"* to the U.S.-based Proud Boys. One's mind is boggled: as of July 2018, the ultra-nationalist Svoboda Party had only 6 seats, or 1.3%, in Ukraine's Verkhovna Rada, while in both rounds of elections held in 2014, Svoboda and Right Sector alike gained less than 5% of the vote.[23] In fact, Ukraine has held its first major LGBT Pride marches following the Euromaidan protests which overthrew the Putin-affiliated President Viktor

[21] Dunayevskaya 318.
[22] Evtuhov 689–690.
[23] Hensman 88–89.

Yanukovych in 2014. Meanwhile, by focusing on the supposedly 'fascist' Ukrainians,[24] Ó Séaghdha and his guests deny the global reach of Putin's conservative authoritarianism, from his 2014 occupation of Crimea and invasion of Eastern Ukraine and his subsequent mass-detention of Crimean Tatar Muslims, including in psychiatric hospitals, to his regime's criminalization of homosexuality, decriminalization of domestic violence, and genocidal intervention in support of the Assad Regime in Syria—to say nothing of his mutual affinities for the Trump Regime. How ironic is this misrepresentation, then, considering that Ukraine was the *"centerpiece of Hitler's vision of* Lebensraum*."*[25]

3. Stalinist State-Capitalism

His advocacy and implementation of state capitalism in the Soviet Union, whereby the basic relationship of exploitation between capital and labor persisted after the Russian Revolution, with the difference that capital in this case was managed and expanded by the Communist Party bureaucracy rather than the private capitalist class.[26] Upheld by the Army and police, the Soviet economy reduced workers to mere slaves: during the existence of the USSR, workers could not regulate, choose, or control their overseers and administrators, much less anticipate not having any, as through anarcho-syndicalist organization, or *autogestion* (самоуправление). In the USSR,

[24] This line is disturbingly close to that of the neo-fascist Aleksandr Dugin, who welcomed Russia's 2014 invasion of Eastern Ukraine by calling for "genocide… of the race of Ukrainian bastards [*sic*]." Alexander Reid Ross, *Against the Fascist Creep* (Chico, Calif.: AK Press, 2017), 233.

[25] Plokhy 259.

[26] Wayne Price, *Anarchism and Socialism: Reformism or Revolution?* 3rd ed. (Edmonton, Alberta: Thoughtcrime, 2010), 186–189; Cornelius Castoriadis, "The Role of Bolshevik Ideology in the Birth of the Bureaucracy," in *Bloodstained: One Hundred Years of Leninist Counterrevolution,* eds. Friends of Aron Baron (Chicago, Calif.: AK Press, 2017), 282.

peasantry following in the wake of the *"extremely successful"* experience of forced collectivization that tipped the peasants into the first famine (spring 1932); once Stalin doubled down on the confiscation of grain and cattle after hearing initial reports of the famine, adding reprisals against those villages that failed to meet production quotas by cutting them off, this exacerbated an already disastrous situation. The result was the death of nearly 4 million Ukrainians, more than 10% of the population, with an additional 1–2 million Caucasians, Russians, and Kazakhs succumbing as well.[3] Unsurprisingly, Justin and Jeremy have nothing to say about these Central Asian and Caucasian Muslim victims of famine.

To advance their lies about Ukraine, the "Proles of the Round Table" rely on one Grover Furr, a Stalin propagandist who also denies the Holodomor by citing the work of Mark Tauger, a supposed historiographer who actually quite fraudulently argues *against* the idea that the British Empire or the Soviet Union were responsible for the Great Irish Famine or the Bengal Famine, in the former case, or Holodomor, in the latter. As Louis Proyect has shown, Tauger wants to exclusively blame *"environmental conditions"* for these devastating catastrophes, and thus hide the role of political economy, power relations, and imperialism. This is the kind of ideology that the "Proles of Round Table" hold up as legitimate historical investigation.

Following the argument of the Jewish Polish lawyer Raphael Lemkin, originator of the concept of genocide, historian Norman Naimark holds Stalin responsible for genocide, if we consider the term's original definition, which meant to include social and political groups. In targeting the "*kulaks"* for elimination and thus provoking the Holodomor, Stalin certainly was genocidal. This conclusion becomes even clearer when we review Stalin's imperialist policies, his regime's concurrent purging of most of the Ukrainian Communist Party leadership for

[3] *Ibid* 253–254; Evtuhov 669.

of the Round Table," we will explore how anti-Semitism, ultra-nationalism, and sexism are essential aspects of the Stalinist legacy. We will then close with some comments about Soviet ecocide and a critical analysis of neo-Stalinist international relations today, which cover for pseudo-anti-imperialist executioners.

Holodomor Denial

While the breadth of Jeremy and Justin's Stalin's apologia on this interview is quite astounding, few aspects are as vile as their denial of the genocidal Ukrainian famine of 1932–1933. Justin is very clear about their view: *"there was no mass-famine,"* and the idea of Holodomor (the "Great Ukrainian Famine") is a *"myth."* Jeremy jumps in to claim that *"Ukrainian nationalists"* sought to undermine Stalin and *"intentionally starv[e] the Soviet Union."* First, let's note that, in making the latter claim, Jeremy unwittingly admits that the Soviet Union was imperialist, and *should be* that way: the implication is that Ukraine and other former colonies of the Tsarist Empire exist to serve Russia, or, in this case, Stalin's regime. Beyond that, certainly there *was* famine in Ukraine in 1932–1933: the "Proles of the Round Table" are almost unique among neo-Stalinists, in that, rather than claim that the reported Holodomor death-toll has somehow been exaggerated for political purposes, they claim that it *never happened.* In so doing, they quite literally ape Stalin's refusal to accept the reality of famine in Ukraine in spring 1932 upon receiving word of it from Vlas Chubar, Bolshevik leader of Ukraine, after which the General Secretary denied famine relief and banned the use of the word from all official correspondence.[2] While climatic conditions played a part, it was arguably the unrealistic quotas for the extraction of grain from the Ukrainian

[2] Plokhy 250–251.

> *"[t]he State [wa]s [the worker's] only employer. Instead of having thousands of 'choices,' as is the case in the nations where private capitalism prevails, in the U.S.S.R. (the U.S.C.R. [Union of State-Capitalist Republics: Voline]) the worker ha[d] only one. Any change of employer [wa]s impossible there."*[27]

Following the Revolution, *"[f]or the Russian workers, [...] nothing had changed; they were merely faced by another set of bosses, politicians and indoctrinators."*[28]

Peasants under Stalin were similarly reduced to serfs, particularly during and following the forced collectivization process that began in 1928. Continuing with the precedent of the Bolshevik policy of "War Communism," which had involved considerable extraction of grain and the conscription of young men from the peasantry, Stalin declared war on the countryside, expropriating all lands held by these peasants and concentrating these into *kolkhozi,* or "collective possessions," and *sovkhozi,* or State farms, which were to be worked by the peasants in the interests of the State.[29] This nationalization did not discriminate between "rich" peasant, or *kulak,* and poor—in contrast to the misleading presentation Jeremy and Justin make of Stalin's forcible collectivization campaign. The "Proles of the Round Table" deceptively explain the emergence of the "*kulaks*" by referring to the Tsarist Interior Minister Peter Stolypin's land reforms of 1906, while saying nothing about Lenin's "New Economic Policy" of 1921, which formally reintroduced private property. They also completely misrepresent Stalin's collectivization policy, which proceeded at the

[27] Voline, *The Unknown Revolution* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1975), 359–361.

[28] Paul Mattick, "Bolshevism and Stalinism," in *Bloodstained: One Hundred Years of Leninist Counterrevolution,* eds. Friends of Aron Baron (Chicago, Calif.: AK Press, 2017), 271.

[29] Voline 372–375.

points of bayonets, as a natural outgrowth of the traditional peasant commune (*mir* or *obshchina*), which had resisted the Tsarist State for centuries. In fact, it was arguably through Stalinist forcible collectivization that the Russian countryside fell under the control for the first time.[30] As peasant resistance to this *"total reordering of a rural civilization from the top down"* mounted, including an estimated 13,000 *"mass disturbances"* just in 1930, Stalin's regime resorted to atrocious counter-insurgent tactics to bring the countryside to heel, including mass-executions, reprisals, and the resulting famines of 1931–1933 in Ukraine, South Russia, and Kazakhstan.[31] The Stalinist regime conveniently expanded the definition of exactly who was a *"kulak"* from a class-based to a political definition, such that even poor peasants who opposed forcible collectivization could be labeled "*kulaks*" and deported to Siberia, the Far North, and Central Asia, as about 1.8 million peasants were in 1930–1931. As during the numerous other episodes of mass-deportations devised by Stalin, mortality rates among "dekulakized" peasants were high.[32]

Puzzlingly, the "Proles of the Round Table" claim this collectivization to have been *"extremely successful"* in providing *"stability"* by the mid-1930's, the resistance of at least 120 million peasants to the Terror campaign and the "excess mortality" of between 6 and 13 million people such Terror caused during this period notwithstanding. By precisely which standards can this campaign have said to have been "successful"? The historian Catherine Evtuhov observes: *"From any humane perspective, the terrible costs were far greater than the rewards."*[33] In contrast, Jeremy and Justin either do not recognize the brutality of the Stalinist regime's campaign, or they simply explain away mass-death during collectivization as resulting from nat-

[30] Evtuhov 670.
[31] *Ibid* 668; Voline 374.
[32] Evtuhov 668–669.
[33] *Ibid* 670.

Repudiating the Stalinist Legacy

> *"In a totally fictitious world, failures need not be recorded, admitted, or remembered. […] Systematic lying to the whole world can be safely carried out only under the conditions of totalitarian rule."* – Hannah Arendt[1]

So far, in parts I and II of this response to "A Marxist-Leninist Perspective on Stalin," we have seen how the "Proles of the Round Table" and their host Breht Ó Séaghdha have systematically lied on their infamous 'Stalin podcast' about the history of the Soviet Union, from covering up the Barcelona May Days (1937), the GULAG slave-labor camp system, the Hitler-Stalin Pact (1939), and the NKVD's mass-deportation of Muslim and Buddhist minorities during World War II to declaring mass-death through Stalin's forced collectivization of the peasantry to have been *"extremely successful."* It is clear why Jeremy and Justin confidently present such a fraudulent version of history: were they even to mention any of these realities, it would become clear that their presence as Stalin apologists on a radio show ostensibly dedicated to an examination of "revolutionary left" history and theory would be immediately revealed as absurd. Yet here we are.

In this final third of my critique of this travesty, we will examine Jeremy and Justin's genocide denial and their enthusiasm for the Moscow Show Trials. In contrast to the "Proles

[1] Arendt 388, 413.

Trotsky in his study using an ice-pick on the pretext of discussing a political article he had begun to write, Mercader invited himself back to Trotsky's residence on the hot summer day of August 20, 1940, to discuss some revisions he had supposedly made to improve the same article. Concealing his ice-pick under a heavy raincoat, Mercader provoked Natalia Sedova's suspicions about his presentation:

> *"Yes, you don't look well. Not well at all. Why are you wearing your hat and raincoat? You never wear a hat, and the sun is shining."*[57]

Nevertheless, despite Natalia Sedova and Trotsky's own intuitive misgivings, this Stalinist agent did 'succeed' in assassinating the exiled Bolshevik that day—precisely by burying an ice-pick into Trotsky's head from behind, as the "Old Man" was distracted turning the page while reading the very essay Mercader had brought him:

> *"The moment was rehearsed. Wait until he finishes the first page, [NKVD officer] Eitington had coached. Wait until he is turning the page, when he will be most distracted."*[58]

Mercader's assassination of Trotsky thus illuminates the clear continuities between the rule of Stalin and the bourgeoisie, in terms of their shared instrumentalization of human life.

[57] *Ibid* 274.
[58] *Ibid* 276.

ural disasters—thus 'naturalizing' the Soviet regime's contributions to famines—and/or "*kulak* resistance." By so easily dismissing mass-death, they imply that the millions of poor peasants who were destroyed as a result of forcible collectivization deserved such a fate.

Jeremy and Justin are very insistent on arguing that the deaths associated with collectivization were "not due" to Stalin's policies—against both logic and evidence. They have nothing to say about Stalin's reconstitution in 1932 of the Tsarist-era internal-passport system, or *propiska,* in order to tightly control the movements of the Soviet peasantry and proletariat during forced collectivization. Upon its proclamation in December 1932, such "passportization" was effected and mandated in *"towns, urban settlements, district centers, and Machine and Tractor Stations, within 100-kilometer radiuses around certain large towns, in frontier zones, on building sites and state farms"*: it thus openly revoked the freedom of movement of the majority of the Soviet population, including peasants and ethnic minorities.[34] With this in mind, it would appear that the "Proles of the Round Table" do not to want to concede the possibility—and reality—that Stalin's "dekulakization" campaign involved the oppression and dispossession of many poor peasants, whether these were insurgents against whom the State retaliated for defending their communities against Stalinist incursion or simply peasants whom the parasitic bureaucracy considered mere objects of exploitation and either killed outright or left to die during forcible collectivization—thus reflecting the extent to which internal colonialism characterized the Stalinist State.[35]

[34] For a translation of the text of the December, 1932 decree of the USSR Central Executive Committee and the Council of People's Commissars, see M. Matthews, *Soviet Government: a Selection of Official Documents on Internal Policy*, J. Cape, 1974, 74–77.
[35] Hensman 34–35; Plokhy 249–250.

Indeed, Stalin's "dekulakization" campaign followed a very clearly state-capitalist rationale, both requiring and (once established) providing mass-labor inputs. Based on the economic theory of Yevgeni Preobrazhensky, Stalin's massive State project to centralize the peasantry so as to more deeply exploit it represented the phase of "primitive socialist accumulation" that was considered as necessary to finance a rapid industrialization of the Soviet Union. In parallel to the colonization of the New World, the enslavement of Africans, and the enclosure of the commons by which capitalism arose as a historical mode of production,[36] Preobrazhensky essentially argued that the Soviet State must exploit the peasants and use the surplus value extracted from them to accelerate the growth of capital and industry.[37] This brutally mechanistic logic, which has served as the model for similar industrialization processes in countries led by Stalinist bureaucracies such as Maoist China and Ethiopia under the Derg,[38] openly exhibits Marxist-Leninism's fundamental bias against the peasantry, whether "*kulak*" or otherwise. Such bias was clearly on display on Ó Séaghdha's podcast, given the embarrassing side-comments about *"comrades cuddling"* during the horrors of forced collectivization, and Jeremy and Justin's astonishing conclusion that this collectivization which took the lives of millions of poor peasants had been *"extremely successful."* These Stalinists thus appear to have no class analysis of the peasantry, instead considering them all as reactionaries and *"capitalists"* whose oppression and destruction signifies progress. They malign the peasants and laugh over their corpses while saying nothing about the conditions of **"second serfdom"**—represented by *barshchina* (State labor

[36] Karl Marx, *Capital,* vol. 1, trans. Ben Fowkes (Penguin: London, 1976), 873–904.

[37] Evtuhov 642.

[38] Jason W. Clay and Bonnie K. Holcomb, *Politics and Famine in Ethiopia* (Cambridge, Mass.: Cultural Survival, 1985).

slavery[54]—still, Stalin's brazen attempts to assassinate him in Mexico City not once but twice remain shocking in their brutality to this day. They may well have inspired the commission of similar atrocities on the part of the C.I.A.,[55] the Israeli Mossad, and even Mohammed bin Salman's recent murder of the journalist Jamal Khashoggi in the Saudi consulate in Istanbul.

First, on May 24, 1940, the Mexican surrealist and muralist David Alfaro Siqueiros led an assassination-squad in an assault on Trotsky's fortified family residence, which the exiled Bolshevik leader had been granted by Mexican President Lázaro Cárdenas, who had afforded him asylum and personal protection. Mercader represented Stalin's back-up plan. Having adopted an elaborate "deep-cover" false identity as "Jacques Mornard," a Belgian aristocrat unconcerned with political questions, Mercader had seduced and used Sylvia Ageloff, herself a leftist Jewish intellectual from Brooklyn connected through her sisters to Trotsky, for two years to get close enough to facilitate both assassination attempts. While the complicity of "Jacques" in the first plot remained undetected, this was only possible because Siqueiros' team captured and murdered Trotsky's young American security guard Robert Sheldon Harte, whom Mercader knew and also used to gain access to Trotsky's residence in the early morning of May 24. Yet a combination of luck; quick-thinking by Natalia Sedova, Trotsky's wife, who isolated and shielded her partner's body from the would-be assassin's bullets; and the imprecise strategy to kill Trotsky that morning ensured his survival.[56] Nevertheless, following a dry-run to assassinate

[54] Ida Mett, "The Kronstadt Commune," in *Bloodstained: One Hundred Years of Leninist Counterrevolution,* eds. Friends of Aron Baron (Chicago, Calif.: AK Press, 2017), 185–190; Voline 592–600; Maurice Brinton, *The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control* (London: Solidarity, 1970).

[55] Arendt xxn4.

[56] John P. Davidson, *The Obedient Assassin* (Harrison, NY: Delphinium Books, 2014), 48, 193–199.

suggest that, as far as political prisoners were concerned, the GULAG system was designed to torment such 'politicals' by maintaining them at a minimal level of sustenance, rather than starving or otherwise killing them outright.

On a more positive note, Stalin's death in March 1953 brought *"hope [to] the [inmates of the GULAG] camps,"* inspiring both the June 1953 workers' uprising against Stalinism, which not only overthrew State power in several cities and work-sites in East Germany but also involved ***workers' liberation of prisons and concentration camps,*** and the unprecedented strike by political prisoners at the Vorkuta slave-labor camp which followed just two weeks later.[51] Dunayevskaya comments in a manner that remains completely germane today that both of these episodes represented an *"unmistakable affirmative"* response to the question of whether humanity can *"achieve freedom out of the totalitarianism of our age."*[52]

5. Assassination of Trotsky

> "*What specific characteristics in a man enable him to become the receptacle and the executor of class impulses from an alien class[…]?"*
>
> – Raya Dunayevskaya[53]

His ordering of the assassination of Lev Trotsky, as carried out by the Spanish NKVD agent Ramón Mercader in Trotsky's residence in Coyoacán, Mexico, in August 1940. Whereas there is little love lost between us and the "Old Man," as Trotsky was known, given his status as the butcher of the Kronstadt Commune, the would-be executioner of Nestor Makhno, an advocate of the militarization of labor, and an apologist for State

[51] Dunayaevskaya 325–329.
[52] *Ibid* 327–329.
[53] *Ibid* 317.

requirements), extraction, and low pay—that formed the basis of Stalinist industrialization.[39]

Within Soviet class society, according to Voline (writing in 1947), there existed approximately 10 million privileged workers, peasants, functionaries, Bolshevik Party members, police, and soldiers (comprising approximately 6% of the population of the USSR/USCR), as against 160 million effectively enslaved workers and peasants (or 94% of the USSR/USCR's population).[40] The basic structure of the Soviet Union, on Paul Mattick's account, was *"a centrally-directed social order for the perpetuation of the capitalistic divorce of the workers from the means of production and the consequent restoration of Russia as a competing imperialist power."*[41] This 'total State' *"resembled an army in terms of rank and discipline,"* and atop it all *"lived Stalin, moving between his Kremlin apartment and his heavily guarded dachas. He and his cronies indulged themselves night after night, in between issuing commands and execution orders, feasting and toasting in the manner of gangland chiefs."*[42]

4. The GULAG Slave-Labor Camp System

"*The deaths of the conquered are necessary for the conqueror's peace of mind.*" – Chinggis Khan: a phrase of which Stalin was fond (Evtuhov 676)

His regime's founding (in 1930), mass-expansion, and vast utilization of the GULAG slave-labor camp system, known officially as the "State Camp Administration," which played a central role in the General Secretary's "Great Purge," otherwise known as his "Terror." These purges served the goal of *"ensur[ing] the survival of the regime and Stalin's position as its*

[39] Evtuhov 685.
[40] Voline 380, 388.
[41] Mattick 264.
[42] Evtuhov 688, 730.

supreme leader" by eliminating the remaining *"General Staff of the [Russian] Revolution"* as well as the workers, peasants, and intellectuals who resisted Stalin's state-capitalist plans.[43] The General Secretary's insistence on obedience, his paranoid vengefulness, his equation of any kind of opposition with treason, and the fear felt by Communists that the Soviet Union was militarily encircled, particularly in light of a newly remilitarized and fascist Germany, can help explain the Terror, which involved the arrest of at least 1.5 million people, the deportation of a half-million to camps, and the execution of hundreds of thousands. The total camp population reached 2.5 million in 1950.[44]

As Yevgenia Semënovna Ginzburg's memoir *Journey into the Whirlwind* attests to, the GULAG system was designed in such a way as to partially recoup the financial losses involved in the mass-imprisonments which followed from Stalin's Purges of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union: instead of summarily being executed or idly rotting away in prison, many detainees were forced to work for the State with little to no material compensation. Ginzburg shows as well that political prisoners suffered greater discrimination in access to health services, nutritional intake, shelter, and types of labor performed in the GULAG, relative to other convict groups: the 'politicals' were always assigned hard labor. Many GULAG prisoners died performing slave-labor, whether clearing forests or constructing railroads: such was the fate of numerous enslaved prisoners forced to construct the Moscow-Volga Canal from 1932–1937.[45] Within the Magadan camp located in Eastern Siberia where Ginzburg was held, the discrepancy between the housing conditions of Hut No. 8, a *"freezing cold" "wild animals' den"* where the female political

[43] Plokhy 255; Dunayevskaya 320.
[44] Evtuhov 671, 676, 693, 730.
[45] *Ibid* 675, 688.

prisoners lived, and the abodes of those convicted for lesser offenses, in which lived individuals with *"healthy complexions and lively faces"* enjoying *"blankets in check patterns"* and *"pillows with hemstitched linen covers,"* clearly illustrates the discrimination.[46] This same dynamic seems to explain the contrast in appearance—and physical comfort—among the female slave-labor teams assigned to the Kilometer 7 work site: the *"peasant women" "had managed to keep their own coarse scarves"* and some of the *"ordinary criminals"* had sheepskin coats, while the political prisoners *"had not a rag of [their own]"* and wore footwear which was *"full of holes [and] let in the snow."*[47] Ginzburg's fellow inmate Olga was therefore right to anticipate that Stalin's regime would expand the use of *"hard-labor camps"* in the wake of the downfall of NKVD head Nikolai Yezhov in 1939, especially considering that the majority of those imprisoned by Stalin were of prime working age.[48]

In a reflection of the maxims of Stalinist state-capitalism, Ginzburg reports that the slave-labor system to which she was subjected in the GULAG would dole out food only in proportion to the output that a given team would achieve. For teams like hers comprised of intellectuals and ex-Party officials who lacked experience with manual labor, then, this dynamic would result in a downward spiral of production—and welfare, since they were unable to achieve a basic threshold for production which would allow them access to the very food they needed to maintain and increase production in the future.[49] Yet slave-laborers were sometimes provided with food relief if mortality rates were deemed 'excessive.'[50] Ginzburg's memoirs thus

[46] Eugenia Semyonovna Ginzburg, *Journey Into the Whirlwind,* trans. Paul Stevenson and Max Hayward (San Diego: Harcourt, 1967), 366, 368.
[47] *Ibid* 402.
[48] *Ibid* 258.
[49] *Ibid* 405–406.
[50] *Ibid* 415.