

ARCHIVES: Stalin, the poet, and life's choices

"I regard class differences as contrary to Justice." (Albert Einstein in a personal statement of his credo.)

"The Russians have proved that their only aim is really the improvement of the lot of the Russian people." (Albert Einstein in his 1934 refusal to sign a petition condemning Stalin's murder of political prisoners.)

"Any government is evil if it carries within it the tendency to deteriorate into tyranny. The danger ... is more acute in a country in which the government has authority not only over the armed forces but also over every channel of education and information as well as over the existence of every single citizen." (Albert Einstein in a speech to Russian scientists in support of democratic socialist ideals and criticism of untrammled capitalism.) (1)

BY GAITHER STEWART

(DateLine: Rome, 20 August 2008)

I have chosen to set out on this trip back in time to Joseph Stalin from the six-meter tall statue of the revolutionary writer, Vladimir Mayakovsky.



Standing on a square about a mile from Moscow's Kremlin, the towers of which are nearly visible from famous Trimphalnaya Square, commonly known as Mayakovskaya Square, the poet's statue seems lonely in the hubbub of modern Moscow. Passing right over the body of the "poet of the Revolution", so to speak, this voyage passes through the intricacies and pitfalls of available choices in life, the artistic choices of the poet and the political-ideological choices of Stalin, a man caught at the center of an extremely complex world historical process. The ultimate goal on this journey is to suggest a reassessment of the historical role of Joseph Stalin, Soviet Russia's leader of 30 years following the death of Lenin, the *Vozhd* of a revolution that changed irreversibly the nature of backward Russia and carried the revolution far beyond its frontiers. (LEFT: Mayakovsky's monument.)

But first, the poet Vladimir Mayakovsky.



The Cubo-Futurist poet of the Russian Revolution, admired, pampered and promoted by Stalin and some Russian revolutionary leaders, mistrusted and criticized by others, apparently shot himself in his office one day in April in 1930 in Moscow. His death ultimately became the subject of speculation for historians and mystery thriller writers alike: suicide or murder? Both versions are tempting and facile: either he committed suicide because of putative disillusionment with the

revolution or he was murdered by Stalin. Or perhaps it was a more mundane question of his love life.



The poet with his pre-eminent love interest, Lilya Brik, who, unfortunately, was married.

Mayakovsky moved with his family to Moscow in 1906 from Georgia (Gruzia) where both he and Stalin were born, he Russian, Stalin, Georgian. Legend has it that he was a member of the Bolshevik Party at age 14, a messenger and distributor of leaflets for which he was arrested before the Revolution. He allegedly wrote his first poem in solitary in Butyrki Prison when he was 16. Then, while studying art he published in 1912 together with a group of avant-garde painters a Futurist manifesto entitled "A Slap In the Face of Public Taste" which demanded that earlier writers such as Pushkin and Tolstoy be thrown overboard. Fiery eccentric Mayakovsky became the star and the legend of the revolutionary period because of his booming voice, exciting reading, showman abilities and the revolutionary idea in his work.

***...grab stones, bombs, knives, whatever you can find and those
of you who have no hands***

hit with the forehead. March you oh hungry ones

Crooked,

Skinny, dirty, full of parasites

March!

During the Bolshevik coup in Petrograd, Red sailors marched on the Winter Place chanting one of Mayakovsky's slogans: *Eat pineapples, chew on quails, Your last day is coming,*

bourgeois!



Mayakovsky was active in many facets of agitprop on behalf of the revolution. This (left) is one of the posters he designed.

Left March, his poem of 1918 about the proletarian courage, discipline and optimism of those engaged in the struggle against counter-revolution, was typical of his lyrical poetry, clear and simple, fully intelligible to the masses and admired by Lenin and soon by Stalin. A newspaper wrote at the time that when with his strong, powerful voice resounding through the whole square, he read *Left March*, the whole square repeated his verse:

'The Commune will never go down.

Left!

Left!

Left!'

Who's marching out of step?

Left!

Left!

Left!'

The poet of the Revolution scorned the official Proletarian Culture establishment, *Proletkult*. Producing posters and

placards and slogans for the revolutionary government, he came to believe he embodied the Revolution. In his many films, none really successful, and in his greatest poetry, his major theme was the proletariat. He traveled over the world from Paris to Mexico (to visit the Communist Diego Rivera) and to the USA where he read his revolutionary works. In one poem he boasted of the bewilderment and fright his red Soviet passport created in the world of those times when immigration officials touched it as if it were a bomb.



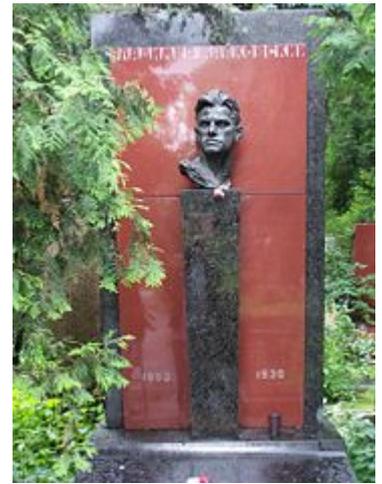
LEFT: Czarist police mugshot and filecard for Stalin. A man of demonstrated courage. Stalin robbed banks at gunpoint to fund the Bolshevik cause. As ruler of the U.S.S.R. from 1929 to 1953, Joseph Stalin was in charge of Soviet policies during the early phase of the Cold War. He adopted the name Stalin, which means "Man of Steel," while still a young revolutionary.

Around the world Fascists burned Mayakovsky's books along with those of Lenin, Stalin and Gorky. Enemies, everywhere and always, feared the poet of the proletarian revolution. For the poet of socialist realism the dialectic of historical development and the change of social system is clear. He wrote that Capitalism once played a progressive role: it ripped open 'the feudal rights', sang the 'Marseillaise', putrefied; it 'lay down on the road of history'. And so there is 'only one way out – blasting!'

In 1925, he had criticized suicide in a poem dedicated *To Sergey Yesenin* (whom he did not particularly admire) when that revolutionary poet committed suicide: *In this life, to die is not so difficult, To make life is considerably more difficult.* Active in diverse fields and the mouthpiece of the Proletariat till the end, Vladimir Mayakovsky shocked everyone when

suddenly, surprisingly, on April 14, 1930 he shot himself in his Moscow office. He left this note:

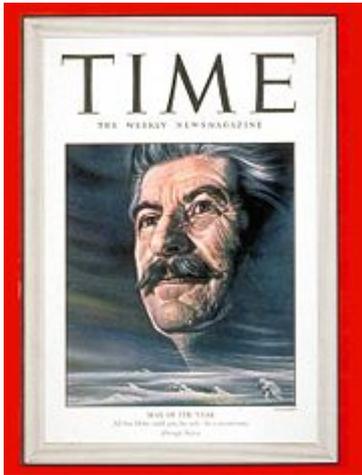
“As they say, the incident is closed. The love boat wrecked by daily life. I’m all even with life and nothing would be gained by listing mutual hurts, troubles, and insults. This is not the way I recommend but there is no other way out. Don’t think I’m a coward. Seriously, it could not be helped. Lili, love me”



RIGHT: *Mayakovsky’s grave*

Why his dramatic exit from life when he and his movement were winning? For much of his life Mayakovsky was in fact concerned with death. Like most artists he was sensitive to criticism, and, as a man he was deeply disappointed in love. He wrote a play about suicide and love called *Vladimir Mayakovsky*, especially about the great love of his life, Lili Brik, and about the tensions between history and personal love. Following Stalin’s death in 1953 rumors arose that Mayakovsky did not commit suicide but was murdered at the behest of Stalin. Apparently that made little sense since Stalin, after a long silence following the poet’s death, wrote that ‘Mayakovsky was and remains the best and most talented poet of the Soviet epoch’ and that ‘indifference to his cultural heritage is a crime.’(2)

CHOICES



LEFT: Stalin, TIME "Man of the Year" for 1943. The anti-Nazi alliance between the US and the USSR in WWII momentarily suspended the constant barrage of anti-communist and anti-Soviet propaganda throughout the Western media. Political truth—for the mainstream press—is what the State Department says it is.

In EITHER/OR Kierkegaard idealized the role and life of a poet as despair. The poet sees the ideals but he must flee from the world in order to rejoice in them and he cannot remain unaffected by the caricatures of these ideals all around him. Similarly also the greatest political idealists, those whose ideas can change the world just as every poet aspires to do, experience extreme despair and doubt. I suspect they too quake in doubt and fear, as Stalin down in the Kremlin must have done. Their passions are perhaps those of the poet even though their mission requires a cruelty—or ruthless determination—foreign to the poet. Tolstoy wrote that ordinary men too do the things they do, perhaps making history without knowing what they are doing. Tolstoy believed that the force that took God's place and moved history was something great but incomprehensible, inaccessible, arcane.

Only the truly arrogant pass through life believing they have always made real choices.

I could hardly believe it! With the idea of political choices in mind I wrote in Yahoo Search the words "American Left" with the intention of investigating the reasons behind the socio-political choices we make in life. And what comes up? A long

list of hate articles about even the mere idea of Left. Especially Socialism. And collectivism. From Rightwing watch. People for the American Way. One wrote "The Left is brainwashing us of our patriotism!" (sic)

Such knee-jerk hate reactions make choice seem like a rare luxury. A chimera.



LEFT: The "Big Three" at the Yalta Summit, in 1945.

One major problem political writers face is receptiveness. That is, the lack of it. When your receptors are geared to receive only what you've heard before, what you've heard all your life, all the rest seems like propaganda! And truth will forever be a stranger. Yet, ignorance is certainly not bliss. I believe we still have the choice of choosing in life. I believe each of us cares about the collective, about what some progressive Christians call "fellowship", and does not really believe and accept all the clichés about rugged individualism. As human beings we have a collective heart. We all yearn for it, those epiphanic moments that change our lives. All of us. Every individualistic capitalist bastard yearns for the feeling of belonging to the collective –the "bosom"–of the human race. In fact he always depends on it, for his pleasures, comfort, wealth, and at times even survival. The most rabidly individualistic libertarian tycoon could not indulge most of his whims, a Lear jet for example, or a huge yacht, palatial mansions, and so on, if he did not rely on a vast and complex network of human beings who designed, tested and built such objects and places. Modern life in a

consumerist culture is impossible in total isolation.

Therefore we should want to know what we believe in. And why. What we stand for. Who wants to be forever conditioned? Though trees too have life, humans are not trees. Trees just grow if they are allowed to, though abused and kicked and starved, they condition us and react to us even if they probably don't face either/or choices. Perhaps in our lives we only choose partly; sometimes circumstances choose for us; and, as many believe, sometimes fate chooses for us. Perhaps choice is also chance at work in our lives. We have to wonder. It often seems that way—if you're too weak-hearted to make the choice yourself. Sometimes chance is a beautiful woman, sometimes she is a monster. I wonder how old we have to be, what preparation is necessary, before we can savor the understanding, the dignity, the satisfaction, of even attempting to make a choice. Perhaps the truth is that no one chooses completely his own path and maybe there is less freedom of will in us than we like to believe. Tolstoy and Stendahl among others believed that everything is predetermined by the course of things.

STALIN AND THE POET

Stalin had several things in common with the poet Mayakovsky. Both were born in Georgia, or Gruzia. Both attended schools in Georgia and as children both spoke Georgian. After he moved to Moscow, Mayakovsky like Stalin was expelled from school because he was more interested in revolution than study. At age 15 he was imprisoned for political agitation for the Bolsheviks. The poet and Stalin shared their fierce unrelenting defense of the proletariat and fears of the counter-revolution. After the poet's suicide, unleashed criticism by the cultural establishment and his fall into disgrace, Stalin rehabilitated him, saying: "Mayakovsky was and remains the most talented poet of our Soviet epoch." Practically overnight, the boycotted poet was reborn as a hero of the revolution. Squares were named in his honor and statues

erected.

Stalin is my major concern here. My conclusion is that I have been had in his regard. I have been brainwashed both by western propaganda—mostly of the Anglo-Saxon variety— and biased historians of all nationalities and ideologies. Now my eyes are more open. My receptors are up and searching. I read my history. I note that Oliver Cromwell, Napoleon and even Robespierre have been rehabilitated. Today Napoleon is more hero than scoundrel.

Most certainly Stalin, whose positive accomplishments survive, should not be classed with Hitler, whose counter-revolution destroyed his own nation in a delirium of madness, and whose social agenda, from the start, was reactionary, racist, and ignoble. Though Stalin like Hitler was ruthless in eliminating opposition and built a totalitarian state, he succeeded in creating a new social order and, at an enormous price, made a modern nation of what had been labeled a country of savages. (3) Moreover, while Hitler was engaged in all his Aryan gibberish, Stalin's goal, however distorted by Stalin the dictator, was and remained the birth of a new society based on equality. Social justice. Surely even in deeply capitalistic and indoctrinated America we remember what that is all about? (4)

I don't want to get started on my views of historians here since the task of reassessing Stalin will fall to them, the young historians capable of eluding the great brainwash. The task they face today is enormous. There are always many reasons to doubt the truth in history. Who organized the Cold War? Why the Korean War? Who killed John F. Kennedy and Bobby? How did either of the Bushes become President of the United States? What is the full story behind the towers of the World Trade Center? How and why did the United States of America go wrong?

As Virginia Wolfe said, "Positions have been taken, myths have

been made.”

I can digest Emerson’s quote that “there is properly no history; only biography” only in the sense that he was referring to life lived by men, not however the recorded one. As a rule so far from reality as to be a lie. Though Tolstoy wrote that men make history without knowing what they are doing, he also believed that the force that took God’s place and moved history was something great, incomprehensible, inaccessible, arcane. Class struggle as the engine for history did not enter into Tolstoy’s otherwise formidable visions, because dialectical materialism was foreign to his formation. If it had, maybe he would have had his answer.



Stalin, Lenin and Kalinin, in 1919. All three at the core of old Bolshevism.

Concerning Stalin, it is time to begin to reassess the revisionists. One must recall that in Marxist terminology revisionism means deviation from the basic principles of the class struggle as laid down by Marx and Engels. Revisionism of the historical role of Stalin began with Khrushchev and culminated in Gorbachev. Now the needle is moving backwards. Reassessment of Stalin and the revisionists is at hand. It is time for a revision of revisionism. Time passes and hard historical data soften and gradually morph into opinions. Though some Russians consider him a monster, many others think of him as a god, or simply a great man, and look back to Stalinist times with nostalgia. For example, I read somewhere that today in modern Russia the Tsar Ivan the Terrible and Stalin are widely considered the greatest of Russian leaders. When Stalin died in 1953, despite the famines and the purges

and show trials, the executions and deportations of whole peoples, the Russian nation mourned him. The crowds lined up at the Kremlin and the Lenin Mausoleum to see his body were so chaotic that some 500 persons lost their lives trying to get a glimpse of Stalin's corpse. Also Communists of the West mourned the passing of Lenin's heir, the leader of the fortunes of the home of Communism and the victor over Fascism.

Here let's list some of the positive accomplishments that outlived Stalin, some also right into Russian capitalism today. Many of my references are found in the biography, *Stalin*, by the historian Isaac Deutscher, who cannot be accused of leanings toward Stalinist Communism.

...

- Whatever his aberrations and "crimes", Stalin was a revolutionary who introduced a new social organization in contrast to capitalism.
- Stalin was the guardian of Marxist doctrine.
- Many historians agree that Stalin was a Leninist as he himself claimed and a true follower of his master, the icon of Soviet Russia. Therefore, one speaks of Marxism-Leninism-Stalinism as a continuum.
- Stalin pragmatically forced through *Socialism In One Country* when it became obvious that world revolution was not imminent.
- Stalin modernized Russia which until the Revolution was basically more Asiatic than European.
- Stalin made a nation of a great potpourri of peoples.
- Under Stalin Russia's industry which in 1930 was inferior to any medium-sized European country by the late 1940s had become Europe's first industrial power and for long the second in the world.
- The whole nation was sent to school, as education boomed.
- In the minds of Russians, Stalin led the entire

nation to defeat Nazism in defense of the homeland against the foreign invader. The victorious war proved Stalin right in his forced, ruthless, rapid industrialization of the 1930s.

- Stalin created the belief of the USSR as defender of the oppressed of the world, while leading the struggle against counter-revolution.
- After WWII and its enormous cost in life (over 27 million dead, practically an entire generation) and the destruction of Russia's productive industry Stalin ruthlessly forced a hungry people dressed in rags to "catch up with the USA", to achieve greater production goals and to lay the foundations for Russia's nuclear efforts.

Under Stalin Russian society was so dramatically changed that even after today's political restoration and the return of capitalism Russia retains much of the heritage of Stalinist Soviet Union. (4)



LEFT: Monument to Stalin in Gori, Georgia.

STALIN'S "TERROR"

Robespierre's "reign of terror" has quietly subsided into history books. Robespierre has found his place in history, comfortable and acceptable. After all, it was revolution. (The question is still debated among historians and political observers whether the French revolutionaries or counter-revolutionaries committed greater crimes. Robespierre himself was executed in twenty-four hours without the benefit of a

real trial, with his jaw literally blown away by a musket shot, and without receiving any form of medical care. And both the Thermidoreans and royalist restorationists were fierce in their vengeance against the Jacobins and sans culottes.)

One of many adulatory posters produced during the war years, when the Cult of Personality was in full sway. Ironically, although Stalin did not directly discourage such sycophancy, he showed on a number of occasions that he had a jaundiced view of the practice.

But Stalin? Well, he is still pretty fresh. Just barely off the books of current political news. And still powerfully influential on the legitimacy of the system he's so clearly identified with: communism, capitalism's main ideological alternative, indeed its nemesis.

The question we should ask is why did he do it? Why the putative cruelty? Terror for terror's sake? Like gassing five million Jews? Of course not. Stalin was a revolutionary, aiming at a better life for Russia's peoples. Otherwise, why all that pain and suffering, and intrigue and duplicity and betrayal of his closest comrades and friends? Only a bad faith western historian could portray the Stalinist period in only one color. If one must accuse, then better to zero in on Brezhnev and Stalin's heirs, those who distorted a revolution into the grayest of useless and obtuse bureaucracies.



LEFT: Stalin's body [lying in state](#) in the House of Trade Unions in [Moscow \(1953\)](#)

Deutscher notes that Stalin didn't need scapegoats for the

enormous economic difficulties involved in industrializing backward Russia. Stalin's real motives were to wipe out all possible alternatives to his "socialism in one country" and the accompanying rapid industrialization. That is, he crushed opposition. And his era was rich in alternative ideas. From Trotsky on the far left to all the others on the right. Stalin suspected—with plenty of reason, as he understood class dynamics quite well and the nature of the capitalist cliques that confronted him— that the West was still plotting against the Soviet Union as it had done from the time of the Revolution. Western appeasement of Nazi Germany and its support of the revival of German militarism filled him with foreboding. Was the West not instigating Germany against Russia? Today stories of America's close involvement with Nazi Germany, that of the Bush family for example, were not the fruit of Stalin's paranoia. It was brutal reality. For Stalin, Germany's crushing of the Tsar's primitive armies in World War I was a recurrent nightmare.

Stalin's real problems concerned the opposition capable of forming an alternative government. Not one alternative, but many. His method was to destroy them. In those times, it was easy—especially in a country convulsed by recent counter-revolutionary action, war and famines—to equate political opposition with counter-revolution, Stalin's major internal problem. No less than organized political opposition has been eliminated in the USA and today more and more in Europe in general, Stalin's goals were the same though his methods and style were much less subtle, even if his ultimate goals were at least defensible, which in our case, the utter triumph of a fascistic plutocracy, they are not. After all, wittingly or unwittingly, what has been the not always subtle policy of the US political leadership for 232 years if not to create what is in effect a one-party system, thus far making impossible the emergence of an alternative political system, i.e. socialism?



LEFT: Today's Stalin's grave by the [Kremlin Wall Necropolis](#)

Revolution is not a tea party for young maidens. It's not, as Mao suggested, a blacktie sitdown dinner. Revolution is dramatic, drastic, sweeping change, not a time for subtleties. Revolutions in human affairs often occur with the suddenness and blind force of earthquakes, once the underlying tectonic plates have come to the point where the friction and cumulative tensions can no longer be controlled. Counter-revolution from within or without was a real danger. The first so-called show trials of Kamenev and Zinoviev, both historic Bolshevik leaders, took place a few months after Hitler's armies marched into the Rhineland. The last trials of Bukharin and Rykov coincided with Nazi occupation of Austria. Germany with Western help was rearming and taunting and testing the world. Western appeasement and aid to Nazi Germany duly preoccupied Stalin who had come to believe that the West was sicking Hitler on the hated Soviet Union. He had to dread the prospect of a single-handed war against Germany. He must have seen such a war as the end of the Soviet experience and his own personal end. He saw an opposition using a new war to its advantage to crush him and his Socialism In One Country. In such circumstances the leaders of the opposition on left and right would have been capable of overthrowing Stalin. Therefore the opposition had to die as traitors. Moreover, the purges then generated real opposition, thus leading to more and more terror, as in the French Revolution. Apparently there was a real conspiracy among military leaders. A genuine plot? A conspiracy perhaps?

Deutscher notes that “quite a few *non-Stalinist* sources maintain that the generals did indeed plan a *coup d'état* and did this for their own motives, and on their own initiative, not in compact with any foreign power.” It was to have been a palace revolt in the Kremlin, culminating in the assassination of Stalin.” The plot was uncovered and Stalin hardly hesitated in the elimination of one-fourth of the officers' corps.

From that point there was no more rebellion against Stalin as happened to Robespierre. There was no Thermidor for Joseph Stalin, born Vissarion Ivanovich Djugashvili. The new Soviet nation hardly changed as a result of the purges. Instead it organized and in defense of the homeland defeated Hitler's until then invincible armies.

For many of the above reasons, western Communists did not desert Communism and the home of the world revolution until nearly 20 years after Stalin's death. Stalin got some of the blame but far from all. If anything the grayness of the bureaucratism of the Brezhnev years and the crushing of dissension and rebellion in East Europe, especially in Prague 1968, finally led to the end of “the age of innocence” of many Western Communists.

While Mayakovsky's lonely statue still stands on Triumphalnaya Square and many people still call it Mayakovskaya Ploschad, the poet is rather forgotten.

On the other hand, though monuments to Stalin have been pulled down across Russia [and new ones are now being proposed], his shadow nonetheless hovers and haunts modern Russia and like the ideals of the French Revolution many of his achievements survive making Russia great and particular and its capitalism dicey ... to say the least.

Gaither Stewart, a Senior Contributing Editor and European correspondent for [The Greenville Post](#) and [Cyrano's Journal](#), is a veteran reporter, raconteur, and essayist on historical

and cultural topics. His observations, often controversial but always thought provoking and well-substantiated, are published on many venues across the web. He resides in Rome, with his wife Milena.

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NOTES

(1) Albert Einstein – Political views

[Editor's Note: Most Americans have never heard that both Albert Einstein and Albert Schweitzer were avowed socialists who regarded the capitalist system as a moral abomination. Gandhi, too, was opposed to capitalism, but he was more of a Fabian socialist. Part of the manufactured ignorance of inconvenient facts, of course.]

Einstein considered himself a pacifist and humanitarian, and in later years, a committed democratic socialist. He once said, "*I believe Gandhi's views were the most enlightened of all the political men of our time. We should strive to do things in his spirit: not to use violence for fighting for our cause, but by non-participation of anything you believe is evil.*" Einstein's views on other issues, including socialism, McCarthyism and racism, were controversial (see Einstein on socialism). In a 1949 article, Albert Einstein described the "predatory phase of human development", exemplified by a chaotic capitalist society, as a source of evil to be overcome. Einstein was very much involved in the Civil Rights movement. He was a close friend of Paul Robeson for over 20 years. Einstein was a member of several civil rights groups (including the Princeton chapter of the NAACP) many of which were headed by Paul Robeson. He served as co-chair with Paul Robeson of the *American Crusade to End Lynching*. When W.E.B. DuBois was frivolously charged with being a communist spy during the McCarthy era while he was in his 80s, Einstein volunteered as a character witness in the case. The case was

dismissed shortly after it was announced that he was to appear in that capacity. Einstein was quoted as saying that “racism is America’s greatest disease”.

The U.S. FBI kept a 1,427 page file on his activities and recommended that he be barred from immigrating to the United States under the Alien Exclusion Act, alleging that Einstein “*believes in, advises, advocates, or teaches a doctrine which, in a legal sense, as held by the courts in other cases, ‘would allow anarchy to stalk in unmolested’ and result in ‘government in name only’*”, among other charges. They also alleged that Einstein “was a member, sponsor, or affiliated with thirty-four communist fronts between 1937-1954” and “also served as honorary chairman for three communist organizations.”^[15] It should be noted that many of the documents in the file were submitted to the FBI, mainly by civilian political groups, and not actually written by FBI officials.

Einstein opposed tyrannical forms of government, and for this reason (and his Jewish background), opposed the Nazi regime and fled Germany shortly after it came to power. At the same time, Einstein’s anarchist nephew Carl Einstein, who shared many of his views was fighting the fascists in the Spanish Civil War. Einstein initially favored construction of the atomic bomb, in order to ensure that Hitler did not do so first, and even sent a letter ^[16] to President Roosevelt (dated August 2, 1939, before World War II broke out, and probably written by Leó Szilárd) encouraging him to initiate a program to create a [nuclear](#) weapon. Roosevelt responded to this by setting up a committee for the investigation of using uranium as a weapon, which in a few years was superseded by the Manhattan Project.

After the war, though, Einstein lobbied for nuclear disarmament and a world government: “I do not know how the Third World War will be fought, but I can tell you what they

will use in the Fourth—rocks!”

(2) After his death, Mayakovsky was attacked in the Soviet press as a “formalist” and a “fellow-traveller” (as opposed to officially recognised “proletarian poets”, such as [Demyan Bedny](#)). When, in 1935, Lilya Brik wrote to Stalin about this, Stalin wrote a comment on Brik’s letter:

“Comrade [Yezhov](#), please take charge of Brik’s letter. Mayakovsky is still the best and the most talented poet of our Soviet epoch. Indifference to his cultural heritage is a crime. Brik’s complaints are, in my opinion, justified...”
(Source: *Memoirs by Vasily Katanyan (L. Yu. Brik’s stepson) p.112*)

These words became a [cliché](#) and officially [canonized](#) Mayakovsky but, as [Boris Pasternak](#) noted,^[1] they “dealt him the second death” in some circles. Mayakovsky had no heir among Russian poets and his style was never properly analysed nor further developed. Mayakovsky was, however, the most influential futurist in Lithuania and his poetry helped to form the [Four Winds](#) movement there.^[2] He was also an influence on the writer [Valentin Kataev](#). The well-known phrase “Lenin lives, lived and will live” come from his elegy “Vladimir Ilyich Lenin”.

(3) Those who have been taught to think that communism inherently signifies an *exceptional* thirst for cruelty and brutality should read closely the struggles before, during and after the French Revolution, a totally *bourgeois, non-Marxist* revolution, in which both sides—royalist and republican—committed enormous atrocities. They should also bear in mind that revolutions often unleash centuries if not millennia of pent-up class grievances in a matter of months or years, and that since for the most part in all truly revolutionary processes the majority is the wronged party, the

revolutionaries also have the numerical edge, at least for a while. It's always the Right's abuses and crimes that create "the Left." See, for example,

War in the Vendée, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Revolt_in_the_Vendée. Eds.

(4) Stalin is by no means perceived as negatively in Russia as he is throughout "the West." As the Wiki note on him makes clear, "In recent years, support of Stalin has resurged. Millions of Russians, exasperated with the downfall of the economy and political instability after the breakup of the Soviet Union, want Stalin back. A recent controversial poll revealed that over thirty-five percent of Russians would vote for Stalin if he were still alive.^[82] This is seen by some as a return of Stalin's cult. In [Krasnoyarsk](#), it has been decided to rebuild a communist-era memorial complex dedicated to Josef Stalin.^[83] Also, a new statue of Stalin is to be erected in [Moscow](#), "returning his once-ubiquitous image to the streets after an absence of four decades, a top city official said yesterday", as reported by [The Scotsman](#).^[84]

A survey from late 2006 revealed that 47% of Russian respondents viewed Stalin as a positive figure, and only 29% as a negative one. Some controversy also ensued when a recently approved history textbook for Russia's schoolchildren attempted to illustrate Stalin's purges as a necessary evil in the process of state-building.^[85] In July 2008, Stalin topped the list of most popular figures of the Russian history and culture in the nationwide television project "[Name of Russia. Historical Choice 2008](#)" in which 178,881 out of 1,453,390 voted for him.^[86]

See also:

[Stalin: A New History](#), by Sara Davies and Jim Harris

Students of the Stalin question are well advised to check out Prof. Grover Furr's own trove of analyses regarding the Soviet leader. Furr was and has remained one of the most steadfast anti-revisionists of this complex period in world history, and his determination to expose the endless distortions and lies concerning Stalin and his regime have made him (as might be expected) a *bete noire* in all quarters with an ax to grind and a propaganda point to make against communism. As such he has battled, by his own reckoning, conservative, liberal, left-liberal, Trotskyist, and Fascist interpretations of history. The following are—among many papers— worth examining:

- [Some Remarks On Yet Another Anticommunist Article](#) Concerning Communist Solidarity With The Spanish Republic In The Spanish Civil War //

- [A review](#) of *Spain Betrayed: The Soviet Union in the Spanish Civil War* by Ronald Radosh (Editor), Mary Radosh Habeck (Editor), Grigory Sevostianov (Editor). Annals of Communism series. Yale University Press, June 2001.

- “The Sixty-One Untruths of Nikita Khrushchev” [an interview with Prof. Grover Furr](#)