

Stalin's Catechism: An Interview with the Historians David Brandenberger and Mikhail Zelenov about their New Book 'Stalin's Master Narrative'¹

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'Modern History of Russia' Journal (Journal): You've just published a critical edition of the *History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks): Short Course* that focuses on I. V. Stalin's editorial interventions into the text. What is the *Short Course* and why does it matter today?

David Brandenberger: The *Short Course* is a Stalin-era textbook on party history that was designed for mass consumption and indoctrination. I. V. Stalin, it turns out, not only commissioned the writing of the book, but edited it before its release. Because the *Short Course* was officially advertised as having been compiled under the supervision of a Central Committee commission, it immediately became the centerpiece of the Bolshevik canon upon its publication in September 1938. The *Short Course* then remained at the center of party ideology and propaganda until N. S. Khrushchev denounced it in 1956 at the Twentieth Party Congress. Before the *Short Course* was withdrawn from circulation, approximately 40 million copies of it had been printed in over a dozen languages, making it one of the most widely published books in the twentieth century.

It bears mentioning that the *Short Course* had quite an afterlife after 1956 as well. Despite being withdrawn from circulation, the textbook's structuring of Bolshevik and state history remained central to the party canon in the USSR into

the Gorbachev period. Outside the USSR, the *Short Course* continued to affect party- and state-building priorities in the People's Republic of China into the 1970s. Outside of the communist bloc, the *Short Course* structured many critiques of Stalin and Stalinism and serves as a symbol of dogmatism to the present day.

Journal: Could you go into greater detail about the various ways that the *Short Course* has been understood since its release in 1938?

David Brandenberger: In the USSR, the *Short Course* was Stalin's master narrative on party and state history. It scripted not only party indoctrination and propaganda, but depictions of Soviet history in mass culture, theater, film and the display cases of the country's museums. During the postwar period, the *Short Course* was also used as a blueprint for the building of socialist societies within the people's democracies of Eastern Europe. It played much the same role in Maoist China, providing instruction on how to build socialism well into the 1970s².

Perhaps the first and most influential critic of the *Short Course* and Stalin's role in its writing was Khrushchev, who famously assailed his former mentor in his 1956 Secret Speech. Exposing Stalin's crimes and deviations from the Leninist path, Khrushchev used the *Short Course* to illustrate his predecessor's ostensible penchant for exaggerating and distorting his role within the party's official historical narrative. "Does this book correctly depict the party's efforts in the socialist transformation of our country, in the construction of a socialist society, in the industrialization and collectivization of our country?" Khrushchev asked. "Does it correctly depict the other steps taken by the party, which unerringly followed the path outlined by Lenin? No — the book speaks principally about Stalin, about his speeches and about his reports. Everything is tied to his name without the smallest exception." Continuing, Khrushchev chided the former leader: "And when Stalin claimed that he himself had written the *Short Course on the History of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks)*, this arouses nothing less than indignation. Can a Marxist-Leninist really write about himself in such a way, praising himself to the skies?"³ Invoking the *Short Course* to demonstrate Stalin's immodesty, Khrushchev connected many of the book's idiosyncrasies to his predecessor's ostensibly craven need for recognition and self-aggrandizement. This for Khrushchev made the *Short Course* a key element of the cult of personality, which in turn was said to explain many of the excesses of the Stalin period.

Khrushchev's speech proved formative in nearly all subsequent assessments of the *Short Course*. In the USSR, B. M. Ponomarev, for instance, denounced the *Short Course* for the way it had ossified party history into schematic and formulaic thinking and stymied new theoretical work on Marxism-Leninism⁴. Outside of the communist bloc, the *Short Course* was regarded as a prime example of everything that was wrong with Marxism-Leninism. Sovietologists such as Leonard Shapiro, Paul Avrich and Sydney Ploss published analyses in 1960s and 1970s that essentially repeated Khrushchev's criticisms of the text⁵. Robert C. Tucker went further to contend that the *Short Course* should be read as a cultic biography of sorts — an indoctrinational tool not only for Soviet society, but for Stalin himself, who apparently suffered from a severe inferiority complex⁶. Still other critics viewed the *Short Course* as epitomizing the dogmatism of Marxism-Leninism-Stalinism. Intellectual historians

like Leszek Kołakowski and Andrzej Walicki viewed it as a paradigmatic example of totalitarian thought⁷.

Between the mid-1960s and the advent of M. S. Gorbachev's *glasnost*' program, historians in the USSR observed an unofficial taboo in regard to critical commentary on the *Short Course*. Starting in 1988, however, N. N. Maslov published a number of revelations about the *Short Course* stemming from archival research. That said, he then reiterated Khrushchev's connection of the text chiefly to the cult of personality. D. A. Volkogonov denounced the book as not only a cornerstone of the cult of personality, but an "encyclopedia of dogma" responsible for ossifying critical thought and reformist thinking in the USSR. R. A. Medvedev expressed similar concerns about the book's dogmatism⁸. Only a handful of scholars aside from Maslov and Volkogonov have looked carefully at the archival documents associated with the *Short Course* since their declassification early in the 1990s⁹.

Ultimately, much of the existing scholarship on the *Short Course* should be considered methodologically suspect. Accepting Khrushchev's hyperbolic, politicized denunciation of Stalin at face value, virtually all of these commentators have sought to expand this indictment, influenced more by George Orwell, Hannah Arendt and the clinical *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* than by the historical record itself¹⁰.

Journal: Why did you feel a critical edition of this text was necessary?

David Brandenberger: Although the *Short Course* played a massive role in both the writing of Stalinist party history and in its anti-Stalinist critique, the text's actual genealogy has never been fully investigated, analyzed or assessed. This critical edition resolves precisely what Stalin interpolated and excised from the *Short Course*, clarifying his role in the writing of this all-important book. In so doing, it reveals a lot about Stalin's efforts to shape historical memory in the USSR. What's more, this critical edition provides unparalleled insight into Stalin's understanding of party history — both in a holistic sense and in terms of important trends, key events and decisive individuals

My involvement in this project stretches back over 20 years. Back in the 1990s, when I was working on my PhD dissertation and first book¹¹, I uncovered traces of Stalin's editing of the *Short Course* in the party archives in Moscow. That said, I also found the materials to be paradoxically both voluminous and incomplete. For that reason, I decided to set the project aside.

I returned to the *Short Course* in 2006 for my second book¹² after extensive consultations with M. V. Zelenov, the-then reigning authority on the textbook. With Zelenov's help, I realized that Stalin's editing did more than just advance the personality cult — indeed, his interpolations and excisions revised the official party line on key issues in Bolshevik history. Of particular note here are the *Short Course*'s accounts of 1917, the civil war, industrialization, collectivization, the Comintern, the Ezhovshchina, etc.

In 2008, I mentioned these findings in passing to Jonathan Brent, the-then editor of Yale University Press (YUP). Intrigued, he promptly offered me a contract for my second book and at the same time invited Zelenov and me to develop a critical edition of the *Short Course* for Yale's *Annals of Communism* series. It took us ten

years to complete the English edition of the project. ROSSPEN has agreed to publish the Russian edition and released a volume of documents in 2014; a second volume focusing on the *Short Course* itself will likely go to press in about two years¹³.

Journal: Could you please describe the process by which you developed this edition?

Mikhail Zelenov: Our research began by systematically combing through the relevant holdings of an array of archives in Moscow. We began with RGASPI — the Russian State Archive of Socio-Political Documentation — where we traced the decision-making resolutions of leading party organs. At the same time, we examined the papers of various institutions concerned with propaganda, agitation, education and publishing, as well as an array of collections of personal papers associated with people central to our story — A. A. Zhdanov, Em. Iaroslavskii, P. N. Pospelov and others. Particularly important to our work was Stalin's personal archive, which was expanded in 1999 to accommodate new materials transferred from the Presidential Archive of the Russian Federation (APRF). We also worked in other archives aside from RGASPI — the State Archive of Recent History (RGANI), the State Archive of the Russian Federation (GARF), the Russian State Military Archive (RGVA), the Central State Archive of the City of Moscow (TsGA Moskv). We searched fruitlessly in still others¹⁴.

After we identified materials important to our investigation, we attempted to synthesize them together into a coherent chronological framework. Some of this work was quite straightforward, inasmuch as many of the documents were properly dated and catalogued. Others, however, were undated and/or miscatalogued. Drafts of executive and administrative directives presented a major challenge in this regard. Still more challenging was the organization and analysis of thousands of pages of early and intermediate draft chapters of the *Short Course*.

In the end, days, weeks and even months were spent on the comparative analysis of different pieces of writing in order to systematize them into a schema that would help us to understand the relationship between them. This allowed us not only to establish the internal history of the editorial process, but to determine the authorship of individual draft chapters and key editorial interventions. Much of this analysis took place while working side-by-side in the RGASPI reading room; other consultations took place afterhours at my kitchen table. Still other collaborative work was conducted on opposite sides of the globe, mediated through Skype and email interfaces that allowed for the intensive communication and consultation necessary to ultimately produce key breakthroughs.

Much of this work required painstaking textual comparisons in order to trace the evolution of key sections of the *Short Course*. A lot of it was done by hand, particularly when the documents under analysis were handwritten or contained extensive marginalia. Less frequently, drafts were digitally scanned and then converted by Optical Character Recognition (OCR) software into word-processing files that allowed them to be subjected to computerized comparative analysis.

In the end, a summary record of all of Stalin's editorial interventions into the text was developed by comparing Iaroslavskii and Pospelov's final prototype draft of the *Short Course* to the final version of the text that was published in



Joseph Stalin at his desk. Late 1930s. (RGASPI, f. 558, op. 11, d. 1650, l. 19ob.)

September 1938. Stalin's interpolations in this critical edition are represented in *italics*; his excisions are rendered in ~~strikeout~~. Because of the complexity of the challenge of orthographically representing all of the changes that Stalin made to the text in the critical edition, we decided to record in *Stalin's Master Narrative* only those changes that actually made it into print. Intermediate drafts and abortive editorial changes are not reflected in *Stalin's Master Narrative*.

Ultimately, we hope to produce a more layered, comprehensive record of Stalin's interpolations and excisions for the Russian edition of this critical edition in 2–3 years. Three factors precluded such an agenda in the present edition. First, YUP contracted the manuscript to run 500,000 words — a word-count that was not generous enough to accommodate extensive appendixes or footnotes. Second, YUP required the text to be designed for undergraduates, graduate students and educated non-specialist audiences — something that precluded the inclusion of exotic orthography or a massive scholarly apparatus. Third, we discovered during our research that although the *Short Course's* archival record is uncommonly rich, it is far from complete. Many chapters of Stalin's *Short Course* lack intermediate drafts; several are missing enough material to provide only minimal detail on his editorial process.

The unevenness of the archival record ultimately suggested to us that the American version of this critical edition should provide a summary of Stalin's editorial interventions. At present, we expect the forthcoming Russian edition to contain much more detail on the layered nature of Stalin's editorial work.

Journal: What is the history behind the conception, planning and writing of the *Short Course*?

David Brandenberger: The *Short Course*'s origins date back to the late 1920s, when the party leadership expressed frustration over the lack of a single, official line on party history. Stalin spurred this new "search for a usable past"¹⁵ forward in 1931 with his famous letter to *Proletarskaia revoliutsiia*, in which he complained about the "scholastic" nature of existing party histories and called for a new, more approachable catechism for mass indoctrination and mobilization.

In the end, despite official support and consultations, it took party historians the better part of six years to develop a new party history. And ironically, when Stalin's court historians Iaroslavskii and Pospelov finally delivered the page proofs of the prototype *Short Course* to him in April 1938, Stalin found the text unsatisfactory. Refusing to authorize its release, he proceeded to rewrite vast stretches of it that summer before its publication in September 1938.

Journal: How do you understand Stalin's edits — what did he tend to add and what did he delete?

Mikhail Zelenov: There are several categories of Stalin's interventions into the text. First, it's worth mentioning that Stalin was a compulsive editor and read reports, draft legislation and even books with a pencil or chemical crayon in hand, proofing as he went. He was pedantic about terminology and preferred formal, sober writing. He disliked flowery language, as well as literary devices like foreshadowing.

Second, Stalin was concerned about the clarity of writing for mass audiences and insisted that the *Short Course*'s narrative be tightly structured around a handful of key themes. This led him to strike huge amounts of detail, lengthy digressions and even entire subsections of the text in order to foreground what he felt were the most important priorities of the manuscript.

Even more interestingly, Stalin meddled with the central theme of the *Short Course* — its red thread. When Stalin's court historians delivered the prototype *Short Course* to him in April 1938, they had structured the text around themes that he had sanctioned earlier in 1937. The Bolsheviks, according to this prototype text, were the only truly Marxist party and the only true party of the worker-peasant masses. Party history as a result was defined by the history of the Bolsheviks' struggle with oppositionists, both inside and outside party ranks. The Bolsheviks prevailed in this long struggle only because Lenin and Stalin understood how to work with the masses to defeat the opposition. Etc. etc.

When Stalin rewrote the *Short Course*, he heightened the vanguard nature of the Bolshevik party and reduced its reliance on the worker-peasant masses. Stalin downgraded the struggle with the opposition in the summer of 1938, despite his earlier support for this theme, in order to argue instead that party history was all about the struggle to build "socialism in one country" and unify Soviet society. What's more, in order to stress the role of the party vanguard in Bolshevik history, Stalin even went so far as to reduce his own role in the narrative in order to reassign some of the agency originally given to him either to Lenin or to the central party apparatus as a whole.

Journal: In terms of specific events in party history, what was Stalin's view of the most seminal event in this Bolshevik epopee, the October 1917 revolution? How was this victory represented in the *Short Course*?

David Brandenberger: Stalin's understanding of 1917 turns out to have undergone a profound transformation over time. During the early years of the Soviet experiment in the 1920s, Stalin espoused a conventionally Leninist view of the 1917 revolution in which domestic events were contextualized within internationalist ideals and a focus on party leadership was complemented by grassroots worker-peasant voluntarism. Perhaps the most distinctive aspect of Stalin's early analysis was his insistence that nationality be considered alongside class as a key source of revolutionary consciousness.

Twenty years later, in 1938, Stalin's 1917 had become an almost exclusively Russian Revolution, realized from above by a centralized Bolshevik vanguard. Activism, whether on the part of workers, soldiers, peasants, women, youth, or the non-Russian minorities, had been downgraded or deleted. Local party organizations were likewise left to languish. Proletarian internationalism and the larger global context of 1917 had given way to the autarchy of "socialism in one country"¹⁶.

Journal: What was Stalin's contribution to the *Short Course*'s treatment of the national question writ large?

Mikhail Zelenov: Nationality policy was considered Stalin's forte in the early Bolshevik movement and he regularly asserted in public after 1917 that the revolution was emancipatory not just in class terms, but in ethnic ones as well.

In 1938, however, a combination of factors led Stalin to downgrade the historical priority of the national question. More important, in Stalin's eyes, was the construction of a streamlined, unified historical narrative that would reinforce the authority and agency of the central party apparatus. In other words, Stalin's *Short Course* was not meant to be the story of a multicultural struggle for a diverse, egalitarian society; instead, it was to focus on the determination of a monolithic, vanguard party to overthrow the old regime and build "socialism in one country"¹⁷.

Journal: How did Stalin explain the Ezhovshchina in the *Short Course*?

David Brandenberger: The prototype of the *Short Course* was developed by Stalin's court historians between 1937–1938, during the years of the Ezhovshchina. Under Stalin's preliminary guidance, the narrative turned out in its prototype form to be an absolutely paranoid, claustrophobic vision in which domestic oppositionists and capitalist holdovers combined with foreign imperialists to undermine the construction of socialism in the USSR. Plots and dirty dealing abounded from 1917 forward; according to the prototype textbook, by 1937–1938, a massive omnipresent conspiracy united an unlikely alliance of leftists, rightists, domestic nationalists and foreign imperialists against the USSR.

Although Stalin had supervised the construction of this narrative, he rejected it during the summer of 1938 — something that I think indicates that he was beginning to have second thoughts about the Ezhovshchina. As Stalin edited the *Short Course*, he reduced the attention that the textbook afforded to this omnipresent conspiracy. He disentangled domestic oppositionists from domestic capitalist holdovers, denying opponents like N. I. Bukharin and A. I. Rykov direct influence over groups like

the kulaks. At the same time, Stalin reduced the level of contact and coordination between domestic oppositionists and foreign imperialists abroad — changes that reduced the coherence of the conspiracy.

In the end, these changes transformed the prototype's imminent, existential threat of an all-powerful, omnipresent conspiracy into a less concrete, more abstract menace. Stalin also rolled back the immediacy of the conspiracy by decoupling it from specific crises that the USSR was facing and by asserting that any terroristic plans already in motion had been arrested by the purges. Put another way, if the red thread of the prototype *Short Course* had been the party's perpetual struggle with the opposition, Stalin attempted in 1938 to reduce the primacy of this struggle and reorient the narrative around the struggle to build socialism¹⁸.

Journal: You write that Stalin deleted a lot of the *Short Course*'s bombastic commentary about his own role in the history of the Party. What was the relationship between the *Short Course* and Stalin's cult of personality?

David Brandenberger: When Khrushchev denounced Stalin during the Twentieth Party Congress in 1956, he noted that Stalin had had the *Short Course* exaggerate his personal role in the text. This contention quickly became popular both at home in the USSR and abroad, as it seemed to confirm all the egotistical excesses of the personality cult¹⁹. New research in the former Soviet archives, however, has called much of this analysis into question. Scholars like Sarah Davies and Jan Plamper have demonstrated that Stalin was frequently irritated by the excesses of his cult, particularly propaganda that focused too tightly on his personality, his idiosyncrasies or his personal background²⁰.

Stalin's editing of the *Short Course* supports this analysis. Iaroslavskii and Pospelov's prototype textbook generally conformed to Khrushchev's characterization of party history under Stalin, insofar as it attributed a vast amount of historical agency to the general secretary. Particularly after Lenin's death in 1924, the manuscript credited Stalin with almost everything of any significance in the affairs of party and state. When Stalin turned to vetting the prototype *Short Course* during the summer of 1938, he objected to the centrality of his biography within the text. Evidence suggests that Stalin regarded his personality cult — as well as the one celebrating Lenin — to be a necessary evil of sorts, a concession to an ill-educated Soviet population that was unable to make sense of unadulterated Marxism-Leninism on its own. Indeed, Stalin believed that his role in Soviet mass propaganda was to personify the party vanguard that was to lead the USSR forward to socialism²¹.

Inasmuch as the *Short Course* had been written for a more sophisticated audience of party members, Stalin questioned the prototype's tendency to attribute all of party history to him. In his view, this readership could handle a more orthodox approach to Marxism-Leninism. For that reason, during his editing of the textbook, he repeatedly reassigned the historical agency that the text had assigned to him to either Lenin or the central party apparatus, elevating particularly the latter institution at his personal expense. These editorial interventions resulted in the excision of passages, paragraphs and entire pages from the manuscript; ultimately, Stalin removed so much about himself from the *Short Course* that the authors of the prototype text protested to him about the scale of his deletions.

This is not to say, of course, that when the *Short Course* appeared in print, it had been entirely purged of its commentary on Stalin. Even after such extensive editing, it remained a product of its times²². But Stalin's editing of the book reveals that his personality cult was intended to do more than merely indulge his ego. It was intended to serve an instrumental, mobilizational purpose by deploying the general secretary as the personification of the Soviet experiment.

Journal: What else of note did Stalin alter in the party history narrative at the core of the *Short Course*?

David Brandenberger: Perhaps the two most striking revisions that immediately come to mind concern the changing contours of Soviet internationalism and the impending threat of war during the late 1930s.

Internationalism was a core element of early Bolshevik propaganda and despite the leadership's growing pragmatism after the October 1917 revolution, the concept remained key to party self-representation. The prototype *Short Course* prepared by Iaroslavskii and Pospelov for Stalin's vetting in April 1938 contained many of the traditional hallmarks of Soviet internationalism and spent a considerable amount of time detailing the global context for the October 1917 revolution and socialist construction that followed. The international revolutionary movement received considerable attention as well, as did the Comintern and its leadership of foreign communist parties. Finally, the conspiracies that threatened the survival and efficacy of the Bolshevik party and Soviet state were given a global dimension by linking them to international agents of imperialism and the world capitalist system.

Stalin rejected this internationalist narrative and reframed much of the history of the party and state in *sui generis* terms, stressing the "Russianness" of the revolution and the autarchic nature of socialist construction in line with his doctrine of "socialism in one country." This turn away from the global nature of the revolutionary movement was matched by a radical reduction in the amount of attention cast toward the Comintern. Even the international dimensions of the struggle with the opposition, which had been one of the defining characteristics of party history in the prototype text, were revised by Stalin's red pen. Although Stalin did not entirely eliminate the connection of domestic anti-party conspiracies to foreign imperialists abroad, he reduced the level of this international coordination and command-and-control — something that rendered the oppositionists opposing the Bolshevik party more homegrown, isolated and disorganized²³.

Stalin's revisions to the text regarding the impending threat of war during the late 1930s were similarly consequential. Iaroslavskii and Pospelov had designed their prototype party history between 1937–1938 to reflect a claustrophobic sense of danger to the USSR and the world socialist movement. A threat stemming from the structural contradictions of the USSR's location within a capitalist encirclement, it was said to be catalyzed by the Great Depression, which panicked the capitalist countries into brutally suppressing working class activists at home while staking their survival on imperialist adventurism abroad. This, according to Iaroslavskii and Pospelov, led to domestic repression in Nazi Germany, civil war in Spain, Japanese intervention in China and the imminent threat of a new imperialist war against the USSR.

стана с руководителями партии и правительства товарищ Сталин сказал:

«...Дружба между народами СССР—большое и серьезное завоевание. Ибо пока эта дружба существует, народы каждой страны будут свободны и непобедимы. Никто не страшит нас, ни внутренне, ни внешне враги, пока эта дружба живет и здравствует».

В результате проведения ленинско-сталинской национальной политики народы СССР перестали быть отсталыми, окрепла их экономика, растет культура, растут национальные кадры.

В 1936 году провозглашены союзники республиками Казахская, Киргизская, Грузинская, Азербайджанская и Армянская республики. В разряд автономных республик переведены автономные области: Кабардино-Балкарская, Коми, Марийская, Северо-Осетинская и Чечено-Ингушская.

Ленинско-сталинская национальная политика партии сыграла вокруг знамени партии все народы СССР и показала трудящимся всего мира образец правильного разрешения национального вопроса.

Ленин и Сталин неоднократно указывали, что частная собственность и капитал неизбежно *развединают* людей, разжигают национальную рознь. Наоборот, коллективная собственность и труд столь же неизбежно *сближают* людей, подрывают национальную рознь и уничтожают национальный гнет. Победа Советов в октябре 1917 года и установление диктатуры пролетариата явились основным условием уничтожения национального гнета и создания великой дружбы равных и свободных народов СССР.

Чем больше укреплялся социалистический строй, укреплялась коллективная социалистическая собственность в национальных республиках, тем больше росла и укреплялась дружба народов СССР. Это явилось одной из основ несокрушимого морально-политического единства всего советского народа, которое с такой силой проявилось при выборах в Верховный Совет СССР.

6. VII конгресс Коминтерна (июль—август 1935 года)

В чрезвычайно сложной международной обстановке собрался в августе 1935 года VII конгресс Коммунистического Интернационала. Конгресс прошел под знаменем объединения всех антифашистских сил.

В замечательном докладе товарища Димитрова были показаны причины, которые способствовали установлению фашистской диктатуры в Германии. Главной причиной явилась предательская политика реакционных социал-демократических лидеров. Социал-демократические лидеры проводили политику коалиции, соглашения с буржуазией. Они расколяли рабочее движение, ослабили пролетариат и его силу воздействия на крестьянство и мелких тружеников деревни. Они позволили фашистам безнаказанно организовать свои силы, призывали массы отступать перед фашизмом и кончили капитуляцией перед ним.

Коммунистические же партии были недостаточно сильны,

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чтобы помимо и против социал-демократии поднять массы и повести их на решительный бой против фашизма. Коммунистические партии иногда не уловили правильно подotti к массам, их агитация была недостаточно конкретна, не учитывала повседневных интересов рабочих.

Фашизм показал себя как злейший враг трудящихся, враг человечества. Своей звериной политикой он вызывает к себе жгучую ненависть трудящихся, ненависть всех честных людей. Сотни тысяч социал-демократических рабочих, обманутых своими вождями, не сопротивлялись приходу фашизма к власти, подверглись и подвергаются жесточайшим преследованиям, так же как и коммунисты. Они теперь начинают все более прозревать, понимать свои ошибки, готовы бороться против фашизма вместе с коммунистами.

Поэтому VII конгресс Коминтерна выдвинул задачу создания единого фронта борьбы против фашизма. «Осуществление единого фронта борьбы рабочего класса представляет на нынешнем историческом этапе главную, ближайшую задачу международного рабочего движения»,—сказано в резолюции VII конгресса Коминтерна по докладу товарища Димитрова.

Коммунистические партии, указывая конгресс, должны выдвигать такие лозунги и формы борьбы, которые вытекают из повседневных жизненных интересов масс, из уровня их способности на данном этапе. На основе таких лозунгов конгресс предложил коммунистам добиваться совместных выступлений с социал-демократическими партиями, реформистскими профсоюзами и другими организациями трудящихся против фашизма, против войны.

VII конгресс указал, что на основе единого пролетарского фронта необходимо объединять под руководством пролетариата все трудящиеся массы на борьбу против фашизма. Коммунисты должны добиваться создания широкого *антифашистского народного фронта*, объединяя на борьбу против фашизма, против войны трудящиеся крестьянство, городскую мелкую буржуазию, трудящиеся массы угнетенных национальностей. В решениях VII конгресса дана развернутая программа борьбы за установление единого антифашистского народного фронта, борьбы против фашизма, против поджигателей войны.

Линия VII конгресса Коминтерна на объединение всех антифашистских сил полностью себя оправдала. Об этом говорят успехи народного фронта во Франции. Об этом говорит героическая борьба испанского народного фронта против фашизма. Этот единый фронт в виде национального блока против японских захватчиков создается и в Китае.

Конгресс заслушал доклад т. Мануйловского об итогах социалистического строительства в СССР. В своей резолюции по этому докладу конгресс указал, что победа социализма в СССР—победа *великого значения*, что она вызывает глубокий переворот в сознании трудящихся всех стран. Победа социализма в СССР внушает трудящимся массам капиталистических стран, колоний и полуколоний уверенность в своих силах и убеждение в необ-

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Stalin removes a whole section about the Comintern from the *Short Course* (RGASPI, f. 558, op. 3, d. 77, l. 303–304)

Stalin reversed this argument as he revised the *Short Course*. Stressing the USSR's commitment to peace and the defense of the USSR, he argued that Soviet society was much less subject to the threat of impending invasion than Laroslavskii and Pospelov had suggested. According to Stalin, although a second imperialist war *had already begun*, this was a war between capitalist powers that did not pose an imminent or existential threat to the USSR. This assessment, likely informed by the Spanish civil war, the Austrian Anschluss and the Sudetenland Crisis, probably left Stalin feeling ambivalent about the need for a collective security agreement with Great Britain and France and laid the groundwork for a non-aggression treaty with Nazi Germany a year later.

Journal: Finally, how has this project affected your understanding of Stalinist ideology and Stalinism in general?

David Brandenberger: In terms of Marxism-Leninism, I think the *Short Course* confirms Stalinist ideology to have been a revolutionary ethic that aspired to change the world and transform people's consciousness. That said, the ideology also prioritized a vanguard role for the party that allowed it to do almost whatever was necessary to build a socialist society during the post-revolutionary period of the proletarian

dictatorship. Autarchic rather than internationalist, party ideology under Stalin was organized more around the idea of building “socialism in one country” than around sloganeering like “workers of the world, unite.”

In terms of Stalinism as a whole, I think the *Short Course* demonstrates the ideology to have been a natural extension of Leninism, rather than a deviation of some sort as Khrushchev claimed²⁴. A true believer, Stalin used Lenin’s authority to essentialize Marxism’s broad and diverse tradition of thought into a handful of key concepts — vanguardism, socialism in one country, the struggle with the oppositionist, etc. — in a way that left the ideology remarkably hierarchical, doctrinaire and parochial.

Stalin clearly intended the *Short Course* to be a central element in the socialist indoctrination of Soviet society. It was intended to be a master narrative that would coordinate all mass culture in the USSR around the task of transforming popular consciousness and historical memory *en masse*. That said, I am not sure that the *Short Course* was a very good vehicle for this indoctrinational project. Even after Stalin’s editing, it was anything but short and accessible. Worse, the *Short Course* offered a storyline that was anonymous, schematic and bloodless — something that many found hard to understand, much less embrace. A far cry from the “usable past” that Stalin had originally sought, his *Short Course* probably contributed more to the ossification of party ideology in the USSR than to its mobilizational potential.

¹ *Stalin’s Master Narrative: A Critical Edition of the Short Course on the History of the Communist Party (Bolsheviks)*, eds D. Brandenberger and M. Zelenov (New Haven, 2019).

² Li H. ‘Instilling Stalinism In Chinese Party Members: Absorbing Stalin’s Short Course in the 1950s’ in *China Learns from the Soviet Union, 1949 — Present*, eds T. Bernstein and H. Li (Plymouth, 2010), pp. 107–130.

³ “O kul’te lichnosti i ego posledstviakh”. Doklad Pervogo sekretaria TsK KPSS tov. Khrushcheva N. S. XX s’ezdu Kommunisticheskoi partii Sovetskogo soiuza 25 fevralia 1956 goda’ in *Doklad N. S. Khrushcheva o kul’te lichnosti na XX s’ezde KPSS: dokumenty*, ed. by K. Eimermacher (Moscow, 2002), p. 106.

⁴ *Istoriia KPSS*, eds B. N. Pomomarev et al., 2nd ed. (Moscow, 1962), p. 506.

⁵ Shapiro L. ‘A New History — a New Mythology’, *Problems of Communism*, 1960, vol. 9, no. 1, P. 58–61; Shapiro L. *The Communist Party of the Soviet Union* (New York, 1960), pp. 471–472; Avrich P. ‘The Short Course and Soviet Historiography’, *Political Science Quarterly*, 1960, vol. 75, no. 4, pp. 541–543; Ploss S. I. ‘The Bolshevik Past as the First Secretary Likes it’, *World Politics*, 1960–1961, vol. 13, no. 1, p. 79; Ploss S. I. ‘Soviet Party History: The Stalinist Legacy’, *Problems of Communism*, 1972, vol. 21, no. 4, pp. 35–36.

⁶ Tucker R. *Stalin in Power: The Revolution from Above* (New York, 1990), pp. 532–537. — See also: Tucker R. *Stalin as Revolutionary: A Study in History and Personality, 1879–1929* (New York, 1973).

⁷ Kolakowski L. *Main Currents of Marxism* (Oxford, 2005), p. 863 (first edition was published in Polish and English in 1978); Walicki A. *Marxism and the Leap to the Kingdom of Freedom: The Rise and Fall of the Communist Utopia* (Stanford, 1995), pp. 431–443.

⁸ Maslov N. N. “Kratkii kurs istorii VKP (b)”. Entsiklopediia kul’ta lichnosti Stalina’, *Voprosy istorii KPSS*, 1988, no. 11, p. 57; Volkogonov D. A. *Triumf i tragediia. Politicheskii portret I. V. Stalina v dvukh knigakh* (Moscow, 1989), vol. 1, pp. 216–217; vol. 2, pp. 143–148; Medvedev R. *Let History Judge: The Origins and Consequences of Stalinism* (New York, 1989), pp. 809–810, 816; Medvedev R. A. ‘Kak sdelan “Kratkii kurs”’, *Svobodnaia mysl*, 2004, vol. 21, no. 2, pp. 130–146, 137,

146; *Istoriia VKP (b). Kratkii kurs. Reprintnoe izdanie*, ed. by R. A. Medvedev (Moscow, 2004, pp. iii–xliv); Medvedev R. A. *Chto chital Stalin?* (Moscow, 2005), pp. 215–232.

⁹ Bettanin F. *La fabbrica del mito — Storia e politica nell'URSS staliniana* (Naples, 1996), pp. 151–178; van Ree E. *The Political Thought of Joseph Stalin: A Study in Twentieth Century Revolutionary Patriotism* (London, 2002), pp. 165, 309–310; Service R. *Stalin: A Political Biography* (Cambridge, 2004), p. 361; Davies S. 'Stalin and the Making of the Leader Cult in the 1930s' in *The Leader Cult in Communist Dictatorship: Stalin and the Eastern Bloc*, eds B. Apor et al. (Basingstoke, 2005), pp. 29–46; Brandenberger D. *Propaganda State in Crisis: Soviet Ideology, Indoctrination and Terror under Stalin, 1928–1941* (New Haven, 2011). — See publications by M. V. Zelenov in "Voprosy istorii", no. 11 and 12 of 2002, no. 3 and 4 of 2003; Stalin I. V. *Istoricheskaia ideologiya v SSSR v 1920–1950-e gody. Perepiska s istorikami, stat'i i zametki po istorii, stenogrammy vystuplenii: sb. dokumentov*, ed. by M. V. Zelenov (St. Petersburg, 2006), vol. 1.

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¹² Brandenberger D. *Propaganda State in Crisis*. — The book was published in Russian: Brandenberger D. *Krizis stalinskogo agitpropa. Propaganda, politprosveshchenie i terror, 1927–1941* (Moscow, 2017).

¹³ *Kratkii kurs istorii VKP (b). Tekst i ego istoriia*, eds M. V. Zelenov and D. Brandenberger (Moscow, 2014), vol. 1.

¹⁴ See introduction in: *Kratkii kurs istorii VKP (b). Tekst i ego istoriia*, eds M. V. Zelenov and D. Brandenberger (Moscow, 2014), vol. 1.

¹⁵ Commager H. S. *The Search for a Usable Past and Other Essays in Historiography* (New York, 1967), pp. 3–27.

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¹⁸ Brandenberger D. 'Ideological Zig Zag: Official Explanations for the Great Terror, 1936–1938' in *The Anatomy of Terror: Political Violence under Stalin*, ed. by J. Harris (Oxford, 2013), pp. 143–160.

¹⁹ Brandenberger D. 'Stalin and the Muse of History: The Dictator and His Critics on the Editing of the 1938 Short Course' in *Ideological Storms: Intellectuals and the Totalitarian Temptation*, eds V. Tismaneanu and B. Jacob (Budapest, 2019), pp. 41–61.

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²¹ Brandenberger D. *Stalin as Symbol*.

²² None of this analysis precludes the possibility that Stalin was also a shameless narcissist. Indeed, he may well have enjoyed many of the hallelujahs sung in his name at the same time that he believed the cult to be performing an integrative, mobilizational function within Soviet society.

²³ Brandenberger D. 'The Fate of Interwar Soviet Internationalism: A Case Study of the Editing of Stalin's 1938 Short Course on the History of the ACP (b)', *Revolutionary Russia*, 2016, vol. 29, no. 1, pp. 1–27.

²⁴ Some of the basic principles of Stalinism — especially “socialism in a single country” — proceeds from the general doctrine of Marxism-Leninism. See: van Ree E. *Boundaries of Utopia. Imagining Communism from Plato to Stalin* (New York, 2015).

FOR CITATION:

Stalin's Catechism: Interview with historians David Brandenberger and Mikhail Zelenov about 'Stalin's Master Narrative', *Modern History of Russia*, vol. 9, no. 3, 2019, pp. 784–797. <https://doi.org/10.21638/11701/spbu24.2019.316>

Keywords: Stalin, Lenin, Bolsheviks, Short Course, party history, 1917 revolution, nationality policy, internationalism, Comintern, Great Terror, cult of personality.

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Received: April 24, 2019

Accepted: May 16, 2019