INTERVIEWS

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THE DEBATE CONTINUES:
VIEWS ON STALINISM FROM
THE FORMER SOVIET UNION

One of the most significant facets of perestroika in the former Soviet Union was the reawakening of historical consciousness. Soviet society openly confronted its past, even its most deeply troubling pages. Among the issues widely debated was the role and legacy of Joseph Stalin. Beginning in 1987, the Soviet media exploded with materials critiquing Stalin and the entire system created during his rule. As time passed, discussion breached all former ideological limits. By 1989 Soviet scholars were wrangling with the problems that have fueled Western academic debate for decades. Consequently, historiography of Stalin and Stalinism in the former USSR has grown greatly in scope, volume and complexity.

The following remarks are a step toward acknowledging and understanding the new scholarship on Stalin and Stalinism. Though not an analysis of written materials, this essay offers views of Stalinism expressed by various scholars from the former Soviet Union whom I interviewed in Moscow and St. Petersburg between June 15, 1991 and April 13, 1992.¹ I shall treat three questions central to the

¹. The interviews were conducted during two research trips to Russia. The first was arranged through a program with the Moscow State Historical-Archival Institute/Russian State Humanities University, directed by Professors J. Arch Getty and Jeffrey Burds. Financial support came from the Institute for International Education for Research Abroad and Emory University History Department Summer Research Travel Fund. The second trip was arranged and funded by an IREX Short-term Independent Research Grant and a FLAS Fellowship awarded through the Emory University Soviet and East European Studies Program. I thank all those institutions, as well as my advisor in Russia, Dr. Andrei Konstantinovich Sokolov, Nikolai Silin, Helena Osokina and Natasha Chuliukova, all of whom helped arrange these interviews. I thank my advisor Dr. Kermit McKenzie for his support and editorial advice. I must also thank the scholars who so graciously agreed to speak with me about such a difficult and painful theme.
Soviet discussion of Stalin: 1) the meaning of Stalinism; 2) the origins of Stalinism; and 3) the relationship between Stalinism, Leninism and Marxism.

I conducted interviews with the following (the date of these meetings is given in parentheses):

Iu. Afanasiev (April 2, 1992). Dr. of History. Rector of the Russian State Humanities University. A specialist on the French Annales School, he was an early and highly outspoken critic of the historical profession and its treatment of Stalin. He is editor of an important collection of essays, including key papers on Stalinism, entitled Inogo ne dano (Moscow: “Progress,” 1988).

Aleksandr Tsypko (January 29, 1992). Dr. of Philosophy. Formerly of the Institute of Economic and Political Studies, he now is head of the Institute for Political Studies, under the Gorbachev Fund. He is a philosopher and political commentator who has written a maverick critique of Marxism as the source of Stalinism, “Istoki Stalinizma,” Nauka i zhizn’, nos. 11-12 (1988), and nos. 1-2 (1989).

I. Kliamkin (March 11, 1992). Dr. of Philosophy. Philosopher and social commentator at the Institute for Economic and Political Studies, he is author of the article that launched the perestroika debate of the origins of Stalinism: “Kakaia ulitsa vedet v khramu?” Novyi mir, no. 11 (1987).

Iu. A. Poliakov (February 20 and March 31, 1992). Corresponding Member of the Academy of Sciences. From the Institute of Russian History of the Russian Academy of Sciences, he is a specialist on the Russian Civil War, historical demography and geography. He has published in the Soviet media various articles and interviews that discuss Stalinism.

P. V. Volobuev (February 25 and April 2, 1992). Corresponding Member of the Academy of Sciences. A specialist on the October Revolution at the Institute of Russian History of the Russian Academy of Sciences, he has published essays in Russia and abroad on Stalinism and the question of alternatives in Soviet historical development.

V. S. Lel’chuk (July 4 and November 12, 1991). Dr. of History. A specialist on Soviet industrialization at the Institute of Russian History of the Russian Academy of Sciences, he was editor of one of the first works by historians on the reinterpretation of Soviet history: Istoriki sporicxt (Moscow: Politizdat, 1988).

V. P. Danilov (July 13, 1991). Dr. of History. A specialist on collectivization and the pre-kolkhoz peasantry at the Institute of Russian History of the Russian Academy of Sciences, he was a major