

Kirill Medvedev — 2 essays from *An Antifascism for Everyone*

Translated by Reuben Woolley

An Antifascism for Everyone

Much of what has happened over the last year has convinced us beyond any doubt: dehumanisation can occur while fighting for the most disparate of things — the purity of blood and religion as much as national independence; against a liberal or jewish conspiracy or for a “russian world” as often as fighting for “European values”, civil foundations, democratic norms...

It is not only those who — out of necessity or with sincere convictions — go to kill in a foreign country for whom it is possible to lose the recognition of human appearance. It's just as easy for those, assured in their own civility, who endlessly reproduce the language of enmity and a mythology of division on social media; not just propagandists who cook up a story of a crucified child, playing with the emotions of millions of parents and believers, but “critical” artists too, who imitate eating children almost as if in response — not far off real human slaughter.

It's fairly easy to fascisise oneself — all it takes is to start justifying one's own personal dehumanisation through that of someone else, and then (this is the main thing) to believe that there are ‘others’ of some kind — “Banderovtsy”¹, “gangsters”, “rejects”, “non-believers”, etc. — whose existence threatens your own living space, honesty, safety. Some people believe this crap earnestly, even die for it, others profit off of it in guarded mansions, and glow on our TV screens.

The monstrous conjoining of the first and second groups, the full instrumentalisation of boundless cynicism on top of any conviction or value, and the impossibility of ever being able to break one away from the other again — this is the main actual threat to Russia, and it will lead to the decay and collapse of our society. The most repulsive thing of all in this is the fact that this sometimes happens under antifascist banners, utilising memories of the war — which was as controversial as you like with regards to the means and geopolitical outcomes, but was undoubtedly the most justifiable cause in history — if, of course, you're looking from a global, non-discriminatory humanistic perspective, and not the perspective that imposes on us foolish whistleblowers and sycophantic apologists from all sides.

Unlike selective, “for-oneself” antifascism, it is *real* antifascism that gives us exactly this human perspective, affirming that there are no “gangsters”, nor “UKROPs”², nor “faggots”, nor “immigrant swarms” — there is simply a majority of people who have concrete requirements: the right to live peacefully, work, love and value oneself. This is an antifascism for everyone.

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Lenin, Stalin, The 90s.

Lenin

Regarding debates about the figure of Lenin, which I see on my feed.

There will be nothing mature or constructive while conversations about Lenin lead off from the position “I, a small but kind person/(liberal), will stand up for all that is good against all that is bad, I don't want to know about any of the horrors in the history of capitalism, and really

¹ Ukrainian Nationalists, named after Stepan Bandera (1909-1959).

² ‘*UKRainskie Obedinenie Patriotov*’, or the ‘Ukrainian association of Patriots’, another Nationalist group.

refuse to answer for them, and from this worn-out old position I will assess Ulyanov-Lenin to be a bloodthirsty executioner and fanatic”.

Meanwhile, there are such positions from which criticism of Lenin has historically sounded, if not more convincing, then simply acknowledging and considered. For example, “I support the intervention of the Western states to hold out against Soviet Russia in 1918, I consider it to be justified by the methods of fighting shown by the Soviet powers. I also consider the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki justified, having brought in a distant strengthening of liberal capitalism — the system that I believe is the most worthy of those available. I support the state terror of the United States against Latin American countries for the duration of the 20th century, which I consider justified by the military weapons in this hotbed of socialism, which constantly arises in this region, through which it is possible to birth their own Ulyanov-Lenins and so forth. I consider the humanitarian interventions of the USA and NATO in third-world countries justified, as I believe even the worst of the consequences would be preferable to a left-populist power or islamic regime in these countries.”

Clearly, it is by no means necessary to immediately take responsibility for everything on one’s own shoulders. But this ethical moment itself — the moment of acknowledging responsibility for the effects of one or another large ideology and the regimes that represent it — I consider absolutely necessary.

Of course, this affects the left too — I myself, for example, am fully prepared not to renounce the worst sides of Bolshevism and Stalinism, instead to accept them as inverted and backward facets of the same communist project I consider my own. And once within this ethical framework, I can discuss the various facts of Bolshevik politics and so on.

Lukacs wrote about this himself:

“Everyone who at the present time opts for communism is therefore obliged to bear the same individual responsibility for each and every human being who dies for him in the struggle, as if he himself had killed them all. But all those who ally themselves to the other side, the defence of capitalism, must bear the same individual responsibility for the destruction entailed in the new imperialist revanchist wars which are surely imminent, and for the future oppression of the nationalities and classes. From the ethical point of view, no one can escape responsibility with the excuse that he is only an individual, on whom the fate of the world does not depend. Not only can this not be known objectively for certain, because it is always possible that it will depend precisely on the individual, but this kind of thinking is also made impossible by the very essence of ethics, by conscience and the sense of responsibility. He whose decision does not arise from such considerations — no matter how highly developed a creature he may otherwise be exists in ethical terms at a primitive, unconscious, instinctual level.”³

I would not like to just routinely curse liberalism here, but as an ideology it does, of course, on some essential level allow you to evade answering these questions. Today liberalism is the ideology of history’s winners, who, as we know, are never judged. It is the ideology of those who have a mountain of corpses behind their backs, but their plans have worked, so they can preach their two-faced morality to history’s losers, whose systems — be they more noble in

³ I’m quoting from an edition translated from the original Hungarian to English by Rodney Livingstone, found on Marxists.org. <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lukacs/works/1919/tactics-ethics.htm>

concept (communism) or less (nazism) — were built on bones too, before they crumbled. But it is exactly because of this two-facedness that liberalism will always be renounced in all places on earth, except perhaps those countries where it developed naturally, parallel with the institution of capitalism. But dictators of all stripes will always be happy to play on organic sentiments of antiliberalism within the masses. This nightmare will only conclude if the political side of liberalism — the discourse on the political rights of the individual — becomes realised in an egalitarian, self-governing society; while its economic side (economic individualism, the dominant rights of the owner etc.) is left in the past. Then, we shall be able to speak honestly of Lenin.

22nd April 2012

Stalin

This is what I think about Stalin. Over the coming hundred years, if Russia is to be seen more or less as the sole successor of the Romanov Empire and the USSR, then of course Stalin will go down in its history as a creator-tyrant, of Peter the First's type. It will be impossible to drastically change opinion on the trauma of the repression or anything else at all. If instead we see mass education regarding, for example, Zalesye, Ingria, the Republic of Ichkeria and countless others, then in light of their constructed histories Stalin would become an indisputably negative figure, leaving completely different people to be canonised — although even they are hardly more likeable for modern supporters of destalinisation.

But this is a national history. In the other history, socialist history, late Stalin remains unconditionally (and so he should) a reactionary tyrant, whose inability to see beyond his framework for understanding real politics ultimately destroyed the growth of an emancipated, grassroots socialism in Russia and other countries, destroyed it along with its bearers. Ah, but did Lenin and Trotsky not begin this process, ask some, can we not simultaneously call them reactionary tyrants too? No, we can not.

Lenin and Trotsky, of course, laid in part the foundations for a repressive system. But they enacted, like any revolutionary, a regime of constant experimentation, constantly varying, and always within the framework of their understanding of socialism as a global democratic liberatory achievement. For this reason, despite the millions of political pretensions that they could lay claim to, revolutionary bolsheviks will without doubt remain a part of left history, the history of social liberation.

From the beginning of his rise to power, Stalin acted, being acutely convinced of the fact that the social and geopolitical tasks it had fallen to him to provide concrete solutions for on a national stage were by definition incompatible with any kind of autonomy as a necessary feature of socialism, from neither workers nor any form of democracy, so to speak; these demands were compatible only with terror, fear and loyalty from all facets of society. There is an opinion that Stalin's national tasks were impossible to complete by other means. Honestly, I don't have the patience to either agree or argue against that. All I know for certain is that Stalin resolved these issues at the cost of a total rejection of all the values that I consider central to my politics.

On which note. I live not only within the utopian history of the international socialist struggle, but also within the concrete history of Russia, as it exists at this moment. For this reason, I am compelled to hold the picture and conception of Stalin as described in the first

paragraph. For exactly these reasons, I find Stalin to be a multiplicitous figure, regardless of my singular personal and political hatred toward him and his system. And that's that. I sincerely hope that I am never called to the Hague upon such a position.

21st December, 2012.

Stalinism and the 90s

I consider the 'Memorial' projects about remembering Stalinist repressions very important, and am happy to have taken a little part in one of them (about a Moscow topography of the terror). On top of this, I have long since thought that another campaign is necessary — "The Forgotten 90s". Dedicated to all those who were socially and morally degraded in the wake of plant closures, researchers with high or medium-specialised education who worked as drivers and traders, those who starved, drank themselves to ruin from a lack of meaning, died unintentionally in idiotic brawls, who were forcefully exiled to the outskirts, those who weren't even exiled, just destroyed. I'm not, of course, talking about those who can preach to us now of new possibilities; I mean all the rest, I mean the majority.

I'm not referring to military conflicts and so forth, because I'm not talking about something extraordinary — just like with the repressions, there was a degree of everydayness: who lived and worked where, and then didn't live or work, who could study where, and couldn't study, and so on — the things that go almost unheard behind the state's old oedipal narratives about the 90s and the mindless debates between Stalinists and liberals over who killed more, Stalin or Yeltsin.

It's turned out that ultimately, Stalinism is perceived as a trauma only by the intelligentsia, not everyone, and I don't think there's anything to be done regarding that; but the project of the forgotten 90s is as charged with potential as any Immortal Rank⁴, or this campaign regarding the repressions. As for the fact that many would then have to reevaluate a great deal, well good, there are still people sincerely hoping that the antistalinist campaign is going to change something too. At the very least, these three histories together hint at rich soil for a certain active solidarity within our society, in place of a distant mutual destruction.

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www.facebook.com/kirill.medvedev.7

⁴ *Bessmertny Polk*, a patriotic group organising events and marches to honour the memory of those lost serving in the Russian military throughout history (with a specific onus on the second world war, which to this day is known as the Great Patriotic War). Strong overtones of nationalism.