

Contemporary Historiography of Social History of Stalinism in Belarus and Russia

Viachaslau Menkouski

Belarusian State University, Belarus

Abstract. The article analyzes the historiographical direction "Social History of Stalinism" in the publications of Russian and Belarusian researchers. It is proposed an overview of the use of the term "Stalinism" in the Russian historiography. It compares the ratio of Marxist theory and the practice of socialism in the Soviet Union. The analysis of the Russian-language historiography of Stalinism abroad in the XX–XXI centuries draws attention to the influence of the English-language historiography on the Russian and Belarusian researchers.

It explains the importance of "social history" to understand the Stalinist period of Soviet history. Having to replace the concept of totalitarianism, this area has allowed researchers to shift attention from the Soviet leadership to the broad social strata. The Stalinism methodology is studied and how it can be applied to other countries and other historical periods. This allowed a more accurate picture of the life of Soviet society and the State in the 1930–1950's.

Attention is paid to the internationalization and globalization of modern historical research as one of the most important specific features. It provides examples of joint projects and publications that focus on the "ordinary people" of the Stalinist Soviet Union, their daily lives, and practice relationships between different social strata.

Keywords: Historiography; Social History; Stalinism; Internationalization; Russia; Belarus.

Introduction. At the end of the XX century Russian and Belarusian historiographies got a new impulse to review old opinions and to resume discussions on practically all the complex of problems of history. The processes of critical rethinking touched upon the Soviet period of history to a great extent.

A scientific analysis of the Soviet society in the 1930-s in the context of the world and European civilizations is one of the priority topics in contemporary historical science. It is hard to imagine the study of the history of the twentieth century without close look at the main political, economic and socio-cultural constituents of the Soviet system and without proper assessment of the uniqueness of the "Stalinist" Soviet Union amongst other states of the world. In those years the Soviet model of civilization obtained its determinant features which mainly were preserved during Soviet history and which were extended to the experience of the "socialist building" in others countries without cardinal changes. That is the reason why the impartial analysis of the Soviet experience in the 1930-s has a civil meaning.

The issue of Stalinism, its genesis and constituent parts as well as its place and role in Soviet history belongs to a complicated set of core problems which contemporary post-soviet historiography pays attention to. Russian and Belarusian scientific literature on Stalin and Stalinism includes a great number of books and articles. Meanwhile, it is necessary to admit that nowadays there is no simple and irrefragable answer to the question of what Stalinism is.

For political reasons «Stalinism» as historical term was not used in the Soviet Union even in the first years of «perestroika». In February 1986 Gorbachev in his interview to the French newspaper *L'Humanité* said that «Stalinism» was made up by anticommunists to attack socialism and the Soviet Union» [1]. G. Bordugov and V. Kozlov noted that the «term Stalinism», which had been avoided before, which gave rise to only negative emotions, which was considered by our politicians and social scientists to be alien, resounded in the middle of 1987 [2]. Meanwhile it is necessary to emphasize that although the term «Stalinism» was not officially approved contemporaries sometimes used it. For example, in M. Prishvin's diary of 1930 there was a mention of «Stalinism» and «Leninism» and differences between them [3]. The term was used also by official persons but only in unofficial documents. L. Kaganovich wrote about «Stalinism» in his correspondence with the members of Politburo of the Central Committee of AUCP(b) in 1935-1936. In 1936 in the letter to G. Ordzhonikidze he wrote: «The way that, for instance, grain procurements are occurring this year is an unprecedented, amazing victory of ours—it is a victory of Stalinism» [4].

In the Soviet Union a wide range of explanations of the “Stalinist period of history” appeared over and over again depending on circumstances, experience and standpoints. For example, Stalinism as a system closely connected with the certain political regime and social-economic system was viewed as socialism by ideologists of the regime and political leaders of those times. But even at that time different groups of the Soviet society put a diverse sense into the term “socialism”.

There is no doubt that an intellectual interpretation of Stalinism is not the result of one generations work. Stalinist epoch means something different for every new generation. Although the number of possible “Stalinisms” is not unlimited because of the system being connected with a certain historical context, the range of variations is extremely diverse and complicated. None of the known definitions of Stalinism embrace all the factors. Every wording includes only a part of the factors and depends on a preferred point of view.

In the classical Soviet interpretation of the USSR’s history, i.e. in the official Stalinist version that dominated from the mid 1930-s till the end of the 1950-s, the phenomenon which we define as “Stalinism” was defined as “socialist building”. The debates on the content of this notion were limited by the censorship and ideological framework while its interpretation was vulgarized for propagandist purposes. Nevertheless, the classical Soviet version had its intellectual foundation. It was rooted in Marxism and in the assumption that the economic basis, ownership of the means of production, first of all, is determinant for the political superstructure and socio-cultural institutions.

State ownership of the means of production was established after the October revolution. It was considerably spread at the end of the 1920-s when the municipal private sector was eliminated, the first five-year plan was launched and centralized state planning was implemented. The collectivization of farms realized in the first half of the 1930-s up-tempo and with great victims destroyed capitalism in the agricultural sector. According to the Marxist theory these steps were the fundamental prerequisites of socialism.

However, there was a serious discrepancy to the orthodox Marxism which prescribed absolute abolition of the state as the machinery of coercion. This contradiction was removed in the official interpretation through stressing the permanent threat from the “capitalist surroundings” which justified the state’s force and vigilance while Stalin was presented as Lenin’s continuator. There was also the internal threat from the residuary class enemies. Permanent threat justified power monopoly of the Communist party, the role of the Soviet leader, and the strengthening of the punitive institutions.

However, from the official point of view this feature was neither constant nor paramount. In the system terms the Constitution of 1936 was the most considerable evidence of the Soviet progress. It proclaimed that hostile classes were basically eliminated.

The Soviet classical model was changed after the XX Congress of CPSU which blamed Stalin for abuses of power and the “cult of personality”. The authorities mentioned a restricted range of Stalin’s “mistakes” and “extremes” and focused attention on his personality. Thus, Stalin became a key to understanding the very nature of Stalinism and his pathological features were viewed as reasons of the “distortion of socialism”. The main aim of the de-Stalinization campaign laid in the disclosure of the myth about Stalin while preserving the myth about the communist party. Now Stalin became the cause of all Soviet catastrophes and failures in the same way as he was the cause of all achievements before.

In the 1970-s the Soviet official authorities proclaimed that in the period of the “cult of personality” the “Lenin’s norms” were broken but foundations of the system kept safe. Such a distinction between Lenin and Stalin was a crucial point for the generation which grew up in the Stalinist epoch and identified itself with the Bolshevist revolution and the communist party. The forced Stalinist industrialization with its values and victims was estimated as unavoidable and “socialist”. It was widely believed that without industrialization the USSR couldn’t overcome its backwardness and reach impressive economic results after the Second World War. The USSR would not have won a victory over Germany. Although there were some “extremes” towards peasants, collectivization was considered as necessary and true party line in agriculture.

The attitude of the party authorities towards Stalinism in the years of “perestroika” transformed into aversion and condemnation. But it was not an official standpoint. Pluralism came into existence and by the end of the 1980-s there was no common point of view any more. For the first time in the Soviet history official opinion and permission were not “a must” for researches. Two types of interpretation predominated among researchers in those years. The first type connected the genesis of Stalinism with the ideological doctrine of Bolsheviks and a one-party

system without factions. Stalinism was mainly viewed as a continuation of Leninism and repressive dictatorship supposed to be a core characteristic of the Stalinist regime. This interpretation was similar to the western analytical frameworks within a totalitarian paradigm.

In another variant of analysis attention was paid to the social forces. First of all, it was said about bureaucratization and the creation of a new bureaucratic ruling class which was supposed to be Stalinism's distillation. Here there was a similarity between European Marxists and Western revisionists. The supporters of that standpoint believed that the new bureaucratic elite was the only base of Stalinism. There were also some assumptions that Stalinism had some approval beyond the elite. But these ideas were discussed carefully to avoid misinterpretation as being a justification of the regime's actions.

The debates on the phenomenon of Stalinism led to the question of the regime's historical necessity – whether Stalinism was an unavoidable stage of the Soviet history or not. Historians began to use the concept of alternatives to escape from the strict limits of Marxist patterns and causal dependence. It gave a chance to conceptualize the Soviet history of the 1930-s in terms of decisive choices and decision points. Thus, they rejected the Soviet approach of the “only truth” and came to the typical methodology of world science.

In 1996 the «translation project» coordinated by the Open Society Institute came into existence. It is aimed at the creation of a library of classical and contemporary literature on humanitarian and social sciences for the post-socialist space. As Russian project's coordinator I. Savel'eva noted, initially «we almost didn't recommend books on Russian history which were written in the West because we believed that our native historiography was enough. But then we understood that this literature was also necessary for our researches to at least compare and orientate themselves to some other patterns» [5].

To acquaint Russian specialists with another tradition of research study and to help them in their methodological search the anthology of works on the Soviet history “American Russian Studies: Milestones of Historiography of the Last Years. Soviet Period” written by American researchers was published [6]. The project was supported by the American Councils for International Education and funded by the United States Information Agency.

In the framework of the *Stalin-Era Research and Archives Project* (SERAP) at the University of Toronto J. Howlett, O. Khlevniuk, L. Kosheleva and L. Rogovaia prepared a publication *The CPSU's Top Bodies under Stalin: Their Operational Records and Structure of Command* which was placed on the Internet and became available for everyone who was interested in this problem [7]. O. Khlevniuk developed this subject in his monograph *Politburo: Mechanisms of Political Power in the 1930s*. He wrote that the absence of a special and detailed research devoted to the Politburo activity was caused first of all by the state of historical sources. The restrictions in the use of archival materials put insuperable obstacles in the way of historians [8]. In the years of «perestroika» and after the collapse of the Soviet Union the situation considerably changed. However a lot of materials are beyond reach nowadays. Commenting upon publication of the collection of documents *Stalinist Politburo in the 1930-s* [9] I. Pavlova noted that after the presidential decree of 24 August, 1991 about assignation of party's and State security services' archives under the jurisdiction of Russian archival service researchers could receive materials of Central Committee's plenums, minutes of Organizational Bureau, Central Committee Secretariat, and on the personal funds of CPSU officials. Meanwhile in the former Central Party Archive at the Institute of Marxism-Leninism (now known as the Russian Center for the Preservation and Study of Documents of Contemporary History) came only copies of the brief minutes of the superior party bodies. The preparatory materials to the sessions and verbatim transcripts were kept in the Common division of CC CPSU. At first these documents were transmitted to the Archive of the President of the USSR and then to the Archive of the President of the Russian Federation. At the same time the most important resolutions of the party and state bodies were not taken to archives because they were not included in the minutes of Politburo's sessions and were marked as “special files” [10].

A lot of “special files” have been not declassified until now. In the Archive of the President of the Russian Federation there are materials which could clarify some aspects of the activities of the Politburo and which are not available for researchers. Historians have only desultory information about a great number of notes which were sent to the Politburo and personally to Stalin from OGPU-NKVD. But even if these materials become available some secrets of history will remain. The stenograph reports of the Politburo's sessions and even brief records of debates were not conducted in the years of Stalin's rule. Often important decisions of Politburo which are found in

archival materials are not accompanied by the documents which could throw light on the process of the decision-making [11].

It is quite possible that a great number of documents that could be interesting for historians have never been kept in archives and the hopes to get a considerable base of documents are illusory. Such a situation is reflected in the debates on one of the most actual and controversial problems of the Stalinist period— on the assessment of the scale of the terror in the 1930-s. Many long years researchers have relied on the undocumented information and evidences that substantially differed from each other. Their reliability is out of any control.

The Soviet “glasnost” allowed including in research some statistics on the repressive policy of the Stalinist regime. The world historiography began to use the Soviet and Russian publications and to review some stereotypes which had predominated in the West. For example, the articles of A. Nove and M. Allman were completely based on the publications of Soviet and Russian authors. But those statistics were questionable enough and left possibilities for different interpretations. J. Getty and G. Rittersporn in co-authorship with V. Zemskov gave data on the victims of repressions in the pre-war years. According to them the maximum total number (including GULAG, colonies and special settlements) came to 2.75 million [12]. The authors admitted that the figures they offered couldn't be viewed as final and needed a range of amendments. Meanwhile new documents permitted one to imagine the scale of the Stalinist terror and moved its analysis to the documentary base. J. Getty and G. Rittersporn even considered that historians who dealt with that aspect of Stalinism had a more detailed documentary base than those who studied German Nazism.

J. Getty and G. Rittersporn's Russian co-author V. Zemskov harshly criticized the opponents of his colleagues in his Russian publications. He believed that the Soviet and foreign public opinions were under strained and unhistorical statistical calculations which were contained in the works of both foreign (R. Conquest, S. Cowen etc.) and Soviet researches. It is worth noting that these researches were inclined to exaggerate true statistics and never to understate. He had an impression that “they competed with each other to strike readers with so to speak “the most astronomic” figures... The statistics given by R. Conquest and S. Cowen were overstated almost by five times” [13].

Conducting debate with S. Maskudov, the author of numerous publications on the demographic situation in the Soviet Union issued in the years of the author's emigration in the West, V. Zemskov said that “Mr Maskudov should submit himself to the role of Zemskov as an arbiter in determination of authenticity or uncertainty, accuracy or inaccuracy of the information on a given research problem which has infiltrated to the West at different times”. Moreover he avowedly accused western historians of deviation from scientific neutrality and asserted that researchers (especially those who were engaged in the study of repressions in the USSR) being in certain social conditions had to carry out a social order which was required by the society at that time (although the researchers often didn't realize that fact). In his opinion during the Cold War the literature with hypertrophic data on the scale of repressions was published in the West in large quantities not on occasion.

In depersonalization of the terror of the 1930-s V. Zemskov was close to the positions of American revisionists of the “second wave”. He redirected attention from personalities to tendencies. In the article *GULAG (historical and sociological aspects)* V. Zemskov wrote that “in the process of shifting from repressive policy, in the 1950-s the personal factor played a secondary role because circumstances were more powerful than the will and wishes of individuals. We are sure that if Stalin were alive at that time then he would have been at the head of liberalization.” [14]

It must be admitted that although there are enough archival documentary evidences it is impossible to produce exact figures of Stalinist repressions' victims until now. Though radical minimum and maximum estimates seem to be marginal, official opinion has not appeared up to here.

According to Russian political legislation, repressions are viewed as different forms of coercion used by the state because of political reasons in the form of deprivation of life or freedom, placement in mental hospitals for compulsory treatment, expulsion from the country and disfranchisement, resettlement of peculiar groups of population from the places of their residence, deportation and settling in special settlements, bringing to forced labour under conditions of restraint of liberty as well as the any other deprivation or restraint of liberty and rights of the individuals who were considered to be socially dangerous for the state and regime for class, social, national, religious or other characteristics putting into practice by the decisions of courts and other organs that were given with judicial functions or by executive bodies and officials and public

organizations or their bodies with administrative powers and by administrative procedure.

In 1954 General public prosecutor of the Soviet Union V. Rudenko, Minister of the Interior S. Kruglov and Minister of Justice K. Gorshennin prepared a memorandum for N. Khrushchev where they pointed out that in the 1921-1954 period 3 777 380 individuals were condemned for the counter-revolution crimes including 642 980 individuals condemned to the extreme penalty [15].

In the law of the Russian Federation "About Rehabilitation of Victims of Political Repressions" which was issued in 1995 it is stated that in the years of the Soviet power millions of people became victims of the tyranny of the totalitarian state, underwent the repressions for their political and religious convictions, on the basis of their social, national and other characteristics. However A. Yakovlev who headed the "Commission of Politburo CC CPSU for the additional studies of the materials connected with repressions that took place in the 1930-1940-s and at the beginning of the 1950-s" and from December, 1992 – the "Presidential commission for rehabilitation of victims of political repressions" indicated that "exact data on the scale of nationwide tragedy which would be founded on documents are absent today" [16].

In the 1990s the conditions for the Soviet studies changed. The archives were opened, and researchers from the post-soviet republics could collaborate with their western colleagues. A lot of pioneering books and articles were published such as the books, *People's Voice: Letters and Comments by Ordinary Soviet Citizens on Events of 1918-1932* [17], and *Society and Authorities. 1930-s: Narration in Documents* [18]. In the introduction to the first work it was said that "this book is not about the mighty of this world but about common people of that time. They were provided with the right to talk about their vision and comprehension of themselves in the impetuous stream of events which flew over Russia in the first third of the twentieth century... The book, thus, belongs to the area of social history. The latter views historical process as a movement of society with institutions typical to it, first of all ...The focus of interest was not the person itself but the person as an elementary cell of a live and developing social organism...".

Let us pay attention to the authors' conclusion of a fundamental importance. To their mind "the content of Russian archives is not adequately explored from the point of possibilities to use the materials for the social history research. This work is at the very beginning. But it is clear right now that there is a boundless ocean of sources telling about the life of the ordinary people in the Soviet epoch".

According to the authors' statement the book *Society and Authorities 1930-s: Narration in Documents* is "to a certain degree a continuation of the earlier prepared documental narration, *People's Voice: Letters and Comments of Ordinary Soviet Citizens on Events of 1918-1932*. It belongs to the studies of the social transformations in the interwar period which did not have analogies in the world history in their scope and character of social shifts and shocks. The special emphasis book made on the 1930-s – the time when the shape of the new social order came to the more or less completed forms. It is called in different ways in literature – "new Soviet civilization", "Stalinism", "Stalinist socialism", "Stalinist totalitarian regime" and so on. But before using such definitions it would be useful to present evidence and opinions of people who took part in the events of those years personally because for the time being our historiography doesn't have a firm desire to comprehend psychology of mass behavior, ordinary people interests, their interrelations with the authorities, to analyze what was happening in the foundation of the society and what were the final results on the base of sources ...".

The authors focused their attention on an "ordinary Soviet person" while the main task of the book was "to tell what Soviet people felt and how they imagined themselves in the new system of social values and how their historical consciousness changed as the result of the shifts which occurred during decades after revolution. Check the statement on one-dimensionality and the unambiguity of their psychology, behavior stereotypes and standards under conditions of Stalinist socialism".

Stressing a priority meaning of the "human" component part of the Soviet history, authors turned "to those to whom traditional 'great' history' pay too little attention. It was time to bring deeds and ideas of the "mighty of this world" into correlation with actions and spirits most members of society who seemed to be not an amorphous and faceless mass but direct participators of the 1930-s events, all the more for the first time they probably had the right to vote".

In the last years such works appeared in Belarusian historiography. So in the collected articles ... *We're Pleading for Your Mercy or one year of the contemporary Belarusian history, demonstrated in letters, applications, complaints and other forms of citizens' appeal* [19] (A. Guzhylovski a compiler) are presented different forms of BSSR citizens' appeals to the

authorities in 1951. The documents chosen for the collected articles cast light on the state of public opinion and changes in mass consciousness that took place in Belarus in the mid of the twentieth century. The materials are unabridged; all originals' stylistic and orthographical peculiarities are preserved.

In her book *Post-war Soviet Society: Politics and Ordinarity. 1945-1953* E. Zubkova emphasizes that historians have to pay attention to the personal impressions and experience. She states that "after social history has experienced a kind of a "boom" there is no need to prove that people's frames of mind and psychological orientations are independent factors of political or economic development because they influence on the peculiarities of social behavior and to a great extent define the mechanism of decision-making including decision-making in the structures of power... If public opinion in the open and democratic society has been in the focus of attention of both sociologists and historians for a long time, the study of this phenomenon in the conditions of dictatorship is per se only beginning". One of the central problems of the book is "people's attitude towards power, its decisions as well as to its representatives, i. e. politics in its subjective aspect".

In the monograph of E. Osokina *Beyond the front of "Stalinist plenty": Distribution and market in population's supply in the years of industrialization. 1927-1941* [20] the problem "power and people" relates to the most important dimensions of historiography. "Relying on the achievements of historiography and inevitably dividing the shortcomings of its contemporary stage" the author put a question "Who was making the history of the 1930-s? Stalin? Society?" The conclusion of E. Osokina is that "seeing the power, its control and influence upon the society in absolute terms is not less dangerous than making a fetish of society's self-dependence and the independence in the decisions of the authorities. It should be admitted that both forces are active participants of the historical process. Following their own interests they coexist, interact and struggle in the real life that finally presents the result of their interactions".

The publications of the last years can be viewed as the response to many questions which were discussed before. The study of the social history of Stalinist Russia became not only available but also necessary. Nowadays the answer to this question is obvious to the majority of researchers. But the views on the social history, the understanding of what it includes and how it correlates with other directions of historical science remain the point at issue.

At the end of the twentieth century the "new social history" spread widely. Its supporters insisted on the radical changes in correlation between social history and intellectual, mental history. They believed that the history of society and large and small groups constituting it could not be explored without the history of values, forms of social behavior, symbols and rituals.

L. Repnina considers that the main and determinative feature of the historiography's development in the middle of the twentieth century "was the movement in defense of the interdisciplinary history which was enriched with the theoretical models and research equipment of the social science contrary to the traditional history which was viewed exclusively as the sphere of humanitarian knowledge. Just in the area of this wide intellectual movement of the end of the twentieth century the so called "new social history" was born. It set the problem of past historical interpretation in terms of social phenomena describing the internal state of the society, its particular groups and relation between them...

If one attempts to formulate briefly the most important distinctive features of the social history as a sphere of historical knowledge, one probably should remark, first of all about its surprising mobility and its ability to adapt to the radical changes in the actively developing contemporary historiography... It owes its changeability and receptivity which for some decades defined the internal logic of the development of the discipline and allowed to show all the diversity of the possible forms of the history of "social" to that extreme openness to other spheres of knowledge—historical, humanitarian, social,—that lie in the very nature of its integral subject of cognition..." [21].

At the end the twentieth – at the beginning of the twenty first century the historiography of the Soviet history got an impulse of the "linguistic turn". As S. Glebov, M. Moghilier, and A. Semionov rightly noted "nowadays 'philological stage' of the rewriting of the history of Stalinism replaced the "sociological" stage which was going under the influence of the social sciences and the theory of modernization (this direction is known as "revisionism"). The modernization and structural social history were replaced by the studies of the cultural mechanisms, language and semantics of the Soviet society." [22]

I consider it necessary to agree with the opinion of the Russian researcher A. Gurevich who believes that "the problem is not in the postulation of those issues that have already become a

banality. The matter concerns how we could do it in material because we are historians in so far as we can transform and interpret material in a new fashion, to go to the depth which is hidden in the sources we explore and which have been unknown before and to view them anew" [23].

The study of the inhuman Stalinist system which used violence on a large scale left an emotional and psychological mark on the works of researchers. The emotional component of a historian's work is inevitable in this case although one tries to conduct an objective and balanced research. But in any case it is history. And it is necessary to explain those irrational and illogical phenomena that were in the life of the country and moreover that were supported by part of society including the intellectual strata. The irrational past of humanity deserves to be a valid subject of study and its analysis can be conducted with the common methods of historical science. Only such an approach will allow one to understand what was taking place, to comprehend the reasons and the consequences of the historical phenomena and to hope that great mistakes will be prevented in the future.

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Современная историография социальной истории сталинизма в Белоруссии и России

Вячеслав Меньковский

Белорусский государственный университет, Беларусь

Аннотация. В статье анализируется историографическое направление «Социальная история сталинизма» в публикациях российских и белорусских исследователей. Предложен обзор использования термина «сталинизм» в российской историографии. Дается сравнение марксистской теории и социалистической практики в Советском союзе. С помощью анализа русскоязычной историографии сталинизма за границей в XX–XXI вв., привлекается внимание к влиянию англоязычной историографии на российских и белорусских исследователей.

Обосновывается важность «социальной истории» для понимания периода сталинизма в советской истории. Заменяя термин тоталитаризм, данная область позволила исследователям перенести внимание с советского руководства на широкие социальные слои. Методология сталинизма изучена для применения в других странах и других исторических периодах. Это позволило нарисовать более точную картину жизни советского общества и государства в 1930–1950-е гг.

Особое внимание уделено интернационализации и глобализации современного исторического исследования как одного из наиболее важных характеристик. Приводятся примеры совместных проектов и публикаций, делающих ставку на «простых людей» сталинского Советского союза, их повседневной жизни, практические отношения между различными социальными слоями.

Ключевые слова: историография; социальная история; сталинизм; интернационализация; Россия; Белоруссия.