



## Stalin Back in Vogue as Putin Endorses History-Book Nostalgia

By Henry Meyer



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Nov. 29 (Bloomberg) -- Josef Stalin may have been cruel, but he was first and foremost a great leader.

That rewriting of the history of the ruthless Soviet dictator who killed millions of real and imagined enemies comes from a new manual for Russia's high-school teachers endorsed by President Vladimir Putin. The book exemplifies Russia's growing nostalgia for its bygone superpower days -- a sentiment Putin stokes at every turn in his quest for political hegemony.

Russia feels that it was ``humiliated during the 1990s, when it lost its international weight," said Fyodor Lukyanov, who edits a quarterly journal for the Council on Foreign and Defense Policy in Moscow. ``Our leaders now believe it is necessary to consolidate the nation."

Putin, 55, may achieve that goal on Dec. 2, when parliamentary elections will likely make his United Russia party almost as powerful as the Communists were in the USSR. Much of his overwhelming popularity stems from his ability to reinvigorate Russia's patriotic pride. He has gained support by confronting the West with Cold War zeal and has paid little price for clamping down on dissent with similar intensity.

Putin, who was a career officer in the KGB, calls the Soviet Union's collapse ``the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century." After members of an Arctic expedition laid Russia's claim to the region's oil and gas last August, he gave them a hero's welcome at his residence outside Moscow, reminiscent of the triumphant homecoming Stalin hosted in 1938 for the Soviet Union's first North Pole explorer.

### 15 Million Victims

Stalin ruled as head of the USSR's Communist Party from 1922 until he died in 1953. His security forces routinely imprisoned or executed people suspected of disloyalty. During the Great Terror of 1937-38, when the purges peaked, about 1.5 million people were arrested and 700,000 shot, according to Memorial, a Russian human-rights group. In all, at least 15 million people died in labor camps or were killed, Memorial says.

Millions more perished from famine after widespread state confiscation of farm land, or collectivization. Tens of thousands of others died of hunger or exposure when Stalin deported entire ethnic groups to Central Asia, including Chechens and Crimean Tatars accused of collaborating with invading Germans in World War II.

### No Enumeration

The new teachers' manual -- ``A Modern History of Russia 1945-2006," -- refers to the purges without enumerating the victims, specifically mentioning only 2,000 killed in the late 1940s.

While it calls Stalin's rule ``cruel" and says he engaged in ``political repression," it also declares him the USSR's ``most successful leader" because his tactics transformed the country into an industrialized counterweight to America's military and economic might.

``The result of Stalin's purges was a new class of managers capable of solving the task of modernization at a time of a shortage of resources, loyal to the executive power and faultless from the point of view of discipline," the manual says.

Many Russians already view Stalin favorably. In a May poll by the independent Levada Center in Moscow, 54 percent said Stalin -- who defended the nation from Hitler's armies and ultimately led it to victory in World War II -- did "more right than wrong." Half deemed him a "wise leader."

At a meeting with teachers at his residence in June, Putin said the new manual will help instill young people with "a sense of pride" in Russia. He argued that Stalin's purges pale in comparison to America's atomic bombing of Japan. "We shouldn't allow anyone to impose a feeling of guilt on us," he told the teachers.

'All That Is Best'

Putin elaborated at a memorial for Stalin's victims on Oct. 30, at a firing range near Moscow where 20,000 people were executed during the Great Terror: "While Russians should keep alive the memory of tragedies of the past, we should focus on all that is best in the country."

Mikhail Gorbachev, 76, the Soviet Union's last leader, criticized attempts to portray Stalin's era as a "golden age" and urged Russians not to forget the "terrible lessons of history" at a 70th anniversary conference on the Great Terror in September.

The new manual is less kind to another Russian leader -- Boris Yeltsin, the country's first post-Soviet leader and Putin's predecessor. It says his weak policies allowed the West to expand the North Atlantic Treaty Organization into former Soviet satellite states in eastern Europe.

#### A Children's History

The manual was written by Alexander Fillipov, the deputy director of the National Center for Foreign Policy, a research group that does consulting work for Putin's government. Fillipov also is writing a children's history book that, starting in September, state schools will use to replace older texts that remember Stalin less fondly. One currently in use chronicles the Great Terror, estimating that 2 million perished in 1935-39.

Fillipov, who declined to be interviewed, told the government newspaper Rossiiskaya Gazeta that his manual is needed to counter foreign "propaganda." Similarly, Putin says some Russian history books are biased because their authors received Western grants.

Arseny Roginsky, Memorial's chairman, is troubled by Stalin's new cachet among influential Russians. "They want schoolchildren to be proud of their Soviet past and to forget that these victories were achieved at the expense of people's blood," he said. Roginsky's father died in 1951 while imprisoned by Stalin's forces.

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^ "Activists Denounce Stalin in Station" 28 August 2009 By Kristina Mikulova Moscow Times. ^ Stalin Back in Vogue as Putin Endorses History-Book Nostalgia by Henry Meyer, Bloomberg.com, 29 November 2007. ^ History textbooks, Russian Ministry of Education. (in Russian). ^ List of admitted school text-books, 2007 (in Russian). ^ 'Gulag' book, once banned, is now required reading Associated Press Retrieved on September 10, 2009. ^ The Gulag Archipelago was included to the school program, Izvestia, September 9th. According to historian Roy Medvedev, the term describes the rehabilitation of Joseph Stalin, identification with him and the associated political system, nostalgia for the Stalinist period in Russia's history, restoration of Stalinist policies, and a return to the administrative terror of the Stalinist period while avoiding some of the worst excesses.[1]. ^ Stalin Back in Vogue as Putin Endorses History-Book Nostalgia by Henry Meyer, Bloomberg.com, 29 November 2007. ^ History textbooks, Russian Ministry of Education. (in Russian). ^ List of admitted school text-books, 2007 (in Russian). 29 (Bloomberg) "Josef Stalin may have been cruel, but he was first and foremost a great leader. That rewriting of the history of the ruthless Soviet dictator who killed millions of real and imagined enemies comes from a new manual for Russia's high-school teachers endorsed by President Vladimir Putin. The book exemplifies Russia's growing nostalgia for its bygone superpower days" a sentiment Putin stokes at every turn in his quest for political hegemony. Russia feels that it was "humiliated during the 1990s, when it lost its international weight," said Fyodor Lukyanov, who edits a quarterly