

“History Lessons”

Sergei Kovalev

It is generally believed that knowledge of the past is necessary not to repeat crimes and, all the more so, not to repeat mistakes. However, there is also an aphorism: “History shows that humanity has not learnt anything from history”. It should be acknowledged that both these theses are not without grounds.

And the questions which should be asked are: does history teach everyone? Does it teach the same things to all those who are ready to learn? And, in general, does it teach something good, something bad or, perhaps, something in between?

It seems to me that History itself does not teach anything. It reports events in a dry and impartial way - either with all details or pathetically fragmented - depending on luck. And professors, politicians and writers all swoop on this historical patchwork. Wise and not so very wise, both honest ones and dreamers, and sometimes also crooks. But all prone to take on a mentoring tone. Yes, we have received lessons from them.

The rest depends on us - do we have the brains and character not to take everyone on their word? To take our time to think. Not to look for a conscience in lessons of advantages.

I think that it is time to move to important historical events and general rules of their interpretation recommended by figures of authority and, in particular, **to use these interpretations in real politics**. After all, it might seem, who should learn from History if not political activists? Well, no.

In 1530, Niccolò Machiavelli published a book “Prince”, in which he knowingly described cunning tricks, referred to today as the realities of politics. The book is not simply a historical document - it is an exact justification of a **natural** social lifestyle.

We have inherited it from our animal ancestors. The world consists of ‘our folks’ and ‘strangers’. Be afraid of strangers and use force unerringly.

Because **the end justifies the means**. It is no longer a proper thing to say. They say instead: “Politics is an art of possibilities”. Let’s check what it means in historical practice... and, incidentally, from a historical perspective.

Let’s begin, first of all, with the so-called “objective assessment” of individuals, political decisions and their consequences. (Of course, I will mostly use Russian examples.) Saint Vladimir the Great, Saint Alexander Nevsky; Ivan the Terrible, Peter the First. Briefly speaking, it is a long list, to put it mildly, of not the most deserving people, anguish, filthy relationships, bloodshed.

Even though “He was completely ugly./ His heart was wicked.../ But it is not the point:/ Your career/ Has proven historically progressive”.

Now Stalin is on the historical stage again. He is treated today as a synonym of victory over fascism.

One of major myths is that the USSR freed the world from fascism. Well, it's not true. I will not mention unpleasant facts from the Soviet history here. However, the USSR did not free anyone. It only enslaved other nations, including its own.

Here in Warsaw, there is almost no need to mention the allies who caused the Second World War. The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, the partitions of Poland, the occupation of the Baltic countries, the attack on Finland. Two years of strategic deliveries for Hitler.

Let me quickly remind you what happened next. On the verge of doom, the USSR waged a difficult war on its territory. For freedom? No, for Soviet power!

Here's the Red Army after crossing the border. Were there any "liberators" there? Yes. They were the ones who believed that freedom meant the Soviet power. Unlike most people. In the meantime, those in power confiscated and plundered lands and secured global influences for themselves.

The Warsaw Uprising while the Red Army stood idle and waited for two months. Eastern Prussia, encouragement of marauding. And then Teheran, Yalta, Potsdam. More than 100 million European slaves. And the attributes of slavery - governors from Moscow, judicial terror, punishment of opponents. German Democratic Republic, Hungary, Poland, Czechoslovakia.

Yes, the Nazi army was drowned in Soviet blood and buried under Soviet corpses. Yes, Europe and the USA did less that they could and should have done. But it is quite another matter. A decisive role in a victory is not synonymous with a liberation mission. The attributes of the Soviet statehood had nothing to do with liberation. I hope that the inhabitants of Eastern Europe and Germany have grasped it really well.

And what about the Allies, advocates of freedom? Let me remind you of Munich, the first concession to the aggressor on a global scale. "I have brought you peace", said Chamberlain after returning home. The war kept spreading. And, in that war, apart from speeches about "universal values", there were also carpet bombings, Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the above-mentioned enslavement of people for whose 'freedom' the fight was fought.

All the rest also qualifies as the "art of possibilities". I understand that once we are trapped within that framework, it is difficult to get out.

And yet the UN was set up. (Let us leave the matter of 3 votes for the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic, Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic and the Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic or whether or not the USSR clashes with the proclaimed objectives and rules of the UN, or whether it can be its co-founder. This discrepancy will soon become evident.)

Nuremberg. It was hoped at that time that from then onwards governments would be responsible for crimes committed under their auspices.

Yes Katyń - every official knew...interrogated for 3 days... no guilt proven. So what. It would have done no harm to take a decision on the need to conduct an investigation and to look for the guilty.

A cannibal tries a cannibal for cannibalism. And, unavoidably - the winner.

The empire of evil. Another prevailing - and, in my view, dangerous point of view is that the Russian lack of political morality is only Russia's business. It is not so. Unfortunately, Russian, Chinese, South Korean barbarity (and endless other forms of barbarity), all this is our common business, and our indifference carries a risk of a global catastrophe. In this cramped and mutually interlinked world, all serious problems affect everybody without exception and there are no local solutions to those problems. They have become global problems. In my opinion, nobody knows how to tackle this challenge. However, many people are well aware that it is shameful and dangerous not to face up to that challenge.

OK, we do not know how to transform universal values into a tool and not a slogan. But we are at least obliged to know what *is forbidden to do*. I believe that the world would be different today if it had not been for the disgrace of Munich and Yalta. Not ideal, but more decent. One must not be indulgent towards an aggressor or pay for one's own safety with *the lives and fate of others*.

What has happened cannot be undone. The problem is, however, that the spirit of the above-mentioned shameful conferences hangs in the air and supports the immoral indifference of the political programme. There are countless sad examples of this, let me mention just a few. The expulsion in early 1990s of 300 thousand residents of Abkhazia due to ethnic cleansing, with the tacit consent of the Russian "peacekeeping forces". Many years of fruitless and inconsistent involvement of the Council of Europe in matters associated with the Russian crimes in Chechnya. The Russo-Georgian war 2008 which created Russia's satellites in Georgia - the war caused public outrage, but it was quickly forgotten. Today, Russia does not hope to profit economically from the war thus started, it simply wants to stop Ukraine from joining Europe. In my opinion, the occupation of Crimea has been almost completely forgotten by society. Let me just mention the example of widely-published criticism of President Gauck, who said on 1 September 2014 in Warsaw that there should be no leniency towards the aggressor.

At the time concerned, the West mistakenly supposed that the cold war ended with the fall of the Berlin Wall. This is not so. Russia just recovered its breath. Try to imagine post-war Germany in a form unaffected by Gestapo. Or a Stasi lieutenant colonel instead of the Chancellor of Germany. This is what Russia will be like - Russia with whom you are trying to establish partnership and mutual understanding. For the time being, it is still possible to force it to play fair. But not to convince it. (Let me point out that the term "enforcement of peace" is a term adopted by the UN.)

The world is ready to make concessions, claiming that a rat forced into a corner turns into a threat. Obviously. But remember, the rat, whether forced into a corner or left in peace, continues to be an enormous, natural reservoir of plague. And that plague is nearly one hundred years old. It has killed people for years and it has killed millions of them.

I knew Andrei Dmitrievich Sakharov well. I believe that today, as always, he would call on the civilized world to be more unrelenting in opposing tyranny. I will refrain here from discussing specific steps which might be taken to support the victims of the Russian expansion. As a historical example of long-term and successful efforts that were made to protect democracy, I will only mention Lend-Lease and Marshall's plan.

Here is a question - how could 86% win over "Our Crimea" in a country which quashed the 1991 coup in such an unambiguous way? Stalinist selection. It was done with a trivial and a very productive method, which is professionally called "provocative selection".

A grower who wants to make a plant resistant to a specific disease, infects the entire plot with a pathogen of that disease. This exactly is a provocation. The grower uses the few surviving plants (the most resistant ones) as a material for cross-breeding, for new selections etc. We will not enter into details. I think that I. W. Stalin did just that and in a completely deliberate way, although obviously he used quite a different terminology to justify it.

Of course, selections were taking place in camps, but not only there. I do not just mean dekulakization and collectivization. I also mean purges, interrogations, rallies and demonstrations of loyalty, a civic duty of denunciation, hatred lessons during political indoctrination or simply teaching and brainwashing, etc. It seems to me that it is no longer a choice but a way of educating people. I think that the above is a kind of selection, too. Those who have responded well to brainwashing and the imposed rules are provided with advantages and are given the right to reproduce on a priority basis. Poor learners are destroyed and leave no offspring.

And what are the results of this selection today? After all, we all come from this "historical community". And so far...

Let me give you just one example of the outcomes of such a selection - elections in Chechnya in 2007, 11 parties, turn-out rate of 99.5% 99.4% voted for the "United Russia". The other ten parties received, in total, one-tenth of a percentage point. Stalin had worse results... But there was only one party.

Unfortunately, this is the direction in which the "real politics" is heading. Slogans about freedom, the rights of an individual and universal values have long before become a pompous rhetoric. And the "art of possibilities" dominates the world. The criminals in power succeed in taking advantage of the fact that their noble-minded opponents are so afraid that they forget everything.

And this is the main history lesson.