

Talk on *Trotsky's Comintern Conspiracy to the Oakland ICSS October 20, 2024*

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I'd like to thank the ICSS organizers for inviting me to talk about our – my and Vladimir L. Bobrov's -- latest book, *Trotsky's Comintern Conspiracy – the Case of Osip Pyatnitsky*.

First, I'd like to give some context that will help to explain its importance.

The academic field of Soviet history is corrupt. It exists primarily to spread anticommunist lies, and especially anti-Stalin lies, while giving those lies an appearance of respectability. Good research on specific topics does take place. But the results of that research are always fitted into an anti-Stalin framework. I have published two full-length studies of influential books that do nothing but pass on anti-Stalin falsehoods as truth – *Blood Lies* (2014) and *Stalin Waiting for ... the Truth* (2019).

Leon Trotsky Was a Fascist

All Trotskyite writing, including what they call "research", on the Stalin period of Soviet history is likewise completely corrupt. Trotskyites are a true cult, like the cult around Jesus Christ. They accept all of Trotsky's lies as the truth. Trotskyism is parasitical on mainstream anticommunist falsehood, which they repeat uncritically. I have discussed this in much detail in four of my books.

It is vital that everybody on the Left recognize that Leon Trotsky was a fascist. Trotsky began as a socialist and became a communist when he joined the Bolshevik party in the summer of 1917.

After 1929 Trotsky led a clandestine conspiracy from exile. Through his followers in the Soviet Union Trotsky collaborated with the Nazis and the Japanese militarists. The Trotskyites committed espionage for the Nazis and Japanese; plotted to murder Soviet leaders; organized economic sabotage that killed a number of Soviet workers; plotted a *coup d'état* with other oppositionists; planned an uprising in Leningrad with the help of the German High Command; and conspired with Marshal Mikhail Tukhachevsky and other high-ranking military leaders to open the front to Nazi and Japanese armies in the case of war.

In his writings in the 1930s Trotsky lied about Stalin and about his own activities activity – lied to an extent scarcely believable! I have written about his provable lies in four of my books and in a chapter in *The Fraud of the 'Testament of Lenin'*.

We should not shrink from understanding that Trotsky was a fascist. If anyone else did these things we would not hesitate to apply that term to him.

Since Nikita Khrushchev's "Secret Speech" to the 20th Party Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union on February 25, 1956, allegations of crimes against Joseph Stalin without any evidence at all have dominated academic historiography.

I began to discover this almost 50 years ago when I decided to check the accusations against Stalin in Robert Conquest's famous book *The Great Terror – Stalin's Purge of the Thirties*. During the mid-1970s I went many times to the New York Public Library where I checked all the footnotes in Conquest's book. I discovered that Conquest had no evidence at all to support the accusations he made against Stalin. Conquest merely cited other books that made the same accusations.

In 1999 Vladimir L. Bobrov, a Moscow-based historian, contacted me about an article of mine on my web page. From Vladimir I learned that since the end of the Soviet Union a great many documents were being released from formerly closed Soviet archives. With his help I began to locate, obtain, and study them. I soon realized that they included primary-source evidence that disproved many accusations against Stalin.

In 2005-2007 I researched and wrote *Khrushchev Lied*. In it I show that all the accusations of crimes Khrushchev made in that "Secret Speech" against Stalin and Lavrentii Beria are false. Expertly translated into Russian by Vladimir, *Khrushchev Lied* was published in Moscow in

December 2007 and in English in February 2011.

Since then I have written more than a dozen books in which I examine accusations against Stalin in the light of primary-source evidence from former Soviet archives. In more than 20 years of study I have yet to identify a single accusation of a crime by Stalin that can be supported by evidence!

Documents from former Soviet archives continue to be published. One recent example is a letter from I.N. Smirnov to his daughter Olga, after Smirnov's appeal of the death sentence passed on him in the August 1936 trial. Smirnov was the leader of the Trotskyite underground in the Soviet Union. He is still considered a "martyr" by Trotskyites and anticommunists.

Smirnov wrote his daughter the following:

In my last word, I said this to all the wavering Trotskyists. We must disarm decisively and quickly ... Keep in mind that the Gestapo men who figured in the trial were not front men, but real, clever fascists. Whether Trotsky wants it or not, his periphery has become intertwined with the Gestapo.

Here Smirnov tells his daughter that he was *not* "framed" by Stalin and that Trotsky's movement was connected with the Nazi Gestapo – something that all anticommunists, and of course all Trotskyites – have always denied.

We begin *Trotsky's Comintern Conspiracy* by studying the claim of Osip Pyatnitsky's son Vladimir that his father was "framed" by Stalin for opposing him. We demonstrate, with evidence, that this is completely false. Pyatnitsky was not framed. He was guilty – just as guilty as Trotsky himself was!

In the first two chapters we critically examine the account of Pyatnitsky's fate by historian Boris Starkov. We prove that it is entirely fraudulent. This is significant because Starkov's account was published in 1994 in *Europe-Asia Studies*, the foremost Soviet history journal in the world. This prestigious journal should have seen that Starkov's article was a fraud. But they were either blinded by their anti-Stalin bias, or they did see it and published it anyway.

We study the Comintern conspiracy, in which Pyatnitsky played a leading role within the Soviet Union in collusion with Leon Trotsky who headed the conspiracy from exile. The conspirators plotted assassinations of Soviet leaders, sabotage of the Soviet economy, an uprising against the government in the event of invasion by a fascist power, diversion of Comintern funds to Trotsky, and collaboration with and espionage for Nazi Germany.

We examine evidence from the NKVD investigation files of a number of Comintern leaders, including Bela Kun, Lajos Magyar, Wilhelm Knorin, Heinz Neumann, Nikolai Bukharin, and Pyatnitsky himself. The final chapters translate and examine the indictment, trial, death sentence, and phony "rehabilitation" of Pyatnitsky by Khrushchev's men.

Our book concludes with a translation into English of all of Pyatnitsky's confession statements.

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Our evidence is based on documents painstakingly copied by Vladimir from the formerly secret NKVD archive in Moscow.

* That evidence refutes the claim that Osip Pyatnitsky challenged Stalin at the June 1937 Central Committee Plenum.

* We expose as fraudulent the Khrushchev-era "rehabilitation" of Pyatnitsky, one of the many "rehabilitation" reports on persons convicted during the 1930s. These convictions are still routinely said to be the result of Stalin's paranoia or brutality. We show that this is completely false.

* We refute the allegation – virtually unanimous among historians – that the Soviet party, i.e. Stalin, "controlled" the Comintern.

* We discuss some of the voluminous evidence that Leon Trotsky and his clandestine followers

inside the Soviet Union collaborated with the Nazis, sabotaged the economy, and plotted to assassinate Soviet leaders.

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In their 1999 source book on the Bolshevik Party during the 1930s Arch Getty and Oleg V. Naumov wrote:

... there apparently was little difference between the Stalinist leaders' private thoughts and their public positions. They seem really to have believed in the existence of a far-flung conspiracy. (455)

In 1999 it was almost unheard of for a scholar in the field of Soviet history to state that Stalin, far from "framing" innocent persons, sincerely believed that conspiracies were genuine.

But Getty did not take the next logical step. He did not ask: *What is the evidence* concerning the alleged conspiracy? Is there any evidence that it was fictitious, an invention perhaps of Nikolai Yezhov and his minions in the NKVD? Or is there evidence that the conspiracy was genuine and that those convicted of participating in it were guilty?

A dozen years later V.N. Khaustov, another "mainstream" anticommunist historian of the Stalin period, concluded that Stalin believed the reports the NKVD sent to him.

The most frightening thing was that Stalin made his decisions on the basis of confessions that were the result of the inventions of certain employees of the organs of state security. Stalin's reaction [to these confessions] is testimony that he took these confessions completely seriously.

Like Getty and Naumov, Khaustov concludes that Stalin believed the information about the conspiracies given him by Yezhov, head (Commissar) of the NKVD. They all agree that Stalin did not "frame" anyone. But Khaustov too was unwilling to admit even the possibility that this conspiracy was real.

Why? Because accepting the possibility that the conspiracies were genuine would dismantle the historiography of the Stalin period that has been constructed since Khrushchev, and in fact since Trotsky's writings of the 1930s. It would undermine the false depiction of Stalin as a murderous dictator who killed thousands of loyal communists. It would contradict the work of generations of historians who had embraced the Khrushchev / Gorbachev / Trotsky version of Stalin and Soviet history.

The Anti-Stalin Paradigm

I have called this phenomenon the "anti-Stalin paradigm." In the professional study of Soviet history there is an unwritten rule that Stalin must be *assumed* to be guilty of many murders and other crimes.

Moreover, once Stalin has been accused of a crime it is considered in poor taste, if not actually "taboo", to investigate the evidence and conclude that Stalin was in fact not guilty. Stalin's guilt is *assumed in advance* despite the lack of evidence.

Any historian who dares to conclude that real conspiracies did exist, that Stalin and the Soviet leadership were dealing with genuine mortal threats to the Soviet state, will simply not be published in mainstream historical journals or by academically respectable publishers. And that historian would lose his job, because publication is essential to tenure and promotion.

The truth – obvious to anyone who studies the primary sources in a spirit of objectivity – is that these serious conspiracies were real. There is an enormous amount of evidence from former Soviet archives to prove it. We have studied and analyzed much of this evidence in previous books.

Osip Pyatnitsky and the Comintern Conspiracy

In 1955 Pyatnitsky was declared "rehabilitated," the victim of a Stalin frameup. Soon afterwards the Right-Trotskyite conspiracy within the Comintern was declared a fabrication. Since then all those convicted in all three public Moscow Trials have been "rehabilitated."

In our book we examine the 1955 "rehabilitation" report on Pyatnitsky and the concept of "rehabilitation" itself. We note that all of the Khrushchev-era and Gorbachev-era "rehabilitations" of persons convicted of participation in anti-Soviet conspiracies – all, that is, to which we have access today – are fraudulent. None of them contain any evidence that the convicted person was in fact innocent.

We present the text of some of the reports sent to Stalin that include reference to Pyatnitsky. As Getty / Naumov and Khaustov agree, Stalin accepted these reports as genuine. Stalin believed that he was taking decisive action against anti-Soviet conspiracies that did indeed pose a serious security threat to the USSR. The evidence available to us today proves that Stalin was correct.

Confessions as Evidence

Many people, including historians who should know better, assume that confessions are dubious or even invalid as evidence because they *might* have been obtained by violence or threats against either the prisoner or his relatives. Such people dismiss the evidence contained in confessions. Their reasoning goes something like this:

As there is often no "material" evidence – for example, documents where the conspirators outline their conspiracy, perhaps even in the handwriting of the conspirators themselves, found in their homes, containing their signatures, etc. – this means that there is no evidence against the accused except for confessions by the accused or accusations in the confessions of other prisoners. But confessions can be faked, and we know that many were faked by the NKVD. Consequently, the accused must be considered innocent and the trial a farce.

Indeed, anticommunists frequently use the word "farce" in order to dismiss, for example, the three Moscow Trials of 1936, 1937, and 1938. Those who use the word "farce" are evidently unaware that they are thereby admitting, perhaps unconsciously, that they have no *evidence* that the trials were fabrications. They just *assume* that they were.

This reasoning is, of course, faulty. All evidence – documents, material objects such as books and photographs, testimony of any kind – can be faked. It is at least as difficult – perhaps even more difficult -- to convince experienced revolutionaries to falsely confess than to fabricate false documents, complete with forged handwriting and signatures, or to create phony photographs. Any modern state, in the 1930s as well as today, possesses the technical means to create any kind of fake evidence that can be exposed as fake – if at all – only by destructive means of examination, which are never permitted.

Confessions are no more or less subject to fakery than any other kind of evidence. What the historian must do in the case of confessions, as with *any* kind of evidence, is study it carefully and compare it to the other evidence that exists, in order to search for similarities and differences, contradictions and consistencies.

The Soviet prosecution did provide "material" evidence at the Second and Third Moscow Trials. But anticommunists and Trotskyites simply ignore it. They know that very few people will read the 600- and 800-page transcripts of these trials and discover that, yes, in fact there was indeed "material evidence" against the defendants.

So how can we tell if a defendant was falsely convicted? The answer is: we need to locate and study the EVIDENCE that the Soviet prosecution had at the defendant's trial.

We have obtained and studied many Khrushchev-era and Gorbachev-era "rehabilitation" reports. We have never found even one that provided evidence. Yet they are taken as "proof of innocence"

by anticommunists and by Trotskyites.

When it comes to historical evidence there is no such thing as "credibility." *All* evidence must be subjected to doubt and carefully studied.

The Need For, and Lack of, Objectivity

Everybody has biases. But everybody can learn to be objective in studying any subject, whether it be physics or history. The techniques are basically similar.

Objectivity as a scientific method is a practice of "distrust of the self." You can learn to be objective by training yourself to become aware of, to articulate, and then to question your own preconceived ideas. You must be reflexively suspicious of evidence that tends to confirm your own preconceived ideas, prejudices, and preferences. You must learn to give an especially generous reading to any evidence and arguments that contradict your own preconceived ideas.

This is simply what every bourgeois detective in every detective story knows. As Sherlock Holmes said, in "A Study in Scarlet":

It is a capital mistake to theorize before you have all the evidence. It biases the judgment.

In short: get the facts before you form your hypotheses. Be ready to abandon a hypothesis that does not explain the established facts. *Especially* if that hypothesis conforms to a preconceived idea of your own!

If you do not begin your research with a determined attempt to be objective, accompanied by definite strategies to minimize your own biases, then you cannot and will not discover the truth. To put the matter bluntly: if you don't start out to look for the truth you will not stumble across it by accident, and what you do find will not be the truth.

This principle is well known. Therefore, the real purpose of most research into Soviet history is *not* to discover the truth. Instead, it is to prefer "convenient falsehoods" to "uncomfortable facts" – to arrive at politically acceptable conclusions and to disregard the evidence when that evidence does not align with those politically acceptable conclusions.

Why is this logical fallacy so common in Soviet history of the Stalin period? I believe this is due to the power of the "anti-Stalin paradigm." Stalin has been so maligned, by so many "experts" and for so long a time, that many people believe "where there's smoke, there's fire" – "there must be something to this."

This is all wrong. *There is no substitute for evidence.* In our books we examine the evidence and draw conclusions from the evidence alone. This is the only rationally defensible way of proceeding, in history as in any other field of scientific investigation.

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In one section of our book we examine the issue of torture and the historical problems related to it. Time does not permit me to outline it here and now. However, we did study A.I. Langfang, the investigator and interrogator in Pyatnitsky's case. In a brilliant analysis Vladimir shows that Langfang was not one of Nikolai Yezhov's torturers and confession-fakers. Read these passages and let me know what you think.

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During Khrushchev's time (1953-1964) and Gorbachev's time (1985-1991) the Soviet state devoted a lot of resources to criminalizing Stalin. The Rehabilitation documents that have been published make this clear. It is hard to imagine that any genuine evidence tending to show Stalin guilty of framing innocent persons would have been ignored. They never found any such evidence.

Conversely, we may suspect that a good deal of the material that has not been released tends to cast doubt on the "official" anti-Stalin version. And in fact, documents have been released here and there

that do tend to exculpate Stalin.

An example is the 2018 declassification of the transcript of the June 11, 1937, trial of the military conspirators known as the "Tukhachevsky Affair." This transcript has always been in the Soviet archives. So all the phony "communist" misleaders of the Soviet Union from Khrushchev on have known that Tukhachevsky and the rest were guilty as hell of conspiring with Hitler's army, plotting to overthrow the Soviet government, to murder Stalin and other leaders, and to open the front to any fascist invaders.

Nevertheless, all Soviet leaders from Khrushchev on said that Stalin had "framed" Tukhachevsky and the rest!

In January 2021 Vladimir and I, together with our Swedish colleague Sven-Eric Holmström, published a book about the Tukhachevsky Affair. There is so much primary-source evidence of their guilt that we could not include it all. But we do include a great deal of it!

In our book *Trotsky and the Military Conspiracy* we also print an English translation of the full text – 172 pages in Russian – of the trial transcript. This is the only translation into any language.

Sometimes documents are released several times, the later versions contradicting the earlier versions so that it is clear that phony "primary" documents are being fabricated until a final forged version is declared "official" by its being inserted into an archive. This is clearly the case with the forged documents that Stalin ordered Jewish theater director Solomon Mikhoels to be murdered, and those that supposedly prove Soviet guilt in the Katyn massacre of Polish POWs.

We have published books about both of these anticommunist and anti-Stalin falsifications: *Stalin Exonerated – Fact-Checking the Death of Solomon Mikhoels* (2023) and *The Mystery of the Katyn Massacre: The Evidence, The Solution* (2018).

As always in the writing of history our conclusions must be provisional. Historians do not deal in "certainties." As more evidence comes to light in future, we must be prepared to adjust or even discard our earlier conclusions.

It bears repeating that we have to be prepared to question our own preconceived ideas and historical paradigms. It's not easy to do this. But if we don't keep the need to do it in the forefront of our consciousness, we will inevitably fall prey to "Confirmation bias" – looking with favor on evidence that tends to support our own preconceived ideas, while looking critically only at evidence that tends to disprove those same preconceived ideas. This is what "mainstream" anticommunists and Trotskyites do all the time.

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Heinz Neumann had been a leading figure in the Communist Party of Germany. He was convicted of participating in the Right-Trotskyite conspiracy in the Comintern, tried, and shot on September 26, 1937.

Heinz Neumann has long been believed innocent largely due to the writings of his wife Margarete Buber-Neumann, a former communist who became a professional anticommunist after World War 2. Even in Buber-Neumann's infamous memoir, *Under Two Dictators*, we can find indications that Neumann had suspicious connections. For example, at the time of his arrest, he advised his wife to get out of the USSR and contact Friedrich Adler, a socialist leader famous for his anti-Soviet activity since the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917.

Judging by the evidence we now have Neumann was far from innocent. He was a central figure among the German Communists in the secret Right-Trotskyite opposition.

Neumann names Pyatnitsky dozens of times in his interrogations and in a long statement of November 1, 1937. These passages also serve to clarify Neumann's own activity in the Right-Trotskyite conspiracy within the Comintern. In our book we review the most important of these passages.

Pyatnitsky and Trotsky

In his confession statements Pyatnitsky claimed he received orders from Trotsky through third parties. Pyatnitsky was fully aware that Trotsky was negotiating with fascist Germany and militarist Japan to foster an uprising against the Soviet government. Pyatnitsky knew that the conspiracy's aim was to restore capitalist relations in the USSR.

Pyatnitsky's main role in the conspiracy was to cultivate his contacts in the Comintern while preparing for the overthrow of the Soviet government by the opposition. Trotsky's contacts with the Germans were essential for this purpose. The oppositionists had lost whatever hope they once had to oust the Stalin leadership by themselves.

Trotsky relied on Pyatnitsky to help steal money from the Comintern's budget to send to Trotsky. This amounted to 20,000 gold rubles, about US\$15,000 a year for three years. This money was supposed to go to support revolutionaries all over the world. But Pyatnitsky & Co. sent it to Trotsky to fund his collaboration with the Nazis and fascists and his sabotage against the Red Army and the Soviet economy!

Pyatnitsky pled guilty at his trial. Soviet law had a provision somewhat like the Fifth Amendment. At trial a defendant could refuse to confirm his pretrial testimony including any confessions of guilt he had made during the investigation. In such cases the Prosecution would have to rely on other evidence. "Rehabilitation" documents of the Khrushchev era and later state that some defendants did refuse to confirm their confessions at trial. Nikolai Yezhov himself, who was unquestionably responsible for many tens of thousands of deaths of innocent persons, did this.

A defendant could refuse to confirm his own confessions. But he couldn't do anything about the testimony of others against him. In the case of Yezhov, whose investigation file and trial transcript have not been declassified, his former second-in-command, Mikhail Frinovsky, was available to testify against him. There was certainly a great deal of other testimony against Yezhov as well.

In the case of a conspiracy in which there was no material -- e.g., documentary -- evidence, this would mean the testimony of witnesses against him. The indictment against Pyatnitsky lists the names of thirteen men who gave testimony against Pyatnitsky. The indictment states that there were "a number of others."

The testimony of so many co-conspirators constitute a large body of evidence against Pyatnitsky. Any attempt to refute it at trial would have been futile. Denial was futile too. There was simply too much testimony against him.

In his last words at his own trial on March 13, 1938, Nikolai Bukharin said:

I shall now speak of myself, of the reasons for my repentance. Of course, it must be admitted that incriminating evidence [uliki] plays a very important part ... The point, of course, is not this repentance, or my personal repentance in particular. The Court can pass its verdict without it. The confession of the accused is not essential. (777-778)

Bukharin was correct! There was an enormous number of accusations against Bukharin by others in the Right-Trotskyite conspiracy. Bukharin wrote two eloquent appeals of his death sentence. They have been published. In them he agrees that for his crimes he "should be shot ten times over." Pyatnitsky made his own appeal for mercy at trial.

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Falsification of the history of the Stalin period

Our account of the Opposition conspiracies is strongly supported by the evidence that has become available since the end of the Soviet Union in 1991. However, despite the evidence, it is mostly or totally rejected by mainstream scholarship.

The field of Soviet history has been dominated by lies about Stalin since Nikita Khrushchev became

the leader of the Soviet Union after Joseph Stalin's death on March 5, 1953. Khrushchev soon began a campaign to attack Stalin by accusing him of ruthlessly killing Party leaders during the 1930s and 40s. Khrushchev's campaign increased in intensity after the XXII Party Congress in October 1961.

Khrushchev led the USSR until he was ousted by the C.C. in October 1964. During the eras of Leonid Brezhnev (1964-1982), Yuri Andropov (1982-1984) and Konstantin Chernenko (1984-1985) attacks against Stalin almost entirely ceased, although the Khrushchev-era lies about Stalin were not retracted. A short time after his elevation to the leadership of the Party in March 1985 Mikhail Gorbachev began a campaign of historical falsification and vilification of Stalin that was, if anything, more virulent than that of Khrushchev.

The Khrushchev-era and Gorbachev-era falsifications against Stalin were "manna from heaven" for pro-capitalist anticommunists and for the Trotskyite movement. During these periods Soviet historians could not cite evidence to prove their assaults on Stalin. The Soviet archives of the Stalin period were closed even to the most trusted researchers -- Party historians. Nevertheless, these falsehoods were accepted as truthful.

After the end of the USSR in 1991 Russian authorities began to publish documents from former Soviet archives. Today we have mountains of such documents about virtually every area of Soviet life during the 1920s and 1930s.

We have been identifying, locating, obtaining -- often with difficulty -- studying, and drawing conclusions from this flood of documents. They permit us to see that every single accusation of crime, atrocity, or even minor misdeed attributed to Stalin since Khrushchev's day is false.

Vladimir Bobrov and I have been searching for 25 years for any evidence of any crime by Stalin. There simply is no such evidence. Nevertheless, these lies about Stalin himself and Soviet history of the Stalin era continue to dominate historical discourse.

Since its inception around the time of the Bolshevik Revolution the academic field of Soviet history has mainly served the purpose of anticommunist propaganda. It has only secondarily been concerned with discovering the truth about Soviet history.

Within the world communist movement Khrushchev's "Secret Speech" and the anti-Stalin allegations that followed it had to be accepted by all those who wished to remain in their communist party. The Trotskyite movement, weak and in decline, was given a transfusion of life by Khrushchev's lies.

The result is that since Khrushchev's time the demonization of Stalin has dominated not only academic Soviet history but also the view of Soviet history held by communists the world over for almost 70 years. This false, demonized portrayal of Stalin and of Soviet history during his time has grown deep roots in every aspect of historical thinking, from academic studies to popular and semi-popular books and articles, to textbooks in colleges and high schools, to the mass media.

Some communists joined with the Chinese and Albanian parties in breaking with the Moscow-oriented movement in rejecting the anti-Stalin tendency. But no one had evidence to support their suspicions that Khrushchev, and later Gorbachev, were lying about Stalin. Today we do have such evidence.

What about the future?

The process of uprooting the lies about Stalin and the Stalin-era Soviet Union will take years. It is in the interest of anticommunists and Trotskyites to continue to promote these lies. Trotskyites and anticommunists simply do not care about the truth, about evidence, or about objectivity in the study of Soviet history. Lies about Stalin are necessary for academic careers and for anticommunist, pro-capitalist, and Trotskyite propaganda.

In contrast, we are dedicated to discovering the truth about Stalin and the Stalin period of Soviet

history by studying the evidence with thoroughness and objectivity.

We realize that those to whom the truth is a threat will call us "Stalinists" and tell themselves and others that they should ignore our research. We are, of course, not "Stalinists."

But there are a great many people, in all countries, who are hungry for the truth about the successes and failures of the Soviet Union during the Stalin period. They welcome the results of our research, and we welcome their comments and criticisms.