

# Glossing over a red sea of murder

A few weeks ago, an ever-vigilant Barbara Amiel blasted the current TV miniseries, *Peter Ustinov's Russia* as blatant Soviet propaganda. Since the historical series was then only up to Ivan the Terrible, I decided to reserve judgment until Stalin's era was reached.

Last week the ever-charming Ustinov raced through the Revolution, breezed through the ensuing Red Terror, gushed over Lenin's NEP reforms and then, oh so gingerly, arrived at Stalin. "He was brutal," conceded a pained-looking Ustinov. Under Stalin, life in the USSR was "difficult." Ukrainians had "suffered." Then, seemingly relieved, Ustinov rushed on to scenes of Soviet war memorials and a long sequence on the Nazi massacre of the Jews at Babi Yar.

La Amiel was right. Slick, effective agitprop. It just shows what can be done when you combine Soviet propaganda with western commercial TV production.

Thanks to Ustinov and the program's main sponsor, American Express, the epic horrors of Stalin's years simply vanished. Perhaps these hideous facts were forgotten because American Express was hoping that its little green card might soon become as popular in Moscow as a little red party card.

Perhaps if Germany had won the last war, we would now be seeing *Peter Ustinov's Third Reich*, sponsored by American Express. We might hear the late Adolf Hitler described as "stern" and the fate of Nazi Europe's Jews as "difficult." Well, Peter Petrovich, life under Stalin was a bit more than difficult.

According to Robert Conquest, a leading authority on Stalin's great purges during the years from 1936 to 1950, there was an average of eight million prisoners in

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Soviet concentration camps. Twelve million inmates are estimated to have perished during those 14 years — 12,000,000. We know all about Dachau and Auschwitz, but who has heard of Serpantinka, Kolyrna or Mylga?

Add the one million shot during the great purges of 1937-1938. Add seven million peasants who were starved or shot during the six years of collectivization. The total: 20 million killed. And some scholars think this figure may be too low by 50%.

In this red sea of murdered people were 3.5 million Ukrainians, 500,000 Poles, perhaps a quarter of the entire population of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia, Tatars, Volga Germans, Finns, Little and Great Russians and tens of thousands of Jews. Exact figures are lacking since to this day Soviet authorities have never revealed the true extent of Stalin's butchery.

Stalin murdered more people than Hitler. But listening to Ustinov, one would not have guessed that modern history's worst crimes had so recently occurred in the same place — and under the same political system — that he was lauding. Truly, history is the propaganda of the victors.

Today the hunt is on again for Nazis. Croats, Ukrainians and even Kurt Waldheim are under arrest or investigation. But what about the Soviet killers who ran the execution cellars at Lubyanka and Lefortovo? What about the monster who starved millions in the Ukraine, the sadists who killed more millions in the gulag's death camps at Pechora and Kolyrna?

Thanks to a few brave men like Alexander Solzhenitsyn and Anatoly Shecharansky, we are reminded of Russia's past and present police state brutality. But their words are not enough. The world should demand of the USSR exactly what it has demanded of Germany: That guilt be admitted and the guilty be brought to justice. Germany paid the price and rejoined the family of civilized nations. The USSR has yet to do so.

The Soviets, of course, are most unlikely to ever admit their guilt. Better to bury their ugly past and recall only the glories of World War II. But we in the West should demand and remind. And recall, as well, that the Nazi system that produced Stalin is alive and well. Another Stalin could always be lurking in the wings.

One may, as I, greatly admire the achievements and heroism of the Soviet Union's people without for a moment forgetting the terrible past. But I cannot admire Peter Ustinov when he spouts agitprop or when he tells us how the Russians, in spite of all their abuse by the wicked past, "will never start a war."

I would like to see him leave home — with his little green card of course — go to Budapest and explain to a crowd of Hungarians just how peace-loving his Russians really are.