Terror and the New Man: Belief, Performance, and Atomization in Stalin's Soviet Union

by

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We acknowledge and respect the Lək'ʷəŋən (Songhees and Esquimalt) Peoples on whose territory the university stands, and the Lək'ʷəŋən and W̱SÁNEĆ Peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day.

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Abstract

When the Bolshevik Party of the Soviet Union came to power following the 1917 October Revolution, the revolutionaries aimed not only to reinvent the political and economic systems of what had been the Russian Empire, but also to reshape the people into ideologically committed "New Men"; a reshaping which took place against a backdrop of extreme violence. In this thesis, I examine the popular reaction to three instances of terror during the Stalinist period— the 1928–1932 Dekulakization campaign; the 1936–1938 Great Terror, and the 1953 Doctors' Plot— to determine whether or to what extent such a transformation occurred and, more broadly, analyze the nature of the Soviet experience under Stalin. Using letters, diaries, newspaper articles, and government and police reports from the era, as well as memoirs and oral histories produced after the fact, I will argue that the reaction to each instance of terror was defined by the interaction between three interconnected factors: belief, atomization, and performance. While the Bolsheviks never succeeded in transforming the whole of Soviet society into New Men and many citizens accepted the official discourse only in part — most often because its elements contradicted either their existing beliefs and prejudices or their lived experiences — these periods of intense and often arbitrary repression had an atomizing effect as expressing one's true opinions carried a significant risk of denunciation, arrest, and imprisonment or execution. Under these circumstances, the Soviet people learned to perform as New Men for their own protection, a practice which in turn produced further atomization and prevented concerted resistance.

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Introduction

By the late nineteenth century, the Russian Empire lagged behind much of Europe in terms of social, economic, and political development: whereas rapid industrialization funneled the historically rural populations of Britain and France into the cities as domestic and factory workers, Russia remained overwhelmingly rural, the peasantry manually farming small and often scattered plots of land. Similarly, while other nations took tentative steps towards more representative forms of government, the Tsar largely retained autocratic control of the Russian Empire even after the State Duma was established as a legislative body in 1905. It was against this backdrop that the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party (RSDLP) was formed in 1898, splitting into the (nominally) majority Bolshevik and minority Menshevik factions in 1903. In the decades following the Bolsheviks' rise to power in October 1917, the RSDLP would be renamed to the Russian Communist Party (RKP) in March 1918, the All-Union Communist Party (VKP) in December 1925, and finally the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) in October 1952. Under the leadership of Vladimir Lenin, the Bolsheviks aimed first to bring about a socialist revolution and subsequently to build a communist society in accordance with Marxist theory, albeit with some adjustments for Russia's particular situation. Writers and theorists such as Aleksandr Bogdanov, Anatoly Lunacharsky, and Nadezhda Krupskaia argued that the success of such a society would depend not only on the implementation of economic programs such as industrialization and the creation of collective farms, but also on the ideological commitment of the populace. They envisioned these "New Men"[1] as ideal Soviet citizens, politically enlightened

[1] Although the common English translation uses the gendered "man," the Russian *Новый Человек* translates more literally into the gender-neutral "new person." Given that the Soviet Union did not achieve gender equality during Lenin's or Stalin's rule and the ideal "New Person" was therefore implicitly male, the English translation is oddly appropriate.

members of the proletariat (both in profession and in character) dedicated not to their individual interests but to the common good, who would be instrumental in disseminating Bolshevik ideology.

Naturally, theorizing about the need to fundamentally transform society was not the same as actually transforming it. In this thesis, I will compare the popular responses to three instances of terror under Stalin— the 1928–1932 dekulakization campaign, the 1936–1938 Great Terror, and the 1953 Doctors' Plot— in order to determine the extent to which the theory of the New Man became a reality. Periods of terror are particularly useful in studying the impact of Soviet rule on the population for two principal reasons. First, because the Bolsheviks justified these campaigns in large part as a means of removing harmful elements from society, they made the populace more aware of their own relationship to that ideal, as dictated by factors such as class background, nationality, and personal belief. Bolshevik policy during these periods had a direct and often destructive impact on everyday life, prompting those affected to compare the regime's theoretical principles— conveyed through the education system, newspapers and films, and workers' groups— with the ways in which those principles were put into practice.

Second, the fact that each campaign targeted different segments of the population reveals how the popular reaction to the use of terror varied based on the identities of the victims: dekulakization primarily targeted peasants, particularly those who opposed collectivization; the Great Terror was characterized by a series of widespread and arbitrary purges theoretically intended to eliminate spies and saboteurs that affected the entirety of the Soviet population; and the Doctors' Plot targeted (primarily) Jewish doctors accused of murdering top government officials through medical malpractice. Had the Soviet people largely embodied the ideal of the New Man, their responses to the use of terror would presumably have been consistent across

these three instances— that is, favourable towards and committed to the advancement of these programs— whereas differing popular responses, whether favourable or in opposition, suggest that the state-guided project of identity construction, as well as the state's control over society, was incomplete.

I will argue that there are three separate though inter-related dimensions to the existence (or non-existence) of the New Man in the Stalinist Soviet Union, and that these three dimensions interacted differently during dekulakization, the Great Terror, and the Doctors' Plot: belief, performance, and atomization — that is, the dissolution of social bonds within society, and particularly the unwillingness or inability to openly express oneself or to form deep connections with others. Although the question of whether the Soviet people adopted the beliefs promoted by their government was both a matter of concern to the Bolsheviks, who hoped to create a society of New Men, and a recurring theme throughout the historiography, the answer is, by nature, not particularly easy to determine. To gain an insight into this dimension of Soviet life, I use a combination of materials produced at the time, including diaries, letters— primarily sent to newspapers such as *Pravda* (Truth) and *Krestianskaia gazeta* (The Peasant Newspaper)— and reports from members of the Communist Party and the People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs (NKVD); as well as memoirs and oral histories produced from the mid-1950s onward. While many writers were surprisingly forthright in expressing views which contradicted those sanctioned by the state in their diaries, contemporary materials were necessarily influenced by the intensely repressive circumstances of the time and the danger inherent in expressing oneself freely. Memoirs and oral histories, meanwhile, were often written or collected decades after the events in question; while the writers and interviewees enjoyed greater freedom of expression than they had under Stalin, their recollections were likely muddied to some extent by time. In

addition, written materials by nature center the voices of the educated and often wealthier segments of the population and do not necessarily reflect the perspectives of Soviet society as a whole. That being said, the fact that a number of these authors found themselves in proximity to individuals from a variety of backgrounds (for instance, while incarcerated in labour camps) offers some insight into the common views and experiences of the time.

Most scholars of Soviet history argue that it was primarily young workers and students who had grown up during or prior to the revolution that embodied the ideal of the New Man in the sense that they were ideologically committed to Bolshevik principles. While these individuals sometimes noted contradictions in the regime's policies or found conforming to its ideals to be difficult or unpleasant, they tended to ascribe these experiences to deficiencies in their own character. However, the New Man did exist in the Soviet Union in the form of performance: contemporary communist autobiographies, newspaper opinion pieces, speeches at public meetings, and even the strategic nature of forms of resistance such as female-led riots reveal a widespread awareness that it was necessary to behave and speak in ways which outwardly demonstrated loyalty to the regime, particularly for the targets of campaigns of terror. This constant need to perform true belief in turn created a highly atomized society. Because individuals were largely unable to share their genuine opinions and experiences with those around them, and because a wide range of activities and comments might be used as evidence that they harboured anti-Soviet beliefs, interpersonal connections were both difficult to form and potentially dangerous to maintain.

For Western scholars, the question of whether the ideal of the New Man was ever realized in the Soviet Union is implicitly part of a larger debate surrounding the nature of Soviet subjectivity, which is to say the experience of living under Soviet and particularly Stalinist rule,

and the extent to which the Soviet people exercised agency and free thought within this system of intense repression. Because the historiography on Soviet subjectivity and Bolshevik theories on the nature of the New Man share a premise— that living under Communist rule was, or at least had the potential to be, transformative— I will cover both in chapter one, along with the positions on Soviet subjectivity that can be found within the largely separate body of work on Soviet antisemitism and the Doctors' Plot. The historiography on Soviet subjectivity began in the late 1940s–early 1950s with the Totalitarian School, a politically-charged body of scholarship which aimed primarily to help Western governments understand and defeat the Soviet Union in the Cold War. This school suggests that the Soviet people were completely repressed by the state and, as such, lacked agency or free thought. By the 1960s–1970s, however, Cold War tensions had cooled somewhat, and a combination of greater access to the Soviet Union, the publication of Soviet accounts of Stalinism such as Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago,* and the advent of social history as a discipline saw the emergence of the Revisionist School. These scholars highlight the distinction between the people and the state, some arguing that the people were largely unconvinced by the Communist Party program, while others frame them as dedicated socialists dissatisfied with Stalin's rule. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the subsequent opening of the archives, a new generation of scholarship emerged in the 1990s and early 2000s which posits the existence of a complex relationship between the Soviet people and the state: on the one hand, Stalinism was deeply ingrained in all facets of life, and much of the population accepted some or even most of the ideas and practices disseminated by the Bolsheviks. On the other hand, this school frames the people as pragmatic, highlighting the performative use of socialist language and the participation in study circles, union meetings, or the Party itself as a means of avoiding persecution or procuring material or social advantages.

Following my overview of the historiography in the first chapter, I will explore the interaction between belief, performance, and atomization during collectivization and dekulakization in Chapter Two, during the Great Terror in Chapter Three, and during the Anti-Cosmopolitan Campaign and Doctors' Plot in Chapter Four. Throughout 1928 and 1929, the Bolsheviks implemented measures to create *kolkhozhy* (collective farms) across the Soviet Union, but particularly in the most productive regions such as Ukraine and the Volga. Met with widespread resistance among the peasantry, they implemented a program of dekulakization designed to remove the opponents of the collectivization program— whom they portrayed as "kulaks," or wealthy and exploitative peasants— from the countryside. As a result, tens of thousands of peasants faced arrest, exile, the confiscation of their property and, in Ukraine, genocide, in the years that followed. The popular reaction to collectivization and dekulakization was largely divided along lines of residence and age: young factory workers and students flocked to the countryside to implement collectivization out of a seemingly genuine belief in, and desire to help build, a socialist state; peasants, meanwhile, largely opposed collectivization as an unwanted intrusion by the state. Because peasants constituted a numerous, concentrated, and largely unified population, they were able to engage in strategic forms of resistance that ranged from writing anonymous letters and proclamations to riots led by women, who were largely perceived as acting on emotion and were therefore generally not prosecuted for these activities. The fact that the peasantry was not atomized meant that individual performance played a far smaller role in their experience than it would for the targets of future instances of terror, enabling them to act collectively, albeit in a limited fashion, in accordance with their beliefs. Similarly, belief and action aligned for the party representatives in the countryside, who tended to interpret

these acts of resistance through the lens of Bolshevik theory, labelling them as the work of kulaks who had deceived and exploited poor and middle peasants.

In August 1936, Lev Kamenev, Grigory Zinoviev, and fourteen other Old Bolsheviks were put on trial for their supposed involvement in the assassination of Leningrad party boss Sergei Kirov two years earlier, in December 1934. This was the start of the Great Terror, a campaign of mass repression which saw the arrest, imprisonment, and execution of millions of Soviet people as spies and saboteurs. While groups such as national minorities, intellectuals, Party functionaries— particularly former oppositionists— and Red Army officers were disproportionately targeted, virtually everyone besides Joseph Stalin himself risked falling victim to the purges. The population's behaviour was closely monitored by the state security organs of the NKVD as well as by friends, neighbours, and colleagues: denouncing others was a means of demonstrating loyalty to the regime, settling personal grudges, and potentially obtaining the victim's possessions. As a result, the Soviet people had a particularly strong incentive to perform as New Men; this, in turn, created a highly atomized society in which any slip of the tongue around the wrong person might lead to one's arrest. However, while some bought into the official justifications for the Terror and believed that any victims they knew to be loyal citizens had been mistakenly caught up in the search for genuine anti-Soviet actors, for others, the sheer magnitude of the purges or the arrest of particular individuals— whether public figures or someone they knew personally— sowed doubt in the legitimacy of the campaign.

After the Holocaust and the subsequent creation of the state of Israel in 1948 sparked a resurgence in Jewish national identity, Soviet Jews became subject to increasing suspicion. The 1948–1952 Anti-Cosmopolitan Campaign targeted Jewish writers, theatre critics, and particularly members of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee (JAC), culminating with the trial twenty-five

Jewish intellectuals in 1952, all but one of whom was executed. In January 1953, the Bolsheviks introduced the Doctors' Plot, an invented conspiracy in which Jewish Kremlin doctors killed top officials through medical malpractice. While these campaigns were arguably more a product of political anxieties surrounding Jewish nationalism and their status as a diaspora nationality with a foreign homeland— Poles, Germans, and other national minorities had similarly been targets for repression in the past— both drew heavily on longstanding antisemitic tropes to garner popular support. This effort proved successful, as the announcement of the Doctors' Plot in particular sparked a wave of accusations that Jewish pediatricians were deliberately harming their patients. Support for the use of terror stemmed not just from state policy, which had previously included efforts to eliminate "backwards" forms of antisemitism such as accusations of blood libel, but also from prejudices that predated it.

In essence, while Stalin and the Bolsheviks failed to create a society composed entirely or even primarily of New Men, they had created one in which, when it benefitted them— either by increasing their chances of survival, as in the Great Terror, or because it aligned with their existing beliefs, as for workers' brigades during collectivization and some Gentiles during the Doctors' Plot— the Soviet people largely performed and interacted with others *as if* such a transformation had taken place.

Chapter One:
The New Man and the Evolution of Soviet Subjectivity

Introduction

Although contemporary Bolshevik theorists and later Western scholars differed significantly in their assessment of the impact of living under Soviet rule, both groups agreed that the experience had the potential to be profoundly transformative not only on a socio-economic level but in its effects on the beliefs and worldviews of the population. The Bolsheviks adopted the teleological view of human history put forth by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels which posited communism as the culmination of human history, and theorists like Vladimir Lenin and Aleksandr Bogdanov suggested that this historical evolution would be matched by the perfection of human consciousness. The creation and success of the socialist state, in their view, relied on a vanguard of proletarian "New Men" knowledgeable in communist theory and dedicated to labouring for the good of the state, as well as educating their fellow workers. Because class consciousness was seen as something that had to be fostered in the population, prior to the 1930s, failure to embody the ideals of the New Man could be explained as either the product of a lack of education— which could be remedied, provided one came from the correct class background— or as a sign that an individual secretly harboured anti-Soviet views. By the mid-1930s, however, Stalin declared that the Soviet Union had largely cast off its backwards origins and that socialism had, in general, been achieved. In the years that followed, any action, writing, or speech perceived to contradict the state's goals were considered signs of the perpetrator's true malicious nature. Behaving as a communist was not enough; anyone who did not also think the correct thoughts was condemned as an anti-Soviet "wrecker" by nature.

From the Western standpoint, the field of Sovietology— that is, the study of the Soviet Union, which encompassed history as well as related fields such as political science and anthropology— emerged in direct response to the Cold War as scholars, many of whom were employed by or in partnership with the United States government, sought to understand their opponent. Inaugurated by Carl Friedrich and Zbigniew Brzezinski's 1956 monograph *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy*, the Totalitarian School emphasized the autocratic power of the Soviet state and the use of terror as a means of eroding individual agency and thought, a position shaped both by the political circumstances of the time and the extremely limited access to primary evidence. By the mid-1970s, cooling Cold War tensions meant that a greater number of Western scholars were able to visit the Soviet Union during the course of their research, while the publication of memoirs on the Stalinist period and the advent of social history as a discipline led to the emergence of the Revisionist School. Although some authors were broadly sympathetic to the socialist project, these works focused on the agency of the Soviet people and their relative ideological independence from the regime.

Unlike dekulakization and the Great Terror, which feature prominently in the historiography on Soviet subjectivity, the Anti-Cosmopolitan Campaign and Doctors' Plot are rarely included in such discussions in-depth, likely because they never reached the level of mass repression, or because they targeted one particular minority group. However, examining instances of terror which affected a specific segment of the population, even in a limited fashion, has significant value in illuminating the relationship between the state and the people. This is particularly true of the antisemitic campaigns of the late 1940s and early 1950s: did the long history of antisemitism in the region make the Gentile population more receptive to the use of terror in comparison to dekulakization and the Great Terror? To what extent did shifting Soviet

policy regarding the Jewish minority spark a corresponding shift in popular expression? Broadly speaking, the debate surrounding these campaigns revolves around determining why Jews were targeted, and specifically, why they were targeted *at that particular time.* On one end of the spectrum, Yehoshua Gilboa argues that the Doctors' Plot was largely (though not exclusively) a product of Stalin's personal antisemitism, while on the other, Jonathan Brent and Vladimir Naumov suggest that the fact that the victims were Jewish was only significant insofar as it made them easier targets: Stalin maintained his hold on power through periodic campaigns of terror, and it was time for another one. Falling somewhere in the middle is Jeffrey Veidlinger, who argues that the persecution of Soviet Jews aligned with the Stalinist regime's treatment of national minorities in general, who were regularly targeted for their real or perceived connections to foreign states. Assessments of the nature and extent of popular antisemitism under Stalin are similarly variable, with historians such as Diana Dumitru arguing that because antisemitism was officially condemned in the Soviet Union during the interwar period, it was far less pronounced than in the neighbouring states of East-Central Europe, while others such as Elissa Bemporad and Martin Blackwell highlight the persistence of antisemitic stereotypes— and, in some cases, violence— in spite of state policy.

Historians Assess the New Man in Theory and Practice

For the Bolsheviks, the New Man was not a single, centralized concept but rather an idea which pervaded many of their works and which was implicitly employed as a justification for the use of terror. Theorists such as Aleksandr Bogdanov, whose *Tektology* served as one of the Bolsheviks' foundational texts before he was marginalized within the Communist Party over his divergence from Leninist thought, argued that scientific study would provide an answer to societal problems,

which would, in turn, create a utopian society.[2] He believed that people had the capacity to consciously create human relations but that the industrial proletariat was the only class capable of transcending their own selfish interests in order to do so effectively, provided they first received the necessary education to spark this ideological shift.[3] While the extent to which the Bolsheviks actually adhered to their theoretical principles once they came to power is a matter of some debate, the idea that human consciousness not only *could* but also *must* be perfected, and that this perfected consciousness had a specific and singular form, is evident in the increasingly repressive means through which the Communist Party responded to real or perceived deviance within the population.

In his 1905 article "The Proletariat and the Peasantry," published in *Novaia Zhizn'* (New Life), Vladimir Lenin stressed that the Bolsheviks must both meet the peasant majority's demands for land and freedom, and persuade them of the correctness of communist theory. He argued that "the course and outcome of the great Russian revolution depend in tremendous measure on the growth of the peasants' political consciousness," and that although "not all peasants fighting for land and freedom are fully aware of what their struggle implies, and go so far as to demand a republic … . [T]he democratic trend of the peasants' demands is beyond all doubt."[4] It was not enough for the revolution to gain pragmatic allies motivated by their own goals; they must also be converted to the Bolshevik cause, a conversion which Lenin implied would occur naturally as the peasants were educated on (what he believed to be) the reality of their situation. In essence, once labourers— whether peasant or proletarian— were taught to

[2] Georgii Gloveli, "Bogdanov as Scientist and Utopian," in *Bogdanov and His Work: A Guide to the Published and Unpublished Works of Alexander A. Bogdanov (Malinovsky) 1873–1928,* ed. John Biggart and Georgii Gloveli (London: Routledge, 1998), 42.
[3] Gloveli, "Bogdanov as Scientist," 48.
[4] V.I. Lenin, "The Proletariat and the Peasantry," *Novaya Zhizn* no. 11 (November 12, 1905), *Lenin Internet Archive*. https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1905/mar/23.htm

understand their circumstances through a Marxist-Leninist lens, they would see that a communist revolution would best serve their interests. The idea that the success of the revolution relied on the consciousness of the Russian people is similarly evident in Lenin's "Six Theses on the Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government" (1918), in which he argued that "the essence of the present situation is that the task of convincing the working people of Russia that the programme of the socialist revolution is correct … [has], in main and fundamental outline, been carried out." While some compromises with the bourgeoisie were necessary during this period of transition, he stated that unquestioning obedience to the dictatorship of the proletariat had not yet materialized due to "the influence of petty-bourgeois anarchy, the anarchy of small proprietor habits, aspirations and sentiments, which fundamentally contradict proletarian discipline and socialism. The proletariat must concentrate all its class-consciousness on the task of combatting this petty-bourgeois anarchy," as the bourgeoisie and their supposed allies, the Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries, supported "every kind of resistance to the proletarian government."[5] Political action was, in this view, the direct result of a deeply-ingrained set of ideological beliefs that stemmed in large part from one's class background.

The evolution of the theoretical discussion surrounding the New Man between the 1920s and 1930s is of particular interest to historians with a focus on Soviet subjectivity, several of whom note that under Stalin's rule, it adopted a particular focus on morality and the idea that ethical problems had political and ideological roots.[6] It was this new dimension, scholars such as Maja Soboleva and Igal Halfin argue, that contributed to the use of terror during the 1930s. In the introduction to *Terror in My Soul: Communist Autobiographies on Trial,* Halfin states that, "[b]y

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[5] V.I. Lenin, "Six Theses on the Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government," 1918, *Lenin Internet Archive.* https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1918/apr/30.htm

[6] Maja Soboleva, "The Concept of the 'New Soviet Man' and Its Short History," *Canadian-American Slavic Studies* 51 (2017), 67–68.

the mid-1930s … political behavior was assumed to be governed by moral motivations irreducible to objective facts such as class origins or environmental influences," and that the purges were not, as some have argued, evidence of a complete breakdown of morality but rather an expression of "[t]he Communist eschatology by which a classless society would be realized only when evil souls were removed from the proletariat."[7] However, the idea that a good Soviet citizen not only acted in the state's interest but also held the appropriate beliefs was not limited to the realm of the government and intelligentsia: Jochen Hellbeck argues in *Revolution on My Mind: Writing a Diary Under Stalin* that diarists among the common people often reflected on the extent to which they embodied or failed to embody the New Man, attempting to work through and rectify perceived flaws in their own psychology which prevented them from conforming to Communist ideals.[8] Similarly, Irina Paperno posits diaries as a means of positioning oneself within the historical moment and crafting a narrative which aligned with Marxist teleology, resulting in a focus on the transformation of the self to mirror the transformation of Russian and later Soviet society.[9]

The Cold War and the Evolution of Soviet Subjectivity

Despite their numerous and fundamental differences, Western and official Soviet scholarship held in common the position that Soviet rule had a profoundly transformative effect on the population. However, where the Communist Party framed this transformation as necessary for the development of the state and the people alike, early Sovietologists framed it as a suppression

[7] Igal Halfin, *Terror in My Soul: Communist Autobiographies on Trial* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 1–2.
[8] Jochen Hellbeck, *Revolution on My Mind: Writing a Diary Under Stalin* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 15–16, 69.
[9] Irina Paperno, *Stories of the Soviet Experience: Memoirs, Diaries, Dreams* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009), 9, 14.

of the people's will and individuality in order to align them, either voluntarily or through force, with the goals of the state. This perspective was very much a product of the Cold War: reflecting on the Totalitarian School, Stephen Cohen states that, "[f]rom the beginning, the partnership [between academics and the American government] that created Soviet studies and caused their extraordinary expansion in the 1940s and 1950s … candidly emphasized the 'urgency of these studies and … their relevance to their questions of national policy.'"[10] He notes that while "scholars of China are enamored of its history, culture, and people … . [m]any Sovietologists, on the other hand, seemed to dislike their subject."[11] In addition, access to primary evidence was extremely limited, as very few Westerners were allowed into the Soviet Union and the Party was extremely selective of the documents it made available to its own people, let alone foreigners. While the Harvard Project on the Soviet Social System and a handful of émigré memoirs offered insight into the lives of ordinary people, the limited nature of British and American intelligence meant that academics largely relied on evidence provided by state-run newspapers like *Pravda, Izvestiia* (The News), and *Krasnaia Zvezda* (Red Star), select Central Committee decrees, and works by Lenin, Stalin, and other theorists. Works produced, sanctioned, and/or censored by the state offer a valuable insight into the past, and what is allowed to be made public knowledge is itself revealing. However, they also present a highly curated version of the Stalinist period in which Bolshevik policy was far more cohesive and closely aligned with the state's ideological foundations than present-day scholars generally agree was the case.

In 1956, avowed anti-communists Carl Friedrich and Zbigniew Brzezinski published *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy*, one of the seminal works of the Totalitarian School. For

[10] Stephen F. Cohen, *Rethinking the Soviet Experience: Politics and History Since 1917* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 10.
[11] Cohen, *Rethinking the Soviet Experience,* 11-12.

Brzezinski in particular, this stance was not just academic: he was the son of the former Polish ambassador to Canada, where his family became stranded after the Soviet annexation of the eastern half of the country in 1939. A Harvard professor at the time *Totalitarian Dictatorship* was published, he would go on to serve as the foreign affairs advisor for Presidents Kennedy, Johnson, and Carter. Despite their biases, Friedrich and Brzezinski outline a list of six key characteristics of totalitarian states which were, on the whole, accurate to the Soviet Union: an elaborate ideology which encompassed all aspects of human existence; a single mass party, generally with a powerful leader and composed of a loyal core of the population; a system of physical or psychological terror directed both against specific enemies and the people at random; an effective monopoly over all means of communication; a monopoly over the control of all weapons; and central direction of the economy.[12]

However, they also posit the state as inherently static, arguing in the preface that although Nikita Khrushchev's Secret Speech[13]— which he delivered two months after they completed the manuscript— and the relaxation of police controls were positive developments, "as yet no fundamental change seems to have occurred in the Soviet system," and that "[n]o effective restraints against the employment of terror have yet been developed. The potential of terror is still present, and the party would not hesitate to use violence to defend its monopoly of power."[14] In their view, the Communist Party was a unified body which consistently and effectively acted in accordance with its ideological underpinnings, and they frame the people as subjects of, rather than active participants in, the Stalinist system. References to the people are rare and largely

[12] Carl J. Friedrich and Zbigniew K. Brzezinski, *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy: Second Edition, Revised by Carl J. Friedrich* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965), 22.
[13] In a closed session at the 20th Party Congress, Khrushchev criticized Stalin for his abuses of power and began a process of destalinization which deconstructed the view of his predecessor as an infallible leader.
[14] Friedrich and Brzezinski, *Totalitarian Dictatorship,* xiii.

incidental: they state, for instance, that "it is almost impossible to subject one social group to punitive … measures without producing a hostile reaction not only from the group concerned, but also from connected groups … . Thus the repressive measures of totalitarian regimes, which aim first at eliminating their open enemies, are gradually extended to other sections of society."[15] In essence, while they suggested that resistance to the Communist Party existed within the populace, their discussion of this phenomenon is *about* the state's effort to control the people, rather than about the people themselves.

The idea that the Soviet state successfully realized its ideological principles was widely accepted across the political spectrum. Herbert Marcuse, a member of the western Marxist Frankfurt School, argues that "Soviet Marxism … is not merely an ideology promulgated by the Kremlin in order to rationalize and justify its policies but expresses in various forms the realities of Soviet developments,"[16] and that "once incorporated into the foundational institutions and objectives of a new society, Marxism becomes subject to a historical dynamic which surpasses the intentions of the leadership and to which the manipulators themselves succumb."[17] Because Soviet institutions were created in accordance with Marxist theory, the state could not deviate from its founding ideology. This premise implicitly denied not only that the Soviet system could undergo meaningful change, but also that anyone in the Soviet Union, especially ordinary citizens, exercised significant agency. Marcuse reinforces this position in his discussion of the public and private spheres, which is infused with an assumption of Western superiority. In the West, he argues, these spheres were distinct, allowing for freedom of thought and of conscience. Conversely, in the Soviet Union the two were merged; an individual's thoughts and beliefs

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[15] Friedrich and Brzezinski, *Totalitarian Dictatorship*, 162.
[16] Herbert Marcuse, *Soviet Marxism: A Critical Analysis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958), 1.
[17] Marcuse, *Soviet Marxism*, 9.

became a matter of public concern and as such necessarily aligned with morals and values dictated by the state, a process achieved through a combination of terror and complete control of mass culture. Marcuse argues that "at the end of the coordinating process, if and when conformity has been established … individual freedom of thought and conscience appears to be losing its independent and unconditional value."[18] The Soviet people were stripped of their agency by a system which denied them, through its very structure, the means to exercise their capacity for independent thought.

Although it lasted only eight years, Khrushchev's Thaw[19] proved that the Soviet government was not, as scholars of the Totalitarian School had theorized, static. By the mid-1970s, cooling Cold War tensions allowed Westerners to visit and study in the Soviet Union and lessened the fervour of anti-Soviet sentiment; the publication of works such as Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago*, Nadezhda Mandelstam's *Hope Against Hope* (untitled in the original Russian), and Evgeniia Ginzburg's *Journey Into the Whirlwind*; and the emergence of the discipline of social history inaugurated a new era of scholarship on Soviet subjectivity. Unlike their predecessors, scholars of the Revisionist School posited the Soviet populace as largely ideologically distinct from the state though often strategic in their dealings with the bureaucracy; in some cases, this approach tacitly framed the Western, capitalist way of life as the default state of humanity. Vera Dunham, for instance, argues that an alliance existed between Stalin's regime and a group she called the "middle class," in reference to both their socio-economic position and worldview. These individuals were "the solid citizens in positions and style of life below the top officials and the cultural elite, yet above the world of plain clerks and

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[18] Marcuse, *Soviet Marxism,* 210-213.
[19] Following his 1956 Secret Speech, Khrushchev ushered in an era of comparative freedom of expression which lasted until he was removed from power in 1964.

factory workers, of farm laborers and sales girls,"[20] who, regardless of their particular occupation or income level, reflected "the embourgeoisement of Soviet manners, values, and attitudes."[21] By using the term "middle class" in this way, she implies that these two aspects— socio-economic position and bourgeois values— were intrinsically linked, the latter naturally arising from the former independent of state ideology. Dunham's analysis counters the somewhat dehumanizing narrative of the Totalitarian School by emphasizing the Soviet people's agency and capacity for independent thought. However, she explicitly equates the Soviet middle class to its Western counterparts, claiming that it "consist[s] of many Soviet Babbitts and organization men,"[22] in reference to Sinclair Lewis' 1922 novel *Babbitt,* which satirized the American middle class. Coupled with her use of Western terminology to refer to the Soviet socio-economic system, this suggests that, consciously or subconsciously, she considered Western values to be natural in a way that their Soviet counterparts were not.

In a similar vein, Moshe Lewin— who worked on a collective farm and as a furnace operator in the Soviet Union for a handful of years as a youth after fleeing the Nazi advance into Lithuania— argues that the pre- and post-revolutionary peasantry were largely contiguous. A follower of the Annales school, he positions the Stalinist period within the *longue durée* of Russian history, arguing that "[a]s Fernand Braudel stated, a revolution, French or Russian, is never really a break in the country's civilization. What went on not only before 1937, or before 1929, but well before 1917 has to be understood and put to work … . Lenin, Trotsky, Stalin, and the Politburo all acted inside a social and cultural milieu."[23] Part of that cultural milieu was a

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[20] Vera S. Dunham, *In Stalin's Time: Middleclass Values in Soviet Fiction* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1990), 5.
[21] Dunham, *In Stalin's Time,* 4.
[22] Dunham, *In Stalin's Time,* 4.
[23] Moshe Lewin, *The Making of the Soviet System: Essays in the Social History of Interwar Russia* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985), 7.

pattern of clashes between the state and the peasantry which long predated the Soviet Union and, in his view, resulted from the fact that the peasantry constituted a distinct society characterized by “(1) the family farm as basic socioeconomic unit; (2) the small scale of the farm’s operations; (3) village life as the basic environment, with its still viable, more or less developed, communal institutions.”[24] In essence, they retained unique customs and beliefs in spite of repeated waves of terror designed to assimilate them into wider Soviet society. While Dunham focuses on a segment of the Soviet population which supported Stalinism and Lewin on a portion of the population which opposed it, both argue that the ideology promoted and imposed by the state had little impact on the convictions of ordinary people.

The dissolution of the Soviet Union transformed the debate on Soviet subjectivity, as well as Soviet historiography more broadly, for two reasons: first, the pool of available evidence increased dramatically as researchers were able to conduct oral history interviews with individuals who lacked the means or desire to leave the Soviet Union and had thus been underrepresented in the Western historiography, while the opening of the archives made available secret police reports, government documents, a handful of transcripts from Central Committee plenary meetings, and letters and diaries written by ordinary people. Second, while anti-communist and anti-Soviet sentiment persists to this day— even four decades after the fall of the Soviet Union, most left-of-center politicians in the United States and Canada are quick to reject the label of socialist, let alone communist— it is no longer as pervasive or intense as in the time of the Totalitarian or even Revisionist Schools, when any representation of the Soviet Union that might be construed as sympathetic had the potential to effectively end one’s career.[25] That being said, Anna Krylova cautiones against overstating the extent of the break between the scholarship

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[24] Lewin, *The Making of the Soviet System,* 268.
[25] Cohen, *Rethinking the Soviet Experience,* 16.

of the 1990s and the Totalitarian and Revisionist Schools which preceded it, arguing that "[t]he search for remnants of liberal subjectivity and signs of resistance against anti-liberal communist Russia constituted a central, long-term agenda for American scholars," which first emerged under the Totalitarian School but which still shaped the discipline when she published the article, "The Tenacious Liberal Subject in Soviet Studies," in 2000.[26]

In 1995, Stephen Kotkin published *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as Civilization*, a work of microhistory based on newly uncovered archival material on the Magnitogorsk steel plant as well as the city surrounding it, both of which were constructed under the industrialization program of the first Five-Year Plan. Kotkin argues that "the distinctiveness of Stalinism lay not in the formation of a mammoth state by means of the destruction of society but in the creation, along with such a state, of a new society— manifest in property relations, social structure, the organization of the economy, political practice, and language."[27] Because he theorizes that Stalinism permeated all areas of life, the issue of Soviet subjectivity is at the forefront of Kotkin's work: he aims to "analyze the ways that things said about work and the work place became a determinant in how workers were understood by others, and how they understood themselves,"[28] a project premised on the idea that state ideology— which the Communist Party took particular pains to communicate to workers— had a meaningful impact on the Soviet people's self-concept. However, living under the Stalinist regime required a degree of self-monitoring and performance regardless of individual ideological convictions, a process Kotkin referred to as "speaking Bolshevik," that is, presenting and conducting oneself in the manner

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[26] Anna Krylova, "The Tenacious Liberal Subject in Soviet Studies," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 1, no. 1 (Winter 2000), 120.
[27] Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995) 19-20.
[28] Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain,* 193.

appropriate to one's station, navigating the convoluted landscape of Soviet bureaucracy, and employing the language of communism. By operating within this framework, which also dictated acceptable forms of resistance— absenteeism, for instance, was extremely common but rarely punished due to perpetual labour shortages— individuals were able to pursue their own interests.[29] Because virtually everyone was an employee of the state, speaking Bolshevik was often more necessity than choice. However, Kotkin is clear that "it should not be thought that Soviet workers were passive objects of the state's heavy-handed designs … . The new identity [of Soviet worker] was empowering, if demanding."[30] Daily life under Stalin was characterized by repression and resistance, but also by the ability to obtain material and social benefits, as well as genuine belief in the regime's stated goals.

Jochen Hellbeck similarly seeks to uncover the nature of Soviet subjectivity in his 1996 article "Fashioning the Stalinist Soul: The Diary of Stephen Podlubnyi (1931–1939)." Born in Ukraine in 1914 to a father who would later be arrested as a kulak and only able to participate in Soviet society because he concealed his class origins— he worked in a printing factory, joined the Komsomol, and enrolled in the Moscow Medical Institute—, Hellbeck argues that Podlubnyi's experiences and perspective were typical of individuals of his generation and background. His diary reflects a desire to mold himself into the ideal of the New Man, and he engaged in harsh self-recrimination over the aspects of his consciousness which he believed to be lacking: he ascribed the fact that he did not enjoy his work, for instance, to flaws in his own psychology and "essentially expressed the desire to reach a state of natural conformity with the Soviet system. What he condemned was not the coercive nature of the system but his own

[29] Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain,* 204-208.
[30] Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain,* 209-210.

behavior in it."[31] On this basis, Hellbeck argues that "an individual living in the Stalinist system could not conceivably formulate a notion of himself independently of the program promulgated by the Bolshevik state,"[32] a position which recalls the Totalitarian School, particularly Marcuse. That being said, the fact that Hellbeck's analysis centers Podlubnyi's own words makes clear that the hegemony of the Stalinist system did not erase the Soviet people's capacity for agency or complex thought.

While the majority of works comprising the current school on Soviet subjectivity were published in the 1990s and early 2000s, Yuri Slezkine's 2017 monograph *The House of Government: A Saga of the Russian Revolution* represents a more recent addition. Slezkine provides, on the one hand, an extremely detailed account of the lives of the residents of the titular House of Government— an apartment complex across from the Kremlin which housed government officials and their families— in the decades following the revolution, told in large part through the extensive use of diaries and letters. On the other hand, his argument that the Bolsheviks were "millenarian sectarians preparing for the apocalypse," and portrayal of the post-revolutionary years as "stages in the history of a failed prophecy,"[33] sets out a framework into which events and individuals seem at times to be made to fit. For instance, while Slezkine, like Hellbeck, argues that the post-revolutionary generation largely internalized Bolshevik ideals, he describes them in essentially mythological terms: "[t]he House of Government children were pure and exuberant Uriels with no old world to confront. They had inherited a happy childhood; their job was to read nonstop and 'work on themselves.'"[34] While this framing gestures towards a

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[31] Jochen Hellbeck, "Fashioning the Stalinst Soul: The Diary of Stepan Podlubnyi (1931-1939)," *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 44, no. 3 (1996), 353.
[32] Hellbeck, "Fashioning the Stalinist Soul," 371-372.
[33] Yuri Slezkine, *The House of Government: A Saga of the Russian Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), XII.
[34] Slezkine, *The House of Government,* 665.

more complex reality— prior to the mid-1930s, the children of government officials on the whole enjoyed far more stable and prosperous lives compared to others of their generation— it is a somewhat reductive approach that casts this segment of the population in the archetype of the New Man without the nuances introduced by scholars such as Hellbeck and Paperno.

Scholarship on the Doctors' Plot and Soviet Antisemitism

While scholars theorizing on the nature of Soviet subjectivity typically address the purposes and impact of the use of terror in the 1930s, the same cannot be said of the 1948–1952 Anti-Cosmopolitan Campaign and 1953 Doctors' Plot, which never reached a mass scale and tends to fall largely within the purview of scholars with a focus on Soviet Jewish history. Like many Soviet policies, the ideological principles and political goals foundational to these campaigns were not always clear. Yehoshua Gilboa presents his theory of premeditated antisemitism in his 1971 monograph *The Black Years of the Soviet Jewry 1939–1953*, arguing that the Doctors' Plot was the product of a combination of Stalin's personal antisemitism, popular resentment towards the Jewish community, and anxiety over the Jewish question— that is, what to do with this culturally-distinct subset of the population at a time when the regime prioritized assimilation into a single, pan-Soviet identity— and was not necessarily intended to achieve a larger goal.[35] In contrast, Jonathan Brent and Vladimir Naumov argue in their 2003 book *Stalin's Last Crime: The Plot Against the Jewish Doctors, 1948–1952* that Stalin strategically engineered waves of terror as a means of reinforcing his hold on power; as such, the fact that these campaigns employed antisemitic stereotypes and that the victims were predominately Jewish had less to do with their identity than it did the fact that they made convenient targets for Stalin's broader political

[35] Yehoshua A. Golboa, *The Black Years of the Soviet Jewry 1939-1953,* trans. Yosef Shachter and Dov Ben-Abba (Toronto: Little, Brown and Company, 1971), 343, 350.

project.[36] In an article published the same year, Jeffrey Veidlinger similarly moves away from the idea of premeditated antisemitism, instead contextualizing the persecution of Soviet Jews in the post-war era through the treatment of diaspora nationalities in the USSR as a whole: just as the German, Korean, and other minorities were deported to the interior in anticipation of the Second World War, the creation of the state of Israel in 1948 and the resurgence of Jewish national identity in the aftermath of the Holocaust meant that they were increasingly perceived as a threat.[37]

However, it is not the regime's aims in engineering the Anti-Cosmopolitanism Campaign and the Doctors' Plot— as well as its policies regarding Soviet Jews more broadly— that offer an insight into the nature of Soviet subjectivity, but rather the popular response to these campaigns and policies. In his 1984 book *The Soviet Government and the Jews 1948–1967,* Benjamin Pinkus suggests that while Soviet antisemitism was never completely eliminated, its prevalence varied depending on structural factors and government policy: "[j]ust as complex social and economic processes in the second half of the 1920s had led to a rise in overt anti-Semitism, far-reaching changes in the structure of Soviet society brought a drop in the early 1930s."[38] Diana Dumitru similarly argues that state policy had a significant impact on popular attitudes towards the Soviet Jewish population in her 2016 monograph *The State, Antisemitism, and Collaboration in the Holocaust* through her comparison of Jewish-Gentile relations under German occupation in the neighbouring regions of Bessarabia, which was in Romania, and Transnistria, which was part of the Soviet Union. In particular, she notes that instances of antisemitic violence outside the

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[36] Jonathan Brent and Vladimir P. Naumov, *Stalin's Last Crime: The Plot Against the Jewish Doctors, 1948-1953* (New York: Harper Collins, 2003), 1, 5-6.
[37] Jeffrey Veidlinger, "Soviet Jewry as a Diaspora Nationality: The 'Black Years' Reconsidered," *Eastern European Jewish Affairs* 33, no. 1 (2003), 5-6, 12.
[38] Benjamin Pinkus, *The Soviet Government and the Jews 1948–1967: A Documentary Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 84–85.

scope of collaboration with the Nazis was far less common in the latter region, and that many more Transnistrian civilians hid or otherwise helped Jews escape the Holocaust than their Bessarabian neighbours. Given the regions' similar histories of antisemitism, she ascribed this difference to the fact that "[t]hroughout the interwar years one of these multi-ethnic populations, that of Transnistria experienced official policies meant to counter antisemitism and integrate Jews into Soviet society, whereas in Romania the people of Bessarabia continued to witness antisemitic, exclusivist policies deployed against the Jewish populace."[39]

Conversely, Martin Blackwell suggests in his 2016 monograph *Kyiv as Regime City* that state policy regarding the Jewish population in some instances shifted *in response to* popular attitudes, rather than shaping them. As refugees returned to Kyiv following the end of the German occupation, "Stalin's regime stealthily adjusted its rule to satisfy the anti-Semitic interests of Kyiv's Ukrainian majority— to the detriment of its Jewish minority."[40] Elissa Bempoard similarly emphasizes that antisemitism changed but was not eliminated under Soviet rule. While accusations of blood libel— that Jews murdered Christian children to use their blood for ritual purposes— remained common in rural areas, it took on a secular form in the cities as "[e]thnic animosity— generated, [Soviet authorities] argued, by socioeconomic tensions— produced more 'acceptable' forms of antisemitism for the modern and enlightened society that the Soviets aspired to."[41] In essence, the state aimed to eliminate extant forms of antisemitism due to their "backwards" basis in religion, but allowed the prejudice itself to persist in nominally socialist forms, such as opposition to exploitative trade practices or an alleged lack

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[39] Diana Dumitru, *The State, Antisemitism, and Collaboration in the Holocaust: The Borderlands of Romania and the Soviet Union* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 5.
[40] Martin Blackwell, *Kyiv as Regime City: The Return of Soviet Power After Nazi Occupation* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2016), 1.
[41] Elissa Bemporad, "Empowerment, Defiance, and Demise: Jews and the Blood Libel Specter Under Stalinism," *Jewish History* 26 (2012), 346–347.

of patriotism. While these scholars are not explicitly concerned with uncovering the nature of Soviet subjectivity, they nevertheless implicitly adopted a stance on the matter, with Pinkus and Dumitru positing that the Gentile population internalized state policy regarding the Jews to a meaningful degree whereas Bemporad and, to a lesser extent, Blackwell, suggest that although the regime did not necessarily succeed in reshaping popular opinion, there existed a degree of synchronicity between popular antisemitism and official policy.

Conclusion

The question of whether and how living under Soviet rule influenced the populace interested not only Western scholars but also the Communist theorists of the time, and what academics call "Soviet subjectivity" is in many ways a successor to the idea of the New Soviet Man. Ideologically pure, hardworking, and totally committed to the Communist Party, the New Man was considered instrumental to the creation of a socialist state— it was not enough to transform the former Russian Empire politically and socio-economically; the people must also be transformed on a fundamental level. The idea of such a transformation was also at the heart of works belonging to the Totalitarian School on Soviet subjectivity, which emerged in the late 1940s as Cold War tensions escalated between the United States and the Soviet Union. Close ties between academia and the American government, as well as the harsh social, and in some cases legal, repercussions against scholars seen as overly favourable towards the USSR meant that historians produced a highly uniform body of scholarship which posited the Soviet people as mere subjects of state power, rather than active agents. The Revisionist School emerged in the 1970s–1980s as Soviet dissident accounts gained prominence, the decrease in Cold War tensions began to separate the field of Sovietology from political decision-making, and history as a

discipline underwent a broader shift towards prioritizing the perspectives and experiences of ordinary people. With the majority of their primary evidence coming from individuals who opposed the Stalinist system, and likely influenced by the persistent— if somewhat less virulent— anti-communist sentiment in the West, scholars such as Moshe Lewin argued that the Soviet people were largely unconvinced by Stalinist rhetoric or, like Vera Dunham, that popular opinion and state policy evolved in concert, with the people supporting the regime because it aligned with their own interests. The current generation of scholarship, meanwhile, is characterized both by the vastly increased access to evidence and the relative decoupling of academic study from politics, insofar as such a thing is possible. Meanwhile, in highlighting the ways in which the nature and prevalence of antisemitism shifted (or failed to shift) in response to changing Soviet policies, the historiography on the Soviet Jewish population offers an insight into the complex interaction between state ideology and popular belief.

Chapter Two:
Collectivization and Dekulakization through the Eyes of Soviet Workers and Peasants

Introduction

"Now we are able to carry out a determined offensive against the kulaks, break their resistance, eliminate them as a class and replace their output by the output of the collective farms and state farms," Stalin stated in a December 1929 speech on agrarian policy. "Now, dekulakization is being carried out by the masses of poor and middle peasants themselves, who are putting collectivization into practice. Now, dekulakization in areas of complete collectivization is no longer an administrative measure. Now, it is an integral part of the formation and development of collective farms."[42] Newly emerged as *vozhd* (leader) and having purged his opposition from the Communist Party, Stalin was determined to transform the Soviet Union into a socialist state through his Five-Year Plans, massive programs of industrialization and collectivization designed to match or exceed the economic development of the West.

Collectivization had long been a key part of the Bolshevik peasant policy, aiming to establish *kolkhozy* (collective farms) in which the members would receive a share of the harvest proportional to their labour, and the means of production— draft animals, livestock, and farm equipment— would be held in common. While Stalin claimed that poor and middle peasants across the Soviet Union were taking the initiative to implement collectivization, in reality, apocalyptic rumours of the end of days spread throughout the countryside, peasants slaughtered their livestock rather than allow it to be collectivized, and violent revolts became increasingly common. To the Bolsheviks, however, these displays of resistance reflected not the beliefs of the

[42] "Joseph Stalin Speech on Agrarian Policy Dec. 27, 1929," *Hanover College Courses, excerpted from "From Marx to Mao."* https://history.hanover.edu/courses/excerpts/111stalin.html

peasant masses but rather the influence of kulaks, wealthy and exploitative peasants seeking to undermine the development of socialism for their own selfish ends, both through terrorist acts and by swaying poor and middle peasants, whose "backwardness" made them vulnerable to manipulation, to their side. In response, the Bolsheviks recruited roughly 27,000 factory workers— the majority of them members of the Party or Komsomol, individuals who could be said to embody the ideal of the New Man— to establish and administer collective farms, as well as to conduct activist work amongst the peasantry. In addition, they implemented a sweeping program of dekulakization designed to strip wealthy peasants of their land, means of production, and hoarded grain; the (supposed) kulaks were then sent to labour camps, into exile, or, in some cases, to be executed. For the peasants, in contrast, collectivization and dekulakization represented the latest chapter in a long history of state intrusions into the countryside that denied them control over the land they cultivated, targeted institutions such as the Orthodox Church which had historically been at the centre of village life, and punished the most prosperous and productive among them for their success.

In essence, both the individuals who carried out dekulakization and collectivization (workers' brigades, party cadres, local officials) and the peasants whom they targeted viewed these campaigns through the lens of their own deeply held beliefs, which were in turn shaped both by their familiarity with Bolshevik teachings— the Party had a strong presence in the factories but not in the countryside— and the extent to which those teachings regarding the peasantry were challenged by their lived experience. Peasants were far more likely than workers or cadres to realize that kulaks were an invented category with little basis in reality simply because they lived among (and risked being labelled as) supposed members of that class. In addition, the fact that dekulakization had a clear target— albeit a slightly different one than it

claimed, as virtually all peasants, not just those who could reasonably be classed as kulaks, were potential victims— created a significant degree of in-group solidarity, with peasants in particular often setting aside conflicts within or between villages in the name of resistance. This in-group solidarity in turn allowed for a form of tacit negotiation with activists, workers' brigades, and local officials in which peasants primarily engaged in less threatening forms of resistance that were illegal in theory but rarely punished in practice: they posted anonymous proclamations calling for revolt, sent threatening letters, and destroyed *kolkhoz* property, as well as that of activists and officials. Non-anonymous forms of resistance were often led by women, who disrupted collective farm meetings and gathered in sometimes violent demonstrations; actions which were excused as outbursts of female hysteria or "backwardness" but which would have seen their male counterparts charged as kulak terrorists. In contrast, open, violent revolts were met with police or military intervention, and although these were more common in the late 1920s–early 1930s than they had been since the Civil War, they were nevertheless far less frequent than the more "permissible" forms of resistance.

Fundamentally, the response to dekulakization from both the peasantry and the Party representatives in the countryside was defined by the fact that 1) there was a relatively clear distinction between those who were at risk of being persecuted as kulaks (the vast majority of peasants, the rural clergy, and local officials) and those who were not (workers' brigades, cadres, most peasant activists), and 2) the dekulakization and collectivization campaigns generally did not challenge the existing beliefs of either group: the Party affiliates saw themselves as carrying out a vital part of the socialist project in spite of resistance from the peasantry, who in turn saw these programs as the latest in a string of unjust intrusions by the state.

Workers and Peasants under Early Bolshevik Rule

The dynamics between the Soviet government, the workers, and the peasantry which shaped both the popular reaction to the collectivization campaign and the campaign itself had their roots in the early days of Bolshevik rule. The Bolsheviks did not, strictly speaking, secure their hold on power on the basis of popular support: Lenin had deliberately prevented the Mensheviks from joining the coalition of socialist parties formed in October 1917, provoked the Socialist Revolutionaries (SRs) into leaving in June 1918, and likely secured majorities at the First All-Russian Congress of Trade Unions and the Petrograd Factory elections because they had excluded Mensheviks from the election committees and shut down their newspapers.[43] That being said, young workers in particular expressed support for socialism and communism *as concepts*, celebrating the February and October Revolutions as victories even if the Bolsheviks were not necessarily their first choice. Although she came from an aristocratic background, Ekaterina Olitskaia, at the time a student at Petrograd's Stebut Agricultural Institute for Women, recalled that she and her friends spent the day of the revolution celebrating. She stated, "I had no doubt that the revolution would triumph," and that she and her friends "did not want to watch the revolution; we wanted to make it."[44] As such, she returned home to Kursk, where she and a number of other students ran a free newspaper stand carrying publications from a variety of parties and lectured workers on topics including Russian history, literature, and economics.

Anna Andzhievskaia similarly framed the February Revolution as a joyous moment in an account that first appeared in *Women in the Civil War*, compiled by the Communist Party in 1938

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[43] Geoffrey Swain, "Leading the Workers, Leading the Peasants: The Russian Revolution 1897–1921," in *Rethinking Revolutions from 1905–1934: Democracy, Social Justice and National Liberation around the World,* ed. Stefan Berger and Klaus Weinhauer (Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), 46–49.

[44] Ekaterina Olitskaia, "My Reminiscences," in *In the Shadow of the Revolution: Life Stories of Russian Women from 1917 to the Second World War,* ed. Sheila Fitzpatrick and Yuri Slezkine, trans. Yuri Slezkine (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 34–35.

to celebrate past heroic deeds. An employee at a Piatigorsk resort who went on to work for the Union of Commercial Employees and served on the revolutionary tribunal as a people's juror, she stated that in February 1917, she and a group of friends attended a workers' rally where representatives from several parties spoke, claiming that "[e]ven though we were only eighteen to twenty years old, we were 'terribly serious young girls,': we liked to read books and were not interested in idle chatter."[45] She went on to marry one of the Bolshevik speakers and followed him to the front during the Civil War, where he was captured and hanged by British forces. While her story was likely tailored to fit the publication, it nevertheless highlights that young workers were aware of and highly receptive to revolutionary ideals, believing that it would bring a positive change to their lives. This was even true of some children: in an interview conducted as part of the Harvard Project on the Soviet Social System (HPSSS), a son of a Ukrainian shipbuilder recalled that "[w]hen the February Revolution occurred in 1917 it had an influence on me; I was only 8 years old but I remember it— I was impressed and enthusiastic."[46]

The situation in the countryside was more complex. Manufactured or not, the Bolsheviks had secured electoral victories in key urban centres. Major grain-producing regions such as the Volga, meanwhile, remained under a Menshevik and Left SR coalition: where the Bolsheviks focused their attention on the cities, the SRs in particular had a strong basis of support in the countryside.[47] In addition, while revolutionary activity in urban areas tended to be guided by socialist parties, unions, and similar organizations, peasants were notably more autonomous as a result of their distance from these population centres. A combination of widespread illiteracy, a

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[45] Anna Andzhievskaia, "A Mother's Story," in *In the Shadow of the Revolution: Life Stories of Russian Women from 1917 to the Second World War,* ed. Sheila Fitzpatrick and Yuri Slezkine, trans. Yuri Slezkine (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 73.
[46] Harvard Project on the Soviet Social System, Schedule B, Volume 9, Case 495. Interviewed by J.R, sequence 2. https://iiif.lib.harvard.edu/manifests/view/drs:5467345$1i
[47] Swain, "Leading the Workers," 48–49; Henry Bernstein, "The 'Peasant Problem' in the Russian Revolution(s) 1905–1929." *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 45, no. 5–6 (2018), 1134–1135.

lack of personnel and administrative structures in the countryside, and the need to establish control over the state's peasant majority meant that the Provisional Government had failed to implement the changes it had promised. While peasants often sought state approval, they did not wait for it to act, passing their own resolutions which granted them usage of previously uncultivated lands and often seizing and destroying state as well as private property.[48] When the Bolsheviks came to power, they faced many of the same challenges: a large rural population which had taken the initiative to reshape the countryside, with whom they had few ties but over whom they needed to establish control for their state to survive. This task would only grow more difficult as harsh grain requisitioning during the Civil War devastated the countryside.[49]

As the Bolsheviks struggled to supply the cities and the Red Army throughout 1918, they instituted a program of War Communism intended to establish total control over the Soviet economy through a grain monopoly and the nationalization of industry. Grain-requisitioning brigades were authorized to use force against peasants refusing to sell their grain— whom they labelled as kulak hoarders— and often seized far more than households could spare, leaving many without the necessary resources to feed themselves or their livestock, let alone plant the next year's harvest.[50] As revolt spread through the countryside once more, the Bolsheviks' understanding of the peasantry and their place in the revolution shifted from potential allies, who could be trusted to police themselves, to a threat they needed to mitigate.[51] The peasantry, meanwhile, largely came to associate the Bolsheviks with conscription, punitive grain requisitioning, and, particularly in major grain-producing regions of Ukraine and the Volga,

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[48] Graeme J. Gill, *Peasants and Government in the Russian Revolution.* (London: The London School of Economics and Political Science, 1979), 22–30, 38–40.
[49] Swain, "Leading the Workers," 52; Bernstein, "The 'Peasant Problem,'" 1136–1137.
[50] Robert Gellately, *Lenin, Stalin, and Hitler: The Age of Social Catastrophe* (New York: Vintage Books, 2007), 63; Orlando Figes, *Revolutionary Russia 1891–1991: A History* (New York: Picador, 2014), 112–113.
[51] Hugh D. Hudson, *Peasants, Political Police, and the Early Soviet State: Surveillance and Accommodation Under the New Economic Policy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 21.

famine.[52] By 1921, the unrest sparked by War Communism threatened the Bolsheviks' already fragile grasp on power. As such, Lenin established the New Economic Policy (NEP), a program of limited capitalist trade in which peasants were subject to a 20% tax in kind but were otherwise free to sell their surplus grain to cooperatives or private traders, in addition to halting the nationalization of industry and the formation of collective farms.[53] However, the NEP was not without its flaws. The combination of low state prices on agricultural goods and high prices on industrial and consumer goods undermined the system of commercial incentives, as rather than sell their excess grain on the market, peasants increasingly kept it to use as fodder, distill into alcohol, or save for the next harvest.[54]

Collectivization and Dekulakization in State Policy

By 1927, the Soviet Union faced a grain crisis, sparking a debate within the Communist Party which would solidify Stalin's increasingly autocratic hold on power. Whereas Nikolai Bukharin and the Right Opposition argued that developing the state's commercial industries in order to introduce commercial goods into the countryside would incentivize the sale of grain under the NEP, Stalin pushed for the rapid development of heavy industry supported by a simultaneous program of wholesale collectivization designed to increase agricultural output. These were necessary measures, he argued, to protect the Soviet Union in the event of a war with the capitalist West.[55] At the December 1927 Fifteenth Party Congress, he explained that the slow rate

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[52] Bernstein, "The 'Peasant Problem,'" 1136.
[53] Bernstein, "The 'Peasant Problem,'" 1138; Lynne Viola, *Peasants Rebels Under Stalin: Collectivization and the Culture of Peasant Resistance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 19.
[54] Massimo Livi-Bacci, "On the Human Costs of Collectivization in the Soviet Union," *Population and Development Review* 19, no. 4 (December 1993), 744; Robert Conquest, *Harvest of Sorrow: Soviet Collectivization and the Terror-Famine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 88; Bernstein, "The 'Peasant Problem,'" 1139–1140.
[55] Bernstein, "The 'Peasant Problem,'" 1139; Viola, *Peasant Rebels Under Stalin,* 19–20.

of agricultural development in the Soviet Union was due to "the extreme backwardness of our agricultural technique and the exceedingly low cultural level in the countryside," and the fact that

> agricultural production is not nationalised and not united, but broken up and scattered. It is not carried out in a planned way, and for the time being an enormous part of it is subjected to the anarchy of small production. It is not united and organised in large units on the line of collective farming and for that reason still provides a convenient field for exploitation by kulak elements.[56]

The solution was to "unite the small and dwarf peasant farms gradually but surely, not by pressure, but by example and persuasion, into large farms based on common, co-operative, collective cultivation of the land with the use of agricultural machines and tractors and scientific methods of intensive agriculture."[57] Collectivization, in essence, was vitally important to the success of the state; in order to implement these measures, however, the Bolsheviks first needed to free the peasantry from the influence of the anti-socialist kulaks.

To this end, the Communist Party implemented extraordinary measures in 1928, expanding the scope of Article 107 of the Criminal Code— initially conceived to combat speculation and hoarding— to permit the seizure of grain reserves.[58] In January of the same year, Stalin toured Siberia, castigating peasants for failing to fulfill their quotas despite what he claimed had been a bumper harvest. He warned that "our towns and our industrial centres, as well as our Red Army, will be in grave difficulties; they will be poorly supplied and they will be threatened with hunger."[59] Notably, this line of persuasion was based on the assumption that his audience felt a sense of loyalty to the Soviet Union— that they were concerned with the fate of

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[56] J.V. Stalin, "The Fifteenth Congress of the V.K.P.(b.)," 2–19 December 1927, *Marxist Internet Archive.* https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1927/12/02.htm
[57] J.V. Stalin, "The Fifteenth Congress."
[58] Viola, *Peasant Rebels,* 22.
[59] J.V. Stalin, "Grain Procurements and the Prospects for the Development of Agriculture: From Statements Made in Various Parts of Siberia in January 1928 (Brief Record)," *Marxist Internet Archive,* https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1928/01/x01.htm

the Red Army and the industrial centres— and were ideologically committed to the first Five-Year Plan. He aimed to ignite a sense of class consciousness in the countryside: "[y]ou say that the plan for grain procurement is a heavy one, and that it cannot be fulfilled. Why cannot it be fulfilled? … Look at the kulak farms: their barns are crammed with grain; grain is lying in the open under pent roofs for lack of storage space; the kulaks have 50,000–60,000 poods of surplus grain per farm, not counting seed, food and fodder stock." Any suggestion that grain requisitioning was not a viable option resulted from a lack of faith in or understanding of the Soviet legal system, which he claimed had been used to prosecute kulaks in other regions:

> If the kulaks are engaging in unbridled speculation on grain prices, why do you not prosecute them for speculation? Don't you know there is a law against speculation — Article 107 of the Criminal Code of the R.S.F.S.R., under which persons guilty of speculation are liable to prosecution, and their goods confiscated by the state? … Why is it that in other territories and regions enforcements of Article 107 has yielded splendid results, has rallied the labouring peasantry around the Soviet Government and improved the situation in the countryside, while among you, in Siberia, it is held that it is bound to produce bad results and worsen the situation?[60]

The issue with Stalin's speech was that although economic hierarchies did exist in the countryside, as did peasants who supported the creation of *kolkhozy* and blamed kulak hoarders for their failure to fulfill the grain quota, the majority of peasants were not only aware of the actual reasons for the grain crisis— such as the lack or high price of consumer goods— but also, as a result of their history with unwanted state intervention (Soviet and otherwise), had little reason to believe that these laws would be effective or have a positive impact on their lives. As a result, villages often proved difficult to split along class lines.[61]

Throughout 1929, the Bolsheviks instituted increasingly repressive measures against kulak farmers, a class defined to include those who hired labour, rented out machinery or land,

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[60] Stalin, "Grain Procurement." One pood is roughly 16.4 kilograms.
[61] C.J. Storella, A.K. Sokolov et. al., eds., *The Voice of the People: Letters from the Soviet Village 1918–1932* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 298.

owned an establishment such as a mill, or otherwise generated an income from something other than their own labour, including through commercial activities or money lending. In the spring of that year, they began confiscating meat, farm implements, draft animals, and land; in June, a decree permitted village soviets to tax households that failed to meet their procurement quota five times the initial amount and to strip the offenders of their voting rights. While the capacity to elect representatives existed only in theory, this was marked on their documents and made it difficult to obtain other employment.[62]

By the following year, the dekulakization campaign escalated from harsh material penalties to a program of deportation and execution with the 30 January 1930 Politburo decree "On Measures for the Liquidation of Kulak Farms in Raions [Districts] of Wholesale Collectivization." This decree resolved to repeal laws that permitted peasants to lease land and hire seasonal labourers, as well as to "[c]onfiscate from kulaks in these raions [of wholesale collectivization] their means of production, livestock, farm and residential structures, processing enterprises, and fodder and seed reserves."[63] In addition, it established three categories of kulaks, each of which was to be handled differently: category 1 consisted of "the counterrevolutionary kulak *aktiv*," which would be immediately liquidated by "incarcerating them in concentration camps, not stopping at the death penalty for organizers of terrorist acts, counterrevolutionary disturbances, and insurrectionist organizations," category 2 of "the remaining elements of the kulak *aktiv,* especially the richest kulaks and quasi-landowners, who are to be exiled to remote localities of the USSR," or to remote areas of a given region; and category 3 of "kulaks who are

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[62] Conquest, *The Harvest of Sorrow,* 95, 100–101.

[63] "Politburo decree 'On Measures for the Liquidation of Kulak Farms in Raions of Wholesale Collectivization,' 30 January 1930. RGASPI, f. 17, op. 162, d. 8, ll. 64–69," in *The War Against the Peasantry 1927–1930: The Tragedy of the Soviet Countryside,* ed. Lynne Viola, V.P. Danilov et. al., trans. Steven Shabad (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 228.

left within the borders of the raion; they are to be resettled on new plots of land allotted to them outside collective farms."[64]

The decree went on to provide estimates for the number of kulak households in each category by region— roughly 3–5% of farms— and outlined a plan to send additional cadres and Joint State Police Directorate (OGPU) squads to the countryside. While the bulk of the decree was overtly punitive, it also stated that these measures were meant *only* to effect kulaks, and that "[t]he CC stresses that all of the aforementioned measures must be implemented on the basis of the maximum development of initiative and activity by the broad collective-farm masses, above all landless labourers and poor peasants, and with their support."[65] However, the dekulakization decree was based on a vision of the countryside in which the only opponents to collectivization were wealthy peasants who exploited their poorer counterparts, which simply did not reflect reality. This, in turn, produced a form of circular logic in which opposition to the dekulakization and collectivization campaigns or refusal to join a *kolkhoz* became evidence of an individual or household's kulak status regardless of their material circumstances,[66] even as members of workers' brigades, officials, and peasants alike noted that the alleged kulaks were often the most productive workers.

Worker and Activist Accounts of Collectivization and Dekulakization

The Soviet people did not share one single, unified experience of collectivization. Rather, a divide existed between peasants on the one hand, who had their lives reshaped by this policy, and the Party representatives who implemented it on the other. At the 1929 Central Committee

[64] "On Measures for the Liquidation of Kulak Farms," 229.
[65] "On Measures for the Liquidation of Kulak Farms," 230–233.
[66] Norman Naimark, *Stalin's Genocides* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 56.

Plenum, Stalin announced a massive recruitment drive to send roughly 25,000 workers— sometimes known as the 25,000ers— to the countryside as members of collectivization brigades, *kolkhoz* and village soviet chairpeople, and political activists.[67] In her monograph *Best Sons of the Fatherland,* one of the most comprehensive accounts of the movement to date, historian Lynne Viola argues that the recruitment drive demonstrates that the Bolsheviks enjoyed a strong base of popular support in industrial centres such as Leningrad and, to a lesser extent, Moscow: the Party was seeking true believers; what state coercion did exist was directed towards factory leadership reluctant to give up some of their best workers rather than towards prospective 25,000ers themselves.

In fact, over 70,000 individuals volunteered, and the initial pool was winnowed down to a final total of 27,519 through a rigorous screening procedure: volunteers submitted a written declaration, a completed questionnaire, and a reference from either their factory party cell or factory committee before passing through four stages of review, culminating with the regional council of trade unions. The majority of those selected were political activists, members of social organizations, and/or had served in the Red Army; 69.6% were Party members and a further 8.6% belonged to the Komsomol. They also typically came from hereditary proletarian backgrounds; as such, they were not only highly politically active but also largely unfamiliar with the peasantry outside of the realm of Bolshevik theory, and although 25,000ers and their families received some material benefits, they largely appear to have been genuinely dedicated young communists who hoped bring about the world they had been promised.[68]

[67] Lynne Viola, *The Best Sons of the Fatherland: Workers in the Vanguard of Soviet Collectivization* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 10–11, 14, 38.
[68] Viola, *Best Sons of the Fatherland,* 38, 43–46, 54.

In a letter to Stalin, Party activist and chemical factory worker Nikolai Bogomolev described the challenges he had faced since being sent to the Central Black Earth region. Grain requisitioning had left the peasants there with thirty funts (27.1 pounds) of grain per person per month, and by the time he arrived, many had been forced to sell their livestock. Furthermore, middle and poor peasants were erroneously targeted in the dekulakization effort: "[w]hoever has the means keeps two horses or two oxes [sic] for a large family of thirteen or fourteen people, and a cow. They count him a kulak, and from such a proprietor they take everything down to the last, and he is forced to buy grain for his family and sell his working cattle."[69]

However, he ascribed these violations not to a flaw in the Five-Year Plan or dekulakization as a concept, but to the actions of individuals unaffiliated with the top leadership: a member of the Communist Party's Central Committee, Yurevich, had been present during the initial period of requisitioning and understood the peasants' situation, but after he left, a local official by the name of Kharlamov "began to take everything and more in violation of the decree." In addition to incompetent and greedy officials, "[t]here are Socialist Revolutionaries in Salovka village who jump on every little thing and hold the poor and middle peasants in the palm of their hands. They oppose everything Soviet power does."[70] These alleged former SRs insisted that conditions had been better under the Tsar; as a result, the peasants were unreceptive to his attempts to explain that "it's impossible right off to supply fabrics and shoes, and to get the factories running, because now we are operating according to a strictly laid-out economic plan."[71] While he acknowledged that the peasants were suffering from material deprivations that

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[69] "Letter to Stalin from the worker and Communist Party Activist N.D. Bogomolev on his grain-requisitioning and propaganda work in the countryside, 14 August 1929. RGAE, f. 8043, op. 11, d. 16, ll. 58–59," in *The Voice of the People: Letters from the Soviet Village 1918–1932,* ed. C.J. Storella, A.K. Sokolov et al. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 306–307.
[70] "Letter to Stalin," 306.
[71] "Letter to Stalin," 307.

needed to be redressed, he explained these issues within the framework of Bolshevik theory by placing the blame on local officials and Socialist Revolutionaries, or by justifying them as necessary sacrifices on the road to a brighter socialist future.

Similarly, Lev Kopelev recalled in *The Education of a True Believer* that when he served in a Ukrainian collectivization brigade in 1933, “I was convinced that we were warriors on an invisible front, fighting against kulak sabotage for the grain which was needed by the country, by the five year plan. Above all, for the grain, but also for the souls of these peasants who were mired in unconscientiousness, in ignorance, who succumbed to enemy agitation, who did not understand the great truth of communism.”[72] While he was troubled by encounters with peasants who pleaded that they were on the verge of starvation and had no grain left to give, he justified his actions within the framework of Bolshevik theory: “[i]t was excruciating to see and hear all this. And even worse to take part in it … And I persuaded myself, explained to myself. I mustn’t give in to debilitating pity. We were realizing historical necessity.”[73]

Kopelev himself came from a middle-class background. However, he worked alongside peasant activists who expressed similar views, perhaps because their backgrounds aligned unusually closely with the Bolshevik vision of the countryside, or as a result of their military service, which often had a radicalizing effect. Vashchenko, the head of the Petrivtsy village soviet, claimed that “[a]t the age of six I was already working for the kurkuls [kulaks] … all the mornings and all the evenings I was moiling and toiling with the master’s cows, pigs and sheep,” and that he was not paid in coin until the age of fourteen.[74] He insisted that kulaks were responsible for the deprivations in the countryside: “[s]ome of ‘em got kids with bloated bellies

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[72] Lev Kopelev, *The Education of a True Believer* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978), 226.
[73] Kopelev, *The Education of a True Believer,* 235.
[74] Kopelev, *The Education of a True Believer,* 227.

already. But they don't open up their underground stores. The hoaxer hopes he can sit out the grain collection."[75] Another activist, Bubyr— a young man who had also worked for kulaks as a child and who had recently been elected as the secretary of the village party cell— used his knowledge of the local community to distinguish between (what he believed to be) genuine denunciations and those made because "someone has it in for his neighbour," but was also passionate and at times violent in his pursuit of kulaks. In one instance, he choked a young woman when he noticed her attempting to swallow something during a raid, and, as was common practice within collectivization brigades, referred to supposed kulaks as "turkeys," "rats," and "rotten meat."[76] Although he and Vashchenko displayed far greater knowledge of the local population than new arrivals like Kopelev, they also separated themselves from their prospective victims through the use of dehumanizing language, likely making it easier to accept that the peasants were willing to let their children starve in order to make a profit or undermine Soviet grain-collection efforts.

The secretary of the Ust-Khmelevka party cell, I. L. Zhuravlyov, provides a useful contrast to Bogomolev and Kopelev. In a letter to *Pravda*, he described the obstacles to collectivization in the Ural province, emphasizing that peasants in the region believed collectivization would improve their lives and that they were loyal Soviet subjects, but also that "it's as if we are invisible to Soviet power, for which we shed our blood in the October days." Although the people worked long, hard hours without any vacations, they simply lacked the resources to make any of the promised advancements, as they had no teachers or medics, nor any machinery to clear the stumps that prevented them from cultivating the land. However, when he provided a list of requests which he claimed represented "the views of all the poor people in the

[75] Kopelev, *The Education of a True Believer,* 227.
[76] Kopelev, *The Education of a True Believer,* 239, 241–242.

entire region," the majority aligned to some extent with the goals of the state: while he asked that they "[t]ake five years to collectivize the Tagil region … . Don't carry out grain requisitions, but establish a firm price," he also requested that the Bolsheviks "[a]llow the sale of church valuables to benefit the peasants," and "[w]in over and separate the poor from the kulak, but not by lying to them in eloquent words, but materially."[77]

Bogomolev, Kopelev, and Zhuravlyov each observed material deprivations in the countryside which stemmed from the dekulakization and collectivization campaigns, and each shifted the blame away from the Party. However, Bogomolev, Kopelev, and even the peasant activists Vashchenko and Bubyr, framed the peasantry from an outsider perspective as a population that resisted efforts to improve their lives due to their ignorance and the subversive influence of the SRs. In contrast, Zhuravlyov did not differentiate between himself and the local community— "it is as if *we* are invisible to Soviet power" [emphasis mine]— and proposed that the collectivization policy be amended to meet the peoples' needs, rather than suggesting that it had been carried out incorrectly or hampered by bad actors. The difference between these approaches highlights not only the difference in perspective between the existing inhabitants of the countryside and the new arrivals, but also the differences in perspective between those who were likely to be persecuted during these campaigns and those who were not: local officials such as Zhuravlyov were often blamed for both the failures and excesses of collectivization and risked being purged from the Party; members of workers' and collectivization brigades, along with troikas, cadres, and plenipotentiaries, generally were not.[78]

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[77] "Letter to *Pravda* from I.L. Zhuravlyov, Party cell secretary of a village in Ural province, describing the conditions of his village and proposing measures to improve it, no date. RGAE, f. 7486s, op. 37, d. 102, ll. 115–117," in *The Voice of the People: Letters from the Soviet Village 1918–1932,* ed. C.J. Storella, A.K. Sokolov et al. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 321–322.
[78] Conquest, *Harvest of Sorrow*, 90.

Peasant Resistance to Collectivization and Dekulakization

Like the 25,000ers who arrived in the countryside throughout 1929–1930, many peasants held strong beliefs about the collectivization campaign. Unlike the 25,000ers, however, they generally saw it as an unwanted and harmful intrusion by the state that stripped them of control of the land and the ability to make a profit. One of the principal vehicles for peasant self-expression were letters to *Krestianskaia gazeta,* or the Peasant Newspaper. These letters tended to be far more overt in their criticisms of collectivization than reports and letters from their state-affiliated counterparts, though many still employed socialist language. In a March 1928 letter responding to Stalin's speech at the Fifteenth Party Congress, for instance, Kirghizian peasant Ivan Chernov stated, "[i]f what is going on locally had not been ordered by the center … then I would have said that it was designed to turn the peasantry against Soviet power and to undermine it." The Congress, he argued, fundamentally misunderstood the peasantry: they had no drive for personal profit that government decrees needed to suppress; their only "appetite" was to "sow more, to better develop the land in order to improve the harvest, to get more healthy livestock, and to better feed the old ox, and to even pay taxes and to let the young grow up." However, this was difficult to achieve when the most productive farmers were branded as kulaks and issued heavy taxes. "We won't get to any kind of socialism this way, only poverty," he concluded, "and then the imperialists will take us by the scruff of the neck with their bare hands."[79] Whether out of genuine belief or to make his arguments more appealing, Chernov, like Zhuravlyov, aligned himself with the Bolsheviks' ultimate goal of establishing a socialist state and invoked the threat

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[79] "Letter to *Krestianskaia gazeta* from peasant I.S. Chernov on the detrimental effects of the Party's kulak policy, 13 March 1928. RGAE, f. 396, op. 6, d. 28, l. 11," in *The Voice of the People: Letters from the Soviet Village 1918–1932,* ed. C.J. Storella, A.K. Sokolov et al. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 301.

of capitalist aggression, which Stalin had used to justify these policies. However, he also highlighted that it was collectivization and dekulakization that were the issue, not simply how these policies were carried out.

While some employed socialist language as a means of essentially laundering their critiques of Party policy, others did so in an attempt at self-protection. Dominika Sigaeva, a priest's wife who had lost her property as a result of collectivization, wrote in a letter to *Pravda*, "I renounce [my] old unnecessary and harmful view once and for all. From the present day, I am divorcing my husband. I no longer need exploitation and coercion … . My own labor and the labor of my children are to be my highest ideal," and called on others to follow her example.[80] In essence, she accepted the kulak status conferred upon her by the state in order to publicly renounce it and recast herself as a good Soviet citizen. This was a form of "self-dekulakization," a strategy in which individuals and households attempted to avoid persecution by renouncing their origins and past anti-Soviet beliefs, divesting themselves of their property through the slaughter or sale of their livestock— which served the dual purpose of depriving the *kolkhoz* of their use, in some cases because they feared the animals would be mistreated—, selling their farm implements and draft animals, and redistributing their property, often before fleeing the countryside.

The slaughter of livestock was particularly common and of great concern to the Bolsheviks, becoming the subject of the January 1930 decree "On Measures to Struggle with the Destructive Squandering of Livestock," which established penalties ranging from the deprivation of rights to two years of exile.[81] A plenipotentiary from the Middle Volga *Krai* (territory)

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[80] "Letter from D. Sigaeva, a priest's wife, renouncing her former life and beliefs, 1930. RGAE, f. 7486s, op. 37, d. 102, l. 218," in *The Voice of the People: Letters from the Soviet Village 1918–1932,* ed. C.J. Storella, A.K. Sokolov et al. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 340.
[81] Viola, *Peasant Rebels,* 72.

illustrated the phenomenon of self-dekulakization through the example of T.I. Sernov, a kulak from the Mordvin Oblast who "killed 120 of his 200 bee hives, and gave away the rest. In addition, he distributed 40 poods [655 kilograms] of honey and delivered his horse and a load of clothing and textile goods to citizen Kuzin in the village of Letka, Staroe Shaigovo Raion." He went on to describe that "[k]ulaks are fleeing on a massive scale": 158 from Buguruslan *Okrug* (district), 164 from Ulianovsk *Okrug*, and 70 from Kuznetsk *Okrug*, though he warned his information was incomplete.[82] Self-dekulakization could be a form of resistance, of self-protection, or both at once, showcasing the often strategic nature of peasant resistance as well as its basis in an understanding of the ideal of the New Man.

However, not everyone was interested in appealing to Bolshevik sensibilities. Addressing Mikhail Kalinin— one of the few Politburo members of peasant origin— and the editorial board of *Krestianskaia gazeta,* Ivan Nikoliivich acknowledged that the Soviet Union must develop its national economy but insisted that they "see it through my way." Collectivization, he argued, would only bring hunger and strife: "if you drive everyone into the kommuna, everyone will be hungry … the women and girls will be raped, and in every kommuna there will be battle and slaughter. And it will end up a brothel [with] many children."[83] Whereas Chernov and Sigaeva's letters employed the language of socialism, Nikoliivich echoed the often apocalyptic rumours which proliferated throughout Soviet villages. Rooted in the Orthodox Christian tradition as well as in the fear that Soviet institutions such as schools, the Komsomol, and the Pioneers would corrupt the youth and destroy the integrity of the family, these rumours held that the Bolsheviks

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[82] "Special summary report from the OGPU plenipotentiary representative for Middle Volga Krai on the progress of dekulakization in the krai as of 13 February 1930, 14 February 1930. TsA FSB RF, f. 2, op. 8, d. 823, ll. 342–51," in *The War Against the Peasantry 1927–1930: The Tragedy of the Soviet Countryside,* ed. Lynne Viola, V.P. Danilov et. al., trans. Steven Shabad (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 250.

[83] "Letter to *Krestianskaia gazeta* from Ivan Nikoliivich calling for changes in the policy towards the peasant, August 1929. RGAE, f. 396, op. 7, d. 14, ll. 284–287." in *The Voice of the People: Letters from the Soviet Village 1918–1932,* ed. C.J. Storella, A.K. Sokolov et al. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 314.

planned to “nationalize women”; that workers’ brigades, Party officials, *kolkhozy*, tractors, and other signs of the Soviet presence were the tools of Satan and signs of the coming apocalypse; that individuals who joined a *kolkhoz* would be massacred or stamped with the mark of the antichrist; that they would face disorder, hunger, and even invasion from states such as Britain, Poland, China, or Japan; that the government would force women to cut their hair and collect it as scrap; send the children away to special colonies, and more.[84]

From the Party’s perspective, these rumours were spread by kulaks leveraging the “backwards” religious beliefs that persisted in the countryside. A February 1930 OGPU report from the Middle Volga *Krai,* for instance, stated that “[i]n order to win over the masses of poor and middle peasants, the kulaks spread provocative rumours, such as: ‘a dark night is going to be declared soon, and the communists are going to slaughter the disenfranchised and their children,’ ‘girls are going to be sent to China,’” and that in the village of Rucheiki, “a message written in gold lettering has fallen out of the sky, saying that Judgement Day is approaching.”[85] These supposedly kulak rumour mongers could be sentenced to a minimum of six months in prison for counterrevolutionary crimes under Article 58 of the Criminal Code,[86] a punitive approach which highlights the disconnect between the Bolshevik perception of the peasantry and their lived reality. Workers’ brigades, cadres, and Party officials operated on the assumption that they fit neatly within the scheme of malicious kulaks, vacillating middle peasants, and loyal poor peasants, with the men of the village being potentially strategic political actors while the women were largely emotional and reactive. In reality, however, peasants formed a complex society with their own traditions, history, and methods of resistance, and many viewed the Bolsheviks’

[84] Viola, *Peasant Rebels Under Stalin,* 19–20, 56–60.
[85] “Special summary report,” 249.
[86] Viola, *Peasant Rebels Under Stalin,* 61–62.

attempts to impose collectivization and new methods of cultivation as an unwanted intrusion regardless of their own economic position relative to their peers.

Like rumours, which typically circulated within peasant communities and were thus not tailored to appeal to outside observers, anonymous threats and proclamations are useful for understanding peasant beliefs. These constituted a particularly common form of resistance: the OGPU recorded 3,512 proclamations and 1,644 threatening letters in the year 1930. Roughly a quarter directly concerned collectivization and dekulakization, while many of the remainder focused on related issues, such as grain requisitioning and anti-religious measures. Though these letters and proclamations were illegal, no more than 10% of the writers were caught and, Lynne Viola argues, both they and the recipients— generally activists, officials, and current or aspiring *kolkhoz* members— considered them an ordinary part of village life.[87]

In terms of content, the letters typically issued threats or called for vengeance, such as one received by a workers' brigade in the North Caucasus that began with the line "[r]emember, you sons of bitches, we'll get even with you,"[88] while the proclamations were directed towards others within the peasant community and tended to highlight their suffering under Communist rule, as well as the broken promises of the revolution. A proclamation from the Stalingrad *Okrug* stated "[c]itizens remember the slogans of the years of the revolution— freedom of speech, press, conscience, religion; factories to the workers, land to the peasants, etc. And what have the people gotten from these slogans. A dictatorship of the ruinous communist party," that committed "a robbery of all the laboring population unprecedented in the history of humanity."[89] These letters and proclamations suggest that many peasants were politically conscious, and that while

[87] Viola, *Peasant Rebels,* 116.
[88] Viola, *Peasant Rebels,* 117.
[89] Viola, *Peasant Rebels,* 120.

their resistance was based in part on a desire to preserve traditional institutions such as the Orthodox Church, many hoped not for a return to the past but rather for the realization of the future they had been promised during the revolution, which legalized their land seizures during the fall of 1917. However, they were also conscious of the need to disguise these beliefs behind a shield of anonymity: arson, another common form of resistance that targeted activists, officials, and *kolkhoz* members and organizers, was similarly popular because it could easily be disguised as an accident, fires being a common occurrence in peasant villages constructed primarily from wood.[90]

In addition to anonymity, peasants often relied on gender stereotypes to minimize the risk of resistance. Whereas men were assumed to be conscious political actors, women were perceived as easily manipulated and driven by emotion; as such, their actions were far less likely to be perceived *as* resistance. Feodosy Taran of the Krestishch settlement near Krasnodar recalled an incident in which the chairman of the village soviet led a drunken raid on the local church and, hearing the commotion, "[n]o fewer than one hundred women came running," fifteen of whom were injured in the subsequent confrontation.[91] Similarly, collective farm activist Igor Sakharov described a meeting dominated by the village women both in number and in terms of participation; they formed an "obvious and overwhelming majority," who "shouted and cursed for a long time. The women let loose their feelings on us," while "[t]he men stubbornly kept quiet, voting neither 'for' nor 'against' the kolkhoz."[92] Although the Soviet Union had made some strides towards gender equality, sexist stereotypes remained prevalent: had the men of the

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[90] Viola, *Peasant Rebels,* 121–122.
[91] "Letter from F.F. Taran describing antireligious violence in a village near Krasnodar, 1930. RGAE, f. 7486s, op. 37, d. 102, l. 220," in *The Voice of the People: Letters from the Soviet Village 1918–1932,* ed. C.J. Storella, A.K. Sokolov et al. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 337.
[92] "Letter to *Pravda* from I. Sakharov, a collective farm activist, describing a meeting of peasants seeking to disband a collective farm, 1930. RGAE, f. 7486s, op. 37, d. 102, ll. 197–98," in *The Voice of the People: Letters from the Soviet Village 1918–1932,* ed. C.J. Storella, A.K. Sokolov et al. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 349.

village shown up *en masse* to shout their resistance to collectivization, they would almost certainly have been prosecuted as counterrevolutionary terrorists, whereas Sakharov implicitly blamed the kulaks for the women's outburst. He lamented that "the ones who did no work and didn't want to work got the crops. They only came [to the meeting] to systematically pull off this partition … . That's how the kulaks operate,"[93] suggesting that he did not see the women's actions as in and of themselves genuine expressions of resistance, a perception which permitted them to stall the formation of the *kolkhoz* and act as a mouthpiece for the sentiment of the community as a whole.

For the same reason, women were often at the forefront of instances of violent resistance: in a continuation of the tradition of *bab'ii bunty*, or women's riots, they were the sole participants in 486 of the 1307 disturbances recorded in 1929 and the majority in an additional 67. Loud and (seemingly) spontaneous, *bab'ii bunty* often began with the ringing of the church bell, which summoned the village women, many accompanied by their young children, to the streets; from there, they typically attempted to remove officials and workers' brigades, making the *sel'sovet* (rural council) a particularly common target. Attempts to disperse the crowd were met with violence; in some cases, men gathered in the distance, waiting until they could justify the use of force as being in defense of the women. Though many of these riots showed clear signs of having been organized, like female-led disruptions of collective farm meetings, the Communist Party and their representatives on the ground rarely ascribed them political motivations or punished the participants.[94] Although the majority of Soviet peasants in the late 1920s and early 1930s did not necessarily behave as though they believed in the socialist project, they leveraged their understanding of Bolshevik ideology and preconceptions regarding the peasantry in order to

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[93] "Letter to *Pravda* from I. Sakharov," 349.
[94] Viola, *Peasant Rebels,* 182, 190–191, 200.

engage in forms of resistance against collectivization and dekulakization which did not present an overt threat to the state and were therefore tacitly allowed by local activists and officials, minimizing the risk to themselves.

That being said, while violent resistance was rarely the peasantry's first or most common choice, the collectivization and dekulakization campaigns were met with a wave of revolt across the Soviet Union. In April 1930, OGPU head Genrikh Yagoda and head of the OGPU in the North Caucasus Yefim Evdokimov reported on mass disturbances in Andiisk Okrug, Dagestan, which they claimed occurred "as a result of the worst possible distortions, naked administrative measures, forced collectivization and tractorization, etc.," and was led by "Sharia elements," which "dispersed local Soviet organs, and created a 'Sharia council' and a 'Shariat court,'" demanding an end to collectivization, the return of endowed lands, and an end to the prosecution of the clergy. They reported that the conflict had escalated to such a degree that "[t]he area of the revolt has been surrounded by military troops and partisan units. They have occupied all mountain passes and roads to Georgia and the northeast part of Dagestan."[95]

In her article "A Peasant Rebellion in Stalin's Russia," Tracy McDonald presents a detailed account of a series of uprisings that occurred in villages across the Pitelinskii district of Riazan *Okrug* in the winter of 1930. As in many regions, collectivization drew the ire of the local populace as the workers' brigade searched the homes of individuals they suspected of concealing grain, kept the collectivized livestock in unsuitable conditions with little by way of shelter or fodder, and targeted middle peasants and the families of Red Army soldiers— who were supposed to be exempt from the campaign— for dekulakization. Tensions came to a head in the

[95] "Report from G.G. Yagoda and E.G. Evdokimov on counterrevolutionary activity in the Didoevsk Sector of Andiisk Okrug, Dagestan. AP RF, f. 3, op. 30, d. 147, ll. 15–17," in *Stalin and the Lubianka: A Documentary History of the Political Police and Security in the Soviet Union, 1922–1953*, ed. David Shearer and Vladimir Khaustov (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 97–98.

village of Veriaevo on 22 February as the villagers broke into the grain store and the *sel'sovet*, redistributed the grain and property seized from (supposed) kulaks to their previous owners, beat the chairman, and drove the collectivization brigade out of town. The uprising was not confined to Veriaevo: the brigade was similarly chased from the neighbouring town of Gridino, and when an armed detachment which had arrived from another district fired warning shots at three women attempting to impede their progress, the locals rang their church bell, summoning assistance from the surrounding villages. Other villages in the region followed suit in decollectivizing; however, the state regained control of the region in March, resulting in 333 arrests. While there was not another uprising in the region, unrest remained a consistent problem for officials as peasants continued to insist on payment for their work, a free share of the harvest, and religious freedom.[96]

On 2 March 1930, Stalin published the article "Dizzy with Success" in *Pravda,* decrying the excesses of collectivization, which he blamed on overzealous local officials. Nevertheless, the situation would only grow more dire for the Soviet peasantry in the years that followed: while the rate of collectivization slowed and some (alleged) kulaks were released from exile in 1932–1933, hundreds of thousands had already been sent to remote regions of Siberia with few possessions and minimal, if any, preparations for their arrival; an OGPU report estimated that by January 1932, roughly 30% of the total deportees had either died in the camps or, less commonly, escaped.[97] In Ukraine, the mismanagement of collectivization turned grain shortages first into a famine and then into a genocide as starving peasants were barred from leaving their villages to seek food, a tragic culmination of the tumultuous relationship between the Bolsheviks and the

[96] Tracy McDonald, "A Peasant Rebellion in Stalin's Russia: The Pitelinskii Uprising, Riazan 1930," *Journal of Social History* 35, no. 1 (Autumn 2001), 126–129.
[97] Naimark, *Stalin's Genocides,* 60–64.

peasantry in which the Party, having failed to establish strong ties with the countryside— or, as a result, a realistic understanding of peasant life— came to view them through a primarily hostile lens.

Conclusion

As collectivization evolved into a program of dekulakization that stripped supposedly wealthy and exploitative peasants of their land, possessions, and even lives, the popular reactions to this wave of terror reveals a split in the experience of Soviet subjectivity between the peasants who were subject to these policies and the workers' brigades and cadres who implemented them. This was the result of two major factors: first, their differing perspectives on the peasantry— the 25,000ers were typically hereditary proletarians with little first-hand experience in the countryside and regular exposure to Bolshevik teachings; as a result, they largely bought into the idea that peasants were divided between kulaks, middle peasants, and poor peasants, ascribing any failures of the collectivization program to kulak interference or mismanagement by local officials. While peasant activists similarly expressed views in line with this framework, the majority of the peasant population opposed collectivization as the latest in a long line of unwanted intrusions into their lives by the state. Second, the dekulakization campaign delineated fairly clearly between those who were potential targets and those who were not— the division being between peasants and non-peasants rather than kulaks and non-kulaks. For the peasantry, dekulakization thus represented not only a threat to their homes, grain reserves, draft animals, livestock, farm equipment, and other materials necessary to make a livelihood, but could also see them condemned to death, whether through execution or starvation, exposure, or illness in exile.

Both the Party representatives who conducted the dekulakization campaign and the peasants who were its targets operated, by and large, on a set of deeply-held beliefs reinforced by their lived experience. Members of the workers' brigades in particular were effectively New Soviet Men dedicated to building socialism; because their beliefs aligned with those of the state, performance played little role in their experience of Soviet subjectivity, and atomization within this portion of the population was low: animated by a common and state-sanctioned purpose as they were, they had little reason to conceal their beliefs from their peers. In contrast, peasants largely opposed collectivization; their displeasure over state control of the land bolstered by rumours which framed collectivization as the coming of the apocalypse. Like the workers' brigades, these shared beliefs meant that there was little atomization within most villages, and in fact, intracommunity struggles were often put aside in face of the external threat. However, while they also did not necessarily engage in a high degree of individual performance and were often open in their opposition to the collectivization and dekulakization campaigns, peasant resistance generally remained within the bounds of what was tacitly permitted by Soviet representatives in the countryside because it did not represent as overt of a threat to the state: in addition to methods that allowed for anonymity— threatening letters, arson attacks that could be disguised as accidents— they took advantage of sexist assumptions that women were largely apolitical, irrational actors by having them conduct the majority of the overt and at times violent displays of resistance. While hundreds of thousands nevertheless fell victim to the dekulakization campaign, it was unique as an instance of Stalinist terror in that it involved a high degree of in-group solidarity, something that the arbitrary nature of the Great Terror would render effectively impossible less than a decade later.

Chapter Three:
Performance and Atomization during the Great Terror

Introduction

On 30 July 1937, the People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs (NKVD) issued Order No. 00447, "Concerning the Operation to Repress Former Kulaks, Criminals, and Other Anti-Soviet Elements," expanding the purges which had targeted the Communist Party, the Red Army, and some sectors of industry since the first Moscow show trial in August 1936 to encompass all levels of society. Known in the Soviet Union as the *Yezhovshchina* (loosely translated, the Yezhov Era) after NKVD head Nikolai Yezhov and in the West as the Great Terror, this campaign would see hundreds of thousands arrested, exiled, and executed over the course of the following years in what was ostensibly an effort to eliminate spies and saboteurs. Although this was not the first instance of mass terror in the Soviet Union, the 1936–1938 purges were unmatched in scope and intensity: the 1918–1922 Red Terror and the 1928–1932 collectivization campaigns both targeted specific groups (suspected opponents of Bolshevik rule such as former imperial officers and aristocrats, the clergy, and members of rival socialist parties in the former case; peasants in the latter), while periodic purges of the Communist Party membership resulted in expulsion or loss of employment rather than incarceration, exile, or execution.

My purpose here is not to uncover the motivations behind the Great Terror at the top levels of the state, but rather to examine how ordinary citizens understood those motivations, how the terror shaped their perception of and belief in the Stalinist system, and how that affected their behaviour and relationships. The Terror made victims and perpetrators both of the majority of the population, as the same individuals who denounced their colleagues, neighbours, and even friends and family members often fell victim to the purges themselves, as did NKVD officers,

bureaucrats, members of the judiciary, Party functionaries, propagandists, and others actively involved in its perpetuation. The fact that someone denounced others does not necessarily mean that they believed the individual in question was engaged in anti-Soviet activity, or even that widespread anti-Soviet conspiracies existed at all, particularly given that the refusal to denounce others was itself legally classified as a counterrevolutionary crime under Article 58 of the Criminal Code.[98] Conversely, however, the existence of external pressure to denounce others does not necessarily mean that most did so solely as a means of self-preservation, or that self-preservation could not coexist alongside genuine belief in the official justifications for the Terror. Diaries, memoires, and oral history interviews produced both at the time and after the fact suggest that while many Soviet citizens were convinced of certain *aspects* of the official discourse— that socialism was superior to capitalism, that spies and saboteurs were endemic to Soviet society—, the scope of the Terror often seeded doubt: they could believe that conspirators existed *in general*, but not that family members, friends, or previously venerated public figures were among their number. However, because virtually anyone could be an informant for the NKVD, because anyone might be arrested at any time and for any reason, and because such arrests often resulted in the arrest of the original target's associates, forming relationships with others and sharing one's true opinions carried a significant degree of risk; this, in turn, prevented the formation of the types of resistance that existed during collectivization and required individuals to perform as the ideal New Man in order to secure their survival.

[98] Article 58, Criminal Code of the RSFSR (1934), First Chapter: State Crimes: Counterrevolutionary Crimes, 58-12. *Cyber-USSR*. http://www.cyberussr.com/rus/uk58-e.html

The Formation of the Security State and the Foundations of the Terror

The Bolsheviks' hold on power was closely tied to the secret police since the early days of the state. These institutions— first the Cheka, formed in December 1917, then the Joint State Police Directorate (OGPU) in 1923, and the NKVD in 1934— cultivated deep loyalty to the person of the ruler rather than to the state or to the Soviet people as a whole.[99] Although the Bolsheviks initially faced genuine and widespread opposition that presented a threat to the fledgling state as well as to the lives of its leaders— Commissar of the Press V. Volodarskii and head of the Petrograd Cheka Moisei Uritskii were both assassinated in 1918, and Vladimir Lenin survived two attempts on his life— Iain Lauchlan argues that the Soviet culture of surveillance had always been to an extent self-reinforcing: Lenin ordered the Cheka to investigate internal enemies because he was already convinced they existed, and when the Cheka uncovered such enemies (some genuine, others not) in response, it only confirmed his fears and caused him to order more surveillance.[100]

The assumption that hostile elements permeated Soviet society persisted even after the Bolsheviks had won the Civil War and established a firm hold on power. When the OGPU replaced the Cheka in 1923, its stated mission was to "consolidate the revolutionary efforts of the republic in their struggle against the political and economic counterrevolution, espionage, and banditism"— a term often used in reference to peasant or nationalist insurgency—, entrenching surveillance and the persecution of political enemies into the state's peacetime functioning. As such, the Bolsheviks continued to issue a steady stream of repressive decrees which targeted a range of identities and activities. As in many totalitarian states, the definition of political crimes

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[99] Iain Lauchlan, "Chekist *Mentalité* and the Origins of the Great Terror," in *The Anatomy of Terror: Political Violence Under Stalin,* ed. James Harris (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 14, 16.
[100] Alexander Rabinowitch, *The Bolsheviks in Power: The First Year of Soviet Rule in Petrograd* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2007), 314, 328–331; Lauchlan, "Chekist *Mentalité,"* 14.

was far broader than in their democratic counterparts, and the distinction between the state security apparatus and the ordinary judicial process became increasingly blurred: by 1950, 90% of state security cases were tried in the regular courts.[101] While the scale of the 1936–1938 Terror was unprecedented, the experience of living under a police state, the idea that certain individuals or segments of society were enemies of the people, and the fact that individuals were regularly imprisoned for supposed political crimes were not.

In her second memoir, *Hope Abandoned,* Nadezhda Mandelstam describes an ideological shift that began in the 1920s:

> Everybody now dreamed of a strong regime, so that they could rest and digest the experience of the years of chaos. This craving for an iron hand to rule them had affected everybody in the country. They were still hesitant to say outright that it was time to curb the population, but the thought was implicit in everything that was said … All the pre-requisites for a fully fledged dictatorship had already arisen — without even the pretense of an appeal to the masses. It was by now quite clear who the victors were; and, as always, people were bowing and scraping to them.[102]

In her view, the chaos and destruction of the Civil War had created above all a desire for stability and the elimination of those who might threaten it. While she characterized this desire as essentially non-ideological, others— particularly the younger generation which came of age after the revolution— tied it overtly to the Bolshevik program. A Komsomol member and graduate of the Sverdlovsk Mining Institute, Leonid Alekseyevich Potyomkin was, by his own account, a dedicated communist preoccupied by the extent to which he lived up to his ideals, as well as his by frustration with the seeming indifference of his peers. In a diary entry from 1934, he wrote that, having been accepted into the Komsomol and reprimanded his fellow members for "the absence of an active role on the part of the Komsomol in promoting socialist competition," he

[101] Paul Gregory. *Terror by Quota: State Security from Lenin to Stalin (an Archival Study)* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 4, 17–22, 30–31.
[102] Nadezhda Mandelstam, *Hope Abandoned,* trans. Max Hayward (New York: Atheneum, 1974), 74–75.

finally felt a sense of achievement: "[a]t the age of twenty I celebrated the seventeenth anniversary of the October Revolution for the first time satisfied with a certain degree of personal worthiness. In the first place as a self-respecting trade-union organizer (social activist), then as a shock worker confirmed by the Trade Union Committee … and finally a pure, solid and committed member of the Komsomol."[103]

He argued that the source of his dedication to communism was a childhood of profound material deprivation in which he, his mother, and his sister were forced to steal and beg to keep themselves fed, fostering in him a tendency towards fear and self-doubt which he was determined to change: "[t]o overcome poverty and the spiritual enslavement of personality this has been the essential meaning of my life up to now [sic]. The awareness of my own material and spiritual poverty called forth a tremendous thirst for a new superior and strong man … So I had to change nature and transform the harmony and beauty of a dream into reality and power." [104] The idea of fashioning himself into a New Man and dedicating himself to the socialist cause appealed to Potyomkin because it provided an alternative to the deprivation and self-loathing which he had previously experienced. As such, the fact that his peers seemed uninterested in refashioning themselves in the same way implicitly undermined the Soviet state, which was foundational to his newfound emotional and material security. Although there is a significant gap between judging one's classmates for a lack of political consciousness and denouncing them to be imprisoned and potentially executed for the same, the basic premises of the purges— that a failure to conform to Soviet ideals presented a threat to society as a whole— had been internalized by at least some segments of the population.

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[103] Leonid Alekseyevich Potyomkin, "Diary of Leonid Alekseyevich Potyomkin," in *Intimacy and Terror: Soviet Diaries of the 1930s*, ed. Véronique Garros, Natalia Korenevskaya, and Thomas Lahusen, trans. Carol A. Flath (New York: The New Press, 1995), 255.
[104] Potyomkin, "Diary of Leonid Alekseyevich Potyomkin," 276–277.

Potyomkin was by no means alone in his suspicion that others within the Party and Komsomol were not truly dedicated to the Bolshevik cause. To prove their good character, aspiring Communist Party members and election candidates presented autobiographies to the Party committee which, after a period of questioning, voted on whether they should be admitted. According to Igal Halfin, the emphasis in the 1920s was on personal transformation. Candidates carefully constructed narratives detailing their backgrounds as kulaks, members of the bourgeoisie, or soldiers in the White army— workers were not required to submit an autobiography—, their anti-communist actions or beliefs prior to the revolution and/or during the Civil War, and how they had come to reject those origins.[105] In 1926, for instance, a student at the Tomsk Technological Institute by the name of Shergov insisted that he had served in the White Army out of ignorance rather than personal conviction, emphasizing that he "served a mere six weeks," and had not become a partisan for the Red Army after he deserted because "I was only eighteen. I wasn't up for it … . I didn't think about politics."[106]

However, although admitting that one had not always supported the Bolsheviks was acceptable in 1926 in a way it would not be a decade later, Shergov's explanation was not particularly well-received. His fellow students questioned why he failed to develop political consciousness by the time he graduated high school, highlighting the atmosphere of suspicion around individuals from undesirable social backgrounds as well as around prospective Party members. As membership increased dramatically throughout the 1920s, so did vigilance against individuals motivated by personal gain rather than ideological conviction, and Party committees tended to focus on not only the factual accuracy of the autobiography but also the apparent

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[105] Halfin, *Terror in My Soul*, 45–46.
[106] Igal Halfin, *Red Autobiographies: Initiating the Bolshevik Self* (Washington: University of Washington Press, 2011), 21–22.

sincerity of the applicant.[107] Vigilance against internal enemies was baked into the Soviet Union since its inception, and an individual's past actions or class background were often used to gauge whether they fell within this category, a practice which in turn encouraged candidates to present themselves and their histories to fit into the acceptable mold of the New Man. Nevertheless, in the 1920s, the Party allowed for the *possibility* of change. While someone coming into political consciousness late might be cause for suspicion, an undesirable class background or past membership in rival socialist or even monarchist organizations were not in and of themselves taken as indications that someone harboured anti-Soviet sentiments in the present.

This is not to say that class-based persecution did not occur in the 1920s. While the belief that it was "time to curb the population"— as Mandelstam put it— may not yet have risen to the forefront, members of the pre-revolutionary intelligentsia and bourgeoisie, ethnic minorities, and the peasantry were regularly arrested. In 1928, Dmitry Likhachev, who would go on to become a renowned linguist and Russian medievalist, was sentenced to a four-year term at the Solovetsky Camp of Special Purpose— a prototype for the later Gulag system— for his participation in an academic discussion circle.[108] He recalled that during a search of his home, "[t]he investigator checked a piece of paper that he had, confidently approached the bookshelf, and pulled down H. Ford's *International Jewry*,"[109] suggesting both that the NKVD equated the mere possession of American and other Western texts with anti-Soviet activity, and that someone close enough to him to be familiar with his library had provided them with information. His cellmates during his initial period of imprisonment represented a cross-section of socially unreliable elements,

[107] Halfin, *Red Autobiographies,* 22.
[108] Anne Applebaum, "Dmitry S. Likhachev," in *Gulag Voices: An Anthology*, ed. Anne Applebaum (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 1–2.
[109] Dmitry Likhachev, "Arrest," in *Gulag Voices: An Anthology*, ed. Anne Applebaum (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 4.

including a merchant under the New Economic Policy (colloquially, a "Nepman"), a professional thief, a Chinese boy, a tsarist-era count, and a young peasant who had shown apparently suspicious interest in a seaplane. Likhachev was later transferred to a "library cell," where he was confined with other members of the intelligentsia and reflected that "[w]hen you consider, our jailers did some strange things. Having arrested us for meeting at the most once a week to spend a few hours in discussion of philosophical, artistic, and religious questions that aroused our interest, first of all they put us all together in a prison cell and then in camps and swelled our numbers with others from our city interested in the resolution of the same philosophical questions."[110] The fact that the Bolsheviks' efforts to eliminate the intelligentsia inadvertently created circumstances in which they could engage in rigorous study is not particularly notable, as many of their own members had used their periods of exile and imprisonment to study and exchange ideas. However, it highlights their hostility towards ideas that strayed outside the narrow yet ever-shifting constraints of Bolshevik orthodoxy (a category which would, by the mid-1930s, come to encompass a continually expanding range of materials and interests), as well as their focus on apparent signifiers of disloyalty, such as one's nationality or the possession of Western texts, over an individual's actual actions. This practice in turn made outward performance as an ideal Soviet citizen key to decreasing one's chances of persecution.

The Legal Foundations of the Great Terror

On 1 December 1934, Leonid Nikolaev shot Leningrad Party boss Sergei Kirov near his office in the city's party headquarters in the Smolny Institute. Although Nikolaev's motives have never been concretely established, they seem to have been personal rather than political in nature,

[110] Likhachev, "Arrest," 6–10.

possibly related to his belief that Kirov was having an affair with his estranged wife. However, Stalin had a particular talent for taking advantage of situations as they arose: as Oleg Khlevniuk argues in his 2015 biography, "treating Nikolaev as an unstable loner did not suit his purposes … . At who else's hand could a Politburo member perish? Something as mundane as murder by a jealous husband was unthinkable. Only a devious enemy of the people would fit the part."[111] Regardless of whether Stalin had been searching for a pretext to initiate a campaign of mass terror, the fact that a member of his inner circle had been shot in a government building while accompanied by a bodyguard was, to put it bluntly, embarrassing. It not only contradicted the Party's own mythology in which it positioned itself as an essentially infallible entity whose apparent failures were attributed to the actions of anti-Soviet wreckers, but also undermined the idea that all acts had a conscious political basis, which had implicitly served as justification for the persecution of individuals such as Likhachev or the peasant boy who showed interest in a sea plane: one could not simply discuss ideas or be intrigued by a novel piece of machinery; these actions were necessarily in service of some larger, malicious goal.

Although he was tried and executed, it was not Nikolaev but two Old Bolsheviks, Lev Kamenev and Grigory Zinoviev, who took centre stage at the first Moscow show trial in August 1936 as the ringleaders of an invented plot to assassinate Kirov and several other leading members of the Party, including Stalin. Like most Old Bolsheviks, Kamenev, Zinoviev, and the fourteen others on trial alongside them had previously been oppositionists but had long since fallen in line with the Party orthodoxy, and both were prominent and on the whole well-regarded figures within the government.[112] Stalin clearly intended to use Kirov's murder as a pretext to

[111] Oleg Khlevniuk, *Stalin: New Biography of a Dictator,* trans. Nora Seligman Favorov (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 130–131.
[112] Gábor T. Rittersporn, *Anguish, Anger, and Folkways in Soviet Russia* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2014), 68.

eliminate potential opponents within the Party, and the public spectacle of the trials provided the opportunity to craft a cohesive narrative and foster support for the coming Terror— but, as was often the case with Bolshevik propaganda initiatives, the writers, scholars, and officials tasked with doing so were rarely provided with clear instructions, and the resulting product was often muddled. While a Party circular claimed that those on trial were members of a Trotskyite-Zinovievite counterrevolutionary bloc, the press was forbidden from publishing it and were thus instead forced to rely on the explanation provided by the prosecutor, Andrei Vyshinskii.[113] Rather than set the stage for widespread purges, Vyshinskii described the defendants as "a contemptible, insignificant, impotent group of traitors and murderers," isolated in their efforts to overthrow the Soviet Union, claiming that in response to Kirov's murder, "[t]he whole country, millions and tens of millions of people, were aroused and once again proved their solidarity, their unity, their loyalty to the great banner of the Party of Lenin-Stalin."[114]

By the end of the year, however, the narrative had shifted from one of a limited group of saboteurs within the Party to a mass conspiracy. November saw a second show trial as mine managers across Siberia were arrested following an explosion at the Kemerovo mine, and in January, seventeen Party executives were tried as members of the "Anti-Soviet Parallel Trotskyite Centre"— a sprawling network of conspirators which had supposedly infected the bureaucracy— at the second Moscow show trial.[115] These trials served as a signal to the people for how to interpret the world around them: when the Kemerovo explosion was labelled as

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[113] David Brandenberger, "Ideological Zig-Zag: Official Explanations for the Great Terror, 1936–1938," in *The Anatomy of Terror: Political Violence Under Stalin*, ed. James Harris (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 145–147.
[114] A.Y. Vyshinsky, "Speech for the Prosecution," Moscow Trials 1936*, Marxist Internet Archive.* https://www.marxists.org/history/ussr/government/law/1936/moscow-trials/22/prosecution.htm
[115] Wendy Goldman, "Small Motors of Terror: The Role of Factory Newspapers," in *The Anatomy of Terror: Political Violence Under Stalin,* ed. James Harris (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 245; Brandenberger, "Ideological Zig-Zag," 148–149.

deliberate sabotage and mine operators arrested, it communicated to Soviet workers that accidents and slowdowns in their own workplaces should also be considered acts of sabotage. Similarly, the second Moscow show trial communicated that Party organizations and bureaucratic institutions at all levels were filled with malicious actors, and that no one was *de facto* trustworthy regardless of their history, position, or public reputation.

Although arrests occurred within the Communist Party and Red Army throughout the latter half of 1936, it was the 1937 February-March Central Committee Plenum that truly set the stage for the Great Terror. Nikolai Yezhov, head of the NKVD since September 1936, consolidated his power within the organization and saw his predecessor, Genrikh Yagoda, persecuted as a spy; meanwhile, Party officials spoke into existence widespread conspiracies which would serve as the basis for the mass arrests and executions to come. In Yefim Yevdokimov's post-plenum report to the Azov-Black Sea Territorial Party Committee, for instance, he warned that they had not taken sufficient note of the "lessons to be learned from the wrecking, sabotage, and espionage activities of Japanese-German-Trotskyist agents," whose presence became clear with the "villainous murder of Comrade Kirov." Not only had the Party failed to put into effect measures such as the verification of documents, but "vile double-dealers, having wormed their way deceitfully into the leadership of party organizations, used the verification of party documents and the exchange [of party documents] for their counterrevolutionary aims."[116] Reports and speeches such as Yevdokimov's painted a picture of a state under threat not only from untold conspirators hiding within the ranks of the Party but from

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[116] "Ye. Yevdokimov's report to the Azov-Black Sea Territorial Committee on the February-March 1937 CC Plenum," in *The Road to Terror: Stalin and the Self-Destruction of the Bolsheviks*, ed. J. Arch Getty and Oleg V. Naumov, trans. Benjamin Sher (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 439.

a lack of vigilance from those around them, justifying the need for mass terror by framing it as in proportion to the scale of the threat.

NKVD Order No. 00447, "Concerning the Operation to Repress Former Kulaks, Criminals, and Other Anti-Soviet elements," built on the foundations laid not only by the February-March plenum but also the previous two decades of Soviet rule in its effort to secure the state's future by eliminating internal enemies. The order held that these "anti-Soviet elements"— which also included members of rival socialist parties and Cossack "White Guards"— had evaded punishment and made their way to the countryside, where they were "the chief instigators of every kind of anti-Soviet crimes and sabotage in the kolkhozy and sovkhozy [state-owned farms] as well as in the field of transport and in certain spheres of industry." As such, "[t]he organs of state security are faced with the task of mercilessly crushing the entire gang of anti-Soviet elements, of defending the working Soviet people from their counterrevolutionary machinations, of putting an end, once and for all, to their base undermining of the Soviet state."[117] The decree divided these individuals into two categories, prescribing regional arrest quotas for each: the most active among them would be subject to "immediate arrest and, after consideration of their case by the troikas, [be] shot," and the "less active but nonetheless hostile elements" to "arrest and confinement in concentration camps for a term ranging from 8 to 10 years, while the most vicious and socially dangerous among them are subject to confinement for similar terms in prisons determined by the troikas [panels generally composed of a representative each from the NKVD, the Party, and the Justice Ministry]."[118] The

[117] "NKVD operational order 'Concerning the Punishment of Former Kulaks, Criminals, and Other Anti-Soviet Elements,' 30 July 1937," in *The Road to Terror: Stalin and the Self-Destruction of the Bolsheviks*, ed. J. Arch Getty and Oleg V. Naumov, trans. Benjamin Sher (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 473–474.
[118] "NKVD operational order," 474–475.

families of the accused would be registered, placed under surveillance, and, if they lived in border regions or major population centres, expelled.

While Order No. 00447 outlined an investigative process which theoretically allowed for defendants to be found not guilty and limited the collateral damage to the arrestees' friends, family, and other associates, it also created the opportunity for one arrest to produce many more, including family members found to be "capable of anti-Soviet actions," and any "criminal connections."[119] However, the quotas not only created a situation in which wrongful arrests were virtually guaranteed, given that the conspirators they targeted by and large did not exist, but also overburdened the police and the judicial system. While the NKVD initially followed a linear process in which they created arrest lists based on their files, drew up arrest protocols, conducted the arrest, charged the offender, then passed their case on to a troika for sentencing, the process soon broke down under the sheer volume of arrests, with lists drawn up essentially at random and witnesses in some cases called to testify against individuals who had already been shot.[120]

The majority of the victims of the terror, as well as those accused of political crimes more broadly, were persecuted under Article 58 of the Criminal Code as part of the subsection on counterrevolutionary crimes. First established in 1922 and expanded in 1934, these were defined as "any action directed toward the overthrow, or weakening of the power of worker-peasant councils or of their chosen … worker-peasant government of the USSR, union and autonomous republics, or toward the subversion or weakening of the external security of the USSR and the foundational economic, political, and national gains of the proletarian revolution."[121] It emphasized the ties between domestic counterrevolutionaries and hostile foreign powers: section

[119] "NKVD operational order," 477.
[120] David Shearer, *Policing Stalin's Socialism: Repression and Social Order in the Soviet Union, 1924–1953* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 352, 355–358; Naimark, *Stalin's Genocides,* 111.
[121] Article 58, Criminal Code of the RSFSR (1934), 58-1.

58-1a concerned "[t]reason to the motherland, i.e. acts done by citizens of the USSR in damage to the military power of the USSR, its national sovereignty, or the inviolability of its territory, such as: espionage, betrayal of military or state secrets," and a number of other acts; 58-3 "[d]ealings for counterrevolutionary purposes with a foreign state or its individual representatives;" and 58-4 "[t]he offering of whatever kind of aid to that part of the international bourgeoisie which, not recognizing the equal rights of a Communist system replacing a Capitalist system, exerts itself for its overthrow."[122]

Other subsections concerned the work of domestic saboteurs, such as "[t]he undermining of state production, transport, trade, monetary relations or the credit system;" "[d]estruction or damage with counterrevolutionary purpose by explosion, arson, or other means," of vital state property and infrastructure such as railroads, water conduits, and means of public communication; "[p]ropaganda or agitation, containing a call for the overthrow, subversion, or weakening of Soviet authority or for the carrying out of other counterrevolutionary crimes"; and "[f]ailure to denounce a counterrevolutionary crime, reliably known to be in preparation or carried out."[123] While each of these subsections specified that the activities in question be "done with counterrevolutionary purpose" or, in the case of denunciations, that they be based on reliable information, the *effects* of these crimes— broken machinery, work slowdowns, fires or explosions— came to be seen as evidence of counterrevolutionary activity regardless of their causes. An accidental mine collapse, for instance, became legally indistinguishable from a deliberate one.

The crimes listed under Article 58 carried harsh penalties. While the failure to denounce counterrevolutionary crimes and the production and distribution of anti-Soviet material had the

[122] Article 58, Criminal Code of the RSFSR (1934), 58-3, 4.
[123] Article 58, Criminal Code of the RSFSR (1934), 58-7, 9, 10, 12.

lightest sentences (deprivation of liberty for a minimum of six months), the majority were punished using "the supreme measure of social defense" defined under section 58-2 as "shooting, or proclamation as an enemy of the workers, with confiscation of property and with deprivation of citizenship of the union republic, and likewise citizenship of the Soviet Union and perpetual expulsion beyond the borders of the USSR," though in some circumstances it could be reduced to confiscation of property and the deprivation of liberty for a minimum of three years.[124] Treason against the motherland carried a sentence of "shooting with the confiscation of all property," or, under exigent circumstances, confiscation of all property and deprivation of liberty for a minimum period of ten years (this option was not available to military personnel, who were automatically sentenced to execution), and family members of military personnel who helped them flee to a foreign country or were aware that they planned to do so were sentenced to five to ten years imprisonment and to the confiscation of property.[125] Although Article 58 ostensibly targeted individuals who deliberately undermined the military, economic, or social fabric of the Soviet Union, everyday activities, industrial accidents, and carelessly chosen words were increasingly interpreted as signs that someone was not a New Man loyal to the regime, particularly as denunciations proliferated and the NKVD worked to meet or exceed their arrest quotas.

The People and the Official Justifications for the Terror

The show trials suddenly cast institutions which had previously been upheld as embodiments of the Soviet ideal into doubt. The Red Army in particular had long been a source of anxiety for the Bolsheviks: in 1926, it was subject to increased surveillance in response to intelligence reports

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[124] Article 58, Criminal Code of the RSFSR (1934), 58-2.
[125] Article 58, Criminal Code of the RSFSR (1934), 58-1a, b, v.

that Britain planned to provoke Ukraine into an uprising and turn the Red Army against the Soviet Union, a program which focused particular attention on Marshal Mikhail Tukhachevsky—though he was not accused of anything at the time— and resulted in the arrests of military specialists from the academies in Moscow, Leningrad, and Kyiv, as well as a handful in the Army proper. A second round of increased surveillance in February 1931 produced similar results, with thousands of "old specialists" discharged from their positions at the academies as counterrevolutionaries, spies, monarchists, and saboteurs.[126] It was not until August 1936 that these purges began to affect the Red Army as a whole, a change driven by Marshals Voroshilov and Budenny— of the five Marshals of the Soviet Union in 1936, they would be the only two still alive by the end of 1939— and Head of Political Administration of the Red Army Lev Mekhlis, who were in turn responding to Stalin's call for a thorough investigation of the Army.[127] Arrests began in the summer and fall of 1936, starting with a handful of isolated, unpublicized cases which laid the groundwork for more extensive purges as NKVD interrogators extracted false confessions of participation in widespread conspiracies. The purges escalated rapidly throughout 1937, particularly after Stalin accused Tukhachevsky of participating in an anti-Soviet, Trotskyist-Rightist bloc in May 1937: army-level commanders had a fatality rate of over one hundred percent over five years— there were fifteen in that position in 1936, but by 1941, nineteen had been shot—, and brigade-level commanders fared only slightly better, with 217 out of the 474 in 1936 dead by 1941; the majority were executed though a handful died in captivity and one by suicide.[128]

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[126] Peter Whitewood, "Subversion in the Red Army and the Military Purge of 1937–1938," *Europe-Asia Studies* 67, no. 1 (January 2015), 103, 106, 109–110.
[127] Whitewood, "Subversion in the Red Army," 113, 115–117.
[128] Alexander Hill, *The Red Army and the Second World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 55–56, 60–61.

The Terror had a particularly devastating effect on the Red Army, but it was far from the only institution to be targeted during its initial months, nor the only one in which individuals previously upheld as exemplary New Men were suddenly charged as spies or saboteurs. While the accused and their families were shunned at all levels of society, mid- and high-ranking officials whose supposed crimes were widely and publicly known were often used as scapegoats, a practice which enabled their former associates to assign blame for issues within their organizations, as well as to reaffirm their shared beliefs and identities by casting out those who supposedly challenged them.[129] When Executive Committee of the Communist International (ECCI) member Gevork Alikhanov was arrested in June 1937, for instance, Secretary Meer Moskvin reflected that he "seemed to be very much a party person," and explained the fact that he had previously held his colleague in high regard not as a sign that the arrest was made in error but rather that "[e]ach of us has to thoroughly contemplate the question of how deeply the class enemy has penetrated the very pores of the Soviet system… and the most important parts of our apparatus."[130]

The accusations levelled against top Party and military officials soon reproduced themselves at all levels of society. In her 2013 chapter "Small Motors of Terror," Wendy Goldman examined the role of factory newspapers in the perpetuation of the Terror at the Dinamo and Serp i Molot factories. Initially conceived as a means of spreading information on issues relating to the factory itself, by the 1930s, they took on an increasingly political focus, and both papers reprinted articles on the show trials which were read aloud in the workers' dormitories.[131] In response, workers at Serp i Molot drafted (or had penned on their behalf) a

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[129] William Chase, "Scapegoating One's Comrades in the USSR, 1934–1937," in *The Anatomy of Terror: Political Violence Under Stalin,* ed. James Harris (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 264.
[130] Chase, "Scapegoating One's Comrades," 273.
[131] Goldman, "Small Motors," 243–244.

pledge that “[n]ot a single defect, not one accident, should pass by us unnoticed. We know that production complexes do not stop themselves, machines do not break themselves, boilers do not explode on their own. Behind each of these acts, lies some kind of hand. Is this not the hand of the enemy?”[132] The issue was that Soviet machinery was, in fact, notoriously prone to breaking itself, particularly as periods of intense shock work overtaxed the machines and workers alike. As a result, the factory newspapers became repositories for denunciations as workers scrambled to avoid blame for such incidents or accusations of insufficient vigilance if they failed to identify the “true” culprit; this practice was encouraged both by meetings held on “political days” which taught workers to identify hidden enemies in their midst, and by articles castigating those who refused to participate for their complacency. The Party committees similarly faced accusations of insufficient vigilance if they failed to pursue the denunciations printed in the newspapers, making it virtually impossible for them to ignore accusations clearly based on rumours or personal grudges.[133] However, although the Terror certainly self-perpetuated by marking those who refused to participate as enemies of the people, the fact that the hunt for saboteurs began with the workers themselves in response to news stories about the show trials rather than arrests within the general population suggests that this was not the only reason.

While virtually all areas of life in the Soviet Union were politicized to some extent, this was particularly true of factory workers due to their material role in supporting the state as well as their central place in Bolshevik ideology. As such, by the mid-1930s, a system of social and economic stratification had emerged within the factories based on the workers’ perceived ideological commitment. Stakhanovites— workers who produced more than their quota, named for the miner Alexei Stakhanov— emerged as a privileged class that carried with it material

[132] Goldman, “Small Motors,” 147, 245.
[133] Goldman, “Small Motors,” 147.

benefits as well as expectations, not only for the Stakhanovites themselves but for the workers as a whole: Stakhanovism, as well as participation in courses, study circles, and other community activities, was key to social belonging, and those who had not yet become Stakhanovites were expected to aspire to do so.[134] In a speech delivered to a meeting of Stakhanovites' wives, A. V. Vlasovskaia recounted that her husband had "let himself go and couldn't become a Stakhanovite for a long time. I was very upset because my husband wasn't a Stakhanovite. In a way, I felt separated from my comrades and friends. Their husbands were all Stakhanovites, and mine wasn't."[135] She not only highlighted her husband's past failure to live up to the expected standard for a Soviet worker as a source of alienation but also reinforced the position of Stakhanovites at the top of the social hierarchy among the workers and their families, positioning herself as a mentor figure to the other workers' wives because she had successfully prompted her husband to achieve this ideal, effectively equating ideological correctness with social acceptability.

The practice of framing personal experiences through the lens of the official discourse, Lewis Siegelbaum et al. argue, "played a considerable role in creating an appropriate social atmosphere for the mass repressions." As a new bourgeoisie emerged in the form of Stakhanovites and state functionaries at the same time that Stalin declared that socialism had largely been achieved, material deprivations and unequal access to housing, food, commercial goods, and other resources could no longer be justified as temporary hardships that would be resolved once the new socio-economic system was established, leaving "enemies of the people" as the primary socially acceptable target for these and other interpersonal resentments.[136] Thus S.

[134] Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain,* 207–208.
[135] A.V. Vlasovskaia et. al., "Speeches by Stakhanovites' Wives," in *In the Shadow of Revolution: Life Stories of Russian Women from 1917 to the Second World War,* ed. Sheila Fitzpatrick and Yuri Slezkine, trans. Yuri Slezkine (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 359–360.
[136] Lewis Siegelbaum, Andrei Sokolov, et al. eds., *Stalinism as a Way of Life: A Narrative in Documents* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 216–217.

Mukhartov, seeking an investigation into the suicide of schoolteacher Galina Mukhartova following years of harassment and physical abuse by fellow teacher Nikolai Rudochenkov, framed Rudochenkov's actions not simply as criminal but as "political banditry," and Mukhartova as having died "a martyr's death."[137] Others used the official discourse surrounding the purges— namely, that enemies of the people had infiltrated the whole of Soviet society— to question their effects without disputing their validity. In a 1937 letter to the Politburo, Kh. Ivanova wondered whether the sudden arrest of old Party members who "have acquitted themselves well among the people," and "worked in conformity with the party line honestly and conscientiously" were due to the work of anti-Soviet actors, stating, "Comrades, you would do better to pay attention to what is going on in our NKVD and check whether an enemy of the people hasn't wormed his way in there or whether a kulak hasn't taken cover and is doing all sorts of vile things there in order to undermine Soviet power."[138] Denouncing others and calling for an investigation into enemies of the people was thus not only a means of performing loyalty to the state but also of explaining events such as the death of a loved one or seemingly unprovoked mass arrests, as well as settling personal resentments.

Doubt and Performance during the Great Terror

Hannah Arendt argues in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* that totalitarian regimes are dependent on the support of the masses— that is, the main body of the population who lack political consciousness or affiliation with parties based in common interest— as they can be formed

[137] "First letter from S. Mukhartov to *Krest'ianskaia Gazeta* on the death of G. Mukhartova, April 1936. RGAE, f. 396, op. 10, d. 41, ll. 141–145ob," in *Stalinism as a Way of Life: A Narrative in Documents*, ed. Lewis Siegelbaum, Andrei Sokolov, et al. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 218.
[138] "Letter from Kh. Ivanova to TsK VKP(b) on NKVD, 1937. RGASPI, f. 17, op. 120, d. 298, ll. 93–95," in *Stalinism as a Way of Life: a Narrative in Documents*, ed. Lewis Siegelbaum, Andrei Sokolov, et al. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 231–232.

through the use of propaganda into a cohesive, loyal body. They are persuaded not by the actual content of the propaganda, which she argued is most effective when devoid of concrete ideas or facts, real or invented, that may contradict an individual's lived experiences, but rather by the consistency of the system.[139] In this view, people are on the whole malleable; when regularly confronted with the same ideas and ways of life— for instance, that the security and stability of the state relies on the elimination of internal enemies— they will eventually come to accept them. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn adopts a similar stance in *The Gulag Archipelago*. In his view, NKVD agents were motivated primarily by the need to fulfill their arrest quotas, while the common people were paralyzed by their belief that the Stalinist system was on some level just, or at least that it would not be unjust *against them*:

> The majority sit quietly and dare to hope. Since you aren't guilty, then how can they arrest you? *It's a mistake!* They are already dragging you along by the collar, and you still keep exclaiming to yourself: "It's a mistake! *They'll set things straight and let me out!*" Others are being arrested en masse, and that's a bothersome fact, but in those other cases there is always some dark area: "Maybe *he* was guilty…?" But as for you, you are obviously innocent! You still believe that the *Organs* [of state security] are humanely logical institutions: they will set things straight and let you out.[140]

Arendt and Solzhenitsyn both propose that the Soviet people experienced a form of essentially passive belief in which they were not necessarily engaged with the ostensible ideological basis for the purges, but rather convinced themselves that there was some sort of order to Soviet rule as a means of coping with their circumstances. However, although Solzhenitsyn captured the sense of disbelief expressed by other survivors at finding themselves or their loved ones targeted in the purges, his characterization of the average person as only tentatively accepting the ideological justifications for the Terror is less widely supported, with many highlighting the

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[139] Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Meridian Books, Inc., 1958), 306, 311, 324, 351.
[140] Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago 1918–1956: An Experiment in Literary Investigation,* vol. 1. trans. Thomas P. Whitney (New York, Harper and Row, 1973), 12.

contradiction between their lived experiences during this period and their understanding of the state's founding principles as the source of their eventual disillusionment with the Stalinist system. All segments of the Soviet population, however— those who actively supported the regime, those who passively accepted it, and those who opposed it— were required to put on an outward performance of loyalty, or, in Kotkin's words, to "speak Bolshevik."

Inna Shikheeva-Gaister, the daughter of a deputy for agriculture to the chair of the Supreme Soviet of the National Economy, Valerian Kuibyshev, was eleven years old in 1937. Raised in the Institute of Red Professors and the House of Government, she had lived a largely happy life up to that point, free of the material deprivations which affected the majority of the population. A politically engaged child, she stated of the show trials, "I believed everything I heard. Only Tukhachevky's arrest puzzled me. After all, I had seen him so many times … . His daughter Sveta and I were friends. How could it be possible? How could one of the first marshals, the legendary Red Army commander and such an important person, turn out to be a spy and an enemy of the people?"[141] Her mother struggled to provide an explanation, suggesting that Tukhachevsky had "created a certain mood among his people… . And maybe because of that mood they did something wrong." In essence, Shikheeva-Gaister could accept the existence of widespread anti-Soviet conspiracies in the abstract, but not that the conspirators were people she knew and admired. Nevertheless, she initially maintained some belief in the justice of the Soviet system. When her father fell victim to the purges not long afterwards, she echoed Solzhenitsyn, recalling that "My father's arrest was, of course, totally unexpected for me. I loved him very much. I did not believe he was an 'enemy of the people.' My father was innocent— he had

[141] Inna Shikheeva-Gaister, "A Family Chronicle," in *In the Shadow of the Revolution: Life Stories of Russian Women from 1917 to the Second World War,* ed. Sheila Fitzpatrick and Yuri Slezkine (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 376.

simply been slandered. Very soon the truth would be revealed, and he would come back home. Other people could be 'enemies of the people,' but not my father."[142]

Protracted contact with Gulag inmates sometimes had a similar effect on those who worked alongside them. Conditions in the labour camps were extremely dire and rarely brought out the best in people: Evgeniia Ginzburg states of her time working in the children's home in Kolyma, "[i]t is hard to describe the way in which someone ground down by inhuman forms of life loses bit by bit all hold on normal notions of good and evil, of what is permissible and what is not," struggling to explain the callous attitude many of her colleagues displayed towards their charges.[143] At the same time, her experiences in the camp were marked by small kindnesses as well as cruelties, and she suggested that the confrontation with a mass of supposed anti-Soviet elements sowed doubts among some true believers. She recalled that the head doctor Evdokia Ivanovna's "carefully supressed kindness and compassion for us [the prisoners employed at the children's home] were transmuted into a burning desire to re-educate us, the enemies of the people, who, quite incomprehensibly, were turning out on closer daily acquaintance to be conscientious workers and even— damn it— fine human beings."[144]

Lev Razgon described a similar moment of revelation in his memoir, *True Stories*. During a conversation with a colonel recently appointed to serve as Chief Medical Officer of the Ustvymlag camp where he was an inmate, Razgon mentioned that he had spoken with Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet Mikhail Kalinin's daughter while she was at the Vozhael camp visiting her mother, Kalinin's wife. Her imprisonment was common knowledge in Ustvymlag, but, it soon became apparent, not the Soviet Union at large: the colonel "babbled

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[142] Shikheeva-Gaister, "A Family Chronicle," 380.
[143] Evgeniia Ginzburg, *Within the Whirlwind,* trans. Ian Boland (London: Collins and Harvill Press, 1981), 13.
[144] Ginzburg, *Within the Whirlwind,* 25.

hysterically and incoherently … 'This is beyond comprehension! It's beyond belief! The wife of Kalinin? The wife of our president?! No matter what crime she committed … to put the wife of Kalinin in a common prison, and ordinary labour camp?! ... How could it happen? ... No, I don't believe it! It can't be true!'"[145] For both Shikheeva-Gaister and the unnamed colonel, the Terror was initially understandable because they had internalized a worldview in which the existence of widespread conspiracies was both plausible and justified mass arrests, but became irrational when it contradicted their deeply held belief in the innocence of specific targets.

Not everyone became disillusioned with the regime, however, even when the Terror had a direct impact on themselves or their families. Giuzel Gumerovna Ibragimova, a former Pioneer and Komsomol member who was raised in a children's home after her parents' arrest, described her younger self as "very, well, invested? … We just believed. I was an idealist, a patriot, all of that," and recalled that she rarely dwelled on her status as a child of enemies of the people until it prevented her from applying to the department of chemistry at Kazan University.[146] Where Ibragimova described her dedication to the Soviet Union in positive terms, framing it as a source of meaning in her life, General Secretary of the Soviet Union of Writers and chief editor of the literary journal *Novy Mir* (New World) Vladimir Petrovich Stavsky, who did not share Ibragimova's disadvantageous origins, fixated on the presence of anti-Soviet elements. He was intensely suspicious of his colleagues— he authorized the arrests of several writers belonging to the Union, including Osip Mandelstam— and wrote in his diary that "[a] year or two will go by, and sooner or later it will all be clear, how they planned to ruin me, a good Stalinist and

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[145] Lev Razgon, *True Stories*, trans. John Crowfoot (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1997), 13.
[146] Jehanne M. Gheith and Katherine R. Jolluck, *Gulag Voices: Oral Histories of Soviet Incarceration and Exile* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 140.

Bolshevik."[147] The fact that he believed he was being unfairly targeted did not give him pause in targeting others, as he insisted "[w]e must wage a fierce struggle against swindlers and thieves!"[148]

For others, belief in the Soviet system on a theoretical level mixed with frustration and disillusionment with the reality. Larissa Mikhailovna Lappo-Danilevskaia stated in an oral history interview that at the time of her arrest and exile in 1937, she already opposed the Bolshevik regime but believed in its foundational ideological principles: "I felt a kind of wild indignation. There was nothing worse in life than Soviet power, or rather, Communism. Communists, not Communism— I didn't feel that way about Communism yet." She agreed with her son, Iuri, when he described it as "a beautiful idea, but absolutely impracticable," and framed this as the reason she "didn't feel hostile towards Communism," at the time.[149] Similarly, Andrei Stepanovich Arzhilovsky, a peasant and factory worker who served in a labour camp between 1923–1936 for alleged counterrevolutionary agitation against the collective farm, expressed frustration both with his colleagues' failure to live up to socialist ideals and the lack of resulting punishment. He wrote that "[a]t the factory where I work, people transgress, and *rather seriously: pilfering socialist property.* But I think that it's better not to interfere, since *the one who blows the whistle always winds up paying for it in the end*: find something, hold your tongue, lose something, hold your tongue," [150] and that "[j]ust one look at the factory reveals a mass of abuse, sloppiness and negligence, in general all the things that people get sent to the

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[147] Vladimir Petrovich Stavsky, "Diary of Vladimir Petrovich Stavsky," in *Intimacy and Terror: Soviet Diaries of the 1930s*, ed. Véronique Garros, Natalia Korenevskaya, and Thomas Lahusen, trans. Carol A. Flath (New York: The New Press, 1995), 226.
[148] Stavsky, "Diary of Vladimir Petrovich Stavsky," 237.
[149] Gheith and Jolluck, *Gulag Voices,* 76.
[150] Andrei Stepanovich Arzhilovsky, "Diary of Andrei Stepanovich Arzhilovsky," in *Intimacy and Terror: Soviet Diaries of the 1930s*, ed. Véronique Garros, Natalia Korenevskaya, and Thomas Lahusen, trans. Carol A. Plath (New York: The New Press, 1995), 114. Italics original.

camps for," lamenting, "I'd like to write a satire exposing all these dear friends who've grown fat on the wealth of the people; but… bitter experience has taught me that every time some abuse is exposed, it ends badly for the person who has brought it to light."[151]

He took issue not with the fact that people were sent to the camps for their performance at work but rather with the fact that, in his view, the *wrong* people were punished. He was deeply alarmed to learn of the purges within the Party, which delegitimized the entire Soviet system in his eyes: "[a]ll these discoveries are giving me the impression that if hundreds of sincerely dedicated, battle-scarred Communists, after decades spent working at [Chief Prosecutor] Vyshinsky's side, ultimately turn out to be scoundrels and spies, then who can guarantee we're not completely surrounded by swindlers?"[152] He was similarly frustrated by the regime's efforts to create a socialist state, describing meetings to discuss the 1936 constitution as "tedious and disgusting," and the Stakhanovite movement as a "cruel, predatory system."[153] In essence, Arzhilovsky accepted and even believed in many of the foundational premises of the Soviet state— namely, that society could be improved through punitive means and the removal of bad actors— and expressed some level of support for socialism in concept, but framed the Bolsheviks themselves as ineffective and corrupt.

It would not be entirely accurate to say that the Great Terror decoupled action from belief. It did, however, create an environment in which individuals' actions were often less a reflection of their ideology than of their efforts to ensure their own and their family's survival as the volume of denunciations, the ubiquity of surveillance, and the arbitrary nature of the purges made it effectively impossible to establish the type of large, ideologically-united groups which

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[151] Arzhilovsky, "Diary of Andrei Stepanovich Arzhilovsky," 130.
[152] Arzhilovsky, "Diary of Andrei Stepanovich Arzhilovsky," 142.
[153] Arzhilovsky, "Diary of Andrei Stepanovich Arzhilovsky," 143–144.

served as the basis for peasant resistance less than a decade previously. "In periods of violence and terror people retreat into themselves and hide their feelings," Nadezhda Mandelstam argued, "but their feelings are ineradicable and cannot be destroyed by any amount of indoctrination."[154] While she implied that the majority of the Soviet people opposed— or were at least not particularly favourable towards— the regime, the Great Terror demanded performance even from its true believers. Small tests of loyalty were built into everyday life: Solzhenitsyn recounts that after a speech honouring Stalin at a district Party conference in Moscow Province, the audience clapped for minutes on end as both the District Party Committee secretary, whose predecessor had recently been arrested, and the audience were acutely aware that "NKVD men were standing in the hall applauding and watching to see *who* quit first!" After eleven minutes, the director of the paper factory, an "independent and strong-minded man… aware of the falsity and impossibility of the situation," stopped clapping and sat, allowing the others to follow suit. However, the audience had been correct in assuming it was a test: "[t]hat, however, was how they discovered who the independent people were. And that was how they went about eliminating them." The factory director was arrested the same night and sentenced to ten years in prison "on the pretext of something quite different."[155] Notably, while Solzhenitsyn characterized the factory director as at least tacitly anti-Stalinist, he would have been punished just the same had he been a dedicated Bolshevik. It was no longer enough to simply *be* a socialist and a loyal citizen; one also had to *perform as* a socialist and loyal citizen in a manner recognizable to the state.

Running for election to the Central Committee of the trade union of workers in state institutions in January 1938, a woman recorded in the transcripts only by her surname, Ulianova,

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[154] Nadezhda Mandelstam, *Hope Against Hope*, trans. Max Hayward (New York: Atheneum, 1970), 39–40.
[155] Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago I-II,* 69–70.

recounted a personal history which framed her as a longstanding socialist from a poor background: her father died when she was young, and she, her mother, and her four siblings all worked as hired hands. Between the ages of ten and thirteen, she worked as a domestic servant, then as a field hand and as a Yiddish teacher; in 1920, she joined the revolutionary committee in Pervomaisk and later the Cheka; and in the years that followed, she and her husband worked in various party committees at the district and provincial levels.[156] Despite her seemingly appealing background, however, Ulianova's family history was a cause for concern. Her three older sisters had emigrated from the Soviet Union, two prior to the revolution and one in 1924, and these relationships became the grounds for extensive questioning: why had they emigrated? What did they do before they left? What was her reaction? If she disapproved of their emigration, why did she maintain correspondence with them, and why did she stop? Was her party organization aware? How did they react? Did she help her sisters emigrate? A similar line of questioning sprung up around her ex-husband and the reasons for their divorce, despite the chairman's efforts to redirect the conversation: "[h]er husband is a party member. He works as a prosecutor. Perhaps they just weren't compatible or something, and here we are asking her about it at the congress."[157] Nevertheless, Ulianova's name was removed from the ballot, though she was allowed to continue in her position as chair of the provincial committee.[158] Focusing on the details of an individual's current and past relationships for any sign that they or someone they were connected to had committed some manner of wrong had become deeply ingrained in Soviet society— in some cases beyond even what officials themselves believed to be reasonable— as

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[156] Ulianova, "A Cross-Examination," in *In the Shadow of the Revolution: Life Stories of Russian Women from 1917 to the Second World War,* ed. Sheila Fitzpatrick and Yuri Slezkine (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 342.
[157] Ulianova, "A Cross-Examination," 343–345.
[158] Ulianova, "A Cross-Examination," 348.

the people became conditioned to interpret innocuous details as potential signs of a person's true, malicious nature, and guarded themselves against others doing the same to them. "We were not, I repeat, revolutionaries, underground plotters or politically minded people at all," Nadezhda Mandelstam wrote of her life during the final years before her husband's arrest, "[b]ut we suddenly found ourselves having to act as though we were."[159]

Conclusion

Although the hunt for internal enemies was built into the foundation of the Soviet system, the purges of the 1920s and early 1930s were comparatively limited, targeting specific groups which were seen as especially threatening to the integrity of the state, such as peasants, members of the pre-revolutionary intelligentsia, and (alleged) opportunists within the Communist Party. The death of Sergei Kirov in December 1934 marked the beginning of a drastic shift: though the gunman acted alone and for seemingly personal rather than political reasons, Stalin used the murder as a pretext to eliminate former rivals within the Party, starting with Lev Kamenev, Grigory Zinoviev, and fourteen other Old Bolsheviks. The purges soon expanded to encompass the top leadership of the Red Army— most notably Marshal Mikhail Tukhachevsky— and then, as the July 1937 NKVD Order No. 000447 established arrest quotas, to the entirety of the Soviet population. However, it was not only the NKVD that targeted individuals through its extensive system of surveillance but the people themselves, with factory newspapers echoing the Party's calls for vigilance and assertion that slowdowns and machinery breakages were the work of malicious wreckers, thereby prompting a wave of denunciations.

[159] Mandelstam, *Hope Against Hope*, 39–40.

For many, the Terror upset but did not necessarily dismantle their faith in the Stalinist system as friends, family members, public figures, or they themselves were arrested on what they knew to be baseless accusations. Regardless of their stance on the Terror, however, the atmosphere of suspicion demanded performance from the population, decoupling their outward behaviour from their beliefs even when those beliefs were in line with the purported ideology of the state. As such, the Soviet people were careful in their speech, particularly around strangers but in some cases even around friends and family, creating a highly atomized society in which the type of collective resistance that existed during the collectivization campaign became impossible: the arbitrary nature of arrests and the fact that virtually anyone could be targeted for virtually any reason meant that there *were* no in-groups of more than a handful of people, if that. Furthermore, with denunciations serving as a means of signalling one's loyalty to the state, individuals were required to closely monitor their behaviour and speech lest they be reported for any perceived deviation. As the scale of the purges called their legitimacy into question, Soviet society likely contained fewer people who genuinely met the criteria of the New Man than it had during collectivization— but the majority of the population now *behaved as* New Men. This transformation would leave a lasting mark on society and influence the behaviour of the populace during the final instance of terror under Stalin a decade later: while the Anti-Cosmopolitanism Campaign and Doctor's Plot had a clear target in the form of Jewish intellectuals and doctors, respectively— though some of its victims did fall outside these categories— they did not band together in collective resistance but in some cases turned against the accused and proactively charged others with similar wrongs, as had been the norm in 1936–1938.

Chapter Four:
Popular Antisemitism, the Anti-Cosmopolitan Campaign, and the Doctors' Plot

Introduction

On 5 March 1953, Joseph Stalin died unexpectedly of a stroke, halting the wave of arrests which had targeted Jewish doctors since the start of that year for their supposed participation in the "Doctors' Plot," an invented conspiracy to shorten the lives of top Soviet officials through medical malpractice. Unlike previous waves of terror, the 1953 Doctors' Plot and the 1948–1952 Anti-Cosmopolitan Campaign— which primarily targeted Jewish theater critics, writers, and members of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee— never developed into campaigns of mass repression. What makes these campaigns valuable in assessing the popular response to the use of terror and the extent to which the Soviet people embodied the ideal of the New Man is not their scope but the identity of their targets. Eastern Europe had a long history of antisemitism, which often manifested through two principal forms of conspiracy theories: first, blood libel, the belief that Jews murdered Christian children to use their blood for ritual purposes; and second, the international Jewish conspiracy, the belief that Jews posed a political, economic, or strategic threat to their countries of residence due to their presumed international ties, clandestine control of the government and economy, and participation in revolutionary movements. Because the Bolsheviks officially opposed antisemitism, implementing policies and propaganda campaigns to combat it throughout the 1920s and early 1930s and allowing Jews to integrate into mainstream society to an extent which had not previously been possible, the popular reaction to the antisemitic campaigns of the post-war era offer an insight into the degree to which Soviet rule shaped public opinion and the people's behaviour during waves of terror.

As with dekulakization, there was a relatively clear distinction between those who were targets or potential targets of the Anti-Cosmopolitan Campaign and Doctors' Plot, and those who were not: while Soviet Jewish recollections of the era suggest that many worried the campaigns would soon expand to affect their people as a whole, and some Gentile writers, artists, and doctors were also arrested, the average non-Jewish worker or schoolteacher was unlikely to be at risk. Like previous instances of terror, atomization and performance were far more common among these target groups, not necessarily because Jews were denouncing other Jews— although the Soviet Yiddish press conducted several campaigns of criticism against its own members— but to avoid the perception that they were all co-conspirators or only concerned with Jewish issues. This type of performance was necessary because the Anti-Cosmopolitan Campaign and Doctors' Plot had led to a resurgence in popular antisemitism, and in particular the proliferation of accusations against Jewish pediatricians, who were suspected of deliberately infecting children with a variety of diseases. While these claims echoed the official justifications for the Doctors' Plot in some respects, the focus on children (as opposed to top government officials) suggests that the campaign found popular support because it appealed to culturally ingrained ideas regarding the Jewish people and the practice of blood libel. In contrast, however, some Gentiles— particularly those with Jewish family or friends— condemned the campaigns after the fact as arbitrary and antisemitic. Both responses highlight that repressive though it was, the Stalinist regime never succeeded in completely transforming the population into loyal and ideologically committed New Men: popular acceptance of the official discourse evolved over the course of that era, increasing during periods when it conformed to individuals' existing beliefs and lived realties and becoming less common at points when it did not.

Patterns in Pre-Soviet Antisemitism

In order to examine the influence of Soviet rule on popular attitudes towards the Jewish population, it is first necessary to establish the nature of those attitudes prior to the October Revolution. Jewish history in Eastern Europe was marked by at times violent antisemitism which manifested in repeated waves of pogroms, one of the largest of which occurred in Kishinev, Bessarabia (present-day Chișinău, Moldova), in April 1903. Months before, a fifteen-year-old boy had been murdered in a nearby town and, apparently unpersuaded by the coroner's report which revealed otherwise, rumours circulated that he had been killed and drained of blood by members of the local Jewish community. This was an accusation of blood libel, a centuries-old conspiracy theory that Jews required Christian blood for a variety of ritual purposes: to make matzah, to heal themselves, to symbolically recreate the crucifixion of Christ, or to enact revenge against the Christian community.[160] As such, deaths and disappearances were most commonly attributed to blood libel around Passover and Easter. This was the case in Kishinev, where Jews from the surrounding region gathered to celebrate the holiday despite the persistent rumours. Tensions erupted on Easter Sunday, which coincided with the final day of Passover: that afternoon and through the following day, a group of seminary students led rioters as they looted Jewish-owned businesses, broke into Jewish homes, and assaulted Jewish people. By the end of the second day, forty-nine Jews were dead and nine hundred rioters had been arrested, along with a group of Jews who took up arms in their own defense.[161]

Although the concept of blood libel had its roots in Christianity and remained tied to the religious calendar, over the course of the twentieth century, it became increasingly intertwined

[160] Hannah R. Johnson, *Blood Libel: The Ritual Murder Accusation at the Limit of Jewish History* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2012), 1-2.
[161] Steven J. Zipperstein, "Kishinev Pogrom," in *Pogroms: A Documentary History*, ed. Eugene M. Avrutin and Elissa Bemporad (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 70-73.

with a form of secular antisemitism defined in large part by *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, a forged pamphlet first published in Russia in 1903 claiming to contain records of the secret meetings of a Jewish cabal composed of a "Grand Rabbi" and elders of the twelve tribes of Israel in which they established a plot for world domination. Notably, some scholars suspect that the *Protocols* may have been composed in part by the notoriously antisemitic writer Pavel Krushevan and his staff, as Krushevan's newspaper, *Bessarabets* (The Bessarabian)— to which some of the rioters in Kishinev had ties— was one of the first to publish excerpts.[162] While *The Protocols* does contain accusations of blood libel, it primarily frames Jews as secret manipulators of the political and economic systems, claims which Krushevan repeated in his 1903 book *Bessarabia*: "Bessarabia's peasants are entirely under the Jews' thumbs, even three-quarters of the landlords are controlled by Jews, and they obediently execute the Jews' wishes." Recounting the story of a previous (and possibly invented) pogrom, he stated, "all it took was for an appeal to circulate around Easter that the Jews were planning ill deeds against the tsar and for that the tsar ordered the Jews punished, and people took it upon themselves to deal with the Yids, unleashing a long-simmering hatred."[163]

This practice of using Jews as scapegoats was particularly common during periods of conflict and upheaval. During the First World War, Russian Jews were subjected to a program of ethnic cleansing spearheaded by the military leadership, who attempted to deported them from the front lines— this was where the Pale of Settlement, the only region of the Russian Empire where Jews were permitted to live, was located— on the grounds that they were politically unreliable and likely to act as foreign spies, as well as to obtain the theoretical economic benefit

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[162] Esther Webman, "Hate and Absurdity: The Impact of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion,*" in *The Global Impact of the Protocols of the Elders of Zion: A Century-Old Myth,* ed. Esther Webman (New York: Routledge, 2011), 3; Zipperstein, "Kishinev Pogrom," 71.
[163] Zipperstein, "Kishinev Pogrom," 83.

of transferring Jewish property to ethnic Russians.[164] Although large-scale deportations never came to pass for a variety of practical reasons, Jews were blamed for food shortages, inflated prices, and military defeats, and soldiers, often joined by civilians, frequently led pogroms during periods when the army performed poorly.[165] Antisemitic violence was similarly common during the Russian Civil War— there were over 1,500 pogroms in Ukraine alone between 1918–1920— in many cases motivated by the belief that Jews had fired on soldiers as they were retreating. While the majority of these pogroms were perpetrated by the White forces and Symon Petliura's Ukrainian People's Army, N. Gergel estimates that roughly nine percent were perpetrated by the Red Army, despite the fact that it officially condemned antisemitism.[166] In the spring of 1918, for instance, retreating Red Army soldiers carried out a series of pogroms in the north of Chernigov province, convinced that the Jewish population was collaborating with the Germans and had fired on them as part of their counterrevolutionary agenda.[167] The fact that the Red Army attacked Jewish civilians using the same justifications as their opponents highlights that the Soviet population could not be divided neatly between antisemites and non-antisemites, either along political lines or along the lines of the state and the people. Regardless of Bolshevik policy, Red Army soldiers, bureaucrats, judges, and other officials had all lived in an environment steeped in antisemitism, one which almost certainly led them to internalize, to some extent, stereotypes and prejudices regarding the Jewish people.

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[164] Eric Lohr, "The Russian Army and the Jews: Mass Deportation, Hostages, and Violence During World War I," *Russian Review* 60 (July 2001), 405-407.
[165] Polly Zavadivker, "Pogroms in World War I Russia," in *Pogroms: A Documentary History,* ed. Eugene M. Avrutin and Elissa Bemporad (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 113.
[166] Oleg Budnitskii, *Russian Jews Between the Reds and the Whites, 1917-1920,* trans. Timothy J. Portice (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 216-217.
[167] Budnitskii, *Russian Jews between the Reds and the Whites,* 245.

Soviet Jews in the 1920s and Early 1930s

The Bolsheviks instituted a handful of protections specifically concerning the Jewish community, beginning in July 1918 with a decree by the Council of People's Commissars which outlawed antisemitism. Although the Soviet authorities adopted no further laws of this sort after 1922, Jews fell under the nationalities policy, a program designed to create national territories, install minority officials in the bureaucracy, and promote national languages and cultures, provided they were "national in form, socialist in content."[168] For many of the minorities in question, this was a contradiction in terms: national cultures did not always conform to socialist theory— particularly when religious and cultural practices were deeply intertwined, as was the case for Soviet Jews at the time. As such, although the Bolsheviks established a number of Yiddish-language schools, many Jewish parents preferred to either send their children to underground religious schools or have them educated in Russian or Ukrainian, enabling them to obtain a secondary or post-secondary education.[169] Taking advantage of this opportunity, many Jews left the former Pale of Settlement to work in the cities, where they were often able to establish successful careers: according to Gennady Estraikh and Lara Ivry Rabinovitch, by 1926, they composed roughly 6.5% of the population of Moscow and a significant portion of the city's professional class, representing 42.6% of the dentists and physicians and 38.8% of writers, editors, and journalists.[170]

Efforts to create Jewish agricultural colonies had similarly mixed results despite strong international support. Younger Jews not only tended to prefer to pursue their education or careers

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[168] Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923–1939* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 9-10, 12-13.
[169] Zvi Gitelman, *A Century of Ambivalence: The Jews of Russia and the Soviet Union, 1881 to the Present* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988), 87-88, 92.
[170] Pinkus, *The Soviet Government and the Jews,* 83-84; Gennady Estraikh and Lara Ivry Rabinovitch, "The Old and New Together: David Bergelson's and Israel Joshua Singer's Portraits of Moscow Circa 1926–27," *Prooftexts* 26, no. 1–2 (2006), 56.

in the cities, but Jewish communities were also not consistently made aware of such initiatives; the existing inhabitants of the selected regions opposed the creation of these colonies, sometimes on antisemitic grounds; and the press argued that they served as hiding places for Zionists and religious organizations. While the Jewish autonomous region of Birobidzhan was established on the border with China in the Russian Far East in 1928, Jews never made up a significant portion of the population.[171] Ultimately, these efforts to refashion national minority populations in general and Soviet Jews in particular— whom the Bolsheviks perceived as exploitative small traders undesirable to the Soviet state— were relatively short-lived. Starting in the early 1930s, Stalin instituted a program of Russification that aimed to assimilate minority groups into the Russian majority, resulting in the closure of Jewish Party sections, schools, newspapers, and other institutions, as well as, by the mid-1930s, the end of a propaganda campaign designed to combat antisemitism.[172]

Such campaigns had been necessary because the growing Jewish populations in regions where they had not previously been present led to an increase in popular antisemitism, with Jews often used as scapegoats for larger social and economic issues. In 1930, for instance, a workers' brigade attempting to implement collectivization in the Helmiaziy district in Ukraine reported that kulaks and members of the church council agitated against the *kolkhoz* by claiming that "they will take the horses to work the Jews' land," equating "the Jews" with the Soviet government and the collectivization brigades.[173] Similarly, Lyubov Vasilievna Shaporina, founder of the Moscow Puppet Theater and wife of composer Yuri Shaporin, attributed the flaws

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[171] Gitelman, *A Century of Ambivalence,* 99, 103-104.
[172] Gitelman, *A Century of Ambivalence*, 102, 106-107, 111.
[173] "Letter to *Pravda* from a Mosselprom workers' brigade describing religion-based opposition to collective farms, 1930. RGAE, f. 7486s, op. 37, d. 102, ll. 56–55," in *The Voice of the People: Letters from the Soviet Village 1918–1932,* ed. C.J. Storella and A.K. Sokolov (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 338–339.

of the Soviet system to a Jewish plot: "the only thing I questioned was how they could socialize the land, divide it up, and then turn around and reestablish private property so to transfer it into new hands, Zionist ones this time. And suddenly it turns out Mr. Trotsky already had everything figured out in advance … . But as always with the Jews, it hadn't been planned carefully enough and was bound to fall through."[174] While Soviet Jews were able to integrate into society to a degree which had not previously been possible in the region, and while the Bolsheviks made a concerted — if not particularly effective or long-lasting— effort to enable them to do so, this did not erase the longstanding preconception that Jews had an outsized and harmful effect on society.

Popular antisemitism was not purely rhetorical. Pulling her evidence primarily from Yiddish newspapers, Elissa Bemporad detailed a number of blood libel accusations in the Soviet Union, including one that occurred in the Ukrainian city of Kaniv in 1926 and followed a similar pattern to the events leading up to the Kishinev pogrom two decades earlier. When a teenage girl disappeared shortly before the start of Passover, her father— spurred by rumours that she had been murdered and her blood used to make matzah— told the district police that she had been killed by the Jewish man who sold milk to their family. Taking him at his word, the police thoroughly searched the man's home but found no evidence of the girl's presence. Nevertheless, many of the townspeople remained convinced that the murderer was Jewish until the girl was discovered alive and preparing for an abortion at a nearby hospital.[175] Events in Kaniv revealed that grassroots antisemitism during the early Soviet era remained highly consistent with its pre-revolutionary counterpart, as well as that local authorities did not necessarily recognize or prosecute antisemitism because they often shared the same assumptions regarding Jews as the

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[174] Lyubov Shaporina, "Diary of Lyubov Vasilievna Shaporina," in *Intimacy and Terror: Soviet Diaries of the 1930s*, ed. Véronique Garros, Natalia Korenevskaya, and Thomas Lahusen, trans. Carol A. Flath (New York: The New Press, 1995), 351.
[175] Bemporad, "Empowerment," 349.

general population: the chief of police assumed the girl's father was making a legitimate accusation, not that he was operating on an assumption based in an antisemitic conspiracy theory. Although he was eventually reprimanded, dismissed from his post, and put on trial, this was highly unusual and likely related to the fact that Jewish Red Army officers supported a petition calling for those involved to be punished.[176]

Antisemitism was generally not harshly prosecuted. In 1929, Vasili Shikula of the Poltava city soviet was sentenced to two months of hard labour— but not dismissed from his post — for accusing his Jewish neighbour, Sarah Lichnizkaia, of kidnapping his daughter for the purposes of ritual murder, and for stating in court that "[i]t is nothing new that Jews use the blood of Christian children. Only recently the Jews of Charkow [Kharkiv] killed Christian children to obtain their blood for Passover."[177] Notably, the final verdict failed to mention this accusation of blood libel, reflecting the regime's divergent positions on secular and religious antisemitism. In his 1929 book *Jews and Antisemitism in the USSR,* prominent Bolshevik Yurii Larin stated that in cities such as Moscow and Leningrad, "Antisemitism takes a more cultured, more, if I can say, European form. It is said that there, they do not call for Jewish pogroms, nor say that Jews literally drink the blood of Christian children on Pesach [Passover]."[178] "European"— which is to say economic— forms of antisemitism were considered more acceptable because they could be framed as an extension of class consciousness: officials often blamed the persistence of antisemitism in cities on Jewish merchants operating under the New Economic Policy who supposedly overcharged for their products,[179] whereas accusations of blood libel indicated a backwards adherence to religious identities.

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[176] Bemporad, "Empowerment," 350.
[177] "Sentence Soviet Official for Ritual Blood Libel," *Jewish Telegraphic Agency* (14 July 1929), 2.
[178] Yurii Larin, *Evrei i antisemitism v SSSR* (Moscow: Gosizdat, 1929), 124.
[179] Bemporad, "Empowerment," 347.

That being said, both *Pravda* and the Yiddish press criticized Shikula's comparatively light sentence, which they claimed was typical of such cases. According to an article in *Pravda*, "anti-Semitic cases are hushed up, the Court refusing to deal with complaints regarding them."[180] The fact that the authorities prosecuted antisemitism at all, and that journalists— particularly those writing for authoritative state-run papers such as *Pravda*— were permitted to criticize local authorities suggests that the Soviet government was to some extent genuinely committed to eradicating antisemitism. However, that commitment was clearly not absolute, as light sentencing, the tendency to downplay or ignore accusations of blood libel, and the inconsistent nature of the propaganda campaign against it suggest that other concerns, such as disguising "backwards" tendencies or creating a homogenous, Russified populace, took priority. As such, there was comparatively little pressure for individuals holding these antisemitic views to perform in accordance to what was ostensibly the Soviet policy by disguising them.

Soviet Jewish Policy during the Second World War

Benjamin Pinkus noted that "anti-Semitism, like other prejudices, easily becomes intensified at moments of crisis," and that, "in searching for 'those responsible' for all the disasters that befell the Soviet Union at the outbreak of the war, many felt it was psychologically necessary to find a scapegoat, and the Jews were natural candidates for this role."[181] This was particularly true of the occupied territories, where the residents were not only subject to Nazi propaganda, but in many cases feared that Jews hiding in the surrounding areas would denounce them as collaborators to the Soviet authorities or attempt to reclaim their homes, possessions, and jobs.[182] That being said,

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[180] "Sentence Soviet Official for Ritual Blood Libel," 2.
[181] Pinkus, *The Soviet Government and the Jews,* 85.
[182] Pinkus, *The Soviet Government and the Jews,* 85.

Diana Dumitru argued that a quantitative analysis of the differences in behaviour between the Gentile populations of the Soviet region of Transnistria and the neighbouring Romanian region of Bessarabia during the Second World War— both had been part of the Russian Empire but had been governed by different political regimes during the inter-war period— suggest that Soviet efforts to combat antisemitism did have some effect. In this study, she assigns numerical values to the actions of Gentiles towards Jews as they appeared in Jewish first-hand accounts of the period — positive for "cooperative" acts ranging from rhetorical support to sheltering Jews; negative for "conflictual" acts ranging from derogatory statements to physical assault or murder — and concluded that the non-Jewish population of Transnistria engaged in far more cooperative acts and far fewer conflictual ones than their Bessarabian counterparts.[183]

The difference, in her view, stemmed from the Bolsheviks' efforts to integrate Soviet Jews into mainstream society, as "[h]aving gained new professions, comparable income, and lifestyles similar to those of non-Jews, Soviet Jewry acquired an air of 'normalcy' that encouraged a more positive attitude among their neighbours," a change bolstered by the concurrent propaganda campaign that used mediums such as literature and film to combat antisemitism.[184] These two positions— that antisemitism increased during the Second World War, and the Soviet population was on the whole less antisemitic than neighbouring regions as a result of Bolshevik policy— are not mutually exclusive. Rather, they highlight that beliefs and prejudices deeply ingrained in a society over a significant period of time are slow to change, and that the growing acceptance of the Jewish people did not eradicate longstanding patterns of antisemitism, particularly when the state's efforts to do so were relatively inconsistent.

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[183] Dumitru, *The State,* 232–234.
[184] Dumitru, *The State,* 237.

Stalin and the Bolsheviks largely avoided addressing the fact that Jews were the Nazis' principal targets, both in order to frame the Soviet people as a unified whole and to avoid legitimizing the claim that they were a people of particular importance to the Bolsheviks. Such a technique was exemplified in a July 1941 radio broadcast in which Stalin warned that "the enemy" aimed to

> destroy the national culture and national existence as states of the Russians, Ukrainians, Byelorussians, Lithuanians, Latvians, Esthonians [sic], Uzbeks, Tatars, Moldavians, Georgians, Armenians, Azerbaijanis and the other free peoples of the Soviet Union … . Thus, the issue is one of life and death for the Soviet state, of life and death for the peoples of the U.S.S.R; the issue is whether the peoples of the Soviet Union shall be free or fall into slavery.[185]

By excluding Jews from the list of target nationalities, Stalin invoked a sense of collective, and implicitly equal, victimization. At the same time, official declarations such as this broadcast served to inform the population of the "correct," state-sanctioned position. While the lack of particular focus on Jewish victims was in part a response to German propaganda, it may also have signalled to the Soviet population that anti-Jewish violence was to some extent permissible; or at least that the state was not looking to protect Jewish interests, a trend that became particularly evident as displaced persons returned to their homes in the latter years of the war.

By the spring of 1943, the tide of the war had turned. The Red Army, previously on the retreat, advanced rapidly into the formerly occupied territories in Ukraine and Belorussia, followed soon after by a stream of evacuees returning home. The Ukrainian capital of Kyiv provides a useful case study on the nature of popular antisemitism in these regions. One of the Soviet Union's first major losses in World War II, Kyiv fell in September 1941 and remained

[185] J.V. Stalin, "Radio Broadcast," July 3, 1941. *Stalin Archive: War Speeches Index,* https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1941/07/03.htm

under Nazi rule until November 1943, a brutal period of occupation which saw some 100,000 Kyivans— at least half of them Jewish— executed at the Babyn Yar ravine, 33,000 Jews between 29–30 September 1941.[186] Although prior to the war Kyiv had been categorized as a “regime city” supposedly free of socially dangerous elements, post-war resettlement was decidedly less organized, bringing returnees, former prisoners of war, labourers, and those who had lived under German occupation into competition for limited resources, including housing stock. With Jews making up roughly twenty percent of returnees and underlying antisemitism intensified by these shortages, the period of resettlement, which lasted from 1943–1946, was marked by discrimination and sometimes violence against the Jewish population.

One such instance took place on 4 September 1945, when a Jewish NKGB officer, Iosif Rozenshtein, shot two Red Army soldiers for making antisemitic remarks and physically assaulting him. Accounts of what happened next differ: according to the official report by the Kaganovich District Party Committee, a crowd assembled outside the location of the murders, where they assaulted Rozenshtein’s wife and two other Jews, as well as three more during the funeral procession. The report argued that the Red Army officers were justified in their antisemitism because a Jew had been awarded the apartment previously occupied by one’s mother, and used the incident to argue for a stricter passport system to restrict who was allowed into the city. Conversely, a letter by four demobilized Jewish soldiers paints a bloodier picture, claiming the two murders sparked a pogrom during which thirty-six Jews were killed.[187] Regardless of the true magnitude of the antisemitic violence, this incident and its aftermath suggest Jews remained particular targets for violence and were assigned

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[186] Blackwell, *Kyiv as Regime City,* 4.
[187] Blackwell, *Kyiv as Regime City*, 162-163.

collective responsibility for real or imagined injustices. By framing the widespread violence and discrimination against Kyiv's Jewish population as a handful of minor and implicitly justified incidents, the regime denied— as it had during the Holocaust— the existence of uniquely Jewish concerns and signalled how the groups in question were allowed to perform their identities: Gentiles could largely express and act on antisemitic beliefs, but Jews could not place undue emphasis on their own particular concerns.

The Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee and the Resurgence of Jewish National Identity

Although the Holocaust was officially framed as an attack on the Soviet people as a whole, the post-war erasure of Jewish issues— which later grew into an attack on virtually any expression of Jewish identity, particularly in art— represented something of a reversal of wartime policy. In 1942, Stalin allowed for the formation of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee, which was part of the Soviet Information Bureau and fell under the supervision of Deputy People's Commissar of Foreign Affairs Solomon Lozovsky. Conceived as a means of raising funds for the war effort by creating connections with the international Jewish community, the JAC was also closely tied to Jewish cultural life: co-founded and led by the actor Solomon Mikhoels, other members included poets and writers such as Itsik Fefer, Ilya Ehrenburg, and Peretz Markish, along with bureaucrats, Red Army officers, and scientists. At a 1941 rally in Moscow's Park of Culture, Ehrenburg drew attention to his shifting relationship with his Jewish identity and, implicitly, to the way in which he presented himself: "I grew up in a Russian city. My mother tongue is Russian. I am a Russian writer. Like all Russians, I am now defending my homeland. But the Nazis have reminded me of something else; my mother's name was Hannah. I am a Jew. I say this proudly. Hitler hates us more than

anything, and this makes us proud."[188] In contrast to state policy, the Holocaust to a certain extent reversed the trend of secularization and assimilation within the Jewish community, fostering a renewed sense of collective identity based on shared heritage, culture, and persecution.

Because the JAC was valuable to the war effort, its members were permitted to create the Yiddish newspaper *Eynikayt* (Unity) in 1942. The following year, Mikhoels and Fefer were sent on a seven-month tour of the United States and Canada where, working in concert with American Jewish organizations, they drafted a proposal to resettle Jews in Crimea and came up with the idea for the *Black Book,* a compilation of testimonies of Nazi atrocities.[189] The resurgence of Jewish national identity during this period undoubtedly occurred in response to the existential threat against their people, but also to the easing of Soviet repression as the exigencies of war took priority and the Soviet leadership attempted to capitalize on the sense of in-group solidarity and national pride within minority groups.[190] However, this tolerance for expressions of minority identity did not extend past the end of the war, and trouble soon began for the JAC as Jewish nationalist sentiment showed few signs of fading and the Soviet Jewish population increasingly came to see the committee, and Mikhoels in particular, as their representatives. Fefer would later recall that Mikhoels "used to receive letters in the hundreds; lots of people came to see him, not only from Moscow but from other cities of the USSR as well." The letter writers including Jews from all walks of life but particularly Holocaust survivors and returnees who, as in Kyiv, often found that their

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[188] Joshua Rubenstein, "Introduction: Night of the Murdered Poets," in *Stalin's Secret Pogrom: The Postwar Inquisition of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee,* ed. Joshua Rubenstein and Vladimir P. Naumov, trans. Laura Esther Wolfson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 7-9.
[189] Rubenstein, "Introduction," 14-19.
[190] Shimon Redlich, "Soviet Uses of Jewish Nationalism During World War II: The Membership Dynamics of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee in the USSR," *Nationalities Papers* 5, no. 2 (1977), 139.

homes and belongings had been appropriated in their absence.[191] Since the Russification program of the 1930s, Stalin had cracked down on (real or imagined) nationalist movements and sentiment, and the resurgence of Jewish identity was similarly a source of concern. Jeffrey Veidlinger argues that after the creation of the state of Israel in 1948 made Soviet Jews into a diaspora nationality with a foreign homeland, they, like Germans and Poles, were believed to be particularly likely to act as foreign agents. The large and enthusiastic crowds which met Golda Meir's 1948 visit to the Soviet Union during the High Holy Days only reinforced this perception.[192]

In 1946, supervision of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee was transferred from Lozovsky to Mikhail Suslov of the Foreign Relations Department of the Central Committee, who claimed in a report to the Politburo that the JAC was "strengthening the Jewish reactionary bourgeois-nationalistic movement abroad."[193] In August of the same year, Second Secretary of the Communist Party Andrei Zhdanov delivered a speech to the Central Committee, later reprinted in the influential weekly newspaper *Kul'tura i Zhizn'* (Culture and Life), in which he attacked the journals *Leningrad* and *Zvezda* (Star) for publishing ideologically unsound works, kicking off the Anti-Cosmopolitan Campaign. Although it would principally target Jewish writers, poets, theater critics, and members of the JAC, the first victims of this campaign were Gentiles: Zhdanov claimed that because writer Mikhail Zoshchenko and poet Anna Akhmatova were involved with these journals, they had begun to publish "works cultivating a spirit of servility, uncharacteristic of the Soviet people, before the current bourgeoise culture of the West." By denigrating their writing as bourgeois and

[191] Redlich, "Soviet Uses of Jewish Nationalism," 147.
[192] Veidlinger, "Soviet Jewry as a Diaspora Nationality," 5-6, 12.
[193] Rubenstein, "Introduction," 31.

alien— he described Akhmatova's poetry as "redolent of old-fashioned salon poetry, frozen in positions of bourgeoise-aristocratic aestheticism and decadence,"[194]— Zhdanov signalled that the coming wave of persecution would be justified as an attack on bourgeois ideology and foreign connections, laying the foundation for targeting the Jewish intelligentsia by criticizing these Gentile authors for characteristics historically associated with the Jewish people.

The Russian-language press responded to the publication of Zhdanov's speech with a string of articles that employed similarly coded language, invoking longstanding antisemitic stereotypes without specifically naming the Jewish people. The 1949 *Pravda* article "About One Anti-Patriotic Group of Theater Critics," for instance, claimed that "[a]n antipatriotic group of epigones of bourgeois aestheticism has emerged in theater criticism … they have revealed themselves as bearers of rootless cosmopolitanism," and that "[some] people, infected with remnants of bourgeois ideology, still try here and there to poison the healthy, creative atmosphere of Soviet art with their rotten spirit."[195] In an article published in the leading party journal *Bolshevik* later the same year, "Bourgeois Cosmopolitanism and its Reactionary Role," F. Chernov adopted a similar stance, arguing that "[t]he bourgeoisie preaches the principle that money does not have a homeland, and that, wherever one can 'make money,' wherever one may 'have a profitable business,' there is his homeland. Here is the villainy that bourgeois cosmopolitanism is called on to conceal, to disguise, 'to ennoble' the antipatriotic ideology of the rootless bourgeois-businessman, the huckster and the traveling salesman."[196] Although neither

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[194] Andrei Zhdanov, "On the Journals 'Zvezda' and 'Leningrad': From a Resolution of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks), 14 August 1946," *Kul'tura i zhizn'* (August 14, 1946), trans. P.R. Wolfe, *Cyber-USSR*. http://www.cyberussr.com/rus/zvezda-e.html

[195] "About One Anti-Patriotic Group of Theater Critics," *Pravda* (January 28, 1949), trans. P.K. Volkov, *Cyber-USSR*. http://www.cyberussr.com/rus/kritikov-e.html

[196] F. Chernov, "Bourgeois Cosmopolitanism and its Reactionary Role," *Bolshevik: Theoretical and Political Magazine of the Central Committee of the ACP(B)* 5 (15 March 1949), trans. P.R. Wolfe, *Cyber-USSR.* http://www.cyberussr.com/rus/chernov/chernov-cosmo-e.html

article explicitly described these harmful elements as Jewish, their language invoked established antisemitic stereotypes: the term "rootless cosmopolitanism" alluded to the Jews' status as a diaspora nationality perceived to lack strong ties to their countries of residence, while the accusation that these theater critics were "infected with … bourgeois ideology" not only tied them to capitalist exploitation but drew on stereotypes of Jews as carriers of disease, which stemmed in part from the cramped and unclean conditions in the Pale of Settlement.[197] While Gentile intellectuals were not completely free of risk during the Anti-Cosmopolitan Campaign, the fact that the regime chose to invoke these longstanding antisemitic tropes in order to create support for this wave of terror suggests that antisemitic conspiracies were still well-established within the popular consciousness.

Where Russian authors echoed stereotypes of Jewish disloyalty and exploitation, the Soviet Yiddish press largely critiqued Jewish writers for over-emphasizing their national identity, denouncing their colleagues not for characteristics which had historically been considered intrinsic to their people but rather for failing to perform as New Men loyal to the Soviet Union above all else. One of their first targets was Itsik Kipnis, who became subject to a fierce campaign of criticism in the spring of 1947.[198] Haim Loytsker was amongst the most zealous critics: in his 1948 article in *Der Shtern* (The Star), "For the Ideological Purity of Our Literature," he attacked even the slightest reference to Jewish identity, arguing that "[t]he works of the Soviet Yiddish writers abound with the word 'Jew' in its various forms, not only when the action concerns national characteristics but everywhere, even when the person is simply being referred to as a human being." He claimed that Hirsch Osherovich's book of poems on the

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[197] Brian E. Crim, "'Our Most Serious Enemy': The Specter of Judeo-Bolshevism in the German Military Community, 1914–1923," *Central European History* 44, no. 4 (2011): 631-632.
[198] Pinkus, *The Soviet Government and the Jews,* 149.

Holocaust was “so filled with ‘Jewishness’ of every kind that the result is a bright bouquet of narrow nationalism which spills over here and there into bourgeois nationalism,” a charge he supported by pointing to Osherovich’s framing of the Holocaust as the result of “hate for Jews” and his use of Hebrew terms.[199] As with denunciations made during the Great Terror, Loytsker drew on the official discourse— that Jews had not been particular targets of the Nazis; that the increase in Jewish national sentiment posed a threat to the state— and performed loyalty to the regime by finding a target to level these accusations against.

The fact that Jewish writers such as Loytsker centered their critiques on expressions of Jewish identity echoed the official discourse as well as the complex relationship of many Soviet Jews to their background. Emil Draitser, who was born in 1937 and whose formative years were marked by the growing antisemitism of the post-war era, recounted in the introduction to his memoir that even after he had lived in the United States for twenty years, he “still spoke in whispers about anything concerning matters Jewish,” and that “not only was I still ashamed of being Jewish, but I also simply couldn’t recall a single moment in my life when shame wasn’t an intimate part of my existence.”[200] In school, he was taught a long list of enemies of the people that included “Talmudists,” and although other religious figures were also categorized this way, it felt like an attack on his people as a whole: “[a]t the mention of Talmudists, I huddle up internally. I already know from Papa that the Talmud is one of the sacred books of Judaism, and it seems to me that *Talmudists* means all Jews.”[201] While Draitser’s sense of shame was not universal among Soviet Jews, their identity— as with other national minorities— marked them as implicitly less Soviet than their Great Russian

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[199] Pinkus, *The Soviet Government and the Jews,* 167-168.
[200] Emil Draitser, *Shush! Growing Up Jewish under Stalin: A Memoir* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 18.
[201] Draister, *Shush!,* 118.

counterparts; as such, criticizing authors who over-emphasized distinct Jewish experiences was a means for individuals like Loytsker to align themselves with the state.

Soviet Jews on Trial

In January 1948, Solomon Mikhoels was struck and killed in what appeared to be a traffic accident. Though he was given a state funeral, Mikhoels had in reality been assassinated on Stalin's orders as part of a wave of arrests targeting Jewish writers, Party members— particularly in Birobidzhan— and especially members of the JAC: along with Lozovsky, the majority of its founding members were arrested in 1947 and 1948.[202] Four years later, in May–July 1952, five members of the JAC and twenty other Jewish intellectuals and literary figures were put on trial after enduring months of torture and interrogation during which most had confessed to the crimes of bourgeois nationalism, creating an anti-Soviet nationalist underground, treason against the Soviet Union, and espionage on behalf of the American government. In contrast to the show trials at the start of the Great Terror, the proceedings occurred in secret and several of the defendants fought to prove their innocence, with Fefer, Markish, Lozovsky, and others petitioning for the inclusion of materials which they believe would paint in them in a positive light.[203] Similarly, not all of the defendants confessed to the crimes of which they had been accused, and not all who confessed adhered to those confessions in court. Former director of the Institute of Physiology at the Academy of Sciences of the Soviet Union Lina Shtern made clear that she did not regard the trials as legitimate and that the circumstances of her captivity had been designed to extract false confessions, stating, "[a]fter you've spent an entire night under

[202] Rubenstein, "Introduction," 1-2.
[203] "Determination Regarding the Defendants' Petitions," in *Stalin's Secret Pogrom: The Postwar Inquisition of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee,* ed. Joshua Rubenstein and Vladimir P. Naumov, trans. Laura Esther Wolfson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 428.

interrogation, you come to your cell in the morning, and you're not allowed to sleep or even sit down. I felt that things were going badly and that I might go out of my mind. And crazy people are not responsible for anything." It was her altered mental state that caused her to confess, not that she had genuinely engaged in any of the activities of which she had been accused: "I repudiate all of my testimony presented here. I have never been an anti-Soviet person. From the time I arrived in Moscow, I swore that I would give all my strength to science, and I have done that."[204]

Despite the defendants' efforts and the hesitancy of the presiding judge, however, the sentencing documents framed the JAC as an anti-Soviet conspiracy from the start, claiming that Lozovsky, Mikhoels, and Shakne Epshteyn had hired Jewish nationalists to conduct anti-Soviet activity; that their attempts to settle Jews in the Crimea implied both that the Jewish question had not been resolved and (ironically, given the circumstances) that antisemitism still existed in the USSR; that they had sent classified information on the Soviet economy to the United States; and that they used the newspaper *Eynikayt* to spread propaganda amongst the Soviet and international Jewish populations on the directions of American "Jewish nationalistic circles," as well as to "spread the notion that the Jews as a nation are separate and different and the false thesis of the exceptional nature of the Jewish people … . Idealizing the distant past, they extolled biblical images in a nationalistic spirit and spread the idea of a 'fraternal' unity of Jews the world over transcending class and based solely on 'shared blood.'"[205] On these grounds, all but Shtern were sentenced to death and executed in August 1952.

[204] "Testimony by Defendants: Lina Shtern Continued," in *Stalin's Secret Pogrom: The Postwar Inquisition of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee,* ed. Joshua Rubenstein and Vladimir P. Naumov, trans. Laura Esther Wolfson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 429–430.
[205] "The Sentence," in *Stalin's Secret Pogrom: The Postwar Inquisition of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee,* ed. Joshua Rubenstein and Vladimir P. Naumov, trans. Laura Esther Wolfson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 484-487.

One of the interrogators in the JAC case was Deputy Head of the Ministry of State Security Mikhail Ryumin. At the time, Ryumin was involved in creating the Doctors' Plot, a fabricated conspiracy in which a group of Jewish doctors planned to murder top Kremlin officials through medical malpractice. Jonathan Brent and Vladimir Naumov argue that the two cases used as the foundation for the Doctors' Plot— the death of Aleksandr Shcherbakov in 1945 and Andrei Zhdanov in 1948— were connected in order to justify the mass targeting of Jewish doctors. Zhdanov's death provided the stronger basis for a conspiracy: he was a well-known official, comparatively recently deceased, and cardiologist Lydia Timashuk had written a letter to Stalin shortly before his death accusing his doctors of medical malpractice, which the Central Committee apparatchiks unearthed from the archives and falsely claimed had been concealed from them. However, with the exception of EKG specialist Sophia Karpai— who was arrested but not framed as a significant player in the Doctors' Plot— none of the doctors treating Zhdanov at the time of his death were Jewish.[206]

Shcherbakov, on the other hand, had been dead roughly seven years by the time the Central Committee began fabricating the Doctors' Plot in 1951–1952; his utility came from the fact that he was treated by the Jewish diagnostician and JAC member Yakov Etinger, who had been arrested during the Anti-Cosmopolitan Campaign and confessed under interrogation to deliberately shortening Shcherbakov's life in service of Jewish national interests. Although Ryumin initially claimed that Etinger acted alone, he soon expanded his accusation to encompass a group of doctor saboteurs, justifying mass repression.[207] Between the public inauguration of the Doctors' Plot in January 1953 and Stalin's death in March of that year, the Ministry of State Security arrested thirty-seven doctors, seventeen of them Jewish, for their supposed membership

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[206] Brent and Naumov, *Stalin's Last Crime,* 156, 161, 167.
[207] Brent and Naumov, *Stalin's Last Crime,* 147-148.

in the cabal. While the fact that they, like the members of the JAC, were accused of working for American or British intelligence drew on the preconception that Jews were beholden to foreign interests, the fact that the Doctors' Plot was a medical conspiracy that centered around Jews secretly harming the Gentile body invoked blood libel.[208]

On 13 January 1953, *Pravda* published an unsigned editorial article titled, "Vicious Spies and Killers Under the Mask of Academic Physicians," bringing the Doctors' Plot into the public awareness. Unlike articles published during the Anti-Cosmopolitan Campaign, the author(s) made no effort to disguise that Jews were the primary targets, stating, "[t]he majority of the participants of the terrorist group— Vovsi, B. Kogan, Feldman, Grinshtein, Etinger, and others … were recruited by a branch office of American intelligence — the international Jewish bourgeois-nationalist organization called 'Joint.' The filthy face of this Zionist spy organization … is now completely revealed."[209] Jeffrey Veidlinger argues that these doctors, only some of whom had treated Zhdanov or Shcherbakov, were likely selected because their names made it immediately obvious that they were Jewish, and that they were listed only by surname to implicitly extend guilt for their (fabricated) crimes onto the Jewish people as a whole.[210] Similarly, the consistent use of dehumanizing language, referring to the accused as "inhuman beasts" and "monsters" implied that they and those like them were fundamentally alien to Soviet society, that regardless of the extent to which they attempted to assimilate, they would always have a malicious Jewish core that prevented them from achieving the ideal of the New Man. It was this framing of the Jewish people as guilty by virtue of their collective identity, coupled with

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[208] Jeffrey Veidlinger, "Was the Doctors' Plot a Blood Libel?" in *Ritual Murder in Russia, Eastern Europe, and Beyond: New Histories of an Old Accusation,* ed. Eugene M. Avrutin, Jonathan Dekel-Chen, and Robert Weinberg (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017), 238, 241-242, 245.
[209] Vicious Spies and Killers Under the Mask of Academic Physicians," *Pravda*, January 13, 1953, trans. P.R. Wolfe, *Cyber-USSR*. http://www.cyberussr.com/rus/vrach-ubijca-e.html
[210] Veidlinger, "Was the Doctors' Plot a Blood Libel?" 240.

the fact that the Doctors' Plot centered on the idea of Jews enacting direct, clandestine harm upon the Gentile body— as opposed to economic, political, or strategic harm to the Soviet state— which linked the Doctors' Plot to accusations of blood libel. Unlike the crowds in Kishinev and Kaniv, the Central Committee did not believe that the untimely deaths upon which they based their accusations were truly the product of a Jewish plot— they had, after all, constructed the conspiracy themselves— but they were drawing on a longstanding pattern within Eastern European history in which the Jewish population was habitually blamed for unexpected deaths, legitimizing this campaign of terror by drawing on beliefs already held by much of the Gentile population.

Reactions to the Doctors' Plot were varied. In his examination of fifty-nine letters to *Pravda* sent shortly after the accused were pardoned in April 1953, Alexander Lokshin argues that the Gentile writers, who composed forty of the letters, fell into four primary categories: roughly 10% adhered to the Party line no matter what and altered their position accordingly; 40% expressed their confusion at the sudden reversal of policy; 15% fully supported the doctors' rehabilitation and condemned the antisemitism behind the Doctors' Plot; and 35% stated, often using antisemitic language, that the accused were genuinely guilty and should not have been pardoned.[211] While some writers were clearly concerned with expressing the "correct" opinions, others were openly critical of the state security apparatus: M. Seliverov, for instance, compared the Soviet Union unfavourably to England, questioning, "[c]ould the arrests of twelve professors on patently ridiculous grounds possibly have occurred there? And if such arrests had been made, would they have been detained more than 2–3 days? Certainly not."[212] Workers Nikol'skii,

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[211] Alexander Lokshin, "The Doctors' Plot: The Non-Jewish Response," in *Jews and Jewish Life in Russia and the Soviet Union*, ed. Yaacov Ro'i (London: Routledge, 1995), 158–159.
[212] Lokshin, "The Doctors' Plot," 160.

Panov, and Remnikin centered the treatment of Soviet Jews, stating, "[f]or two or three years the paper waged a pogrom-like anti-Semitic campaign in its articles and feuilletons."[213] This sentiment, Lokshin notes, was particularly common among writers with Jewish family members. As during the Great Terror, individuals often came to doubt the validity of the purges when they contradicted their existing beliefs or observed reality by, for instance, targeting people they knew to be innocent, an occurrence which may have become more common in the post-war era due to the decreased in persecution during World War II as well as the memory of the arbitrary nature of the previous round of purges.

However, while letters opposing the Doctors' Plot suggest that antisemitism had become somewhat less common or accepted in the Soviet Union, Jewish recollections of the 1940s and early 1950s highlight that the campaign also fostered a wave of suspicion and hostility towards Jews in general and Jewish pediatricians in particular. While accusations of medical malpractice were somewhat more common in regions such as the Baltics which had been integrated into the Soviet Union comparatively recently— Fira Bramson recounted in a 2010 interview with Elissa Bemporad that a Party member and employee of the Ministry of Justice of the Lithuanian SSR claimed that a Jewish pediatrician "killed [his patients] by infecting them with cancer,"[214] for instance—, they occurred across the state. Evgeniia Ginzburg recalled that they felt the effects of the Doctors' Plot in Kolyma, where previous campaigns of terror had had little influence: "[i]t was only in 1953 that the administrators pulled themselves and started to 'regularize the nationality mix.' The head of the Medical Administration, Shcherbakov … rushed around the

[213] Lokshin, "The Doctors' Plot," 161.
[214] Bemporad, "Defiance," 356.

hospital courtyard as if he had suddenly gone out of his mind, exclaiming: 'Isn't Gorin a Jew? Isn't Walter a Jew? Well, where are the Jews around here?'"[215]

While the "regularization of the nationality mix" in Kolyma may have stemmed more from an effort to bring the region into compliance with state policy than from a genuine belief that they were engaged in medical malpractice, Jewish doctors across the Soviet Union were losing their jobs. Shortly after the publication of "Vicious Spies and Killers," a close family friend of Draitser's whom he called "Aunt Tanya" was fired from her position as a pediatrician, where she had previously treated a steady stream of patients and often received gifts from their grateful parents. She recounted to Draitser's mother, "[t]hey're afraid to entrust their children to me … . Yesterday, I tell one mother, Stepanenko, 'Your little Polina has pneumonia. She's running a high fever. We have to hospitalize her at once. And she says to me … 'I'd rather let her die at home than in your hospital from poison.'" Tanya was pessimistic about her chances of finding another job because she knew several other Jewish doctors who had similar experiences: a surgeon, Dr. Feinblat, had been suspended from performing operations at City Hospital, and she had overheard one of her neighbours telling another, "[h]ave you heard what *they* do? In the hospitals, they infect Russian babies with cancer. Under the guise of injections, they infect them with cancer bacillus."[216]

While most Jews could not disguise their heritage without changing their names, Draitser recalled that he and his Jewish friends made an effort to avoid calling attention to their identity or acting in ways that might be interpreted as confirming antisemitic prejudices. Recounting an instance in which a classmate refused to walk home with him, he stated, "[f]or a second, I feel offended. Some friend! But suddenly I feel relieved. He's right— today it's better to walk

[215] Ginzburg, *Within the Whirlwind,* 345.
[216] Draitser, *Shush!* 355–356.

separately. In the papers, Jewish names are always brought together. The papers hint that Jews cover up for one another, for whatever bad things they have done. In lines at the stores, Jews are also accused of making room for other Jews. Maybe, that's why Vovka tries to keep some distance between us. It's the survival instinct."[217] In essence, while antisemitism may have decreased for a time as Jews integrated into mainstream Soviet society, the fact that these prejudices were quickly reignited during the Anti-Cosmopolitan Campaign and especially the Doctors' Plot, as well as the fact that accusations of blood libel persisted throughout the Stalin period, highlights that state programs were most effective when they aligned with longstanding beliefs and prejudices. As the targets (or potential future targets) of these campaigns, meanwhile, Soviet Jews fell into the patterns of atomization and performance that existed during the Great Terror, with some carefully monitoring their behaviour to avoid drawing negative attention or, like Loytsker, demonstrating their loyalty to the regime by denouncing others for, in effect, being "too Jewish."

Conclusion

Although the Anti-Cosmopolitan Campaign and the Doctors' Plot never escalated into campaigns of mass terror, they are useful in understanding the nature of Soviet subjectivity because their principal targets, Soviet Jews, had been subject to both centuries of deeply-ingrained prejudices and to Bolshevik campaigns designed to eradicate those prejudices and integrate them into mainstream society. Indeed, Gentile opinion on the validity of these campaigns varied, with some quickly adopting beliefs that echoed the centuries-old conspiracies of blood libel, accusing Jewish pediatricians of infecting their patients with cancer or killing them with poison, while

[217] Draitser, *Shush!* 348.

others noted their arbitrary and antisemitic nature. However, while letters to newspapers such as *Pravda* suggest that many made an effort to express their views in a way that reflected the official discourse, it was primarily Soviet Jews rather than the population as a whole who later recalled this period as one in which they closely monitored their behaviour, with many performing as loyal Soviet subjects by minimizing their Jewish identity and contact with other Jews. The destruction of the JAC, which had become something of a central institution for the community, signalled that such ties could be perceived as a threat. With intra-community denunciations originating largely from the Soviet Yiddish press rather than ordinary Jews, atomization was largely a means of avoiding negative attention from Gentiles who, like the workers' brigades during the collectivization campaign, were likely receptive to the official rhetoric because it conformed to ideas which were deeply ingrained in society— in this case, that Jews were plotting together to sinister ends.

The experience of living in the Stalinist Soviet Union was thus not simply one of repression, in which the state imposed its ideology onto the people to the exclusion of all else, but rather an evolving conversation between the official discourse— which was heavily promoted but not necessarily consistent—, existing beliefs and prejudices, and individuals' observable reality, all of which shaped the way they understood the world. It was when the official discourse best aligned with the latter two that it was most easily adopted and translated into action, such as participation in campaigns of terror. However, for the victims and potential victims of these waves of terror— peasants during the collectivization and dekulakization campaigns, Jews during the Anti-Cosmopolitan Campaign and Doctors' Plot, and the entire Soviet people during the Great Terror— their position as targets often (though not always)

damaged their loyalty to the regime or reinforced their sense of distrust towards it while simultaneously diminishing their ability to act in accordance with those beliefs.

Conclusion

Joseph Stalin's rule of the Soviet Union was bookended by terror: his rise to absolute power in the late 1920s was soon followed by a sweeping program of dekulakization which saw tens of thousands of peasants, rural clergy, and local officials arrested, exiled, and executed; two decades later, in March 1953, his death would bring an abrupt halt to the Doctors' Plot, a crusade against Jewish Kremlin doctors for their supposed murder of top Communist Party officials through medical malpractice. Had Stalin survived, this campaign may have grown into the third instance of mass terror during his rule, coming not even two decades after the 1936–1938 Great Terror devastated the Soviet population. The Bolsheviks' use of terror had its roots not only in Karl Marx's call for violent revolution but in the idea put forth by theorists such as Vladimir Lenin and Aleksandr Bogdanov that the complete social, economic, and political transformation of the state must be accompanied by the complete transformation of the people. Led by the revolutionary core of the proletariat, they argued, the population would be educated in Bolshevik theory and come to embody the ideal of the ideologically committed "New Man" dedicated to the creation of the socialist state.

Because these periods of terror disrupted everyday life in a way that made the hand of the Stalinist regime particularly visible, and because each targeted a different group, they offer an insight into the extent to which the Soviet population did or did not embody the ideal of the New Man: had the majority undergone such a transformation, they likely would have supported the use of terror consistently across these three instances, with the identity of the targets having little impact on their reaction. This was not the case: while some— particularly workers who grew up during or after the October Revolution— were genuinely dedicated to the Bolshevik cause,

popular reactions to the use of terror varied depending on whether the official justifications and effects on the society contradicted or confirmed an individual's entrenched beliefs and observable reality, and the use of terror often sowed doubt in the legitimacy of the Stalinist regime among its actual and potential victims. However, the largely arbitrary nature of the purges had an atomizing effect on society which forced many to *perform* as New Men regardless of their true beliefs, as any perceived deviation put one at risk of denunciation.

Like the Bolsheviks, scholars of the Totalitarian School argued that Soviet rule had reshaped the population, that fear of the state producing atomization and obedience. Published at the height of the Cold War and largely aligned with Western governments in their effort to combat the Soviet Union, these works spared little attention to the common people, tacitly framing them as entirely crushed by the regime and suggesting that the Bolsheviks created a society of New Man through force, by effectively eradicating the capacity for individuality or free thought. In contrast, the Revisionist School, which emerged in the mid-1970s as the cooling of Cold War tensions allowed for greater contact between the Soviet Union and Western nations, emphasized the separation between the state and the masses, suggesting that while the Soviet people may have in some cases performed loyalty to the regime for their own benefit— for instance, to advance their careers or as a means of self-preservation— a significant number genuinely internalized Bolshevik ideals. Starting in the mid-1990s, after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the subsequent opening of the archives, scholars such as Stephen Kotkin came to something of a middle ground between these positions: Stalinist ideals were deeply ingrained into society and as such internalized to some extent by the majority of the population, but that at the same time, the people learned to navigate that system strategically, and in some cases to their personal advantage, including by participating in campaigns of terror.

The Bolsheviks consistently justified the use of terror as a means of removing harmful elements from society, claiming that the targets were spies and saboteurs whom they often accused of working with Western capitalist powers in service of capitalist interests. From 1928–1932, the principal group of alleged conspirators were kulaks, a largely invented category of wealthy and exploitative peasant. In practice, the label was applied to those with perceived markers of wealth (for instance, owning livestock), those who opposed the collectivization campaign introduced under the First Five-Year Plan, or essentially arbitrarily to fill arrest and expulsion quotas. Although some peasants became collective-farm activists, the majority opposed collectivization and dekulakization, viewing it as the latest in a long string of unwanted state interventions in the countryside. This, in turn, meant that there was little atomization within villages. While peasants were often strategic in their resistance, favouring methods which posed less of an overt threat to the regime and were thus tacitly permitted— anonymous proclamations and letters were particularly common, as were disruptions led by women, who were less likely than their male counterparts to be persecuted as political actors—, their large, concentrated, and unified population meant that performing loyalty to the regime on an individual scale was not necessary to the same extent that it would be during later instances of terror.

Performance and atomization were similarly uncommon amongst the collectivization brigades, which were composed primarily of dedicated Communist Party and Komsomol members, many of whom were hereditary proletarians with little or no prior experience in the countryside and thus tended to interpret the actions of the peasantry through the lens of Bolshevik theory. As a result, although the actual targets of dekulakization were not who the Bolsheviks claimed them to be, there was a relatively clear distinction between who was and was not a potential target of this campaign: the majority peasants, the rural clergy, and local officials

all risked being branded as kulaks, while the urban population and members of collectivization brigades did not. As such, while the decision to persecute some peasants as kulaks and not others was often arbitrary, the fact that the peasantry collectively carried the status of potential victims created a sense of in-group solidarity which in turn allowed for a degree of collective resistance.

The Great Terror, in contrast, consumed the entirety of the Soviet Union, rapidly expanding from targeted purges of the Communist Party, Red Army, and the top managers in industries such as mining throughout 1936 to arbitrary mass arrests and executions in 1937–1938. Although some believed such measures were necessary to eliminate enemies of the people and that a handful of false accusations were an unfortunate but unavoidable side effect of that effort, for others, the arrest of family members, friends, or public figures they believed to be innocent seeded doubts in the legitimacy of the regime as a whole. This sense of doubt was only reinforced by the fact that social inequalities and resource shortages which had previously been excused as growing pains of the new state persisted after Stalin announced in the mid-1930s that socialism had largely been achieved. At the same time, however, the scale of the purges— driven in part by mass denunciations— meant that expressing such views carried a high degree of risk. Consequently, Soviet society became increasingly atomized as individuals avoided sharing their true opinions, expressing themselves freely only in private with a small inner circle, if at all. In these conditions, even those who were genuinely to the Bolshevik government were required to perform that loyalty in a way intelligible to the regime— as Kotkin put it, to "speak Bolshevik."

The 1948–1952 Anti-Cosmopolitan Campaign and the 1953 Doctors' Plot are not typically included in studies of the Stalinist Terror or of the nature of Soviet subjectivity more broadly, instead falling within the historiography on Soviet Jews: the targets were primarily Jewish, and whether this persecution would have expanded into a campaign of mass terror had

Stalin not died in March 1953 is a matter of debate. However, the long history of Eastern European antisemitism and the shifting nature of Bolshevik policy in regards to the Soviet Jewish population means that these campaigns are a useful case study in assessing the nature of Soviet subjectivity and the extent to which Bolshevik policy influenced deeply ingrained societal attitudes. Notably, while Jewish integration into mainstream society and propaganda campaigns against antisemitism may have made Soviet Gentiles more likely to help their Jewish neighbours during the Holocaust than their counterparts in non-Soviet regions like Romania, casual antisemitism remained common; accusations of blood libel persisted, the perpetrators often receiving light sentences; and Jewish returnees during the Second World War faced violence and discrimination as they attempted to reclaim their former homes and property. This suggests that while Bolshevik policy had a genuine impact on public opinion, it did not completely eradicate or supersede deeply ingrained attitudes and prejudices— something the Bolsheviks themselves instrumentalized during the Anti-Cosmopolitan Campaign and Doctors' Plot, which drew heavily only the existing antisemitic tropes of Jewish dual loyalty and blood libel to foster popular support. As the targets and potential targets of these campaigns, meanwhile, Soviet Jews began to modify their behaviour to avoid suspicion, and the Jewish community began to atomize as some minimized their social contact with other Jews in an attempt to avoid calling attention to their identity.

The Totalitarian School allotted the Stalinist regime an immense degree of influence, positing that the Bolsheviks exercised complete, repressive power over not only the bodies but also the minds of their people. While the scholarship has since moved on, the idea that totalitarian regimes effectively brainwash their populations, transforming the people from individuals into cogs in the government-run machine, remains ingrained within the popular

consciousness. In reality, the Soviet Union, like any state past, present, or future, was populated by complex individuals living complex lives, who were undoubtedly shaped by the intensely repressive regime under which they lived but also by societal attitudes and practices which had existed for generations beforehand, as well as by their lived realities and the ways in which that reality (seemed to) affirm or contradict those societal attitudes and state messages. The Bolsheviks therefore succeeded in creating the New Man only in part: certain segments of the population genuinely bought into the regime, and many more knew how to perform as New Men, particularly when they were at high risk of facing repression. However, these were often temporary or incomplete or circumstantial changes, far from the fundamental transformation they had envisioned. The Soviet people, in essence, were altered but not reinvented.

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