

# STALINIST RUSSIA

## PREFACE

The fourteen works referenced for this study are all highly critical of Stalinist Russia. Yet nine were authored by contemporary, committed socialists or communists, with seven being dramatic personal chronicles of the lives of patriotic comrades in the early Soviet Union. The works of the remaining authors are fairly straightforward histories. Thus, none of the books can in any way be characterized, much less dismissed, as simply Western anti-socialist or anti-Soviet "propaganda"--the epithet with which defenders of Stalin or communism reflexively besmirch all critiques of the Soviet dictatorship. Indeed, it is striking that the authors for the most part do *not* condemn socialism (or even communism) as such, only the Stalinist leadership of its Soviet manifestation. Yet their frank accounts provide plenty of evidentiary material for just such a deeper critique. These writings are in fact all the more valuable precisely because of their relatively objective nature.

Toward the end of my reading I noted to myself that "nothing whatsoever in any of these histories or personal accounts smacks of Western propaganda; all seem perfectly genuine, truthful, factual; all accounts are by loyal but disappointed socialists/communists." In the midst of his harrowing prison ordeal, Alexander Weissberg, for instance, could say, "I still believed at that time that the only way to the socialist transformation of the world was through revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat." {Weiss 59} Likewise, Eugenia Ginzburg, while suffering severe physical privation during her long prison sentence, asks herself (and does not answer in the negative): "Even now . . . after all that has happened to us, would we vote for any other than the Soviet system, which seemed as much a part of us as our hearts and as natural to us as breathing? Everything I had in the world--the thousands of books I had read, memories of my youth, and the very endurance which was now keeping me from going under--all this had been given me by the Soviet system, and the revolution which had transformed my world while I was still a child. How exciting life had been and how gloriously everything had begun!" {Ginz 227} Much later, now free, with Stalin long dead, and addressing "true Communists," she proclaims of the Soviet Union: "How wonderful that . . . the great Leninist truths have again come into their own in our country and Party!" {Ginz 417}

Listed below are the books which this essay draws upon. The asterisk denotes that the author thus marked lived through the historical phenomenon under study. The abbreviations used for the authors in the text notes are in curly brackets {}.

\*Eugenia Ginzburg, *Journey into the Whirlwind* (1967)  
contemporary Russian communist; terror memoir {Ginz}

Wendy Goldman, *Terror and Democracy in the Age of Stalin: The Social Dynamics of Repression* (2007)

modern American scholar; general history {Gold}

\*Suzanne Labin, *Stalin's Russia* (1949)  
contemporary French socialist; general history {Lab}

Walter Laqueur, *Stalin: The Glasnost Revelations* (1990)  
modern American scholar; general history {Laq}

Leonard Leshuk (ed.), *Days of Famine, Nights of Terror: Firsthand Accounts of Soviet Collectivization, 1928-1934* (1995)  
modern American scholar; collectivization {Lesh}

Moshe Lewin, *Russian Peasants and Soviet Power: A Study of Collectivization* (1968)  
contemporary, modern Polish scholar; collectivization {Lew}

\*Elinor Lipper, *Eleven Years in Soviet Prison Camps* (1951)  
contemporary Dutch socialist; terror memoir {Lip}

\*Roy Medvedev, *Let History Judge: The Origins and Consequences of Stalinism* (1989)  
contemporary/modern Russian socialist; general history {Med}

\*Bertrand Russell, *Bolshevism: Practice and Theory* (1920)  
contemporary British socialist; general history {Russ}

\*Andrew Smith, *I was a Soviet Worker* (1936)  
contemporary American communist; terror memoir {Smith}

\*Alexander Uralov, *The Reign of Stalin* (1953)  
contemporary Chechen communist; general history {Ur}

\*Freda Utley, *Lost Illusion* (1948)  
contemporary British communist; terror memoir {Ut}

Lynne Viola, *Peasant Rebels Under Stalin: Collectivization and the Culture of Peasant Resistance* (1996)  
modern American scholar; collectivization {Vio}

\*Alexander Weissberg, *The Accused* (1951)  
contemporary Austrian communist; terror memoir {Weiss}

Lastly, it should be noted that this study is more an annotated compilation than an original work of mine. I thus use quotations liberally, allowing the authors to speak for themselves and at length. I make no apology for this, as I find this method practical and efficient for my present

purpose, which is not to show off any writing ability I myself might have but rather, through careful selection of passages from the chosen authors, to convey the essence of what happened in Stalinist Russia.

---

## CONTENTS:

Collectivization

Kirov assassination, first show trials

Terror - general

Terror - psychology

Censorship, lies, deception

Governmental structure / Communist Party

Russell on communism

Stalin

Smith book

---

## COLLECTIVIZATION

Following the Revolution of 1917 and the Civil War (1918-1922), collectivization was the first great test of the mettle--the real nature--of the Soviet regime. Many histories of Stalinism pretty much skip right over or otherwise pay scant attention to this epic period, and instead delve immediately into the Great Terror. I will argue, by contrast, that collectivization was the seminal, mind-bogglingly vast crime--the original sin, so to speak--that solidly set the regime's foundation in blood and tyranny. The full meaning of the following statements by contemporaries Freda Utley and Alexander Weissberg will become clear only later, but it is nonetheless worthwhile quoting them here:

"Decent young men and women sent to the villages were persuaded that it was their duty as Communists to stifle all humanitarian scruples while driving the bewildered, sullen, and resentful peasants into the collective farms, and to confiscate grain, milk, and meat from men and women whose children would starve to death in consequence. Those who could not perform the terrible deeds expected of them were expelled from the Party as 'rotten liberals.' Both duty and hopes of a career compelled the Party member and the Komsomol [party youth member] to utter ruthlessness and inhumanity. Many of the young people became hardened and cynical careerists prepared to commit any atrocity commanded by Stalin. Some thus became moral perverts, sadists who enjoyed the tortures which they were ordered to inflict on the helpless victims of the OGPU [the secret police]. The war on the Russian peasants was more brutalizing than war against another nation, for the peasants were unarmed and defenseless. The present generation of Communists [Utley was writing in 1948, while Russia was still under Stalin] was brutalized in youth by the pogrom conducted against the peasants." {Ut 80}

"All the prisoners were quite convinced that the disastrous Great Purge was the legitimate successor of the disastrous collectivization ['the lunatic policy of the Party']." {Weiss 329}

"Collectivization" is the name given to "the large-scale creation of kolkhozes and sovkhoses [collective farms and state-owned farms] . . . to provide the government with large quantities of grain, which would make [it] independent of the private sector . . . [and give] the State the same control over agriculture that it already exercised over industry." {Lew 255, 256} It must be made clear from the outset that the famine which occurred during the period of collectivization was in no way natural--i.e. the result of poor harvests due to bad weather, or anything of the sort. As Leonard Leshuk plainly states: "[T]he forced collectivization of agriculture . . . which led to the deaths of millions . . . and the ruination of the lives of tens of millions more, was . . . a coldly calculated plan regarded as being the most effective means to achieve total government control over the economy and society." {Lesh 7} In fact, says Leshuk, the famine was no surprise to the Communists. Rather, "it became the weapon of choice for breaking the resistance and punishing those nationalities and ethnic groups which were perceived as most defiant." {Lesh 11} Not least significant as a factor in the artificial cataclysm was that the preceding, forced grain requisitions as well as the collectivization itself resulted in a "crushing of the spirit of enterprise among large segments of the population," especially among the best farmers, many of whom were of German extraction. {Lesh 14}

When agricultural peoples no longer see good reason to work as hard as they normally do, famine is the predictable result. Weissberg explains: "If the peasants had worked well then everything was taken away from them with the exception of a small remnant which was supposed to cover their own needs. . . . In addition there was the impossibility of estimating the labor performance of the individual peasant either by quality or by quantity. The result was that the individual peasant and the collective as a whole lost all feeling for the fact that in the last resort their return depended on their own performance. The simple relation between work and wages was destroyed. In the first years of collectivization the hard-working peasant got no more than his lazy neighbor did, and the efficient collective was not allowed to retain any more for the use of its members than the inefficient collective. In consequence, from about 1930 on,

the peasant was firmly convinced that there was no sense in working: the Government took everything anyway. . . . The peasants simply stopped working and the grain no longer grew in the fields." {Weiss 330} At least 10 million died from starvation and epidemics or were killed during the resistance struggles and the fatal deportations.

Lynne Viola neatly paints the larger picture--the regime's underlying purposes: "The collectivization of agriculture was a watershed event in the history of the Soviet Union. It was the Communist Party's premier effort at social engineering on a mass scale. . . . Collectivization destroyed the peasant commune and left in its place a coercive enterprise, socialist in name only, that the Communist Party would use to try to transform the peasantry into a cultural and economic colony. The collective farm was to be an instrument of control: it would enable the state to exact a tribute from the peasantry in the form of grain and other produce and extend political and administrative domination to the countryside. To accomplish its goal of colonization, the party aimed at nothing less than the eradication of peasant culture and independence. It launched a wholesale campaign against such peasant institutions as the *dvor* (household), the *skhod* (peasant council), the land society, the mill (a gathering place for informal politics), the market, and even the church and the traditional holidays in an effort to destroy sources of peasant cultural strength and autonomy. . . . Collectivization was an all-out attack against the peasantry, its culture, and way of life." {Vio vii}

Russian agriculture was not on a downward trajectory when the government undertook the collectivization madness--far from it. The Russian agricultural economy and the economy in general under the NEP (New Economic Policy: a modest revival of market features after the harsh "war communism") were in fact recovering in the late 1920s from the dislocations and difficulties of the Revolution and the Civil War. Roy Medvedev describes what he finds in a number of relatively recent, informative novels on the period: "[The novels picture] the swift and natural development of the Russian countryside on a healthy economic basis in the years 1927-1929. In them we see the policies of NEP being carried out successfully, the bond between city and countryside being strengthened, and many different forms of cooperatives, including the first steps toward producers' cooperatives, growing. The rural areas were not free of contradictions, but coercion and a 'second revolution' were not required to overcome them. . . . The enormous potential of the Russian village . . . was just beginning to be revealed, promising our country a previously unheard-of abundance of agricultural goods. Instead of that abundance there suddenly occurred . . . a rude and violent interference in the natural development of agricultural production [and the] destruction of the most productive farms." {Med 16}

Indeed, while Stalin presented *kolkhozes* and *sovkhozes* as the solution to the agricultural problem, his Bolshevik colleagues Alexei Rykov and Nikolai Bukharin saw no economic evidence of their viability. In other words, it was by no means a given that the sudden, total supplanting of private farms by these new entities was a good idea at all. Bukharin stated that "'For a long time to come, the private farm will continue to be the mainstay of the country's supplies.' The *kolkhozes* and *sovkhozes*, he said, were not in a position to act as a substitute for the private sector." {Lew 322} He and his allies among the leadership opposed Stalin's

coercive measures and favored instead "a resumption of normal economic relations in conformity with the principles of NEP," that is, "free market and exchange relations, and [the removal of] the obstacles to trade and kulak [prosperous peasant] production." In other words, the peasants should be assisted in order to increase their production, not coercively corralled into kolkhozes and sovkhozes. {Lew 323}

But Stalin and his acolytes had other ideas. Having decided that the Soviet Union must industrialize at all cost, they took their cue from the Marxist concept of "primitive capitalist accumulation" (the early expropriation of property by proto-capitalists by any means necessary), and they decided that the Soviet Union needed to embark on "primitive *socialist* accumulation." But, the country being essentially an agricultural country, there was only one large source of capital to draw from: the produce of the peasantry. The necessary capital must therefore be extracted from that source. In other words, the peasantry must be "squeezed"--needless to say, without their consent. This amounted, as Bukharin put it, to the "military-feudal exploitation of the peasantry," or--in more common parlance--slavery. {Laq 33}

The Stalinists were quite explicit about their chosen strategy for soaking the peasants. The Party economist E.A. Preobrazhensky frankly referred to the peasantry as an "internal colony" to be exploited. (In her analysis of the state-peasantry conflict, Viola uses this same phrase, as well as "an occupied people" and "a subject population.") The resources of the private sector were to be transferred to the socialist sector via a "pumping action" which would include "non-equivalent exchanges" achieved through the manipulation of the prices for industrial goods. The need to finance industry was the reason for the lower prices paid to the peasants versus the extremely high prices they had to pay for manufactured products--if these were available at all, otherwise the peasants "were expected to work practically for nothing." {Ut 73} Simply put: "To ensure a net profit for industry, it was necessary to turn the terms of trade against the peasantry." {Vio 20} "The immediate task," says M. Lewin, "was to take from the [countryside] even more than had been taken from it under the Tsars. . . . [V]aluable resources were [to be] drawn off from the countryside in order to finance industrial investment--i.e. sold abroad to purchase industrial machinery." Stalin bluntly stated that the peasants would have to grant a "tribute" to the state. {Lew 151, 258-9}

Viola and Utley sum up the government's strategy thus: "Collectivization would allow for the extraction of vital resources (grain, soldiers, labor), as well as enable the state to subjugate the peasantry through the imposition of vast and coercive administrative and political controls." {Vio 3} "Coercion and intimidation were impracticable unless the peasants could be herded together like the workers in the factories." "What collectivization has done is to make the state confiscation of crops by forced grain deliveries much easier. A small detachment of OGPU soldiers in each district can terrify the collectives into giving up the greater part of the harvest, whereas an enormous number of troops would be required to terrorize each individual peasant cultivating his own farm." {Ut 72, 85}.

The problem for the Communists was that the peasants were not fools; they would not take this blatant mass theft of their property lying down. They "responded to negative terms of trade

between industry and agriculture by withholding grain from the market. . . . [T]he state responded not by raising grain prices, but by employing massive force to seize grain." {Vio 133} The result of the regime's forced requisitions and of its collectivization policy was a famine of biblical proportions, killing many millions of people in one of the greatest human calamities in world history--and an entirely man-made one. One contemporary writer, Pasternak, stated: "What I saw there [in the villages] cannot be conveyed in words, any words. There was such inhuman, unimaginable misery, it was such a terrible disaster, that it began to seem almost abstract, beyond the bounds that the conscious mind could admit. I fell ill. For an entire year I could not write." {Med 243}

Needless to say, overall Soviet agricultural production dropped precipitously. This should have been no surprise, since, as previously noted, the initiative of the peasants had been broken. Furthermore, collectivization--the gathering of the individual peasants into communal farms--was only one part of the economic disruption visited upon the countryside. "At the same time [as collectivization, the government], to induce the people to forget the days when they could sell their produce as they saw fit . . . decreed that all commerce within the country should be a State monopoly. The hand-to-hand sale of a pound of flour or a handful of nails became a serious offence. The peasants were required to deliver their entire yield to their new master, the State. As to the country-dweller's need for manufactured articles, industry, overwhelmed by war demands in the first place, and disorganized by two revolutions and the destruction caused by civil war, could not even begin to supply it. The State, therefore, had nothing to offer the peasants. The country districts had to go short in order that the industrial proletariat, the 'motive force' of the Revolution, and the Army, the Party officials, and the police, the core of the new regime, might be catered for." {Ur 121}

If the Soviet Union had not already by 1929 turned into an outright tyranny, the mega-crime of collectivization in that year certainly made it one. It could hardly have been otherwise. Bukharin commented on "the dehumanization of the party apparatus" resulting from collectivization: "Deep changes took place in the psychological outlook of those who participated in this campaign. Instead of going mad they became professional bureaucrats for whom terror was henceforth a normal method of administration and obedience to any order from above a high virtue." {Laq 34}

Among traditional American leftists, Leon Trotsky is usually seen as the anti-Stalin hero who would have saved the Soviet Union from plunging into tyranny if he had won the post-Lenin struggle for power. But, although Trotsky was certainly a more rational person than Stalin, there is in fact little evidence for this assessment of him in the Stalinism literature--at least not during the decisive early period. A much better candidate for such an exalted role would be Nikolai Bukharin. While Trotsky did object to the precipitousness of Stalin's violent collectivization policy, it was Bukharin who led the most vigorous opposition to forced collectivization.

Bukharin was sharply critical of Stalin's utterly dogmatic anti-peasant, increasing-class-struggle position. "In the sphere of agriculture," says Alexander Uralov, "the Bukharin school held that

methods of administrative violence and economic pressure must be abandoned. The peasants must be convinced by practical experience of the superiority and immense possibilities of socialist agriculture. With this end in view, the State should assist peasants wishing to form themselves into agricultural co-operatives by supplying them with credit, implements, livestock, seed, and fertilizers. The co-operatives could also be encouraged by an appropriate taxation policy. . . . The rural petite bourgeoisie (the kulaks) [the nemesis of the orthodox Bolsheviks], being unable to withstand the competition of the co-operatives, would gradually disappear, and the class struggle in the country districts would steadily diminish. The kulak would become integrated in the socialist system, having no other choice." {Ur 123} Far from being heretical, such views were considered commonsensical by many Communists at this point in time. Medvedev notes that "Socialist construction was just beginning--in the context of a backward, small-peasant country. There were no ready-made prescriptions or recipes. What was needed therefore was not dogma but discussion and exploration in various directions." {Med 148}

Bukharin did much more than quietly offer an alternative policy proposal. Remarkably, in 1928 he led a veritable revolt against Stalin's policy, and he was supported by most of the Party leadership and many Party members. Stalin, by contrast, was left with few authoritative supporters. Indeed, this was a perilous moment for the would-be dictator, as Uralov explains: "He realized that Bukharin's views were likely to find favour with the peasants and with moderate-minded persons throughout the country, and he saw in them a serious hindrance to his personal dictatorship. The free competition between the socialist and capitalist sections which Bukharin advocated was the negation of the totalitarian economic system towards which he was working." Still in the driver's seat, however, Stalin doggedly pressed on, almost single-handedly. "Stalin determined to act. He visited the Institute of the Red Professorhood to talk to the economists about Party policy in relation to economic matters. Speaking in the name of the Central Committee, he declared that the Bukharin economic school was anti-Marxist, that Bukharin's program was nothing more than an ideological defence of the kulaks, that Bukharin's principles were incompatible with the policy of the Party, which was to press forward with the socialist offensive on all fronts, and that it was the duty of Marxist economists to expose Bukharin's doctrines as being those of the rural petty bourgeoisie. . . . Stalin made no attempt to analyze Bukharin's theories or to discuss them in detail. He approached the matter not as an economist but simply as a Chekist [the Cheka was the secret police]." {Ur 124}

In Uralov's portrayal of Bukharin and his adherents we perceive a set of Communist Party leaders quite different from the unreservedly dictatorial Stalin, not only with regard to collectivization but in all aspects of government policy and party machinery. This is important to note because it shows that the Soviet leadership of the late 1920s was not yet monolithic. Stalin's ultimate victory and his consolidation of power were the result not of a completely uniform frame of mind among the Bolsheviks from the beginning regarding policy, but of the profoundly oligarchical nature of the Soviet system of government, which in time led inexorably to a consolidated autocratic dictatorship.

"In the matter of internal policy, the Bukharin group condemned the military and feudal methods used to rob the peasants and to enforce collectivization in agriculture. They demanded



the breaking up of the collective and State farms, and a return to the New Economic Policy. They also demanded that the industrial workers should no longer be exploited in a renewed state of slavery, and that the trade unions should be given back their former prerogatives so that they might defend the interests of the workers and not merely those of the State. In the matter of internal democracy the group, like the Trotskyites, demanded the restoration of the state of affairs that had existed in Lenin's time, when all essential questions affecting the destiny of the country had been decided at Party congresses or by the Central Committee, and not by a single 'chief,' that is to say, Stalin. As did the followers of Trotsky, the [Bukharin] group desired that the persons comprising the administrative machinery of the Party should be simply officials and not dictators. They demanded that the NKVD should cease to be a police organization overshadowing the State and the Party. They demanded that the Stalin regime should abandon its 'frantic rhythm' for the industrialization of the country, and that both the Party and the Government should take steps to increase the production of food and manufactured goods in order to raise the standard of living of workers and peasants." {Ur 35} Indeed, these seem to have been perfectly reasonable policy positions. In fact, the Bukharin-Rykov group, Medvedev remarks, "had many opportunities for victory. Under certain circumstances their platform could have won a majority in the Politburo, the Central Committee, and wide party circles, as well as support from the majority of peasants and industrial and office workers." {Med 207}

So why did Bukharin fail while Stalin succeeded? Here's where the Soviet form of government--unmitigated oligarchy--was key. The scholar Stephen Cohen (here quoted by Medvedev) explains: "Of the several circumstances favoring the general secretary, the most important was the struggle's narrow arena and covert nature. This situation . . . confined the conflict to the party hierarchy where Stalin's strength was greatest, and nullified the Bukharin group's strength, which lay [primarily] outside the high party leadership and indeed outside the party itself. For, unlike the Bolshevik Left, which remained to the end a movement of dissident party leaders in search of a social base, the Right was an opposition with potential mass support in the country. That its rural policies were preferred by the peasant majority was clear to almost everyone." {Med 207} Thus, Stalin won precisely because of the undemocratic nature of the Soviet government created by the Revolution. Power was concentrated in the hands of a tiny number of persons at the apex of a thoroughly bureaucratic government. In fact, "representative" government of any type (versus genuine democracy) is fertile ground for Byzantine intrigues and muscular political machinations of all kinds, including the pressuring and buying off of individual officials. It is a rewarding playground for ruthless operatives who work behind the scenes manipulating processes and persons. We see just such a dynamic--manifested in extreme fashion--in the post-revolution Soviet Union.

Despite--as we observe with the Bukharinists--significant dissent in the Party at this time, a penchant for backroom politicking coupled with an ethos of contempt for the common people pervaded to some degree or other the entire Bolshevik leadership, Bukharin included. This disposition was not confined to Stalin and his ilk. Bukharin's reluctance to appeal to the general population (which sealed his doom) "derived from the Bolshevik dogma that politics outside the party was illegitimate, potentially if not actually counterrevolutionary ['party patriotism'] . . . . But Bukharin was restrained by another consideration as well. In Marxist eyes, the social

groups thought to be most receptive to his policies, notably peasants and technical specialists, were 'petty bourgeois' and thus unseemly constituencies for a Bolshevik. His reluctance to carry the fight against Stalin to the party-at-large derived from similar inhibitions. For party politics outside the leadership area had also become suspect and atrophied. . . . [H]e remained throughout a restrained, reluctant oppositionist." {Med 208}

Skipping ahead in time somewhat: The Stalin-Bukharin conflict came to a head at a remarkable September 1936 meeting of the Central Committee (i.e. long after the collectivization issue itself had been settled). At this meeting Yezhov, the NKVD chief at the time and Stalin's principal henchman, accused Bukharin and others of being agents of the German Gestapo in a plot to destroy the Soviet Union. He proposed a motion to expel Bukharin and Rykov from the Party and to charge them with treason. Bukharin countered that it was in fact Yezhov and Stalin who were conspiring against the country in order to consolidate Stalin's absolute personal dictatorship over the Party and the people.

The Central Committee and Politburo sided with Bukharin (!) and in the ensuing vote defeated Yezhov's motion, thus repudiating Stalin. And yet Stalin stood firm. "In countries and parties run on normal lines," noted Uralov, "it is customary, in these circumstances, for the government or the ruling body to resign, but Stalin preferred to adopt another course. Directly the vote had been taken he declared to the assembly that he accepted the decision of the Central Committee and would take note of it for his future guidance. He congratulated the members of the Central Committee on 'healthy criticism and auto-criticism worthy of true Bolsheviks.' . . . Thus it seemed that Stalin had bowed to the Central Committee's decision. {Ur 47} "Stalin had made the discovery that the Central Committee, of which he was Secretary General, was anti-Stalin. His position was so catastrophic that only the greatest coolness, suppleness in maneuver, and boldness in the selection of means could enable him to retain the power which legally was no longer his. . . . The members of the Central Committee had repudiated Stalin, but with a great lack of political sense they had not followed up their gesture with executive action. They had dispersed to their own districts, leaving the power in the hands of Stalin and his minority." {Ur 48} It was precisely this systemic, extreme concentration of institutional power--in the hands, finally, of one man--that enabled Stalin to prevail in the face of such a major revolt as this on the part of the Bukharin group.

By the autumn of 1937 only fifteen of the 140 Central Committee members and deputy-members involved in the foregoing conflict were alive and free. "At the Eighteenth Party Congress, Stalin formed a new Central Committee composed of men who were well known only to the NKVD." {Ur 47} In March 1938 Bukharin was shot. Thus did Stalin take his revenge. He was able not only to remain in power through the various challenges to it in the course of time, but to vastly increase it. This was possible only because the former revolutionaries around him fully accepted the dictatorship itself. They were in the end not democrats of any kind, in any way. They merely would have preferred a somewhat kinder, gentler dictatorship, with a dictator other than the bloodthirsty Stalin at its helm.

Back to the earlier period: Collectivization was of course pure top-down, authoritarian social engineering, without the slightest attempt made by those in power to obtain the peasants' free consent. The contemporary Marxist scholar Lev Krittman noted that there were in fact two antithetical revolutions in 1917, not just one--an urban, socialist revolution and a rural, antifeudal revolution. "Following the forced expropriations and partitions of the nobility's lands, the peasantry desired no more than the right to be left alone: to prosper as farmers and to dispose of their produce as they saw fit." {Vio 15} As Lewin observes: "The revolution freed the peasant from the system of barshchina (service to the landowner), it gave him the status of an independent producer." {Lew 37} It can hardly be doubted that the vast majority of peasants had little use for the regime's doctrinaire socialism.

Peasant support enabled the Bolsheviks to win the Revolution, and the Communists purported to value the alliance (smychka) between the "proletariat" (i.e. themselves) and the peasants. But in reality, and certainly as time went on, it became clear that the peasants would be consigned to the role of junior partner in this alleged partnership. As Viola explains: "Stalin stubbornly maintained that the leading role of the working class in the smychka was paramount. . . . '[W]e do not defend just any kind of union of workers and peasants. We stand for that union, in which the leading role belongs to the working class.'" {Vio 22} "[The] socialist town must lead the petit-bourgeois peasant countryside." {Vio 23} So much for any pretence of society-wide democracy. The antagonism and condescending elitism of the urban Communists toward the peasantry was palpable. "In the eyes of many town dwellers and members of the intelligentsia, the peasantry was . . . an enemy, an alien and adversary class . . . an obstacle, a hindrance to the town, the working class, socialism, and modernity. Hostility toward peasants was deeply embedded in the party's popular culture. In the years leading up to collectivization, and even more once collectivization began, the peasantry would be shorn of its humanity, reduced to a subhuman status that would enable and encourage the atrocities of the times." {Vio 32}

It must be kept in mind that Russia at this time was an overwhelmingly agricultural nation. The peasantry comprised about 85% of the population, while the industrial proletariat--of which the Communist Party proclaimed itself to be the vanguard--was a mere 3%. Thus there was absolutely nothing reasonable, much less democratic, about the regime's monomaniacal pro-proletariat, anti-peasant program. And aside from this program's remorseless violation of peasant tradition, there was another very good reason for the peasants' resistance to it: collectivization was economically senseless. The farmers lost all incentive to work hard and produce a surplus, since it would simply be taken from them--literally stolen without anything like fair compensation.

But, the Communists' motive in the collectivization undertaking was not purely--or perhaps even primarily--economic. Collectivization had an overarching political purpose. Uralov puts it thus: "For the Bolsheviks the creation of the kolkhozes was first and foremost a political undertaking for the purpose of transforming the individual and militarising the country. The future of the Stalin regime was bound up with its success. It was a question of who would win--the Stalinists or the 'class enemies,' socialism or capitalism, the kolkhozes or the peasants, the communist regime or the nation. In these practical terms did they conceive the problem, and in

solving it they attached only a secondary importance to the economic difficulties of the moment. Over a period of seven years, from 1929 to 1936, a war was fought with which none of the historic wars between peasants and their feudal lords can be compared. For the Russian peasant it entailed unprecedented losses. Neither during the wars of the Middle Ages, nor in the revolutions that followed, did the peasantry and other classes have to undergo such appalling hardships. . . . But even when he had been collectivized, the peasant remained fundamentally an individualist. It remained necessary to eradicate in him the 'petit bourgeois' mentality of the man who is master of his property and of himself. He had to be convinced that the past was dead and would never return, and that the sooner the countryman ceased to look backwards, the sooner would the teething troubles of the new life come to an end. A whole series of measures was planned and put into effect by the Politburo for the purpose of re-educating, transforming, and, above all, intimidating the peasant masses in order to fulfil the complex aims of the regime." {Ur 166} In a word, Stalin and his henchmen viewed the peasantry as a hostile force, an internal enemy, to be once and for all utterly subdued.

According to Uralov, the top two aims of the "kolkhoz revolution" were (1) the total proletarianization of the peasants, converting them from independent farmers working their own land to forced-labor serfs bound to the state farm, and (2) the total nationalization of rural property, enabling the state to enforce delivery of almost all agricultural output to itself. {Ur 167} Indeed, collectivization was nothing less than a return to serfdom, which is in fact what many peasants explicitly called it. It was the proletarianization and enslavement of the farmers, or, as Bukharin put it, "the return to the feudal pillage of the peasantry." {Ur 177} From the peasants' point of view, the Russian Revolution was one giant leap forward--ridding the nation of the landed nobility and handing the land over to them--and then two giant leaps backward, to a condition the pre-Revolution peasantry would not have envied.

One of the major themes of this essay will be that socialism, considered as an ideology, is not really a *political* philosophy: it says almost nothing about the power structure per se. Put into practice, socialism no doubt has very real political consequences, but this is due in fact to its *deficiency* in political ideas, which leads to a real-world power vacuum which is then necessarily filled. Essentially it is nothing but a set of socio-economic concepts and proposed policies, many of them quite dogmatic. A key one among these concepts is that of the "class struggle." In the real world this notion manifests as a divide and rule paradigm, perhaps even the ultimate one. In the case of the Soviet regime's subjugation of the Russian peasants, "kulak" was the boogeyman label of choice during the operation. Technically the term means "rich peasant," the Bolshevik implication being that such a person is by definition an exploiter of non-rich peasants, i.e. the rural equivalent of the evil urban capitalist--the enemy of the proletariat and the people. In fact, as the sources attest, this creature was for all practical purposes a complete fiction by the time of the collectivization period. Whatever truly rich peasants had ever existed had long been exterminated.

Medvedev notes that "Journalists and writers of fiction as well as scholars specializing in the agrarian question are today disputing the accuracy of the term 'kulak' in the way it was used from 1929 to 1932 as a justification for the mass deportation of relatively well-to-do peasants. .

. . [T]he kulaks of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries . . . almost completely disappeared during the civil war. In the late twenties the term 'kulak' was applied mainly to hard-working middle peasants who by stubborn toil and effort had achieved relative prosperity during the few short years of NEP." {Med 17} Indeed, peasants of all classes were pretty much united in defense of their rural culture, and it was only with the most intensive efforts, utilizing all of its massive resources, that the regime was able to succeed to any substantial extent in cracking this unity. "The peasantry," says Viola, "resented the intervention of outsiders in their affairs. . . . [M]ost villages stubbornly defied the party's attempts at social division and resisted as a cohesive entity." {Vio 16}

Lewin describes the peasant masses as "more or less homogeneous. . . . Poor or better-off, kulak or even batrak [agricultural laborer], the peasant was first and foremost the owner of a farm." A contemporary researcher specializing in the social structure of the peasantry noted that "not only does almost every peasant work on his farm, but he himself or the members of his family also work outside of it; or again, he may take on workers, or hire the means of production from someone, or alternatively hire out his own means of production. He borrows or lends, for example, his seed-grain. In short, there are practically no cases where a peasant farm manages its production entirely independently. But very often it will nevertheless be managed, in substance, as an independent farm." {Lew 45} And regardless of their current status, all peasants certainly shared the same aspiration: "to become an independent farmer, to have more land, and more implements with which to cultivate it." {Lew 52} It must be remembered that the Revolution eliminated the great landlords and handed the land over to the humble farmers themselves. All were more or less modest; some were merely somewhat more successful than others. "[T]he farms which could, according to Soviet definitions, be classified as kulak were in fact fairly small. . . . Only a minority of [kulaks] owned three to four cows and two to three horses. . . . [O]nly 1% of farms employed more than one paid worker. . . . All things considered, the dimensions of the so-called kulak farm were modest." {Lew 74-5} Not only were the "kulaks" not reprehensibly rich or a class apart in village society, they were in fact widely respected by the poorer peasants as good farmers and businessmen. The fact of the matter is that the regime simply singled them out arbitrarily as convenient scapegoats.

As already noted, the decision to embark on grain requisitions and collectivization was of course--like all major policies of the Soviet regime--an utterly top-down decision, with no consultation whatsoever with the masses of the people. And it is clear in retrospect that the regime's goal was the expropriation and taming of the peasantry as a whole from the beginning. However, the Bolsheviks could not exactly walk into the villages and proclaim precisely this as their intent. They therefore came up with the aforementioned divide and rule canard, with Stalin babbling diabolically about how the class struggle would naturally and necessarily intensify as the country advanced ever closer toward socialism--a theory which Bukharin dismissed as "ignorant nonsense." Hence the Communists cynically and opportunistically compartmentalized the peasant population into the arbitrary categories of poor, middle, and rich: bednyaks, serednyaks, and kulaks. The operative stereotypes--Lewin calls them "fallacious," "unreal" concepts--were as follows according to Viola: "The poor peasant was the ally of the working class, partner in the dictatorship. The middle peasant 'wavered,' sometimes

to the side of the revolution, sometimes to the side of counterrevolution. The kulak was the class enemy, 'avaricious, bloated, and bestial.'" {Lew 391, Vio 33} The Communists proceeded to enlist as class allies the poorest peasants--the bednyaks--as best they could with special treatment (including artificially placing them, to the point of gross overrepresentation, in local governing bodies) and with economic aid (largely superficial). With these new supposed partners they then tried to win over the middle peasants as well, pitting all against the now isolated, supposedly evil kulaks. Though the Party theorists and demagogues made much of these peasant distinctions, it was in reality pure window dressing. The regime would have recruited the village dogs and found a way to rationalize this if it would have helped its cause. Any claimed major, natural differentiation between these arbitrary categories of farmers was and is specious.

It was the Communists' religious belief in, and use of, theoretical Marxian dogmas such as that of the implacably class-riven society (two other obvious ones were the evil of private property and trade and the necessity of the dictatorship of the proletariat) that enabled them to ignore the policy preferences of the actual Russian people, the vast majority of whom were peasants, and to justify to themselves all manner of coercive measures and massive crimes, with Stalin eventually calling for the "liquidation of the kulaks as a class." "This sense of class," notes Viola, "was an abstraction, a party construction, but it allowed Communists to behave, on a theoretical level, in conformance with their ideas." {Vio 17} "[T]he Manichaeian view of the world that animated much of Communist theorizing . . . enabl[ed] the party to demonize and therefore dehumanize social groups and entire classes deemed adversaries by its ideology." {Vio 33}

The Communists' witch-hunt of "kulaks" is surely one of the most abominable, lunatic policies by any government in the history of civilization. "In practice," says Utley, "since in many parts of the country real kulaks who 'exploited' other peasants were hard to find, the designation was applied to every peasant who was a little better off than his neighbors, to anyone who owned two horses and two cows, or had managed in some way to lift himself a little above the miserably low general standard of life in the Russian village. It meant that hard work and enterprise were penalized wherever they were found. . . . The Russian peasant sank further into slothfulness and hopelessness. Since to raise himself above the level of his beasts of burden was now accounted a crime against the state, he worked as little as possible. . . . The fecklessness of the Russian character was the result of Russian history, but it was left to the Soviet government to make laws penalizing all who worked hard and took thought for the morrow. . . . Precisely those peasants who had the knowledge, skill, and industry to raise Russian agriculture above its medieval level were liquidated. The collective farms were deprived of the men who could have made them function efficiently." {Ut 77} In effect the regime made it a crime to do well, but since there would nonetheless always be some who were at least a little better off than others, the zealous agents of the expropriation "[found] kulaks wherever they chose to look." {Lew 491}

Collectivization was, as a matter of plain, cold fact, a genocidal campaign, described as just this by Utley: "Then began the wholesale murder of the kulaks by the Soviet state. I use the word

murder deliberately, for although the kulaks were not lined up and shot, they were killed off in a manner far more cruel. Whole families, men, women, children and babies, were thrown out of their homes, their personal possessions seized, even their warm clothing torn off them. Then, packed into unheated cattle cars in winter, they were sent off to Siberia or other waste parts of the Soviet Union. . . . Women and children perished. Hundreds of thousands of peasants were herded off to the timber prison camps in the Arctic regions, to die like flies from hunger, cold, and exhausting labor, whipped by the OGPU guards and treated like the slaves of Pharaoh or of an Asiatic tyrant." {Ut 73} "Thus Stalin used the technique of artificially focussing hatred on the innocent, which Hitler copied in the case of the Jews." {Ut 77}

It bears emphasizing that the Soviet regime's dogma of the "class" nature of society provided it with a built-in mechanism for it to carry out its scapegoating, divide and rule politics. This was illustrated perfectly in the government's demonization of the kulaks and its pitting of the "poor peasants" against them (as far as it was able to). The conjuring of the "kulak menace . . . a ready-made bogey, suitably blackened and blown up out of all proportion," says Lewin, "was henceforth to work with unflinching efficacy [for the regime], particularly because it proved acceptable to Party members who were alive to arguments of a class nature. Similarly, it commended itself to a certain section of public opinion abroad, among socialists, or liberals, who saw no reason to question the need for extremely stringent measures against the kulaks who were standing in the way of socialism and progress for the mass of the muzhiki [peasants]."

In defiance of this strategy of class division by the authorities, the humble peasants would often defend their neighbors by declaring: "We have no kulaks [here]," "We are all laborers," "We have neither poor peasants nor kulaks." "In the village of Ekaterinovka in the Don in late March 1930, peasants held a 'mass meeting' [at which they] called for an end to the artificial division of peasants into classes." {Vio 88}

None of this means, of course, that there was no social stratification *at all* in the villages. It simply means that the peasants were well aware of the regime's nefarious divide and rule strategy, whose ultimate aim was the subjugation of all peasants. "During collectivization, most peasants united in solidarity against Soviet power, outsiders, and what had become an aggressively alien culture. They recognized that collectivization and dekulakization were not about class war or a smychka with the poor, but rather represented key elements in the state's war against the peasantry and its culture *as a whole*. [They felt] that the repression against the kulak was just the beginning. First, they would take away the kulaks, then they would come for the middle peasants, and finally the poor would suffer the same fate. At a peasant assembly in a Ukrainian village in early 1930, collectivization was said to be 'the *final solution* to peasant farming.' Here a peasant warned his neighbors: 'You think that they, having destroyed two or three kulak farms, will stop at that--you are mistaken. All peasants are petty capitalists. Get in line [with the Communists' program] and your farm will be destroyed.' Few peasants appear to have shared the illusions of intellectuals, who never saw themselves reflected in the face of the enemy until it was too late [more on this phenomenon later]. Most peasants realized that all

kulaks were peasants and all peasants could be considered kulaks." {Vio 91} What we see in the historical literature under study is a war on the peasantry as such--pure and simple.

The rural villages had relatively egalitarian, democratic traditional institutions: the mir--the village community/society, governing land use and tenure, often communal--and the village assembly. The latter, explains Lewin, was "a very primitive and very ancient form of democracy. . . . The peasants participated in the administration of the village economy, decisions being taken by the heads of households." {Lew 27} In time the regime effectively replaced the organic village assembly with its own pliant creation: the selsovet. "[T]he selsovet . . . was the basic element in the structure of government. . . . [It] was not very popular with the peasants [with only a minority turning out to vote]. . . . Their lack of interest in this particular Soviet institution is readily understood when one considers the functions of the selsovet and the methods by which it was elected. In its capacity as the 'rural arm of the dictatorship of the proletariat,' the selsovet was controlled by the authorities, and its membership was decided upon by the Party in the volost [administrative peasant subdivision]. . . . The Party . . . [made] great efforts to ensure a favourable 'class representation.' . . . The Party manned the selsovet with batraks and bednyaks [the purported allies of the proletariat against the kulaks], or even with workers sent out from the towns to strengthen 'the dictatorship of the proletariat' in the villages. We learn from Soviet sources that the work of the selsovet was carried on without support from the mass of the peasantry. The chairman took all the decisions, sometimes with the help of the secretary, general meetings were seldom convened, or, when called, were poorly attended." {Lew 81}

"It will readily be understood," continues Lewin, "that the village society, which decided so many problems of importance to the peasants, had a great advantage over the selsovet, an unpopular organization whose administrative role [principally tax collection for the state] was a restrictive one." {Lew 89} "And so we are left with a paradoxical situation, in which the village organization which stood for all the collectivist aspects of village life, and which had been rooted in the village for centuries, was given no part whatsoever to play in the collectivization of the peasantry. . . . The mir was to perish in the holocaust of collectivization, seemingly vanquished by the selsovet." {Lew 93} No other action of the regime, namely its treatment of the village mir and assembly, more pointedly demonstrates that it had no interest whatsoever in real democracy.

As pointed out earlier, Bukharin was adamantly opposed to Stalin's violent collectivization policy, calling it "monstrously unilateral." {Lew 328} Bukharin's fierce opposition to Stalin's policy is probably not widely known to most casual historical observers. But even less widely appreciated is the fact that his views were broadly shared in the mainstream of the Party. "[T]here was general agreement about the continuation of NEP, the long-term role of the private sector in agriculture and the need to encourage growth in this sector, the importance of market relations and of co-operation in trade." {Lew 329} But Stalin, from atop his dictator's throne, roundly rejected such proposals as nothing less than heresy. He had little conception of, and even less use for, rational economics. Instead, he was hell-bent on attaining complete state control of the rural economy and the suppression of its commercial aspects--which is what the



kolkhozes and sovkhoses would ultimately provide. "The regime . . . wished to free itself . . . from its dependence on the rural sector . . . [and to] hold the key to the nation's food supplies once and for all." {Lew 406, 437} It simply was not going to allow the peasants to avail themselves of anything like a free market which would give them something like a fair return on their labor and investment. Lewin reminds us that "Stalin's famous theory about the intensification of the class struggle with the gradual approach of socialism was no [mere] abstract concept, intended for use solely within the context of academic research. It was a political instrument, a weapon which the regime might use to combat opposition, not from the capitalists but from the mass of the peasantry and the discontented workers, and those factions within the Party who [would not toe the Party's--i.e. Stalin's--line]" {Lew 369}

By late 1929, "procurement"--the seizure one way or another of the peasants' grain--had become the regime's standing order to its organs and agents. Lewin describes the general process whereby the full force of the colossal governmental machine, with its panoply of resources, was employed: "The Party, the unions, and local administrative organizations were all alerted, and brigades were sent to the villages from the administrative centers and the other towns. . . . The villages were subjected to a full-scale onslaught by propagandists and other Party officials, who organized meetings with the local inhabitants and members of the co-operatives, in order to persuade them to accept the plans for grain deliveries. In so far as the concept of 'rural democracy' was concerned, the role of the village assemblies now counted for very little. As in previous years, they were called upon to co-operate in bringing pressure to bear on any peasants who were withholding sizeable quantities of grain. This year, however, for the first time they themselves were given notice, well in advance, of the quotas which were to be delivered, and were invited to discuss these, but only for the purpose of agreeing them." {Lew 413} Severe penalties were meted out to resisters.

As for the push to round up the peasants and drive them into kolkhozes: "The villages were invaded by Party representatives, workers, and officials [from the towns] who came armed with strict instructions, and set about the task of persuading an unreceptive peasant audience of the superior virtues of the kolkhoz. The great majority of these activists had never seen a kolkhoz, nor had they any knowledge of agriculture. For the most part, their arguments were based simply on their own faith in the superiority of socialism in general . . . and above all in the manifest advantages, in theory at least, of large-scale fully mechanized agriculture, organized and managed by technicians and agronomists on the basis of the latest scientific developments." {Lew 418}

Not only were the peasants naturally resistant to having their traditional ways of life destroyed, but the allegedly superior sovkhoses and kolkhozes that the regime was herding them into were in fact badly managed and deplorable in every way. "Batraks or bednyaks [i.e. the poorer peasants] might seek work there from necessity, but the rest of the peasants could not but be repelled by the sovkhoses. Apart from the question of wages, any peasant casting a farmer's eye over these establishments would see . . . too many things which were wrong, machinery broken or unprotected from the weather, buildings in a state of disrepair, frequent breakdowns in the tractors, [poor wages and living conditions,] and so on." {Lew 421} Yet the regime

seemed "obsessive[ly] preoccup[ied] with the large-scale . . . [with] the creation of enormous 'grain factories' and . . . factories for the processing of livestock products." {Lew 462} In short, the communists' ideal was a "modern" factory farming supposedly superior to the traditional farming, i.e. the industrialization of agriculture.

It is instructive to consider that the regime's assault on the farm communities was not restricted to the realm of agricultural production alone--demonstrating just how deep the regime's hostility was to the peasants' independence from authoritarian control in general. Viola describes an all-encompassing campaign against peasant culture and autonomy which included attacks on the village church, the village markets (replaced "with a centralized and coercive administrative-command system of economics" {Vio 74}), peasant holidays, arts and crafts, popular entertainments, peasant-run establishments such as mills and shops, and, most significantly (and already touched upon), traditional bodies of local self-governance like the peasant land society (or commune) and the skhod (or peasant council). Peasant leaders and authority figures (many of whom would have fallen under the category of "kulak") were especially targeted by the authorities for elimination, and this course of action naturally decapitated the villages--as planned.

History can hardly provide a more clear-cut example of massive, top-down, authoritarian social engineering than the Communist regime's post-Revolution treatment of the Russian peasantry. Not surprisingly, therefore, the peasants could hardly help but be aware of their oppression and who their oppressors were. "Many peasants believed that the town--rather than the kulak--was the real exploiter. A Moscow-area investigator noted that he often heard peasants complain that the workers lived better while the peasants worked harder, paid more taxes, and suffered unfairly due to the price scissors. . . . [O]fficial observers noted a widespread 'antitown' mood in the countryside, with peasants expressing such sentiments as 'We agree to support Soviet power if it establishes identical rights for workers and peasants.' . . . With the imposition of 'extraordinary measures' in the late 1920s, peasant anger lent new force to these opinions. Throughout the countryside, peasants cried: 'Throw out the Communists!' 'Get rid of the workers coming from Moscow--don't interfere in our village affairs!' 'Peasants live poorly because the workers and officials sit on them!' and 'The city workers live on us; they take all we have.'" {Vio 30}

With their entire way of life thus assaulted, the peasants resisted every way they could--including by revolting. "Arson, assault, lynching, and murders of local officials and peasant activists dotted the rural terrain. Rebellion engulfed the countryside, resulting in some 13,000 riots with over two million participants in 1930 [the key year in collectivization]." {Vio 4} But it was all to no avail.

The entire business of collectivization was obviously the very antithesis of democracy--and totally indefensible from any humane perspective. Indeed, some historians have noted that the regime scarcely looked upon or treated the peasants as adults at all, much less as citizens worthy of respect. Russian Marxists, from early on, saw themselves as progressive modernists battling a backward people in "dark ignorance" (Gorky). {Vio 31} Viola observes among them an

"infantilization of the peasantry. . . . [T]he process of infantilization deprived them of agency and responsibility. They were in need of the civilizing guidance and leadership of the town." {Vio 32} There was therefore, as already stated repeatedly, no thought whatsoever among the Bolsheviks of country-wide democracy.

It should be noted that the Communists' anti-peasant stance did not by any means begin with Stalin. Lenin in 1918 called all peasants who refused to turn over their surplus grain "enemies of the people." He declared a "ruthless and terrorist struggle and war against [recalcitrant] peasant[s]." {Vio 16} "Any peasant who is a little bit developed and has emerged from his primordial muzhik darkness," said Lenin, 'will agree that there is no other way [but to turn over his grain to the Soviet state.]' According to Lenin, 'all class-conscious and sensible peasants . . . will agree that all surplus grain without exception must be turned over to the workers' state.'" {Vio 17} Naturally, Lenin, sitting in the dictator's chair of his peculiarly enlightened Communist state, did not even consider asking the primitive peasants to weigh in on the matter. Lenin often aimed his venomous barbs specifically at the kulaks, but there can be little doubt that any claimed inter-class differentiation among the peasantry was as specious in his day as it clearly was under the Stalin regime. So when he attacked the "kulaks" he was essentially attacking the peasants as a whole. "Lenin referred to [kulaks] as 'avaricious, bloated, and bestial,' 'the most brutal, callous and savage exploiters,' 'spiders,' 'leeches,' and 'vampires' . . . and called for 'death to them!'" In 1919 he said: "The kulak is our implacable enemy. And here we can hope for nothing unless we crush him." {Vio 16}

Bertrand Russell, who had a long conversation with Lenin while visiting Russia in 1920, recounts how the latter "spoke as though the dictatorship over the peasant would have to continue a long time, because of the peasant's desire for free trade [which was counter to Marxist dogma]." {Russ 39} Russell further observed that "The [Soviet] Government represents the interests of the urban and industrial population, and is, as it were, encamped amid a peasant nation, with whom its relations are rather diplomatic and military than governmental in the ordinary sense." {Russ 106} In other words, from well before Stalin's ascendancy the Bolsheviks had no conception whatsoever of democracy in Russia--a fact that is impossible not to reiterate.

The immediate consequences of the late 1920s offensive--"a veritable siege"--against the better-off peasants were predictable. {Lew 415} The peasants cut down on their sowings throughout the countryside and sold off much of their livestock. The numbers of horses, sheep, pigs, and cattle throughout the country dwindled to a small fraction of what they had been before the assault. The kulaks, the best farmers among the peasants, seeing that their economic status was a hazard to their well-being, quite rationally engaged in auto-dekulakization: selling their land, animals, and implements and in many cases giving up farming altogether so as not to be categorized as "kulak." Whether rich or poor, countless peasants--when they were not imprisoned or deported--were effectively driven to abandon their farms. Agricultural production and the availability of food plummeted as a result.

Aside from the famine as such, "a million households suddenly found themselves reduced to the state of outcasts, deprived of all their rights and not knowing which way to turn." {Lew 489} Furthermore, for those peasants not actually eliminated in the murderous ordeal, veritable serfdom was their fate. "Stalin's utter ruthlessness won the day," says Utley. "The resistance of the peasants was broken. Since 1932 they . . . have been forced to work on the government's terms. They have become serfs again. Their work on the collective farms is forced labor, and corresponds to the labor service rendered to his overlord by the serf in medieval times." {Ut 83} Indeed, the scope of the cataclysm was such that it is arguable that after it the peasants were much worse off than ever before. Uralov states: "The ancient basis of the peaceful life of the country had been destroyed, and a new [but certainly not better] form of social life had triumphed." {Ur 165}

---

## KIROV ASSASSINATION, FIRST SHOW TRIALS

Following the genocide of collectivization was the Great Terror. This period of concentrated, murderous persecution of the entire population, not just peasants, in the Soviet Union was kicked off by the assassination on 1 December 1934 of Sergei Kirov--member of the Politburo, secretary of the Central Committee, and a man generally regarded within the Politburo as Stalin's successor as General Secretary. This incident bears many of the hallmarks of what are now called false flag events--deceptive, orchestrated events masking deeply nefarious agendas. It is widely held by historians of Stalinism that although Stalin's masterminding of the assassination is not completely certain, the circumstantial evidence and the sheer suspiciousness of the event are overwhelming, especially as seen from the point of view of the twenty-first century, when phenomena of this type are better understood.

Walter Laqueur says that "many circumstances point to Stalin's involvement." {Laq 62} "[Kirov's] murder offered a unique opportunity to carry out a widespread purge, leading to the wholesale massacre of the old party leadership, as well as many others. But for the killing of one of the party's central leaders, allegedly carried out by Trotskyite terrorists and other enemies of Soviet society, it would have been difficult to persuade the party and the public that measures of extraordinary severity were needed to crush an enemy lurking everywhere and willing to strike at any moment at all targets." {Laq 74} "In December 1934, there was absolutely no basis for the arrest of Zinoviev, Kamenev, and other persons implicated in the Moscow center case. Their arrest marked the beginning of the implementation of a scheme to use the assassination of Kirov to politically discredit and physically eliminate former opposition figures by charging them with organizing, preparing, and executing this crime. The charge that the former members of the 'Zinovievist' opposition planned and organized the murder of Kirov was based on the fact that the murderer, L.V. Nikolaev, had allegedly been a partisan of Zinoviev's at one time. Yet there were no documentary or other materials that supported this contention. The notion that Nikolaev belonged to the Zinovievist opposition came from Stalin.

It was conceived and brought to life through an investigation and trial as a result of direct pressure on his part." {Laq 300} Again: "The notion that the murder of Kirov was carried out by members of the Zinovievist opposition was put forward by Stalin in order to take reprisals against the former opposition figures." {Laq 304} In fact, the accused himself, Nikolaev, stated that "the assassination had been arranged by the security police and that he had been promised his life if he implicated the Leningrad Zinovievites." {Med 343}.

Alexander Uralov, a contemporary, persuasively argues that the notion of Zinoviev and company's assassination of Kirov is utterly irrational and improbable. "Zinoviev and Kamenev could not have been the instigators of the crime. If they wanted to overthrow the Stalin regime, it was Stalin they had to kill, not Kirov. The thing would not have presented great difficulties at that time for any functionary of the Party. A great many people living in the Kremlin passed Stalin every day. The most simple logic shows that in ordering the assassination of Kirov, Zinoviev and Kamenev would have been simply safeguarding Stalin, because all the heads [of rival leaders] would have been cut off by the Cheka long before that murder could be followed by a revolver shot in the Kremlin. Zinoviev and his followers could not be ignorant of this. If it had been their plan to unloose a campaign of terrorism against the members of the Politburo, they would have been bound to start with Stalin. But they had no such plan. It was attributed to them by Stalin himself in order to achieve the physical destruction of his adversaries. The romantic episode . . . was an admirable pretext for launching a campaign to suppress the 'enemies of the people.'" {Ur 28}

Another contemporary, Alexander Weissberg, reasons similarly: "It was impossible for me to decide whether the Zinoviev, Kamenev group had actually had so much courage, though I doubted it. Their general attitude and their repeated capitulations did not suggest such firmness of character. At the same time it was very strange that their first victim should have been not Stalin but a second-rate figure like Kirov, whose assassination represented no threat to the regime but rather a timely warning. They must have known that it would inevitably be followed by ruthless repression which would paralyze their work. Why had they killed Kirov when Stalin was their game?" {Weiss 54}

We will not be spending any time on the details of the Kirov assassination itself. The assassination's *consequences* are much more pertinent to this study. On Stalin's unilateral order (without approval by the Politburo), judicial due process was suspended and mass arrests among members of the former Zinoviev-Kamenev opposition began immediately. Many others accused of terrorist activity were also arrested. Dozens of people were then shot. In general, "The charge of terrorist activity was a favorite . . . since it permitted all legal restrictions to be disregarded in the investigation and trial." {Med 344} A first, secret trial was held in 1935, and a second, public trial took place in August 1936: the Trotskyite-Zinovievite Center trial. In fact, it has now been established that this "Center" never existed.

Medvedev explains Stalin's likely motive for the assassination: "Nasty, suspicious, cruel, and power-hungry, Stalin could not abide brilliant and independent people around him. Kirov's growing popularity and influence could not have failed to arouse Stalin's envy and suspicion.

Kirov's great authority among Communists and his reluctance to go along with Stalin unquestioningly served to impede the realization of Stalin's ambitious plans. . . . [H]is assassination gave Stalin a desired pretext for reprisals against everyone obstructing his road to power. The Kirov assassination was an important link in the chain of events leading to Stalin's usurpation of all power in the country. That is why Stalin's guilt in the assassination, which would have seemed improbable in 1934-1935, nowadays appears plausible and, logically and politically, almost proven." {Med 344}

"On 18 January, 1935, a confidential letter from the Central Committee was sent to all party organizations, demanding the mobilization of all forces to destroy enemy elements and to root out counterrevolutionary nests of enemies of the party and the people. Every oblast, Leningrad especially, was swept by the first wave of mass arrests . . . the 'Kirov flood.' Simultaneously former noblemen and their families [bourgeois 'alien elements'] were deported en masse from Leningrad, although the majority of them had not carried on any underground anti-Soviet activity." The Leningrad Pravda proclaimed that "'only genuine proletarians, only honest working people' had the right to live in the city of Lenin." {Med 347} In classic scapegoating/divide and conquer fashion, "All 'former people' were removed: former aristocrats and members of the nobility, former officers, and former businessmen or merchants." {Med 348} Repression based on social class or social origins (rather than any alleged personal guilt) was in this manner to become an increasingly important characteristic of the Terror. "Selective repression never let up throughout 1935 and the first half of 1936. In every oblast and republic, dozens and dozens of people were arrested--not only former oppositionists but Communists who had never belonged to any opposition. At the same time, hundreds were expelled from the party [a life-threatening punishment given the substantial party privileges versus the dire economic conditions in Russia at the time] 'for a connection with hostile elements' or 'for lack of vigilance.'" {Med 349}

Interestingly, despite all of this repression happening all around, many members of the political class saw nothing alarming going on. A number of middle-level party officials and a few other prominent persons were arrested, but "By no means everyone noticed the increased political tension; many party leaders, members of the Central Committee, obkom secretaries, people's commissars, and top military men sensed no danger. Stalin knew how to conceal his intentions." {Med 352}

From the accounts of the assassination's aftermath in Laqueur and Uralov we learn that "if previously the hands of the NKVD had been tied by various administrative regulations, on the very day of Kirov's murder a special decree was passed removing the restrictions. From then on, the organs of state security had a free hand in bringing 'terrorists' to trial and interrogating them. There was to be no appeal for clemency, and executions were to be immediate." {Laq 77} In the 48 hours after the Kirov assassination, several thousand political prisoners were shot without trial. Between December 1934 and January 1935 mass arrests of "enemies of the people" took place throughout the country. A few days after the assassination, Zinoviev, Kamenev, and numerous other leaders of the former "Zinoviev opposition" (or Left Opposition) were arrested--the first step on the way to the infamous 1936 Moscow Show Trial. "The

defendants in the Moscow show trials represented only the tip of the iceberg. The 'purge' affected millions of others who disappeared without any publicity whatsoever. They were taken from their homes, their place of work, from a meeting, or in the middle of a lecture." {Laq 93}

Uralov describes the setting up of a veritable police state (beyond the loose dictatorship that had already existed) five months after Kirov's assassination. "[O]n the 13th of May 1935, the Central Committee of the Party reached four decisions of profound importance to the lives of millions of people. . . .

1. The setting up of a special Commission composed of five members of the Central Committee to put the country in a state to withstand an eventual war [with Germany, Japan, et al.]. The members of this Commission [included] Stalin. . . .

2. The setting up of a 'special Security Commission' whose task was to eliminate all 'enemies of the people.' The [six] members of this Commission [included] Stalin. . . .

3. The carrying out of two measures within the Party: (a) public verification of the dossiers of all Party members . . . (b) secret scrutiny of the political conduct of all Party members by the NKVD.

4. The sending of a personal letter to all . . . members of the Party calling upon them to redouble their 'Bolshevik vigilance.'

Only the decision to verify the dossiers of all Party members was made public. Stalin thus took the initiative in a vast conspiracy directed against the Party, the people, and the State." {Ur 29}

The first major show trial began on 19 August 1936. The sixteen defendants were charged with constituting a "Trotskyite-Zinovievite Terrorist Center." They all "admitted" their guilt.

"Elementary rules of judicial procedure were violated," Medvedev says. "No material evidence or documentary proof of the guilt of the accused was presented to the court by the prosecutor, Vyshinsky. . . . The entire case rested on the contradictory 'depositions' and 'confessions' of the accused. Moreover, they were deprived of the right to defense counsel." {Med 355} "Today the falsity of such 'depositions' [obtained through intense pressure and torture] is not hard to prove . . . but in 1936 the party and the majority of the people still trusted Stalin, the NKVD, and the Soviet courts. There were a few who had doubts, but hardly any dared to express them, even to their closest friends. The trial and the shooting of the accused [and the extermination of all their relations] engendered a new wave of repression throughout the country." {Med 356}.

In January 1937 took place another macabre show trial, this time of an alleged group called the "Parallel Center." Again there was no evidence besides supposed confessions. As Stalin called for intensified struggle against "enemies of the people," Bukharin commented: "I feel my helplessness before a hellish machine, which, probably by the use of medieval methods, has acquired gigantic power, fabricates organized slander, acts boldly and confidently." {Med 366} Yet another trial, that of the "Right-Trotskyite Center," with Bukharin as the chief victim, got

underway in March 1938. When it ended Bukharin, Rykov, and many others were shot. Within a decade most Central Committee members were dead.

---

## TERROR - GENERAL

The ensuing country-wide, murderous terror was on such a scale as hardly to be believed. Laqueur calls the Soviet Union at this time "an empire of fear." {Laq 11} Suzanne Labin, a contemporary, stated in her memoir: "To-day, all that any Russian Communist need do is to betray the slightest misgiving about any of Stalin's orders, no matter how unimportant, and his fate is sealed: deportation or execution." {Lab 81} The expression of any and all discontent among the masses was criminalized. "An old woman of seventy-two was incautious enough to complain loudly that, try as she would, she was unable to buy a pair of shoes for her granddaughter of eighteen. Both were arrested and charged: the grandmother for incitement to insurrection and the granddaughter as a passive accomplice." {Lab 357} There are countless such examples.

The subject of the Terror is so large that a comprehensive coverage is out of the question here. I will only highlight a few select aspects of it that should adequately convey the larger picture.

First of all, was there in fact a real "threat" from "enemies of the people" of a type and magnitude which might conceivably have justified the kind of totalitarian repression that the Soviet citizenry experienced in the 1930s? The answer is no. Says Medvedev: "The very possibility of organizing [as claimed], on Soviet territory, entire underground parties with thousands of members, central committees sending instructions to the provinces and maintaining close contacts with foreign centers, embassies, and so on is to be doubted. The investigative agencies frankly informed the court that they could not produce any material evidence or documents proving the existence of underground parties. There was much talk about instructions and directives, appeals to members, circular letters, resolutions, and records of plenary meetings, but not one of these documents was presented to the court and the press." "A great many absurdities and inconsistencies can be found in the defendants' testimony about their counterrevolutionary activity." {Med 268}

Laqueur concurs: "There were no conspiracies against the regime other than imaginary ones; there was not even a potential opposition against Stalin. Many, probably most, of the victims were his supporters. There was virtually no resistance against the terror machine . . . no plot like the one hatched by senior German officers against Hitler in 1943-44. The . . . allegations were . . . [absurd]." {Laq 61}

Having himself been caught in the dragnet, Weissberg reflected: "[I]f I make an exception for the few real foreign agents who may have been caught up in the vast net . . . I can say with a



clear conscience that all the prisoners who passed through the GPU machine in those years--whether they 'confessed' or not--were legally, politically, and morally innocent. They were doubly innocent. Not one of them was guilty of spying; not one of them had betrayed his country to the Germans or to the Japanese; not one of them had planned or carried out any act of sabotage. But perhaps . . . they really were conspirators, not against the Soviet power as such, but against the Party leaders and the Party regime? Perhaps they had attempted by underground methods to overthrow Stalin's dictatorship in the Party? . . . Nothing of the sort. The arrested men were not enemies of the socialist revolution but its most ardent supporters. And the overwhelming majority of them were not even opponents of the dictator. . . . Many of them were actually enthusiastic Stalinists who had vigorously opposed the opposition. In short, the general political attitude of the arrested men was not one whit different from that of the millions who had been lucky enough to escape. The arrests were made indiscriminately." {Weiss 3} All the other prison memoirs corroborate this assessment.

Weissberg compares the Great Purge to "the witch hunting of the Inquisition. In both cases the 'confessions' extorted by torture and fear were complete inventions." There were no guilty Russians, just as there had been no witches. "There was no organized opposition throughout the length and breadth of the country. All that existed was this unspoken hope in all hearts." "There was hardly a prisoner in our cell who had not worked readily and often with enthusiasm [for the regime], and not one who was in any way disloyal to the Soviet power. Why should this happen to us?" "In all my long and wide experience of prisoners I never came across one who had been a White." "I did not meet a single monarchist in prison during the Great Purge." {Weiss 317, 148, 388, 424, 517} And yet there were nine million political prisoners in Soviet jails at the time.

Weissberg further explains the baselessness of the "enemies" fantasy: "Examiners who wanted to advance their careers--or even merely to hold their ground--had to invent conspiracies and keep on inventing them. In this way they fabricated plots for dynamiting factories, burning down granaries, wrecking trains, and poisoning whole battalions of the Red Army. Soon even that was not enough. They wanted more than mere plans. They wanted counterrevolutionary facts. But the accused could provide them only with words, intentions, conspiracies, and not with real insurrections. They could provide only terrorist attempts which had been planned, not any which had been carried out. They could talk vaguely about secret stores of arms, but they could not provide any real arms which could serve as exhibits at trials. The reason for this awkward shortage lay irrevocably rooted in reality. There were plenty of people who hated the dictator, but there wasn't a single illegal organization anywhere in the country. There were no insurrections, no secret stores of arms, and no attempts on the lives of Stalin and his leading henchmen. . . . As it was impossible for the GPU to reveal counterrevolutionary actions, it had to content itself with counterrevolutionary intentions, but it unmasked these on a fantastic scale. Every village had two or three separate terrorist groups all thirsting for the blood of the dictator. In every industrial concern there were desperate diversionists all planning to blow up the power station. Up and down the country railwaymen were only waiting for an opportunity to wreck troop trains. . . . The politicians made preparations to cede Russian territory to Russia's deadliest enemies. The national minorities made preparations to wrench their territories away from the

Soviet Union and unite them to the fascist fatherlands--even when the latter, as was the case with the Volga Germans, was thousands of miles away. That was the Soviet Union toward the end of 1937 as reflected in the minds of the GPU men." {Weiss 310}

Trotsky described the impetus behind the cascading repression: "[Stalin] absolutely must connect the Opposition with assassination attempts, preparations for arm[ed] insurrection, etc. . . . The impotent policy of maneuvering and evading problems, the growing economic difficulties, the growing distrust within the party toward the leadership have made it necessary for Stalin to stun the party by putting on a large-scale show. He needs a blow, a shock, a catastrophe. . . . [T]his is the kind of thing--and the only kind--that Stalin thinks through to the end." {Med 345}

The propaganda press was a key player in the repression. In 1935-36 a big press campaign was launched to unmask and eliminate all "enemies of the people". Rewards were given to informers. "Denunciations poured in, spreading like a plague with an increasing virulence. . . . The whole country . . . was infected by this peculiarly Russian disease--informer's mania." {Ur 32}

In the first stages of the Terror, much of the state's focus was on alleged "wrecking" activity by "saboteurs." These persons were targeted in some of the first trials. Yet, as told by Medvedev, "The fact was that on the whole the specialists were quite loyal to the Soviet government and served the nation well with their knowledge and experience. From 1929 to 1932 the main blow of the punitive agencies fell on the technical intelligentsia. The Soviet press asserted that wrecking by 'bourgeois specialists' had penetrated everywhere." {Med 285} This was nothing more or less than scapegoating to cover the regime's many deficiencies. In actuality there was no deliberate wrecking on any significant scale. "Wrecking as a conscious policy, pursued by the entire stratum of bourgeois specialists, never existed." Wrecking accusations were "intended 'to mobilize the masses,' 'to arouse their wrath against the imperialists,' 'to intensify vigilance,' and so forth. In reality the aim of these false charges was to divert the dissatisfaction of the masses from the party leadership, which was encouraging haste in pursuit of a maximum rate of industrialization." {Med 259-60}

Medvedev highlights Stalin's personal political gain from all of this deception: "Stalin tried to cover up his own mistakes and miscalculations during the first years of collectivization and industrialization by blaming them on the 'wrecking' activities of bourgeois specialists. On top of that, Stalin desired to win credit for thwarting foreign intervention and breaking up nonexistent underground counterrevolutionary organizations. He wanted to accumulate political capital--fictive to be sure, but crucial for him in that period. He was deliberately forcing tension in the country to silence his critics and once again cast the shadow of suspicion on the leaders of all the former opposition groups." {Med 272}

Anything and everything was attributed to "sabotage," says Labin: "There is no breakdown or setback suffered by the economic, political, military, cultural, or social machinery of the regime which is not put down to sabotage. There is no shade of heterodox, economic, political,

military, cultural, or social opinion which does not partake in some way of the Satanism of sabotage. A fugitive thought, a carelessly-hummed air, the fashion in which a stamp is affixed, the way in which a man climbs the stairs, a fall, a pet aversion, a greeting, a smile--all such things and many more can be interpreted as sabotage of the great work of building up Socialism." {Lab 354}

In September, 1936, an explosion in the Kemerovo coal mines in Western Siberia killed ten miners and injured fourteen others. The NKVD arrested the mine officials and their trial began shortly after. The Kemerovo Mine trial, Wendy Goldman explains, "was a web of interlocking testimonies in which the defendants incriminated themselves and each other. There was no evidence apart from their own confessions." And here is the farcical level of this testimonial "evidence": "Noskov, for example, testified, 'Drobnis told me to organize acts of physical annihilation of workers by poisoning and explosions in the mines.' And Kurov, in turn, testified, 'Noskov told us that explosions in the mines would be very effective even if some of the workers suffered.' Shubin, informed of the plan, allegedly crowed with delight, 'Soon our dear brother workers will croak in the mines like rats.'" {Gold 101} "The trial . . . blended the plausible with the fantastic. In fact, the mines were often filled with gas, the tunnels were poorly planned, and ventilators were absent. The procurator claimed that Kemerovo's managers *deliberately* refused to spend the state funds allocated to the mine for safety. . . . The problems in the Kemerovo mines, high accident rates, shoddy planning, and managerial negligence existed in every industry. They were the inevitable results of rapid industrialization and pressure to meet high production targets. The trial deflected blame, however, from the state to 'enemies, who aimed to destroy the faith of workers in Soviet power.' The nine defendants, convicted solely on their interlocking testimonies, were shot." {Gold 103}

Georgy Piatakov, Vice-Commissar for Heavy Industry and the real organizer of Soviet industrialization, was implicated in Kemerovo and arrested. He allegedly instructed the accused "to neglect the ventilation plant in the Kemerovo mines so that the miners should be asphyxiated and resentment against the Soviet Government aroused." Weissberg knew Piatakov personally: he was a totally devoted worker. "You felt that all the superhuman energy of this man went completely into his work, [from whose development he derived great] creative satisfaction. . . . He was the brain of the whole vast organization. And this was the man who was charged by the accused in the Kemerovo trial with having sent an engineer to a small mine in Central Siberia to sabotage the ventilation plant! Did [prosecutor] Vishinsky really think that any reasonably intelligent human being could possibly believe such rubbish? Was that sort of thing calculated to bring down a government? Could anyone believe that that a man of Piatakov's caliber could be guilty of such fantastic stupidity?" {Weiss 55-6}

In the case of the counterrevolutionary Menshevik Union Bureau trial, the whole trial was actually rehearsed by the investigators and the accused (under duress). As related by Medvedev, the state prosecutor, Krylenko, told one of the accused, Yakubovich: "I have no doubt that you personally are not guilty of anything. We are both performing our duty to the party--I have considered and consider you a Communist. I will be the prosecutor at the trial; you will confirm the testimony given during the investigation. This is our duty to the party,

yours and mine." {Med 278} (Later we will discuss the interesting psychology behind this statement; for now we only note how the trial was completely stage-managed, like a theatrical production.)

"Recalling this difficult period, the chemical engineer D. Vitkovsky wrote the following in his autobiographical short novel . . . 'Almost all the prisoners at that time gave in to the investigators and endorsed the fantastic charges against themselves. In fact there was no real investigation. There was only a system for forcing false confessions out of people by threatening to have them shot, to have members of their families arrested, or by promising an easing of their lot.'" {Med 286} In general the trials were a transparent, perverse farce (though not, of course, widely recognized as such at the time)--meant to consolidate the Party's and the regime's power no matter what the cost to truth or to the lives of Soviet citizens.

The well documented Slansky trial in Czechoslovakia (within the Soviet sphere) took place much later--in the 1950s--but is nonetheless revealing. "For several months before the trial . . . the participants in the 'conspiracy' were forced to rehearse the evidence over and over, both individually and as a group. If someone forgot his lines, he was yelled at. Better food was given for good performances. 'Dress rehearsals' were conducted without the judges or prosecutor, but under the investigators' direction. In this way inconsistencies were eliminated. All testimony was simultaneously translated for the Soviet security officials who attended these rehearsals. These Soviet 'teachers' made observations and corrections which were immediately written into the record and memorized by the prisoners. The presence of the defendants inhibited no one. The Slansky trial began on November 20, 1952. A prompter sat close to each defendant. The accused were well-fed and well dressed. Doctor Sommer anxiously looked after their well-being. The judges asked only those questions that had been rehearsed. Most of the accused were sentenced to death." {Med 796}

Says Labin: "It is a patent absurdity to declare that all the surviving leaders of the November Revolution were the paid agents and spies of all sorts of Powers hostile to the Soviet Union and hostile to each other." There were "innumerable material improbabilities," patent falsehoods in the trials. For example: a high official of the railway administration allegedly organized 3,500 accidents in a single year, which would require a veritable army of accomplices. "The rare details" in the trials all proved to be false. {Lab 122}

"By organizing political trials of former oppositionists," says Medvedev, "people who were already discredited, defenseless, powerless, Stalin sought to terrorize the party and the people, to create an emergency situation, and thereby to allow himself, the 'warrior' and 'savior' of the state, to concentrate more power in his own hands. Another important motive was undoubtedly his desire to blame the 'enemies of the people' for the political and economic difficulties that still existed in the country. Every despot building the cult of his own person needs a scapegoat. In 1928-32 it was the 'kulaks' and the 'wreckers' among the bourgeois intelligentsia; in the mid-thirties it was the former members of the various oppositions. But Stalin could not and would not limit himself to the destruction of former oppositionists. The logic of the struggle for power and the logic of the crime led Stalin further, until he finally decimated the main cadres of party

and state personnel and anyone not to his liking in the fields of science and culture, regardless of whether they had belonged to an opposition. Thus, the trials and repression [so far] discussed were only a prologue to an even more frightful campaign of mass terror, one unprecedented in world history." {Med 389} Laqueur says pithily: "Stalinism . . . needs, above all, the presence of an enemy against whom one must defend oneself, an enemy either wholly invented or altogether indistinct." {Laq 237}

By the end of this first phase of the Terror, the true oppositionists (who were not criminals or traitors at all but merely those who had taken issue with the government's policies), some 50-60,000, had been eliminated. Yet the flood of oppression did not abate but instead rose, now with no more fine distinctions. "Stalin and the NKVD undertook the organized and systematic destruction of the basic cadres of the Bolshevik Party and Soviet state." {Med 395} In Gorky, for instance, the entire city party committee and the entire city soviet were imprisoned, as were many other officials. In city after city and region after region, e.g. Belorussia, Medvedev describes a "gigantic meat grinder. Almost all the leading Bolsheviks perished." {Med 412} In Kazakhstan every member of the Central Committee bureau elected at the republic's first party congress was arrested and shot. Most Central Committee members and party secretaries at all levels were arrested. In the end, the whole Bolshevik Old Guard was decimated. {Med 414} In the Red Army, most high officers were discharged: 3 of 5 marshalls, 15 of 16 army commanders, all corps commanders, almost all division commanders and brigade commanders, 1/3 of regimental commissars. {Med 424}

"If one were to go by the materials from the NKVD files of the thirties, one would have to conclude that far-flung networks of 'right-Trotskyist, spy-terrorist, diversionist-wrecking organizations and centers' existed in almost every krai, oblast, and republic, for some reason always headed by the local first secretaries of the party organizations. It was not hard to see that the great bulk of these false accusations did not come to the NKVD from without; they were fabricated by its own investigators. A real factory of lies was in operation, turning out hundreds of thousands of false stories about all kinds of 'plots,' terrorist acts,' 'espionage,' and 'diversions.' [But it] would be a mistake to think that [the NKVD investigators were acting completely independently]. More often Stalin himself set the line to be followed by the investigators. The NKVD men had no authority to question or try to verify the accusations that came from Stalin. Their job was to 'fill in the details' and obtain a confession from the accused by any means necessary." {Med 538}

As the repression progressed, its focus turned from allegedly traitorous individuals to entire classes deemed "counterrevolutionary." A high Cheka official named Martyn Latsis explained: "Under the dictatorship of the proletariat, first of all, the entire big bourgeoisie is counterrevolutionary. But counterrevolution also lurks among the petty bourgeoisie. . . . Military cadets and officers of the old regime, teachers, university students, and all youth in school are in their overwhelming majority a petty-bourgeois element, and it is they who have constituted the fighting forces of our opponent." {Med 653} Medvedev comments: "Social origin alone was sufficient basis, said Latsis, for declaring someone to be an enemy of Soviet power." {Med 654} Thus, the class-dividing Marxian concepts of the "dictatorship of the

proletariat," and the "class struggle" proved to be deadly tools against the populace in the hands of Soviet authoritarians--against the *entire* populace, that is, because it was not only the disfavored classes which were thereby condemned. *All* classes were eventually attacked, each in its turn, picked off one at a time by means of divide and rule.

Hence, as Laqueur notes, unlike Nazi terrorism which "was predominantly directed against Jews, foreigners, and active oppositionists. . . . [and] did not operate indiscriminately," the Russian terror was eventually directed at the entire population. {Laq 64} "[N]o one in Nazi Germany had reason to fear arrest unless he was an active anti-Fascist, a Jew, or belonged to some other undesirable group. The situation in the Soviet Union was different because even the most enthusiastic Stalinists could not feel secure." {Laq 111} Labin describes "a whole people . . . in the grip of a nightmare without end." {Lab 110}

"The fate of a Bukharin or a Kamenev," says Laqueur, "was deeply tragic, but they had opted for radical politics, a calling notoriously associated with high risk. It is more difficult to make sense of the arrest and the murder of a poet or a philosopher or an engineer; their world was not that of affairs of state; they were just following their vocation as best they could. Why should they, their families, and friends have been singled out for destruction? And the issue becomes altogether unfathomable once we reach the 'great unwashed masses'--semiliterate, poor peasants or unskilled workers. To give but one example: A young porter, Ivan Demura, twenty-four years of age, from Blagoveshshensk in Siberia, was arrested on April 4, 1938. Under interrogation, he admitted having been a member of the right-wing Trotskyite bloc that plotted to assist Japan in restoring the capitalist order in the Far East. They found in his possession an antiquated single-barreled shotgun. Under pressure, Demura gave the names of fellow conspirators--porters like him, some fishermen, a builder's mate, and a carpenter. The end of the protocol read: 'There was no material evidence found.' But poor Ivan Demura was nevertheless found guilty. . . . Consequently, the 'highest measure of social defense,' execution, was called for. He was killed on May 16, 1938. . . . Poor, semiliterate Ivan Demura had surely never heard of Trotskyism and right-wingers, let alone the alleged bloc between them. He probably had never seen a Japanese in his life, and he was a loyal citizen of his country. Who had picked him and millions of other unlikely plotters against Stalin? . . . [T]he NKVD . . . were always interested in extracting names of fellow conspirators and because everyone undergoing the full 'treatment' would provide lists of fellow conspirators from their own milieu, the security organs ended up with countless Ivan Demuras." {Laq 112}

Weissberg witnessed this indiscriminate phase of the Terror. "[I]n the second half of 1937 the character of the action changed. The scale of the arrests increased enormously and extended to those who had never been members of any political party. Day and night GPU vans raced through the streets of town and village, taking their victims from their homes, factories, universities, laboratories, workshops, barracks, and government offices. All walks of life were involved, and workmen, peasants, officials and professional men, artists and officers found themselves together in the cells." {Weiss 7} "Millions of ordinary people from town and country were thrown in prison. People who had never bothered their heads about politics;

people who were quite prepared to be loyal to any government provided it did not oppress them too harshly." {Weiss 10}

The reasons for arrest were very often completely nonsensical, as in these instances told by Laqueur and Uralov: "There was the case of a member of a kolkhoz in Siberia, a woman of little education, who had allegedly said . . . while working in the fields [that] the situation would be better if people were permitted to pray freely. . . . [S]he was . . . given a six-year sentence in a labor camp." {Laq 113} "A Moscow musical composer was arrested because an English review had printed a few friendly lines about his work. He was found guilty of having secret contacts with foreigners and shot as a spy." {Ur 87} Cases of this kind of utter lunacy are legion in the Stalinism literature.

The repression became so all-encompassing and systematic that there were actually schedules of arrests drawn up of "enemies of the people" for every district in the country. "A predetermined percentage of persons in each category [intellectuals, industrial workers, peasants] was to be liquidated." Mere cultural identity (or mere association with someone of a certain identity), rather than action, was taken as an "index of guilt," e.g. former enemy classes, anti-Bolshevik parties, kulaks, oppositionists, non-Russian nationalists, and, even more vaguely, "persons of anti-Soviet mentality." Thus, large swathes of the population could find themselves in the regime's crosshairs simply for being who they were. {Ur 30-1} A Politburo "order for 'mass operations' in July 1937 set target numbers for the imprisonment or execution of criminals, village clergy, religious activists, former kulaks, lishentsy (nobles, industrialists), and other 'hostile elements.'" {Gold 5} This and other similar operations resulted in the execution of hundreds of thousands. Ginzburg recounts that "Hardly anyone at the time realized that purges of this sort were carried out strictly in accordance with a prearranged plan which affected this or that category quite irrespectively of the way they had actually behaved." {Ginz 17}

Millions were eventually killed. A number of Russian authors put the figure at 7-8 million. The KGB itself admitted that 3.8 million had been arrested between 1930 and 1953, of which 790,000 had been shot. This of course is not the total. It does not cover, for instance, victims killed without trial. Nor is it known how complete the existing files are. In any case, says Laqueur, "What happened in the Soviet Union was without precedent in peacetime in modern history." {Laq 126-7}

Running throughout the accounts of the Terror is the watchword: "the General Line," or "the party line." This was the term for the approved position of the regime on any given policy issue or topic, at any given time. Especially among the intellectual classes, it was literally courting death to deviate from this "line." All thought must be constrained within the strictures of the permitted Marxist-Leninist-Stalinist doctrines (whose interpretation changed constantly and arbitrarily, keeping everyone off balance). In this spirit, an All-Union Conference having to do with industrial planning committed itself to "a Socialist modernization of its methods . . . on the basis of dialectical materialism" and to "make an end of 'bourgeois objectivism' according to which science . . . [is] an end in itself. Our scientific work must uphold the principle of the

superiority of the proletarian class and of the Communist Party. . . . We must fight against all deviations and uphold the General Line of the party." {Lab 323} Similar fealty to the "party line" was declared by communist loyalists in many other, ostensibly non-political fields--or at least demanded of them by the authorities. For instance, one of the secretaries of the Central Committee, L. Kaganovitch, told the Red Professors: "Any science that does not contribute to the success of the general policy of the Party is not science at all but mere irresponsibility!" {Ur 102}

"Not actions," says Medvedev, "not even intentions, but opinions became the basis for criminal prosecution and physical annihilation. For a long time people whose opinions were nonsocialist had been victimized by the punitive agencies even if they were completely loyal to the Soviet regime. But as the Stalinist system developed, all Soviet citizens, including party members, who objected to specific measures taken by the Soviet government or to particular decisions made by the Central Committee, or who only disagreed with certain aspects of the party line--all such persons fell into the category of 'enemies of the people' and became victims of repression. And since a great many incorrect decisions were made in the thirties, the number of 'enemies' became quite large. For example, after the first elections to the Supreme Soviet in late 1937 a worker expressed some criticism to his close friends concerning the new electoral system, under which only one candidate appeared on the ballot. Another worker at a trade union meeting asked why semolina [a coarse flour] was sold to managers and officials at closed distribution stores but had long been unavailable in stores for ordinary workers. Both workers were quickly arrested and sentenced to ten years imprisonment for 'anti-Soviet agitation.'" {Med 607}

Needless to say, in this Inquisition-type atmosphere all political opposition of any kind was deemed traitorous; indeed it became suicidal. There was no due process whatsoever. And not only anti-government political opinions but *any* "incorrect" idea, even just an inadvertent slip of the tongue, was often fatal. Reviewing Soviet law under Stalin, Labin observes that "anyone can be sentenced to death for anything without the opportunity of defence, without being able to cite witnesses, without the right of defence by a lawyer and without the right of appeal." {Lab 340} In one case recounted by Eugenia Ginzburg, a man waiting along with her and others to be interrogated told how, in answer to the question "Who founded the new type of party?" during a required political study circle, he had blurted out "Plekhanov" (an early Marxist theoretician long since out of favor). He hadn't done his reading homework, and he thought he had heard that name whispered from behind him. "[A]nd that was what finished me. First I got a reprimand, and then things went from bad to worse. They started calling me a Menshevik, of all things! . . . So they threw me out of the Party and I lost my job, and the children are starving. And my wife . . . She can't stand much more. She'll die. And all because of Plekhanov." {Ginz 28} A woman was given a 10-year sentence for "extolling an enemy of the people" after casually mentioning that the condemned and executed Marshal Tukhachevsky had been a handsome man. Another was arrested and given eight years for having had two books by Bukharin (which had probably belonged to her arrested son) in her house. {Lip 48, 54}



Wendy Goldman describes a dynamic of guilt by association on steroids, whereby the alleged guilt of (initially) a few individuals spread virulently throughout the population like a highly contagious disease. "[E]ach person who was arrested cast a deadly political shadow over their circle of intimates, colleagues, and acquaintances, who became suspect in turn." {Gold 178} Every newly discovered "enemy of the people," whether designated as such by the authorities or denounced as such by other citizens encouraged to do so (divide and rule) led to many others, as all of the original enemy's contacts also became presumed "enemies." "In this way, incrimination by association spread rapidly to encompass ever more people." {Gold 217}

In other words: You arrest people for no good reason--utterly arbitrarily and with no due process--and then everyone who knew them is also subject to arrest in an endless spiral of unfounded insanity. Goldman describes all of this as "the absurdity of the reigning madness" and "a surreal and macabre confusion" where "chaos reigned," "a phantasmagorical world peopled by enemies and wreckers." {Gold 196, 201, 206} This writer would call it a descent into nonsense land. In any case, Goldman's book does a fine job of bringing out the utter lunacy of what was happening in Stalinist Russia. "As arrests and expulsions multiplied, the hysteria intensified. The demands for loyalty grew ever more fantastic, producing in turn more prevaricators who needed to be 'unmasked.' The terror had become self-generating, manufacturing ten new 'sinners' with the 'unmasking' of each one. . . . Arguably, every citizen was part of a pattern of interlocking circles that overlaid the entire country." {Gold 220} "Repression, which began as a series of surgical strikes against 'terrorists,' had broadened to include former oppositionists, faithful party members, and large social and national groups suspected of political disloyalty. To counter the threat of 'terrorists,' the Stalinist leadership had eliminated civil liberties, empowered the police, and undermined the rule of law. Eventually, methods of repression were applied to workers as well, the very group that the revolution had sought to empower. . . . [O]rdinary people filled the prisons and the camps." {Gold 260}

The terror peaked in 1937-38, with 1937 being the most frightful year.

---

## TERROR - PSYCHOLOGY

It has already been intimated that the Terror was as much psychological as physical. People were certainly imprisoned, tortured, sent to lethal labor camps, shot, and killed in various other ways. But first and foremost they were indoctrinated, brainwashed, confused, and made to live in a world of fear, of manufactured reality, of censored or coerced thought, i.e. in a world of lies and make-belief which, ipso facto, they could hardly understand. In other words, they were not only assaulted physically but, quite literally, terrorized mentally.

Medvedev recounts: "In 1936-38 [during the show trials] the overwhelming majority of Soviet citizens, not only industrial and office workers but intellectuals as well, had no doubt that real

enemies of the people were seated on the defendants' bench in the House of Trade Unions. Twelve- or thirteen-year-old schoolchildren, such as I was, believed this too, as did people like Yevgeny Gnedin who took part in the organization of the trials. In his memoirs Gnedin [reminiscing on the trials, which he calls 'those monstrous judicial crimes . . . this monstrous act of evil'] writes . . . 'We became victims of the butchers long before we fell directly into their hands. Even when people are not behind bars, they can be fettered by unseen chains. One of many possible illustrations of this thought is the attitude people had toward the frame-up trials. Not only out of primitive fear did the loyal citizen dismiss any doubts that such a huge number of wreckers, spies, and enemies of the people were at large in the Soviet Union. The web in which we were caught was more complex than handcuffs and irons. We were bound by prejudices and illusions. We subjected ourselves to dogmas, not wishing to lose hope. In our minds there lurked a hidden fear of quite a special kind: If the trials of enemies of the people were analyzed consistently, the chain of logical conclusions [i.e. that they were staged, false] could become a noose around our own necks [i.e. everyone was himself either implicated in the crimes or in mortal danger or both]. . . . I can explain things this way as I write my memoirs. But I was incapable of such reasoning at the time of which I write. Among people of my acquaintance--and I am referring to unquestionably honest people--I did not know a single one who would have taken upon himself the burden of the final logical conclusions from an analysis of the political events of that time, in particular, the trials.' . . . The truth [summarizes Medvedev] is that the trials were completely fraudulent. They were monstrous theatrical productions that had to be rehearsed many times before they could be shown to spectators. . . . Most of the testimony consisted of outright lies, deliberately fabricated in the torture chambers of the NKVD and put into the mouths of the accused by sadistic investigators." {Med 375-6}

The Soviet government deeply depended on the people's loyalty, their trust in it. "One of the most terrible features of the repression in the thirties was that the masses, trusting the party and Stalin, were drawn into it. Hundreds of thousands of simple and essentially honorable folk, guided by the best motives, were led astray by the campaign against 'enemies of the people.' Millions were poisoned by suspicion [of their countrymen]. They believed Stalin's story about a ubiquitous underground and were caught up in the spy mania. The campaign against 'enemies' and 'wreckers' acquired a mass character, like the Stakhanovite movement [Aleksei Stakhanov was a legendary, superhuman hero-worker lionized by the regime]. The central newspapers were especially zealous in inflaming this mass psychosis. Almost every issue of *Pravda* and *Izvestia* called on the workers to seek out and expose enemies of the people. . . . 'Enemies of the people' were to be sought everywhere. *Pravda* declared that 'not one disorder, not one accident, should go unnoticed. We know that assembly lines do not stop by themselves, machines do not break by themselves, boilers do not burst by themselves. Someone's hand is behind every such act. Is it the hand of the enemy? That is the first question we should ask in such cases.'" {Med 608}

It has been noted by many observers that the Russian people had for ages been accustomed to being ruled by despots, and this, it is widely thought, must have been at least a significant factor in their acquiescence to Stalin. "As in the time of Ivan the Terrible," says Medvedev, "people created an earthly god and then could not raise a finger against the idol they had created. A

nineteenth-century radical historian described with horror how 'Prince Repnin, impaled on a stake and dying slowly . . . praised the tsar, his lord and executioner.' The historian ascribed such behavior to 'the inculcation of distorted views, for self-abasement and submission to the tsar were unalterably sacred ideals for these people from the time of their early youth, with the result that their strength of spirit acted only to stifle the indignation within them and the natural impulse to rebel." {Med 620}

But Stalin did not rely solely on the cultural proclivity of the Russian people to admire their rulers to achieve and maintain his overblown authority. "[T]he boundless praise of Stalin did not arise spontaneously; it was organized by Stalin and his creatures. And this well-organized campaign did its job. From their earliest years schoolchildren were taught that everything good came from Stalin." {Med 621} "[T]he adulation of Stalin . . . had been drilled into [the heads of young people] from infancy." {Med 680}

Whether from ancient mores, youthful indoctrination, or simply nationalist loyalty and support for the revolution that all middle-aged and older Russians had experienced together, the belief in the regime among much of the populace was extremely deep, even adamant, all the more so since the alternative explanation for events--that the government was evil to the core and orchestrating the calamities--was all but unthinkable. "The majority of Soviet people believed in Stalin and the NKVD in those years and were sincere in their indignation against 'enemies of the people.' But many people, even members of the NKVD, had their doubts . . . [but] people who felt some doubts could not admit to themselves that [by condemning their fellow citizens, as so many Russians were compelled to do] they were in some measure accomplices in crimes. So they forced themselves to believe in Stalin, who knew everything and could not make mistakes. They found mitigation for themselves in the cult of his personality. The writer A. Pismenny, who wrote many novels justifying the repression of the thirties . . . and who in later years deeply regretted having done that, gave the following explanation: '[I]n those years it was impossible to understand what was happening. You could become an informer, go mad, commit suicide, but if you wanted to live, the most convenient way for an unhappy, distraught, but honorable person clinging with his last ounce of strength to his place in society--I repeat and will go on repeating a thousand times--was to believe. To believe without reasoning, without second thoughts, without proofs, as people believe in omens, in god, in the devil, in life beyond the grave. The thought that all social actions could be prompted by the criminal designs of a single man who had appropriated the full plenitude of power, and that this man was Stalin, was blasphemous, was unbelievable.'" {Med 622}

Many people sensed deep down inside that something was terribly wrong, but they could not articulate what it was--at least not openly--or come to grips with it, and this caused them great anguish. "Boris Yefimov . . . wrote the following in his memoirs: 'It would take a really talented writer . . . to reproduce the thoughts and feelings that possessed thousands and thousands of people in that period. There was agonizing bewilderment and a passionate desire to understand something; there was unspeakable fear and faith in common sense; there was hope flooding the heart and despair laying waste the soul. How can one describe the condition of people who sensed with all their being the approach of a terrible disaster and did not know

how to escape it, how to save themselves, and remained bound and helpless as in a nightmare? . . . How can one describe the mood of people who had no possibility of explaining anything because questions were lacking . . . who understood the full horror of their position, the ominous danger hanging over them and those close to them, and at the same time had to act as if there was no cause for concern, as if everything was all right, had to preserve their cheerfulness and capacity to work?" {Med 631}

For the victims of repression in particular (their acquaintances having abandoned them), "Incomprehension was even more serious than the lack of solidarity, the feeling of isolation, in depriving many people of the strength to resist. Even such a well-informed and intelligent man as Mikhail Kolstov could not comprehend what was going on": From Kolstov's book: "What is happening?" Kolstov used to repeat, walking up and down in his office . . . 'I feel I'm going crazy. I am a member of the editorial board of *Pravda*, a well-known journalist, a deputy (to the Supreme Soviet): it would seem that I should be able to explain to others the meaning of what is happening, the reasons for so many exposes and arrests. But in fact I, like any terrified philistine, know nothing, understand nothing. I am bewildered, in the dark.'" What we seem to see here is a failure of imagination and thought. The ominous clouds themselves were obvious to most, but the people could either not understand or not accept what they meant: that their rulers were conniving to destroy them. {Med 673}

Thus a good many Communist true believers were loyal to the bitter end. "Calm, self-control, and nonresistance were . . . the parting [words of] advice to his friends from Iosif Pyatnitsky, a close colleague of Lenin's. On the day before his arrest Pyatnitsky met Tsvitsivadze, who had been expelled from the party, though his loyalty could not be doubted. 'For the party,' said Pyatnitsky, 'we must endure everything, just so that it remains alive.' Within a few months both Tsvitsivadze and Pyatnitsky were shot." {Med 675} "In one prison [a certain] Shabalkin met a group of party officials who argued that if the Soviet government was obliged to take such harsh measures, that meant they were necessary. After suffering the most refined tortures, they still sang the song with the words: 'I know no other country where people breathe so freely.'" {Med 676}

Commenting on the phenomenon of the "true believer," Medvedev mentions the Soviet writer Boris Gorbatov as "an example of sincere delusion . . . as Mikhail Baitalsky's description indicated: 'Of all my friends Boris Gorbatov was probably the greatest enthusiast. . . . For me and my other Odessa friends, for all of us who had been in the Left Opposition, faith, once it had been cracked and glued back together again, no longer gave off such a clear crystal tone. But Boris in the early thirties rang out just as clear as ten years earlier when he first joined the Komsomol. . . . Times change, but a person's traits of character remain. . . . He is a believer. Can a believer imagine that the devil has taken up residence in the holy sepulcher? Seeing the horns sticking out behind the golden halo, the believer does not trust his own eyes and thinks he is imagining something. He crosses himself three times and utters the Lord's name. And soon he has convinced himself that this was a mirage and the devil's gold-tinted horns swim before his eyes, taking on the features of a nimbus around the head of a saint. And he prays to the devil and makes his children pray too. But that is no saint they are praying to.'" {Med 619}

Among the true-believing Communist Party members there were of course not only intellectuals but more simple souls, for whom, having joined the Party, remaining loyal and dutiful to it was the easiest thing to do, the path of least resistance. Any deep thinking to acquire true comprehension of the political turmoil surrounding them was downright hazardous to the pristine faith of such people. "The closed mind, the refusal to think independently, was the epistemological basis of the cult of personality, It was not only degenerates and careerists who supported the cult; there were also sincere believers, genuinely convinced that everything they did was necessary for the revolution. They believed in the political trials of 1936-1938; they believed that the class struggle was intensifying [as Stalin declared]; they believed in the necessity for mass repression. They became willing or unwilling accomplices in Stalin's crimes, although subsequently many of them also became his victims. Mikhail Baitalsky, in his memoirs, gave a very accurate description of one such dogmatist and follower of orders from above--his first wife, Yeva: '[Yeva, a shop worker,] always remained an enthusiast. It's simply amazing how little she changed [over the years]! Just as she began with faith in the revolution, so she believed faithfully to the end. . . . She could not think of herself outside of the revolution. For her the revolution merged totally with the party, and so she could not think of herself outside the party, which in her heart was always spelled with a capital letter. . . . Since the Party had sanctioned the shooting of its previous leaders as 'self-confessed spies and murderers,' that meant they actually were spies and murderers. No other proof was required for Yeva, so long as there was a Decision by the Party. . . . Was Yeva good? Did she love people? Those are questions I find difficult to answer with a simple 'Yes.' Cruelty sickened her. . . . But her goodness gave way before another feeling, which had grown within her to incredible dimensions--the sense of duty she had acquired over the years. The notion of good or evil in Yeva's consciousness was built on the firm foundation of the political knowledge obtained, first, in Komsomol study circles, then at the provincial party school, then from party resolutions [i.e. she was thoroughly indoctrinated]. Believers must be ready to scorn not only their own suffering but also that of others when their duty to the faith requires it. . . . Yeva, with her faith, did not demand clarity in her own thoughts; she undoubtedly felt that such clarity was dangerous for her bright, serene faith. Yeva needed only clarity in the instructions sent from above: Do this, don't do that. The dogmas of faith must be indisputable. Therefore, there is no more convincing theoretical argument than a resolution, a decision, a decree.'" {Med 697}

Mentioned earlier was the case of a woman arrested and sentenced to prison for having had two Bukharin books in her house. This woman had earlier disowned her own son for the sake of the Party. Elinor Lipper relates: "To her the Party was still the purest and most just of all parties; to her it had a copyright on all truth and wisdom. When the time came and she was told to testify for the Party against her son, she sacrificed even her child to the Party. Her mother's love, she assumed, must have blinded her--for the Party could not be mistaken." {Lip 56}

Medvedev adds that "Through propaganda and the educational system many primitive dogmas and cliches were drilled [not only into the heads of the Communist Party members but] into the masses as well, becoming for them a guide to action. . . . [D]ogmatic and sectarian thinking on a mass scale only served the victory of Stalin and Stalinism." {Med 701} Both wilful ignorance

and blind belief were rampant throughout the land. "There is a period," says Laqueur "in which information about mass murder had been received but was rejected. . . . [P]eople were disoriented because they had to cope with a situation that was essentially new, for which there was no precedent and for which there existed no compass to guide their actions. Ideological bias acted as a further impediment: The more faithful and loyal the believer in communism and the Bolshevik party, the more difficult it was for him to confront the reality of Stalinism." {Laq 28} "[Stalin's] authority was enormous. If he said that the country was surrounded by enemies, that there were countless internal enemies, and that the class struggle would not decrease but intensify the more the country approached socialism, this had a very great impact on the mentality of a great many people. It helps to explain that the wild accusations against so many people, high and low, did not become a matter of ridicule but were believed, or at least half-believed, by many for a long time." {Laq 135} It is thus abundantly clear, again, just how critical a factor indoctrination was in the acquiescence--or at least the mental paralysis--of the general population in the face of the cataclysmic events unfolding around them.

In her truly harrowing memoir, Ginzburg describes the profound catharsis she experienced while in prison--apparently the kind of mental transformation any Russian had to undergo to fully face the reality of the Terror: "Garey [a prisoner in the neighboring cell] hated Stalin with a bitter passion, and when I asked him what he believed to be the cause of the current troubles, he replied tersely: 'Koba [Stalin's nickname].' 'It's his eighteenth Brumaire [Napoleon's coup d'etat making himself dictator after the French Revolution]. Physical extermination of all the best people in the Party, who stand or might stand in the way of his definitely establishing his dictatorship.' For the first time in my life I was faced by the problem of having to think things out for myself--of analyzing circumstances independently and deciding my own line of conduct. 'It's not as if you were in the hands of the Gestapo.' [Her NKVD interrogator] Major Yelshin's words rang in my mind. How much easier and simpler if I had been! A Communist held by the Gestapo--I would have known exactly how to behave. But here? Here I had first to determine who these people were, who kept me imprisoned. Were they fascists in disguise? Or victims of some super-subtle provocation, some fantastic hoax?" These, it seems, are the kinds of questions--despite the understandable shock and confusion--that you have to ask yourself when the institutions you have trusted all your life turn out to be your persecutors. {Ginz 74}

But many if not most would not ask themselves such questions, or they would not answer them honestly. They went instead in the opposite direction: nurturing, through mental gymnastics, their commitment to the regime that was destroying them. One of the most intriguing episodes in Weissberg's thoroughly interesting account is his long-running dialogue with a fellow prisoner, one Rozhansky, who, bit by bit, laid out a certain loyalist philosophy, the essence of which is that there is no circumstance whatever--including severe repression by the authorities, torture by the secret police, or fathomless deception by the government--under which it is permissible for a good Communist to fail to support and obey the Party and its leaders: "'I consider it to be my Party duty to make whatever confessions the examiner requires.' 'Either you're mad or I am, Rozhansky. Why should your Party duty require you to make false confessions?' . . . 'You're a member of the Party and you still use bourgeois concepts such as truth and lies though they're devoid of all sense when applied to Soviet conditions.'" {Weiss

177} "[T]here are certain political necessities and the Party has the right to demand that Party members should recognize them.' . . . 'Comrade Rozhansky, do you really think it can ever be the duty of a comrade to sign things which simply aren't true?' 'I believe it is the duty of every Communist to subordinate himself to the necessities of the political struggle at all stages.'" {Weiss 178} "We can only hope that the man at the helm knows where he's going. Perhaps one day we shall all know, if we don't go under before that. But it's our duty to the movement and to ourselves to bend now." {Weiss 182} "[P]erhaps I shall never be free again, but the feeling of dedicating myself completely to the cause which was the lodestar of my youth, and the knowledge that even in the darkest night I can't go wrong give me peace of mind. The aim of our struggle was great enough for millions of the best men and women of all ages and all nations to sacrifice themselves to it, and it's still great enough for me." {Weiss 183} "The Central Committee isn't caught napping. It is aware all the time of the historical interests of our country and of the working class of the world. When a measure becomes necessary the Politburo issues the right instructions at precisely the right moment." {Weiss 188} "A fact is not a fact for millions of people until it's been officially confirmed. You don't understand the importance of revolutionary propaganda. If the truth about the famine had been openly discussed we [the Communist regime] shouldn't have survived in 1931 and 1932. A fact which is openly proclaimed has an electrifying effect. Peasant insurrections would have swept us away. The first attempts to found a socialist order of society would have been drowned in the flood of counterrevolution." {Weiss 195} "The examiner is there to decide what serves the interests of the Soviet Union; not you. It's up to you to support him. For a good Party man the examiner is a commander in the difficult struggle the Soviet Union wages to defend itself. It's up to you to obey his orders. . . . No one asks the meaning of it all anymore. It's not our business. We place ourselves in the hands of the Soviet power and we are confident that it will find the right path." {Weiss 199}

This prisoner eventually betrayed Weissberg to the NKVD (in a way that is unnecessary to detail here). But, interestingly, Weissberg could not hate him; their relationship was not so simple. "Despite everything that had gone before, I felt no resentment toward him. On the contrary, I was sorry for him. I realized only too well what he must have been through before he fell as low as that. I looked at his worn, emaciated face and his thin, bony hands, and all anger left me. If he wanted to survive at all he had to go the way of least resistance and do whatever the GPU told him to do." {Weiss 220} It should be kept in mind that Weissberg, who was never quite broken by his captors, was a prominent foreigner (Austrian) and therefore relatively privileged. Although his prison/interrogation experience was horrific enough, it was not as bad as that of his Russian comrades, who were more severely treated physically and therefore more likely to surrender to their tormentors.

Medvedev describes Stalin's stranglehold on the press and the general muzzling of free speech: "When Stalin achieved one-man rule in the thirties he extended his personal control of all sources of information to an unheard-of degree. Party members and citizens in general were given no other information than Stalin and his aides thought necessary. No motion picture could be shown to the public unless Stalin personally had seen and approved it. The idea of a proletarian monopoly on the press, which Lenin meant as a purely temporary measure, was perverted by Stalin. . . . Engels wrote long ago that in a country where all sources of knowledge are under government control, where nothing can be spoken or printed without prior permission from the government, it is very difficult to arrive at correct ideas. Stalin had no desire for Soviet citizens to develop a correct understanding of things. He knew that the absence of public disclosure enabled him to deceive the party and the people more effectively. . . . In her open letter to *Izvestia* on the fifteenth anniversary of Stalin's death, Lydia Chukovskaya described the situation: 'What got us into this unprecedented trouble? Into this utter defenselessness of people in front of a machine rolling over them? Into this historically unexampled merger, fusion, union, of the state security organs (which were breaking the law every minute of the day and night) with the procuratorial [i.e. judicial] organs that exist to uphold the law (yet become obsequiously blind for years on end), and finally with the newspapers, which are supposed to defend justice but instead excreted planned, mechanized slander on the persecuted--millions of millions of lying words--on "hardened," "vicious" enemies of the people, who had "sold themselves to foreign intelligence services," and are now rehabilitated [i.e. they were always innocent]? When and how was this accomplished, this combination, undoubtedly the most dangerous of all the chemical combinations known to scientists? How was it possible? . . . The murder of the truthful word--it too derives from the cursed time of Stalin. And it was one of the blackest crimes in all history. The loss of the right to independent thought closed the door in Stalin's time to doubt, questioning, cries of alarm, and opened it to the self-confident, shameless, multi-copied, and multi-persistent lie. The hourly repeated lie kept people from finding out what was being done in their native country to their fellow citizens. . . . Whoever knew or guessed was condemned to shut up, keep quiet, for fear of perishing the next day; not fear of trouble at work, unemployment, or poverty, but plain physical destruction. What a great honor was shown to words in that time: for them people were killed.' Thus Stalin used the party's temporary monopoly of the printed word to the detriment of the party itself and the Soviet people." {Med 628}

During the purge, scholars of all types were accused of struggling against the Soviet regime, and for that reason arrested. As one can imagine given the Orwellian climate, historians were especially closely scrutinized and repressed. "[P]eople who did not write the history of Bolshevism in the prescribed way" were fired. {Med 304} Labin quotes an author saying that "We burn more books than the Nazis do. . . . Soviet librarians are under closer surveillance, and are more threatened, than most other Soviet citizens. . . . Purges go on ceaselessly. . . . A collection of official newspapers and journals of the preceding year becomes forbidden literature." {Lab 329} Uralov describes how "Text-books which had been printed by the million . . . were withdrawn from circulation and burnt in case they should contain an unfortunate phrase, a word, anything at all which some unhappy 'Trotskyite' might at some moment have let fall. A series of monographs produced by the collective labours of historians



to elucidate certain matters relating to the 1905 revolution . . . suffered the same fate on the grounds that they did not sufficiently expose Trotskyite theories. . . . Numerous historical works, conceived in the purest spirit of Marxism and Sovietism, were confiscated for the simple reason that they made no reference to the leading part played by Stalin in the October Revolution. Later on, works were confiscated for not mentioning Stalin's speeches and writings." {Ur 109}

Furthermore, "the verbatim reports of all Party Congresses . . . were caused to disappear. This was done in the first place because nearly all the leading delegates at these congresses, with the exception of Stalin, had been arrested and shot as 'enemies of the people'; and secondly because no one reading those reports could possibly believe that Stalin, shoulder to shoulder with Lenin, had been the organizer of the Bolshevik Party and the leader of the October Revolution. . . . One may also find in them the speeches of Stalin's adversaries, now shot, who, whether they were to the right or to the left, were unanimous in asserting that Stalin's aim was to establish the bureaucratic dictatorship of the Party, and that he was pursuing a policy which threatened the proletariat with pauperism and the agricultural workers with destitution. Stalin considered, not without reason, that these verbatim reports could not be read by the new generation of Soviet citizens without danger to himself. All the Party's historical publications were therefore withdrawn from circulation." {Ur 110-1}

Weissberg describes "the domination of the lie" in the Soviet Union, "a gigantic falsification of the truth down to the smallest details," and the literal "rewriting of history." {Weiss 70, 480} All of our authors portray what can only be described as a veritable regime of lies. The Stalin-era Soviet Union, says Uralov, is "a regime which is in effect a monstrous lie built up into a social structure." {Ur 201} The "lie" was in fact pervasive; it was not confined to literature. "The disparity between word and deed," says Medvedev, "penetrated every sphere of party and government activity in the Stalin years. . . . All of the mass media embellished reality, ignoring difficulties, conflicts, injustices, and arbitrary acts." {Med 852} Laqueur speaks of "the false pretence, the utter mendacity, that permeated so deeply every aspect of public life." {Laq 199} Labin states: "To the farthest corners of the Soviet power the lie reigns supreme. The observer of the Russian scene is soon aghast and . . . feels an inclination to vomit. On the ashes of a crumbled ideal and amidst a harried and betrayed people a swirl of impenetrable lies blankets all access to reality. Figures, communiques, . . . proclamations . . . constitutions . . . everything is a travesty, a counterfeit, a parody, an invention; everything is changed, adulterated, puffed up, spoiled, and destroyed. And truth itself, met with by chance through the network of an intrigue, appears somnambulistic, like a thing in a dream, amidst a succession of shams and distortions. One sixth of the globe . . . [is] barricaded behind the lie." {Lab 161}

Utley speaks of the "[hell] of knowing the truth and not daring to speak it," and of how she "had at long last adapted myself, learned to hide my thoughts and feelings in public, learned to avoid political subjects in conversation, and to talk only about food or rooms or scandal, except to one or two intimate friends." {Ut 167, 173} Weissberg recounts that "The growing terror instituted by the GPU in recent years had forced . . . a secret language on us. We had good cause to fear GPU spies everywhere. People became afraid to talk openly even to their friends. People were

horrified at the thought of straying too far away from the official line. . . . The dictatorship of the lie dominated the press, the school, the radio, the film, the factories, and the meetings of the Party. It had dominated even before the period of the big trials, but at least at that time no one had dreamed of asking people to believe such improbable and fantastic stories. The gulf between what one could believe and what one was supposed to believe widened enormously. The contradiction opened up in this way by the terrorism of the GPU poisoned the relations between men. Men denounced their friends for fear of being denounced by them. A man no longer trusted his own brother, and he no longer spoke openly to his own wife. . . . [W]e were literally afraid of our own words. In this period any expression of opinion would be equivalent to adopting a political position in irreconcilable contradiction to the prevailing line of the Party and the dictator." {Weiss 58}

Labin relates several cases of Potemkin Village-type dissimulations where rundown Soviet factories or towns were suddenly remade into respectable places for the benefit of foreign delegations. For instance: "[I]n September, 1933 . . . a Mr. Harry Lang, a member of the American Federation of Labour and correspondent of . . . an American daily newspaper printed in German [visited Kiev and wrote:] '[W]e became the involuntary witnesses of a theatrical production a la Potemkin. . . . The day before, at two o'clock in the morning, the whole population was turned out to clean the streets and house fronts and repair the pavements. Tens of thousands of hands were mobilized to give a dirty and dilapidated town a European appearance. All the shops and all the co-operatives were closed. Strict instructions were issued that on no account were queues to be formed on the streets. The vagrant children and all the other vagabonds of the town were rounded up and driven off. Policemen on horseback paraded in the squares, a sight absolutely unique for the inhabitants.'" {Lab 18} The other authors describe similar staged deceptions.

---

## GOVERNMENTAL STRUCTURE / COMMUNIST PARTY

The Soviet Union, called by its spokespersons "the most democratic country in the world," was never a democracy at all (and neither are any Western countries, but that's another story). The top leadership of the Bolshevik Party--an oligarchy of a couple dozen persons--was in charge from the beginning. Likewise, the notion of the government of the Soviet Union being an actual "dictatorship of the proletariat"--i.e. the rule of the veritable proletariat as a whole--was a patent fiction. Even if it *were* possible for a few members of an entire socioeconomic class to represent the whole--which it is not--not one of the thirty members of the Central Committee at the time of the Twelfth Party Congress (1923) was a worker or a peasant. Not one of the top leaders at any point during the Stalinist period had any conception whatever of societal democracy, much less did any of them aim for or attempt to implement it. Trotsky, for instance, was constantly arguing about which policy among those discussed within high Party circles was the correct one, not about the essential structure of power in the nation as a whole.

The Bolshevik Party was a small minority party within Russia up until the Revolution. "In order to maintain itself in power," says Uralov, "this minority of conspirators created a system of terrorist dictatorship by a single party. This dictatorship was based essentially on the secret police force founded on the 20th of December 1917"--the Cheka (later: OGPU, NKVD). Between 1917 and 1923, 1.9 million people were shot by the regime. {Ur 17} The Soviet Union was from the start a police state and only became more thoroughly one with time. "In reality," says Medvedev, "what existed [in the Soviet Union] was not so much a dictatorship of the proletariat as a dictatorship of the Communist Party, which gradually turned into the dictatorship of the strongest faction of the party, and in the first half of the thirties became the dictatorship of the top echelons of the party, a special kind of 'dictatorship of the leaders.'" {Med 564} Finally, of course, Stalin usurped *all* power over the heads of the other Party leaders (the Central Committee) and the governmental bodies.

Lenin's death gave rise to an intense succession struggle--a struggle for power. Needless to say, such a thing does not occur in a democracy, where the people as a whole--not any individual or faction--are always in power. The fact that it was a Stalin rather than a Trotsky or someone else who finally emerged on top obviously had no bearing on the nature of the system itself--which was oligarchy. This system arose directly out of the 1917 Revolution, a revolution that aimed for socialism/communism, not democracy at all. Labin states: "[T]he concentration of all power in the hands of the party and the militarisation of inner party life were by no means inventions of Stalin, but the deliberate master-strokes of Bolshevism, persistently aimed at by Lenin." {Lab 91} Opposition leaders (while they still lived) sometimes called for greater "democracy" *within the Party*, but they never made any demands for the extension of democracy to the masses, i.e. *societal* democracy, democracy properly so called. There simply was no serious democratic ideology among the Bolsheviks. There was therefore no solid ground of democratic principle for Stalin's opposition to stand upon, and this put them in a hopeless situation which ultimately led to their demise. Says Labin: "Within the framework of exclusively Bolshevik methods and notions, which the Opposition was unwilling to break, Stalin and his powerful apparatus undoubtedly had the greater practical advantage." {Lab 99} In fact, all opposition groups eventually capitulated.

Given that the system was a brutal authoritarian dictatorship that would tolerate no criticism or dissent, all opposition was in effect illegal, and all policy differences within the Party leadership necessarily became profoundly personal, with the losers (e.g. Trotsky, Bukharin) suffering debilitating if not fatal consequences. To say the least, Russian politics was not a matter of individuals merely having different opinions and being able to express them freely. In a forum where only the most ruthless intriguers could win and prosper and thereby gain absolute control, all policy disagreements become titanic, deadly power struggles. In general, whether for party leaders or the common citizens, there could be no such thing as independent political opinion in the Soviet Union; it was either the party line or the gallows.

One of the more interesting aspects of Stalin's dictatorship was that it was to a large degree founded on his use of orthodox Marxist tenets, which he wielded effectively as simplistic

propaganda weapons. As already suggested, none was more useful to Stalin than the notion of the existence of firmly entrenched, hierarchical class divisions in society. Laqueur relates that the philosopher Aleksander Tsipko "sees the origins of Stalinism in the belief of the Bolshevik old guard that the working class and, a fortiori, its vanguard, the party, were always right . . . [while] the character of the peasantry was considered fundamentally petty bourgeois [i.e. inferior]. . . . [and] the nonproletarian classes, which were regarded as an impediment on the road to a better future, constituted no less than 80 percent of the population." {Laq 239} Thus class domination, i.e. dictatorship--not of "the proletariat" but of a revolutionary-intellectual elite--was built into the doctrinaire Marxism of the Communists. "Marxism-Leninism had placed too much emphasis on the nature of a class-based society to the detriment of all other factors." {Laq 241} Medvedev says: "Covering himself with the thesis that the class struggle was intensifying, [Stalin] gradually accumulated more and more power." {Med 637} Indeed, the "class struggle" trope, as discussed earlier, was the perfect basis--and cover--for a divide and conquer strategy.

As for the formal bodies of government, they were largely subordinate to the Communist Party (or, more accurately, the ruling cabal within the Communist Party). Says Uralov: "[T]he power of the Soviets [the formal legislative institutions] is a myth: the Stalin regime merely conserves the appearance in order to conceal its real nature. {Ur 16} Says Medvedev: "The chief agency of supervision and control [in the nation], above all other governmental institutions, was the Bolshevik [i.e. Communist] Party itself. The party's best people were placed in key government posts, and all state institutions were obliged to account for themselves to party organizations and to carry out directives issued by the party. . . . Under the system of one-party rule, the Bolshevik Party, especially in the case of its leading bodies, ceased to be just an association of like-minded people. The party apparatus became the most important part of the governmental system. Certain party bodies, in particular the Central Committee and the party congresses, in fact became the legislative organs of the Soviet system. . . . Top party leaders had more power than directors of government agencies. . . . [T]he heightening of the party's influence weakened that of the soviets as representative bodies. Soviet congresses did not so much discuss and draft legislation as give formal approval to directives made by party congresses and the party Central Committee." {Med 706}

Bertrand Russell, after visiting the Soviet Union, explained in his book that "The All-Russian Soviet, which is constitutionally the supreme body, to which the People's Commissaries are responsible, meets seldom, and has become increasingly formal. Its sole function at present, so far as I could discover, is to ratify, without discussion, previous decisions of the Communist Party on matters (especially concerning foreign policy) upon which the constitution requires its decision. All real power is in the hands of the Communist Party, who number about 600,000 in a population of about 120 millions. I never came across a Communist by chance: the people whom I met in the streets or in the villages, when I could get into conversation with them, almost invariably said they were of no party." {Russ 77}

Labin describes how all of the many new "auxiliary" organizations in all areas of public life have a controlling "fraction" of Communist Party members. "In this way the Communist Party

keeps a close control over even the less important phases of public life. Nothing whatever escapes its tentacles." {Lab 51}

Under the dictatorship, the bureaucracy--a new class composed largely of Communist Party members--became a self-serving colossus. "The political passivity of the masses," says Medvedev, "the absence of real democracy, including freedom of criticism and opposition, the high salaries and 'packets,' the extreme centralization and lack of any popular control over officials--all this generated an amazingly rapid growth of bureaucracy. A bureaucrat is not simply a government functionary who sits in an office and directs certain affairs. A bureaucrat is a privileged functionary, cut off from real life, from the people, from the needs and interests of common folk. Bureaucrats are interested in their jobs as positions to be preserved and improved, not as tasks to be done. They will knowingly do something unnecessary or even harmful for the people if it will preserve their positions." {Med 844}

Labin insightfully describes the psychology of the low- to mid-level Party functionary: "Although the rank and file of the Communist Party no longer take any appreciable part in the formulation of policy, they are informed of it before the others and more effectively than the others, and that is a definite advantage. The ordinary party member is like the good little boy who is favoured by teacher, taken to one side to have teacher's aims explained to him, and honoured with the exalted task of serving as a model for all the other little boys. He is the favourite; he is on teacher's side; and he backs up everything teacher does as well as he can. And, naturally, towards the rest of the class he is a little authority himself. In obeying he receives the power to be obeyed. . . . Masters above me, slogans within me, and slaves below me--that is his moral equilibrium. . . . The sight of an old symbol inscribed on a banner satisfies him. . . . [H]aving shaped an effective organization, the Communist bows down and worships it. He has made the party, originally destined to be the instrument of reason, into the tyrannous object of his devotion. An association originally intended to be merely a means to an end has become an end in itself. And after that, if they ask him to say that black is white, he will say that black is white, and if they ask him to believe it, he will believe it; if they ask him to become a spy, he will become a spy; if they ask him to torture his fellow men, he will torture his fellow men; if they order him to commit a dishonourable action, he will commit that dishonourable action; and, finally, if they ask him to die blessing his murderer, he will die so doing. The diabolical wheel of fanaticism has turned full circle. . . . [W]e have penetrated the psychological secret of the attraction exercised by the one authorized political party in the Soviet Union on the teeming masses of would-be recruits." {Lab 42}

The economic and social privileges of being a Party member were formidable. Hence, party members were kept in line through the threat of individual expulsion and through periodic mass purges. Labin explains: "The fear of being expelled not only makes a party member guard his least word or action and obey all orders with military precision, but it also makes him pathologically afraid of showing the least initiative. . . . Bolshevism . . . has the power to make its orders obeyed, but those who obey them are robots." "Once the hunger for privilege is added to the desire for power, once ambition and self-interest begin to flourish, then no power whatever can stem the growth of nepotism, intrigue, and toadyism. . . . If it is sufficient to obey

in order to obtain a place, if it is sufficient to repeat slogans mechanically in order to preserve that place, then advancement no longer depends on merit, but on servility. And when the loss of that place is equivalent to a death sentence, then the road to power becomes a twisting, winding path through a fierce and bloody jungle, whilst suspicion, denunciation, and fear riddle the once immaculate organ." {Lab 45}

Labin further--and perceptively--describes how the "cell" model of political organization, rather than being democratic, is actually the perfect tool for a totalitarian party, "more readily manageable by the central party apparatus" than are territorial political units. "The basic organization of the party is the cell. Such a cell embraces all members working in the same place, whether factory, workshop, kolkhoz, regiment, or Ministry. In really democratic political organizations the members are organized not according to their place of work, but according to where they live, i.e. territorially. In this way members have a chance of meeting people other than those with whom they rub shoulders at their place of work every day; they can discuss social problems in non-professional or occupational terms; they can learn to discuss things before a larger audience; they can observe the interesting reactions of other and different people; in short, they can raise themselves to the real level of political life and the examination of broad general principles. In other words, they can do precisely everything Bolshevism seeks to prevent their doing by its organization on the basis of the place of work. . . . The factory cell, often sub-divided into workshop cells in a larger factory, has a limited membership and a limited horizon which makes it nothing but a cog in the machine of the all-powerful 'apparatus.' Operating where the work of society is performed and where wages and salaries are paid out, the cell organization is an excellent instrument of propaganda, control, manoeuvre, and intimidation in the hands of the party." {Lab 95, 47}

"The complete dominance exercised by the Communist Party over all spheres of life in the Soviet Union," adds Labin, "is denied by no one." The Stalin Constitution *explicitly states*: "The most active and conscious citizens of the working class . . . are united in the Communist (Bolshevist) Party of the Soviet Union as the advance guard of all the toilers in their struggle to consolidate and develop the Socialist regime, as the core of all organizations, both social and governmental, and as the only political party which has the right to organize itself in the Soviet Union." {Lab 50} So says the *constitution* of the country--the formal, definitive document establishing the institutional repositories of societal power.

The higher the governmental organs, the higher the percentage of Communists were to be found among its ranks, from 55% in the local Soviets up to 100% in the Presidium and Councils. About 80% of main university professors and students were Communist Party members in the time of Stalin. By contrast, the percentage of Communists in the general population was 3%. The judges in the higher courts were almost all members of the Communist Party. And in their proceedings these judges employed arbitrary "revolutionary reason" with no due process. Thus, the Russian Communist Party in the Soviet Union, unlike the typical political party in the West, was an entire elite, immensely privileged ruling class. Membership in the Communist Party was a "much-sought-for and highly privileged position." {Smith 273}

Weissberg makes it clear that Russian Communist Party members were not simply ordinary people with a particular political viewpoint. They were rather a caste apart from and above the rabble, and they were deeply conscious of, and zealously cherished, this most fortunate status of theirs. And yet, at the same time, it was a kind of shackle around their neck. "It is easy enough to recognize a Party member. For one thing, he has an assurance that ordinary people lack. He has got used to being one of the masters of the country." {Weiss 91} "During the revolution and the years of civil war [people like Gerf] had been attracted by [the Party's] revolutionary ideas and, once inside, a cleverly devised system saw to it that they never drifted away again. Their choice was between membership of the dominant group, which included a comfortable and secure position, and the terrible threat of complete moral and physical destruction if they ventured to depart by as much as a hairs-breadth from the Party line. This threat hung over the head of every member of the Party, high or low. It compelled Party members to suppress every heretical thought, even every critical thought. If the Gerfs of the Party saw the lunatic policy of Stalin in the villages in the years 1932 and '33, they refused to admit that they had seen. They suppressed every critical impulse and forced themselves to believe that the Great Leader was right, and that there was really no other way to bring about the collectivization of agriculture but by exterminating innocent peasants wholesale." {Weiss 123} "For a Communist it was the worst thing in the world to be expelled from the Party." {Weiss 145}

As Labin explains, the top stratum of the "all-powerful" Communist Party bureaucracy was a true "ruling class." "[T]hey control the means of production and exchange just as they control the levers of political life. It is this [class functioning as a capitalist] bourgeoisie which directs Soviet economy, and it does so without sharing control in the least with the industrial and agricultural proletariat. It develops this branch of production and retards that; it fixes prices; it controls distribution; and it decides the rate of accumulation--all without any interference from below. And, finally, and above all, it appropriates the 'surplus value' to create its own privileges and it distributes the benefits amongst its members pro rata according to their 'functions,' just as a limited liability company distributes its profits among its directors and shareholders in proportion to their competence and the capital they have invested." {Lab 163} "This bureaucracy," Labin reiterates, "collectively controls the instruments of production and the means of distribution, and it also controls the apparatus of the State. Its control is far more absolute than that of the old individual proprietors ever was, and it exploits the workers and peasants more harshly than ever they did." {Lab 401} "[The bureaucracy is] an exploiting class . . . absolute master of the masses of the workers and a jealous defender of its privileges." {Lab 425} In the Soviet Union the proletariat owned nothing, the bureaucracy owned everything. Collectively, the latter was the "proprietor" in society. Thus, the Soviet Union was not actually socialist in the traditional, workers' control, sense of the word; rather, it practiced what Labin calls "state capitalism." {Lab 426}

In a chapter appropriately entitled "Red Tsar," Utley closely echoes Labin's assessment of the true nature of the Soviet system. "It seemed to us that the Soviet economy had become the most perfect example of state capitalism in existence, since the state exploits (takes profit from the labor of) all the people. . . . Since in Russia the people do not participate in the government and have no control over it, the new society combines the methods of government of an oriental

despotism with the worst features of capitalism. The Russian workers, like the peasants, have no say at all as regards the disposal of the wealth created by their labor. The Communist Party, although not in theory the 'owner' of the means of production, appropriates to itself or for its own purposes the profit and benefits derived from the labor of the rest of the population. One can call the system state capitalism with the Bolshevik Party drawing the dividends. If a group of capitalists in the United States were able to acquire control of all land and productive capital, to abolish representative government, and to draw their dividends not as individual owners but as a ruling and managerial clique, the result would be in essence the same economic and political system as that of the Soviet Union. . . . The fact that the ruling group in the USSR is composed of men who did not start life as capitalists makes no vital difference. It means that they are far more incompetent, but it does not mean that they are not exploiters. Collective exploitation is no more moral than individual exploitation nor is it any more bearable for those who are exploited. It is an extraordinary proof of mankind's inability to see realities behind facades, and its incorrigible propensity to examine the label on the bottle instead of the contents, that so many of our American liberals and socialists fail to realize the true nature of the Soviet state. They think that because there are no capitalists in the USSR there cannot be any exploiting class, and that therefore of necessity Russia is a socialist state according to the original conception of the word socialism. There is in the Soviet Union a new society, a society in which the method of exploitation is new. Instead of the worker and peasant being exploited by a capitalist or a landowner, he is exploited by the state. The state appropriates the produce of all men's labor beyond what is required to keep them alive at the lowest level of subsistence. Since the Communist Party has a monopoly of political power it owns the state. There is therefore collective exploitation by a group. The profits derived from the labors of the Russian people are disposed of as the Communist ruling class decrees." {Ut 223} "[S]lavery is slavery, even if coated over with a thin cast of Marxist dogma" wherein a planned (supposedly rational and thus superior) economy is the be-all and end-all. {Ut 229}

An episode recounted by Labin illustrates just what position in the Soviet state hierarchy the actual proletariat really occupied. "In 1929, at the decision of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party, Tomski, General Secretary of the Soviet Labour Unions, and his chief assistants were deprived of office and replaced by more docile men. . . . It is worth while giving a little thought to this incident. In the eyes of all Socialists the trade-union movement is of the greatest importance. The unions have been built up patiently, and often heroically, by generations of workers, and their Statutes possess almost the solemnity of laws. The dismissal of a general secretary is inconceivable without meetings of the unions everywhere, the calling of congresses, and the holding of lively discussions and debates on the pros and cons of the matter in which all organized workers take part. But that, of course, does not refer to the Land of the Soviets, 'the most democratic country in the world.' There the whole revolution takes place silently behind the scenes without the members of the unions knowing anything about it until a body completely outside the trade-union movement publishes a simple communique, informing them of it. After that the Press takes cognizance of the fait accompli in the form of a fierce campaign of abuse against 'the band of counter-revolutionaries' who but a day before were the respected leaders of the trade-union movement--and all the trade-union papers hurry to contribute their share to the howl of denigration." Thus, "[t]he trade union in the role of slave-



driver urging on all its members to produce more and always to do as they are told without question is a particular blossom of Soviet Socialism." {Lab 53, 54} "It is not difficult to imagine," notes Labin, "that in unions so thoroughly domesticated the representative principle is a mere facade." The members of the Central Council of Soviet Labour Unions, it should be noted, were all appointed. {Lab 55}

At this point in the discussion we would do well to consider briefly, apart from politics, the state of the Russian economy and the Russian people's quality of life in general. Not surprisingly, the stifling political oppression inflicted on the nation by the state did not give rise to either workers' freedom and prosperity, or to a productive and prosperous economy as a whole. Labin carefully (with data and statistics) studied and documented the people's economic situation. She found that "the Russian worker has to work much longer in order to obtain the same quantity of products (not to mention the question of quality) [as his Western counterpart]. In other words, . . . the degree of labour exploitation in the Soviet Union is higher." "[M]isery reigns supreme amongst the workers of the Soviet Union." "The rate of exploitation and the degree of surplus-value extraction was never so high in capitalist countries as it is in the alleged stronghold of Marxian Socialism." "Russians . . . are suffering a particularly rigorous form of oppression and exploitation." {Lab 202, 206, 232, 262}

Utley describes how industrial workers had lost all liberty and human rights and had been reduced to the status of slave laborers. "Perhaps the breaking of the human spirit into submissive, thoughtless robots is the most terrible feature of Stalin's Russia. Humanity is bowed down. Everyone cringes before his superiors. . . . Integrity, courage, and charity disappear in the stifling atmosphere of cant, falsehood, and terror. [We] decided that the best term to apply to the 'new and better' society being created in Soviet Russia was *industrial feudalism*. Freedom of movement, collective bargaining for wage increases, strikes, and other such evils of capitalist society had been finally abolished. *The workers as well as the peasants had become serfs of the Party which owned the state.*" {Ut 156}

It is only in this economic context, as Labin explains, that the great attraction of the impoverished and oppressed Russian citizen to the exalted Communist Party can be fully understood: "Riches have no sense except in relation to poverty, and the very word 'privilege' suggests something relative. . . . To sleep huddled up with many others, to awake[n] in the same filth in which he went to sleep, to wait in a line for his turn at a trickle of icy cold water from a tap, to put on his rags again, to breathe the asphyxiating atmosphere of a tram packed to suffocation point, to slave at his machine to the Stakhanovite rhythm under the ever-watchful eye of the Secret Police, to eat buckwheat porridge and cabbage soup, to live in constant fear of being sent off 3,000 miles away on forced labour, to hear nothing but the insolent howl of lying propaganda on all sides--thus the everyday horizon of Ivan Ivanovitch, the eternal mujik in the land of mujiks. To understand the Soviet Union, one must never lose sight of this unchanging background. It is against its desolation alone that one can measure the value of a room of one's own, a juicy beefsteak, a warm piece of material, a summer-house with its arbour. All these things are common enough in the capitalist countries of Western Europe . . . but in the Soviet Union they are privileges of the gods. To have access to such simple things and simple

pleasures is to pass from the age of the mud hut to the contemporary age, to pass from a panting for breath to a deep, satisfied respiration, to pass from brutish existence to life. We can say without exaggeration that the attraction of privilege is more tyrannical in poverty-stricken societies than it is in rich societies, because in the latter the condition of the poorer sections of the population is still tolerable, whilst some cultural and moral satisfactions, including the pride of independence, are accessible to even the most modest, and respected by even the most powerful. In countries of misery, such as the Soviet Union, the individual can emerge from the morass only if he can secure a pole of material privilege to assist him, no matter how short it may be. And if he is offered this pole by the powers that be he will retain a fanatical gratitude to them for lifting him out of the rut." {Lab 173}

Several writers noted the extraordinary wage inequalities in the Soviet Union. Party members were privileged both politically (they were the bosses) and economically (they received all kinds of material perks). Utley observed that "high Communist Party functionaries were getting the best of everything and . . . all the sacrificing was being done by the dumb crowds, the dragooned peasants, and the helpless workers." {Ut 60} She noticed marked social gradations and spoke of a new Russian aristocracy with special privileges, an emerging nouveau riche. "Mrs. Khinchuk [wife of the Soviet Trade Representative in Berlin] was the perfect example of the new Moscow socialite, Soviet snob and hypocrite, but she was only one of thousands. She did no work, she shopped and visited in an automobile which she did not 'own,' but which with its chauffeur was at her disposal day and night. And she loved to hold forth about the sacrifices 'we are making.'" {Ut 65} "Collectivization and industrialization meant the formation of a privileged aristocracy as cut off from the masses of the people by the conditions of their lives as the nobles of the ancien regime in France." {Ut 67}

"Gradations of social rank in Russia," Utley says, "went according to our food ration much as in the ancient Byzantine Empire the salaries of imperial officials and generals were reckoned in measures of corn, wine, and oil. Only top-flight Communists were favored by ample supplies of food and clothing. This device of Stalin's . . . was designed to keep Party men loyal to him personally. Any deviation from the Party line involved expulsion from the Party and the loss of these precious food supplies. It also meant the withdrawal of many other privileges awarded in kind and not in money: use of an automobile, the pick of housing accommodations, special hospitals, and an exclusive medical service reserved for the new aristocracy alone. The closed distributors also enabled the government to discriminate in favor of the aristocracy with the scarcest goods, such as fruits, fresh vegetables, cocoa, chocolate, and butter and eggs. . . . [T]he salaries of high Communists were worth ten to twenty times as much as those of the non-Party specialists . . . and those of the skilled workers." {Ut 63}

The economic class divide (i.e. the wealth gap) in the Soviet Union was not only to be measured in food rations and wages. The salaries of officials were indeed ten to thirty times that of the average worker, but "the greater part of the income of the rulers was paid in kind." {Ut 231} "Our friends the Rabinovitches, who ranked as just below the top Party bureaucrats, had a large modern flat, a big datcha, and a private automobile all paid for by the Commissariat of Foreign Trade for which Philip Rabinovitch worked. One of their two servants was also paid

for by the Commissariat, and Philip received a handsome entertainment allowance over and above his salary. The Rabinovitches were higher in the Communist social scale than anyone else we knew, but their standard of life was far below that of others we heard of. The luxurious life lived by the Soviet aristocracy, which the ordinary citizen [and even more so the completely closed off foreigner] glimpses only from afar . . . is one of the most striking features of Stalin's Russia," {Ut 232}

Russell states: "The Communists . . . are practically the sole possessors of power, and they enjoy innumerable advantages in consequence. Most of them, though far from luxurious, have better food than other people. Only people of some political importance can obtain motor-cars or telephones. Permits for railway journeys, for making purchases at the Soviet stores (where prices are about one-fiftieth of what they are in the market), for going to the theater, and so on, are, of course, easier to obtain for the friends of those in power than for ordinary mortals. In a thousand ways, the Communists have a life which is happier than that of the rest of the community." {Russ 30}

Utley analyzes the situation thus: "This new Soviet aristocracy and its hangers-on were even more grasping, cruel, and ruthless than the old Tsarist aristocracy which had lived in conditions of less general want and misery. The Soviet bureaucracy and their employees were like the people in a shipwreck who had managed to get into the few lifeboats not smashed to pieces. If they helped the drowning wretches in the sea of misery into the boats, all would drown. So the lucky ones beat back the masses of the unfortunate with their oars. Those who did not starve in the Soviet Union thus aided the government in repressing the masses who did." {Ut 122}

"There was, of course, a convenient theory to justify the terrible social and material gulf between the rulers and the ruled. The rulers were held to be 'indispensable' as the 'builders of socialism.' They were so important that they must always be well fed and enjoy comfortable holidays in luxurious sanatoria and rest homes, else they would be unable to bear the great burden of their responsibilities. The wretches dying of starvation and the ill-fed workers and peasants were just cannon fodder in the battle of socialism. If there were not enough food to go around, the officers of the socialist army must be well fed even if everyone else went short. In the future everyone would have plenty if the rulers were ruthless enough now to see millions die in the cause of industrialization. . . . Thus have aristocracies in all historical periods justified their privileges. The Soviet aristocracy is no exception." {Ut 123}

It is instructive for Westerners to consider the Stalin Constitution. Like other constitutions from many other places and eras, it guarantees all manner of "rights," including the freedom of speech, of the press, of conscience, of meeting, of association, and of public demonstration. But of course it was all a very bad joke, demonstrating that lists of rights on paper without the people having real power are always and everywhere useless, or worse: deceptive. Uralov notes that the listed rights and guarantees were "mere words," but their *propaganda* value was of immense importance to the Bolsheviks. The Stalin Constitution was perfectly worthless to the Russian people: "Under a dictatorship the power of legislation lies solely with the dictator, as does the power of modifying and breaking the law. . . . [T]here has been no more complete despot [in human history] than Stalin. The little work bearing the resounding title Constitution

of the USSR has had less influence on the life of the country than the least movement of Stalin's eyebrow. . . . [I]t calls for special talent to govern by anti-constitutional means a country where a constitution exists, even if only on paper. Stalin achieves the feat by the use he makes of written Soviet law (the New Constitution) and unwritten police law. Police law is an effective instrument of government prevailing over the Government itself; Soviet law has merely a theoretical value. The first is the real law, the second merely propaganda." {Ur 138} Utley calls the Stalin Constitution simply "a thin facade to cover the naked police regime, a cruel mockery of the millions condemned without trial."

It was explained above that the Soviet Union was a dictatorship from day one of its existence. Yet there is a question among many observers of the Stalinist Soviet Union about whether the monster Stalin was the necessary result of the Russian Revolution, or whether he was an aberration. Bertrand Russell told Freda Utley that Stalinism "followed naturally from Lenin's premises and Lenin's acts." {Ut 13} Utley later came to agree with him: "Lenin had laid established foundations of the permanent despotism of an aristocracy of Communists over the mass of the people." {Ut 112} "[Lenin's] goal had been human freedom. But by sanctioning the ruthless use of power by an elite minority . . . he had laid the foundations for a worse tyranny than the world had yet known." {Ut 114} It should also be noted, as several authors do, that until very late in his waning life, when he suddenly expressed strong misgivings about Stalin, Lenin had in fact been quite favorable toward his Bolshevik colleague. Indeed, he had brought him up through the party and had treated him as his protege.

Tyranny was *built into* the Soviet system. As Weissberg explains, the "leaders"--seeing themselves as the heroic agents of the one true gospel (Marxism)--essentially considered themselves omniscient and infallible, and therefore entitled to absolute rule, both within the Party and in the country as a whole. "The cement of this organization was not only the belief of its members in their world historical mission but also the uniform ideology which dominated them all. The Communists of Lenin's day were firmly convinced that they had discovered the historical laws of development. For them Marxism was a scientific instrument, and all they had to do was to use it properly, and then at every stage and in all circumstances they would be able to discover the next step to take. The theory of revolutionary Marxism inspired them with the conviction that they were the executors of historical necessity. . . . Their task was rendered interpretative instead of creative. The correct policy in every situation was merely a question of the proper application of the scientific principles of Marxism. Once in possession of the truth, one is entitled to demand unquestioning obedience from one's followers, and that was the basis of Lenin's insistence on strict Party discipline and the acceptance of the one true ideology of the revolutionary party." {Weiss 509}

As mentioned at the very beginning of this study, all of the contemporary authors considered here started off as committed socialists, and most if not all remained so throughout in a broad sense. They took issue not with socialism per se, but rather with the particular form of socialism (or communism, if it could be called either socialism or communism at all) that developed under Stalin. They all came to understand that the Stalin regime's very essence was tyrannical, no matter how it dressed and presented itself. Utley says: "We learned to recognize

reality under false labels and were cured of political illusions, or at least of the propensity to fall for slogans, facile panaceas, and hypocritical pretenses. Ever since I lived in Russia it has been almost impossible for me to accept professions and declared aims at their face value anywhere. . . . I am . . . forever cured of the Western intellectual's preoccupation with external forms and labels. I cannot accept tyranny, cruelty, and starvation as justified because they are being inflicted on people in the name of a humanitarian ideal [i.e. an alleged ideal--socialism]." {Ut 124} "The pathetic belief in Russia of the die-hard Stalinists is based on their obsession with the socialist formula. They argue that since there is state ownership of the means of production and distribution, there can be no exploiters in the Soviet Union and the condition of the working class must have improved"--which Utley knows does not follow logically and is not factual. {Ut 213}

Utley also emphasizes how deadly serious a mistake it is for well-meaning humanitarians to accept for even one moment such a deeply flawed system as that set up by the Russian Revolution. "[T]here is no such thing as embracing Communism as an experiment. It is a one-way street, ending in a cul de sac of secret police terror, firing squads for the intellectuals and leaders, and concentration camps and slave labor for the masses. There is no turning back; there is no escape." {Ut 125}

Any claim of the USSR being some kind of democracy, Utley makes clear, is utterly farcical. "It is, of course, absurd to suppose that the Russian people, workers, employers, or peasants, really desire to go on living on the barest level of subsistence under repeated promises that it is for the benefit of future generations. Only force can compel them to do so. If Soviet democracy were a reality, the planners would provide for a rapid increase in the production of consumers' goods. Such an increase would probably lead to a more rapid development of heavy industry and light industry than has been accomplished by Stalin's forced depreciation of the general standard of living to squeeze out capital for industrialization. No people can work efficiently on the meager diet of the Russian worker, living as he does in crowded tenements and forced to spend much of his 'leisure' standing in line to secure food, clothing, and other necessities, or attending long, dreary meetings where the sorry farce of pretending that 'life is joyous' has to be played over and over again. The psychological strain of pretending that they are happy, and of always saying the opposite of what they think, and the constant fear of arrest contribute to impairing the efficiency of the Russian workers. Slave labour long ago was recognized as unprofitable. Serfdom in most of Europe gave way to private ownership and free enterprise because the latter were more productive. These economic truths have been proved once again in Soviet Russia." {Ut 218}

Although several of our authors certainly had profound insights, only one was a philosopher per se: Bertrand Russell. Naturally, then, his critique of the Soviet system was, in a scholarly way, the most in-depth.

Essentially, Russell finds Soviet communism to be anti-rational. "Bolshevism," he says, "is not merely a political doctrine; it is also a religion, with elaborate dogmas and inspired scriptures. When Lenin wishes to prove some proposition, he does so, if possible, by quoting texts from Marx and Engels. A full-fledged Communist is not merely a man who believes that land and capital should be held in common, and their produce distributed as nearly equally as possible. He is a man who entertains a number of elaborate and dogmatic beliefs--such as philosophical materialism, for example--which may be true, but are not, to a scientific temper, capable of being known to be true with any certainty. This habit, of militant certainty about objectively doubtful matters, is one from which, since the Renaissance, the world has been gradually emerging, into that temper of constructive and fruitful skepticism which constitutes the scientific outlook. I believe the scientific outlook to be immeasurably important to the human race. If a more just economic system were only attainable by closing men's minds against free inquiry, and plunging them back into the intellectual prison of the middle ages, I should consider the price too high." {Russ 6} Again: "Bolshevism is a religion. . . . Those who accept Bolshevism become impervious to scientific evidence, and commit intellectual suicide. Even if all the doctrines of Bolshevism were true, this would still be the case, since no unbiased examination of them is tolerated. One who believes, as I do, that the free intellect is the chief engine of human progress, cannot but be fundamentally opposed to Bolshevism, as much as to the Church of Rome." When one reads these words, one should keep in mind the Communist Party's absolutist insistence on acquiescence to the "party line." {Russ 117}

Marxist communism, of course, claims to be grounded in the historical struggles of the proletariat. In practice, however, the Soviet adherents of this ideology--at least among the top leadership--tended to be profoundly elitist: "When a Russian Communist speaks of dictatorship [in 'dictatorship of the proletariat'], he means the word literally, but when he speaks of the proletariat, he means the word in a Pickwickian [i.e. non-literal] sense. He means the 'class conscious' part of the proletariat, i.e., the Communist Party. He includes people by no means proletarian (such as Lenin) who have the right opinions, and he excludes such wage-earners as have not the right opinions, whom he classifies as lackeys of the bourgeoisie." {Russ 26} "[T]he parallel is extraordinarily exact between Plato's Republic [the rule of philosopher-kings] and the regime which the better Bolsheviks are endeavoring to create. Bolshevism is . . . aristocratic." {Russ 29}

Russell alludes to a fundamental flaw in communism: its theoretical denial of power (as in the "withering away of the state") simultaneously with its erection and wielding of a vastly powerful, coercive governmental machine. "Advocacy of Communism by those who believe in Bolshevik methods rests upon the assumption that there is no slavery except economic slavery, and that when all goods are held in common there must be perfect liberty. I fear this is a delusion. There must be administration, there must be officials who control distribution [i.e. there must be a powerful state]. These men, in a Communist State, are the repositories of

power. So long as they control the army, they are able, as in Russia at this moment, to wield despotic power even if they are a small minority. The fact that there is Communism--to a certain extent--does not mean that there is liberty. If the Communism were more complete, it would not necessarily mean more freedom; there would still be certain officials in control of the food supply, and these officials could govern as they pleased so long as they retained the support of the soldiers. This is not mere theory: it is the patent lesson of the present condition of Russia. The Bolshevik theory is that a small minority are to seize power, and are to hold it until Communism is accepted practically universally, which, they admit, may take a long time. But power is sweet, and few men surrender it voluntarily. It is especially sweet to those who have the habit of it, and the habit becomes most ingrained in those who have governed by bayonets, without popular support. . . . The system created by violence and the forcible rule of a minority must necessarily allow of tyranny and exploitation." {Russ 157}

Russell again dismantles the myth of a genuine "dictatorship of the proletariat"; in fact the Soviet Union is a despotic state: "It is sheer nonsense to pretend that the rulers of a great empire such as Soviet Russia, when they have become accustomed to power, retain the proletarian psychology, and feel that their class-interest is the same as that of the ordinary working man. This is not the case in fact in Russia now, however the truth may be concealed by fine phrases. The Government has a class-consciousness and a class-interest quite distinct from those of the genuine proletarian, who is not to be confounded with the paper proletarian of the Marxian scheme. In a capitalist state, the Government and the capitalists on the whole hang together, and form one class; in Soviet Russia, the Government has absorbed the capitalist mentality together with the governmental, and the fusion has given increased strength to the upper class. But I see no reason whatever to expect equality or freedom to result from such a system, except reasons derived from a false psychology and a mistaken analysis of the sources of political power." {Russ 159} "More and more the pretense of representing the proletariat has grown threadbare. Amid official demonstrations and processions and meetings the genuine proletarian looks on, apathetic and disillusioned. . . . [under] a slavery far more complete than that of capitalism. A sweated wage, long hours, industrial conscription, prohibition of strikes, prison for slackers, diminution of the already insufficient rations in factories where the production falls below what the authorities expect, an army of spies ready to report any tendency to political disaffection and to procure imprisonment for its promoters--this is the reality of a system which still professes to govern in the name of the proletariat. At the same time the internal and external peril has necessitated the creation of a vast army recruited by conscription. . . . Militarism has produced its inevitable result in the way of a harsh and dictatorial spirit: the men in power go through their day's work with the consciousness that they command three million armed men, and that civilian opposition to their will can be easily crushed." {Russ 173}

---

STALIN

It is universally acknowledged that Stalin was neither an inspired orator nor a profound thinker in the scholarly sense. Yet he "undoubtedly possessed an extraordinary organizational talent." {Med 45} Stalin was, above all, a political operative, a "master of political intrigue" who got himself into higher and higher offices and key positions where he was able to exercise control. {Med 65} "Stalin had become a key figure in the party apparatus," says Medvedev. "With local elections to party bodies taking place under his direction, he was able to carry through a mass reshuffling of cadres in the provincial and regional party committees and in the central committees of the Communist parties in the non-Russian republics." {Med 69} Stalin thereby placed his men in key offices, and they in turn bolstered his rule. Without doubt, Stalin was 100% a product of a bureaucratic and oligarchical--i.e. an undemocratic--system.

Trotsky described Stalin thus: "Such attributes of character as slyness, faithlessness, the ability to exploit the lowest instincts of human nature are developed to an extraordinary degree in Stalin and, considering his strong character, represent mighty weapons in a struggle." {Med 88} In his *Memoirs of a Secretary of Stalin's*, Boris Bazhanov "describes Stalin as vindictive, suspicious, vulgar, and devoid of any restraining moral principles. He was a crafty and skillful intriguer, extremely reticent and self-possessed. Stalin always dressed simply and lived modestly. He displayed no taste for luxury or desire to enjoy the good things in life. He lived in the Kremlin in a modestly furnished apartment formerly occupied by a palace servant. At a time when Kamenev had already appropriated a magnificent Rolls-Royce, Stalin rode around Moscow in an old 'Russo-Balte.' Although not particularly well-educated, Stalin knew how to conceal his lack of culture. . . . The one all-consuming passion of his life was power. Yet he was patient; he knew how to wait for the right moment before striking a blow at his political rivals. He was neither unintelligent nor devoid of common sense." {Med 89}

The critics reviewed here all agree that Stalin was motivated primarily, indeed overwhelmingly, by a lust for power. For him all other considerations, including ideas and principles, were either subsidiary or immaterial. Says Medvedev: "[T]here were serious theoretical and practical disagreements in the twenties, and they resulted in an important struggle of ideas, especially over the question of the methods and possibilities of socialist construction in the USSR. It is true, however, that for Stalin the question of power was the main one. Maneuvering skillfully among the various platforms and tendencies, Stalin made use of the conflict among factions in the party to weaken all his rivals and increase his power and authority." {Med 93} "Stalin was not in the least concerned with changing his opponents' minds and drawing them into the common work. He sought to break their resistance and subject them to his will; if this failed, he unceremoniously cast them aside. . . . And in all this, of course, Stalin was able to conceal his real feelings [and purposes] quite skillfully." {Med 95}

Lewin describes Stalin as "primarily a tactician," a "back-stage intriguer," whose lack of concern for real principles "left him free to pursue the internal struggle within the Party, and in this art he was a . . . master." {Lew 164, 166, 165} "Stalin was . . . a master in the art of manipulating the Party apparatus. He accordingly played his cards with the greatest skill. . . . Doctrinal considerations played no part in these tactics, the sole purpose of which was to strengthen Stalin's personal power." {Lew 300-1} Bukharin stated: "He is an unprincipled



intriguer who puts his desire for power before all else. He will change his theories at a moment's notice in order to get rid of someone." {Lew 301} Zinoviev and Kamenev once told Trotsky: "Stalin is not interested in ideas. It is power alone which attracts him. He is cunning and cruel." {Lew 166} In her characteristic bluntness Utley opines that "Stalin had little theoretical knowledge, and in any case was not in the least concerned with the rightness or wrongness of a policy. He wanted absolute power." {Ut 69} Laqueur calls Stalin "a technician of power. Stalin mastered that art better than his contemporaries; he was a first-rate tactician, intriguer, and plotter, playing enemies and potential enemies one against the other. . . . Stalin was infinitely more ruthless [than the old Bolsheviks]; he was, in fact, devoid of any scruples, a quality of decisive importance in his rise and in his successful stay in power. A man of great brutality, he would seldom boast of his ruthlessness. On the contrary, he was a master of sanctimoniousness, hypocrisy, and mendacity." {Laq 13}

Besides ruthlessness, duplicity was Stalin's other outstanding characteristic. Maria Joffe recounted: "He behaved as such a simple, ordinary, good guy. Very sociable, on friendly speaking terms with everyone, but there wasn't a truthful gesture in any of this. . . . In general, Stalin was an actor of rare ability, capable of changing his mask to suit any circumstance. And one of his favorite masks was precisely this one: the simple, ordinary good fellow wearing his heart on his sleeve." {Med 87} From Stalin emanated endless hypocrisy and lies. "While systematically falsifying history and contemporary events, he sanctimoniously exclaimed: 'God forbid we should be infected with the disease of fearing the truth. The Bolsheviks differ from all other parties in that they do not fear the truth, and are not afraid to look truth in the eye, however bitter it may be.' . . . 'Write the truth!' was his cogent pronouncement at a meeting with Soviet writers, who had asked him what they should write about first of all. . . . While sanctioning the arrest of millions and the execution of hundreds of thousands of innocent Soviet citizens, while observing the mass terror with equanimity, even with pleasure, Stalin spoke of concern for people. . . . 'People must be cultivated with as much care as a gardener cultivates a select type of fruit tree. . . . It must be understood at last that of all the most precious capital that exists in the world the most precious and the most crucial is people, cadres.'" "The disparity between word and deed penetrated every sphere of party and government activity in the Stalin years." {Med 849, 852} Stalin was in fact a consummate liar/deceiver: "Stalin's greatest gift," says Uralov, "was always that of being able to give an impression of perfect loyalty while remaining treachery incarnate." {Ur 67}

Labin persuasively explains *why* Stalin eliminated his Old Bolshevik comrades: "Unlike the new recruits, the old comrades of Lenin knew Stalin apart from parades, congresses, and official receptions prepared in advance in every detail by the Kremlin. They had thought, worked, and fought for many, many years in the same party, often side by side with him, and one and all they were convinced of his personal mediocrity. They had thought, worked, and fought for many, many years in the same party with Lenin, and they were in a position to make comparisons between the two leaders of the Communist Party. A bitter and cruel comparison for Stalin. But there was an even more serious and dangerous factor than this. Every one of these Old Bolsheviks, now below him in the hierarchy, was convinced beyond doubt of his own intellectual superiority to the all-powerful General Secretary of the party. Every one of them

was perfectly aware that he had come to power above their heads, not by his talents as a theoretician or statesman, but as a result of the play of circumstances, by arrangements, nominations, gerrymandered majorities, and so on. After imprisonments and deportations, men like Bucharin, Sokolnikov, Piatakov, Mouralov, Zinoviev, Kamenev, and Rakovski were compelled to bend the knee with the rest, abjure their 'errors' and loudly recognize the infallibility of Stalin. But even when they were mere shadows of their former selves, they were still witnesses--silent witnesses [of Stalin's inferiority and of his machinations]. . . . He waited patiently for his opportunity . . . [and then] ruthlessly slaughtered all those whose mute presence cast a shadow on his glory." {Lab 82}

Labin also describes some of Stalin's tactics in achieving such mastery as he did. "The methods which he employed were fundamentally quite simple. . . . In order to obtain [a] majority in a party based on strict military discipline all a capable General Secretary had to do was to get rid of recalcitrants before the voting, to appoint his own nominees to the bodies entrusted with drawing up the lists of candidates, to eliminate insufficiently docile officials by sending them on missions to places where they could no longer be awkward, to see that the party [literary] organs received editors devoted to his cause and prepared to censor the resolutions and other material of the opposition, and, finally, to vilify and calumniate all rivals, and establish a system of espionage to supervise those in his own camp--and to do all of this with unscrupulous determination." {Lab 90}

As we noted earlier, once Stalin had finally consolidated his power to the maximum, it could not even be said that a Communist Party inner circle was the ruling power in the country. One man ruled alone. But how could he? The answer, of course, is with a secret police at his disposal and command, as Uralov describes. "A single, all-pervading power . . . enforces its will. Its name? The NKVD. . . . The NKVD is wholly based on Stalin's personal method of operating. . . . It is he who fashioned this cruel and ruthless institution. The Stalin regime continues to exist, not by reason of the organisation of the Soviets, or of the ideals of the Party, or of the authority of the Politburo, but thanks to the methods and science of a force of political police in which Stalin himself is the chief policeman." {Ur 16} "As Secretary General of the Central Committee, [Stalin] took the work of the OGPU more and more under his personal control and protection. No nomination to one of the higher posts in the service could take place without his approval. All the heads of the NKVD were his proteges and were chosen from among his personal friends. Stalin took charge of the political police in order to eliminate his rivals by means of it and to impose upon the country a government in his own image. Thus it is to the NKVD that Stalin owes his personal position." {Ur 18}

---

One of the most fascinating and riveting accounts on Stalinist Russia, even among the stellar works now being considered, is a 1936 book by Andrew Smith, a Hungarian-American communist worker (member of the Communist Party of the United States) who went to live in the Soviet Union. Labin, in her own book, calls the book "one implacable accusation, one long cry of indignation, one long warning to others against the lies and deceit of which he had been a victim." {Lab 20} Smith chronicles "in living color" the absolute squalor, misery, and destitution of the Russian working people, the starkly contrasting material privileges of the Communist Party elite, and--via a trip down the Volga River--the artificially created genocidal famine taking place in that region at that time.

Very striking in Smith's story is the pervasive lying and deception he encounters, as well as a peculiar method of psychological control by which the workers are made to be obedient. "To become a udarnik (good worker) meant to be late less than three minutes in one month, to fill out the required speed-up program, to attend every meeting and demonstration, to contribute toward all Government-sponsored raffles, funds, and loans, to belong to all the required organizations, to vote without question for all party measures, to volunteer one day's additional labor each month, and in general to be a loyal, submissive, and untiring slave against whom no *vigovor* (complaint) was registered by the foreman. A udarnik was usually one who collected funds for the Press, for relief, defense, the Party, or good roads, etc., outside of his regular work. The udarniks were usually the smoothest bootlickers. The factory was full of these official favorites who wandered about aimlessly doing nothing. I found that the self-respecting mechanics who knew the trade very rarely humiliated themselves in this way. It was usually those who were technically incompetent who sought this method of gaining favor. Udarniks were entitled to speedy promotion, and were not docked when they were sick. A udarnik secured special consideration when looking for lodgings. He was entitled to first call for vacations to the Sanatoria, for clothing, shoes, candy, fruit, or other luxuries in the *magazin* (general store) as well as low-priced theatre tickets. I found this method of favoritism on the one hand, and slave-driving on the other, far more exacting and pernicious than anything I had ever experienced in the United States." {Smith 65}

More striking still is Smith's trenchant depiction of a Communist Party that is in its very essence an elitist organization. Even more than an economic elite, it is an ideological elite with the conviction that its members, because of their special mission, are vastly superior to the common Russian people and have every right to control them utterly. One party administrator, for instance, while fully acknowledging the reality of the starvation in Ukraine and the Caucasus, commented: "But what does it matter if a million or more lives are lost, as long as we are building Socialism?" These remarks were typical of the cold-blooded attitude of the Communist Party udarniks and officials toward the sufferings of the Russian people." {Smith 128}

Communists were expected by the Party to lie on its behalf in all matters--brazenly and as a matter of course. Having promised a certain propagandist to deliver a radio speech on his Volga trip experience, Smith wrote one in which he naturally referred to starving people. This was rejected by the radio editor. "'You know the situation,' he said to me. 'The whole trip was intended for propaganda purposes. You must tell only good things.' 'How can I tell of the good

things, when I did not see anything good?' I asked. 'You are indeed a poor Communist,' he declared. 'Can't you prepare something enthusiastic, something that will be a good answer to Hitler? . . . You are a party member. Remember that. And you will have to abide by party discipline.'" Thus, in so many words, the editor made it clear that it was a Communist's very duty to lie for the cause, the supposedly beneficial ends apparently justifying the unsavory means. {Smith 191} Smith encountered this implicit or even explicit directive from the Party's operatives over and over again during his stay in the Soviet Union.

Smith, a communist, felt it was his duty to inform the Party of the disastrous expedition he had gone on, which he did in a letter. A month later he was called into the office of the Moscow Committee of the Communist Party and interviewed by Comrade Tzeitlin. When Smith described the starvation he had seen not only on this particular trip but everywhere in the Soviet Union, Tzeitlin flatly denied it all (even blaming "counter-revolutionary elements" and "kulaks") and warned him: "'Now see here, Comrade Smith. Remember, you are in the headquarters of the Moscow Committee of the Party.' 'Where should I speak of such matters, if not here?' I inquired. 'Nowhere!' she snapped. 'I don't understand. Isn't the party supposed to know what is going on in the Soviet Union, or doesn't it want to know?' Again she flew at me. 'You are an American Communist. When you come here, you are supposed to speak of the starvation in America, the seventeen million people out of work and starving to death, of the Hoovervilles, where the workers live, of the misery which you ran away from when you came here, of the Scottsboro boys [nine falsely accused black boys in Alabama]--why don't you speak of these things?' 'Why should I speak of those things when you know them so well?' I asked, as she hopped about the room. 'I thought that you, as a party leader, would be more interested in what is going on in the Soviet Union, although I know very well that there is no starvation in this building.' 'That will suffice! Enough!' She fairly screamed at me.'" {Smith 194}

At a party meeting at his factory to discuss poor productivity, Smith suggested paying the workers more, so they would be better fed and therefore more productive. Jurov, the factory's party secretary, closely echoing the cold-blooded party administrator mentioned above, frankly stated: "'The chief mistake which Comrade Smith makes . . . is to ask us to pay the workers more. If we paid the workers more, then we all would starve. We cannot do that. If we paid higher wages and reduced the price of food, we would not have enough to supply all the people. We, as Communists, must eat and live better than the workers. We have greater responsibilities. Everything depends on us. . . . Don't worry, Comrade Smith . . . that you saw people dying of hunger. If twenty millions die of hunger, we will still have plenty of people to continue our work. And what does it matter if millions of people die, as long as we are building Socialism? . . . [D]on't worry about the rest of the workers. Keep yourself strong and healthy. When we have established Socialism, the rest of the workers will have it better too.' . . . When I heard Jurov expound this new Communist doctrine, it seemed to me that the world had turned topsy-turvy. I thought of the memorable words of the Communist Manifesto, '[The Communists] have no interests separate and apart from those of the proletariat as a whole,' which I had so often read, and taken so deeply to heart. . . . Yet here was a Communist leader cold-bloodedly defending the systematic starvation of an entire people and actually justify[ing]

the wiping out of millions. . . . Was it not all a tragic fable meant only to fasten the yoke of a cruel, self-seeking bureaucracy upon the Russian people." {Smith 204-6}

Similarly, at another factory party meeting, where again Smith suggested that Party members should give up their privileges and live like the common Russian workers, another official said, "How can we give up our privileges when we are worth more to the Soviet Union than the rest of the people?" {Smith 277}

It is clear from a number of instances described in Smith's book and in the other accounts that the ruling Communist Party was a kind of intellectual aristocracy: a set of idealists, often quite young, who truly thought that they knew better than everyone else--certainly better than the dumb workers and peasants, especially the latter--what was right for the country. While visiting a sovkhov, Smith (unlike his colleagues) took the initiative to actually talk to one of the peasants to find out what was really going on. The peasant explained: "[We] are dissatisfied with the way things are run. You see those buildings over there? The officials live there. They live well. They live much better than we do, but they do not know how to manage the farm. They are ruining everything. For instance, there is the agronom, a little slip of a girl, no more than eighteen or twenty years of age, with her lipstick and fancy dresses, a chit just out of school, what does she know about the land? Where linseed should be planted, she tells us to plant potatoes, where cabbage should be planted, she wants wheat and rye. When we tell her it is wrong, she says that we don't know anything, that we have no education and that we must do what we are told. Can you blame the peasants for feeling disgusted and disheartened? Look here how the grass is rotting under our feet, while the cattle are starving. If you have time, you must come with me. I will show you our tractors which we got only last year. They are new. Yet they are rusting in the fields. When the time comes for plowing, they will start repairing them. By the time some of the tractors are in working condition the plowing season will be over. If a peasant should say anything, if he should complain about the management, the [secret police] takes him away, and he disappears forever." {Smith 89}

Smith's wife, Maria (co-author of the book), relates the story of a young woman named Sonia whom she met at a sanatorium. Sonia described her experience after being assigned to work on a state farm with other Communist youngsters. "I was a nurse and a party member. One day I was notified by the party, that I must go out as a propagandist to a sovkhov near by. I had no idea what my duties were to be. I knew nothing about farming. When I asked for further information, I was told that I would receive full instructions at the sovkhov. . . . The group assigned to work at the sovkhov . . . [consisted of] two hundred komsomols, girls and boys ranging in age from seventeen to twenty-two. They were headed by a leader, a young man of about twenty-four, with absolutely no agricultural training. The group was supposed to receive training in handling tractors. This training was being intrusted to me and to the Komsomol leader. This Komsomol leader was a typical propagandist, a smooth talker, a man who had no interest in or sympathy for the workers. He told me that he would only stay for a day or so, that he was departing for another sovkhov and that he was leaving me in charge. I appealed to him: 'What will I do with these young people? What shall I teach them?' 'Oh, teach them about the achievements of the other sovkhoves. Teach them to work enthusiastically to carry out the Five

Year Plan, to build up Socialism,' he replied. 'But I don't know anything about tractors or about farming!' I said. 'Well, to tell the truth, Comrade,' he admitted, 'I don't know very much about these things myself.'" Not surprisingly, this enterprise born of sheer elitist, urbanite arrogance turned out to be a total disaster, leaving the group starving and Sonia in near-death physical condition, which is why she had ended up at the sanatorium. Seeing such treatment of their comrades, it can only be imagined how derelict young Communists of this sort must have been in their treatment of the peasants. {Smith 219}

In a second visit by Smith to the office of the Moscow Party Committee, an official named Comrade Brodskaya wanted to speak with him about a letter of complaint, on some matter, which he had written to the Central Committee. Smith explained to her in the course of the broader conversation that he was "'completely disappointed because you are not building socialism, but bureaucratism.' Here Brodskaya interrupted me: 'But what are these gigantic factories? Is this not Socialism?' 'I don't call that Socialism at all. The factories are run by the State, but for the gain of certain individuals. Under Socialism the workers are entitled to the full product of their labor. But here the workers starve and a small privileged group appropriates the products for itself. Under Socialism if production increases, then the workers are supposed to benefit by improved conditions and increased equality. But here as production increases, the condition of the workers becomes worse and worse.' . . . 'But Comrade Smith,' objected Brodskaya sweetly, 'you seem to be an educated man. You are a good mechanic. You have received a position as an engineer in the factory. Do you mean to tell me that you should receive the same pay as an ignorant peasant who has just come from the village, where he lived among the cattle and the pigs? You want these backward workers to get as much as the more intelligent people?'" Smith was "incensed by her evident contempt for the common people." {Smith 239}