Harvard Papers in Ukrainian Studies

The Great Soviet Peasant War

Bolsheviks and Peasants, 1917–1933

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List of Abbreviations

CIK	Central'nyj ispolnitel'nyj komitet SSSR [Central Executive Committee of the USSR]
CK KPSS	Central'nyj komitet Kommunističeskoj partii Sovetskogo sojuza [Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union]
GARF	Gosudarstvennyj arxiv Rossijskoj Federacii [State Archive of the Russian Federation]
GULag	Glavnoe upravlenie ispravitel'no-trudovyx lagerej [Main Administration of Corrective Labor Camps]
KPbU	Komunistyčna partija (bil'šovykiv) Ukraïny/Kommunističeskaja partija (bol'ševikov) Ukrainy [Communist Party (Bolsheviks) of Ukraine]
ITL	Ispravitel'no-trudovoj lager' [Corrective Labor Camps]
NEP	Novaja èkonomičeskaja politika [New Economic Policy]
NKVD	Narodnyj komissariat vnutrennix del [People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs]
OGPU	Ob"edinennoe gosudarstvennoe političeskoe upravlenie pri Sovete narodnyx komissarov SSSR [Unified State Political Administration of the Soviet of People's Commissars of the USSR]
PSR	Partija socialistov-revoljucionerov [Socialist-Revolutionary Party]
RCXIDNI	Rossijskij Centr xranenija i izučenija dokumentov novejšej istorii [Russian Center for the Preservation and Study of Documents on Modern History; formerly CPA, Central Party Archive]
RKP	Rossijskaja kommunističeskaja partija [Russian Communist Party]
RSFSR	Rossijskaja Sovetskaja Federativnaja Sotsialističeskaja Respublika [Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic]
VČK	Vse-rossijskaja črezvyčajnaja komissija po bor'be s kontrrevoljuciej i sabotažem [All-Russian Extraordinary Commission for the Struggle against Counter-revolution and Sabotage]

The Great Soviet Peasant War

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Introduction *

This essay will try to sketch an important part of what has been called the "Thirty Years War" of our century. Actually, one should say the Forty Years War since, as I believe, the correct chronological boundaries are 1912 and 1956.[1] This is the event that shaped the epoch, at least for those who experienced it, since it is possible that in two or three hundred years from now people will look at what happened in India or China as the truly crucial developments.

The part of this war I will deal with is represented by the great conflict in two acts—1918–22 and 1928–33—which opposed the newly-born Soviet state to the overwhelming majority of its own population. (In 1926, peasants and nomads of many nationalities still accounted for 82 percent of the country's inhabitants.) As we will see, it could be argued that this war was the continuation of the confrontation between the Empire's peasantry and the Russian state. However, in the spring of 1918 this confrontation took completely new forms and entered into a different stage which would determine the events of the subsequent decades.

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* This is the revised version of a lecture given at Harvard University in March 1995. I thank Harvard's Department of History for the invitation and Paul Bushkovitch, Marco Buttino, Michael Confino, Ettore Cinnella, Luca de Capraris, Vincenzo Giura, Jim Heinzen, David Shearer, and Alessandro Stanziani for their friendly criticism. I also thank the Russian friends and archivists who helped me in these exciting years, the Istituto Italiano per gli Studi Filosofici for its generous support and the Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute which offered me the opportunity to publish these pages.

1 I prefer these dates over the more obvious 1914–45 because, as Elie Halévy showed already in 1929 in his beautiful *Une interprétation de la crise mondiale, 1914–1918,* now in E. Halévy, *L'ère des tyrannies* (Paris, 1990), World War I came from the East and was ignited by the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, sanctioned by the 1912–13 Balkan wars. The date 1956 arises from the fact that I believe that for Eastern and Central Europe this was a crucial turning point that closed the period dominated by war and war-like regimes.

I believe that this conflict was perhaps the single most important factor at play in pre-war Soviet history. It was indeed the *greatest European peasant war*—the category may of course be criticized but I believe that in our case the meaning of the term is clear[2]—of the modern era, possibly the greatest peasant war in European history.

To prove it we can adopt a rather sad and rough, but effective criteria: the number of its victims. These were close to 15 million—it is an order of magnitude more than a precise figure—if we limit our count to those who lost their lives fighting in the conflict and in the repressions and the famines which concluded this war's two major episodes (I hope that by the end of this essay it will be clear why famines are to be included). The number is greater if we take all epidemics, and not only hunger-related diseases, into account. Of these victims *grosso modo* a few hundreds of thousands died in the fighting and the repressions of 1918–22; 5 million in the 1921–22 famine; up to one million in the deportations and the repressions of the early 1930s; more than one million during the denomadization of Central Asia (where at least another million people had perished between 1917 and 1920); and close to seven million in the 1932–33 famine (see Tables 3 and 4 below, pp. 64 and 66).

Even though there are many studies devoted to some of the specific aspects and periods of this war, to my knowledge nobody has studied it in its entirety. Actually, nobody seems to have considered it as a self-standing historical entity. This has produced a number of serious interpretive blunders. They are especially evident in the studies which have examined the NEP and collectivization, often led astray by ignorance or misunderstanding of the conflict's first act.[3]

Of course, an event of the magnitude of this war could not but be extremely complex. In fact, many of the pieces which composed it and of the problems it raises are of great interest and complexity *per se*. This applies, for instance, to this conflict's relationships with the national

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[2] See for example Michael Khodarkovsky, "The Stepan Razin Uprising: Was it a 'Peasant War'?" *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 42 (1994): 1–19.

[3] I discuss this point in "Collectivisation, révoltes paysannes et politiques gouvernamentales à travers les rapports du GPU d'Ukraine de février-mars 1930," *Cahiers du monde russe* 35 (1994): 437–632. Also the interpretations of the great purges were often affected by the ignorance of this war.

question or to its impact on the psychological and ideological evolution of the Bolshevik leadership.

That is why this essay can only be a quick overview which will take much for granted—also because many single episodes have been studied—and will ignore several important developments, most notably those that took place in Central Asia. Here the regime waged a war against Muslim peasants and nomads similar to the one I will focus on, but the conflict differed in these regions since it immediately took over unmistakable colonial features (the fact that in the fall of 1917 "seizing the land" meant there the appropriation of indigenous property by the Russian minority can serve as an illustration of the point).[4]

This article is a *vue d'ensemble* and not a comprehensive reconstruction also because this war has not been the main focus of my research. For many years I have been working on a biography of G. L. Pjatakov, the real organizer of the Soviet industrialization drive.[5] But it was precisely my work on a life spanning the years between 1890 and 1937 which allowed me to move back and forth through this period with a certain ease and helped me look at it as a whole and grasp—I hope—its crucial problems.

In addition, a good dose of archival luck—I happened to be blessed with repeated serendipity—put me more than once before material which clarified important parts of this war and signaled its decisive role. This happened in the Archives of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs

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[4] See for example Georgij Safarov, *Kolonjal'naja revoljucija (Opyt Turkestana)* (Moskva, 1921); Martha Brill Olcott, *The Kazakhs* (Stanford, 1987); Richard Pipes, *Russia under the Bolshevik Regime* (New York, 1994) and Marco Buttino's studies based on newly available archival material like "Politics and Social Conflict during a Famine: Turkestan immediately after the Revolution," in Marco Buttino, ed., *In a Collapsing Empire* (Milano, 1993): 257–78; "Turkestan 1917, la révolution des Russes," *Cahiers du monde russe et soviétique* 1 (1991) and "Etnicità e politica nella guerra civile: a proposito del *basmačestvo* in Fergana" (a French version of this paper will be published in *Cahiers du monde russe* 1–2 [1997]).

[5] See Andrea Graziosi, "'Building the First System of State Industry in History.' Piatakov's VSNKh and the Crisis of the NEP, 1923–1926," *Cahiers du monde russe et soviétique* 32 (1991): 539–80; "G. L. Piatakov (1890–1937): A Mirror of Soviet History," *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 16 (1/2) 1992: 102–166; "At the Roots of Soviet Industrial Relations and Practices: Piatakov's Donbass in 1921," *Cahiers du monde russe* 36 (1995): 63–106.

for the 1932–33 famine, in the Russian State Archives (GARF) for 1919 Ukraine, and in the former party archives (now RCXIDNI) for collectivization.[6]

On the other side, my participation in the new, extraordinary period our profession has entered with the opening of the former Soviet archives has granted me the privilege to see the results of the work of many colleagues, who have discussed their findings and tentative conclusions with me.[7]

Consequently, this essay relies extensively on new, published and unpublished documents and on the work of many, mostly young colleagues. I consider it a duty, however, to state that, given the 20th century's countless printed sources and millions of literate people moving around, it was indeed possible to know many things—at least in their general terms—*before* the recent opening of the former Soviet archives. This is especially true for the "civil war" years, but there were also plenty of both first-hand accounts and documents on collectivization and on the 1932–33 famine. With a few admirable exceptions, however, our profession did not avail itself of these possibilities. In particular, *victims were not listened to* and official documents were, to put it simply, *revered.* Similarly, we risk today extending this uncritical treatment to the newly available archival

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[6] A. Graziosi, ed., *Lettere da Kharkov* (Torino, 1991); Id., "Collectivisation"; Id., *Bolsheviks and Peasants in Ukraine, 1918–1919. A Study in Bolshevisms, National Socialisms and Rural Movements,* to be published in 1997 by AIRO-XX (Moscow), Seuil (Paris) and Il Mulino (Bologna).

[7] Viktor Petrovič Danilov and the French colleagues collaborating with him were so kind as to invite me to participate in the Russian-French multivolume project of publication of the VČK-OGPU-NKVD *selsvodki* (the reports of the secret police on the peasants moods and behaviors); Oleg Xlevnjuk, Aleksandr Kvašonkin and Aleksandr Livšin shared with me the preliminary results of their research, which are being published in the multivolume series *Dokumenty sovetskoj istorii* sponsored by the MGU, the Istituto Italiano per gli Studi Filosofici, the Maison des Sciences de l'Homme and the Ecole des Hautes Etudes; Gennadij Bordjugov put me in touch with the work of a number of young Russian historians by associating me to the series *Pervaja monografija* which he edits; finally, over the past six years my involvement in the European Seminar on Russian and Soviet history allowed me to meet and listen to a number of young European scholars.

sources, which are often taken at their face-value—as if historians had not accumulated over the centuries a vast body of experience on how to approach archives and their holdings.

For all of the above mentioned reasons, this essay does not pretend to say any definitive word. Rather, I hope that colleagues will be stimulated, perhaps polemically, to take up the questions I did not properly treat and to put forward their own reflections on the meanings and the consequences of this war and on the problems it raises.

ONE

Background

The general background of our story is formed on one side by the strength and the traditions of the Russian imperial state and on the other by the strength and the autonomous drive of the Empire's rural world, especially after 1861.

The economy of this essay does not allow a discussion of the former. It is however necessary to spend a few words on the latter for in the past two decades a number of studies of the great reform and of its aftermath have substantially altered the traditional interpretation, with its poorer and poorer peasants, oppressed by taxes and by Witte's industrial schemes.[8]

Even though the negative sides of both the reform and the industrialization "from above" as well as the ill feelings and the real suffering they generated in the countryside have not been denied and should not be underestimated, we now have a much clearer picture of the vigor and the impetus of the liberated peasantry.

All the relevant indicators point in the same direction. On one side we have the demographic boom, the massive purchase of noble land,[9] the rising agricultural productivity, the rising living standards and the rising per capita income of most peasants.

On the other side, we have the peasants' active involvement—*on their own terms*—in the process of modernization. This is testified by their positive attitude toward literacy, by the huge development of cooperatives, which grew from 1,600 in 1902 to over 35,000 in 1915, by the rural origin of the majority of the new urban strata—workers of

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[8] The works of Jeffrey Brooks, Paul Gregory, Steven Hoch, Heinz-Dietrich Löwe, Stefan Plaggenborg, James Simms, Alessandro Stanziani, and Elvyra Wilburg can be mentioned. See also Michael Confino, "Present Events and the Representation of the Past: Some Current Problems in Russian Historical Writing," *Cahiers du monde russe* 35 (1994): 839–68.

[9] The land belonging to peasants almost doubled between 1877 and 1905. In the following eight years peasants bought another nine million desyatinas.

course, but also traders and merchants (in 1910 Petersburg, for example, peasants and former peasants were 1,310,000 out of 1,900,000 inhabitants while in 1914 Moscow they made up 82 percent of the population). These newly urbanized people kept close ties with their villages: The Russian Empire had relatively small, stable urban slums, extremely frequent city-village "round-trips," etc.

In sum, on the eve of the revolution, when nearly 83 percent of the Empire's population still lived in rural settlements, the countryside had accumulated an enormous energy, embodied by the traditional, pyramid-shaped, demographic structure of the Empire, with its millions of young people of overwhelming rural origin.

This accumulation, however, bore at least partially the marks of the legal, normative and cultural boundaries of what have been called "the peculiar conditions of the peasant social structure."

Especially since the 1880s, these peculiarities had been reinforced by the government attempt "to isolate or segregate the Russian peasantry from both civil society and the body politic . . . as a guarantee against political instability."[10]

These efforts, which could not prevent the peasants' active participation in the social processes, had the paradoxical results of strengthening the autonomous drive of the countryside. They also strengthened, in spite and by way of the growing influence of the Socialist-Revolutionary Party (PSR), the peasants' feeling of "otherness" in the political realm. Michael Confino has looked at the mutual distrust and at the enmity between peasants and the state as one of the distinctive feature of Russian history. And while it is true that Stolypin's reforms made some inroads in the countryside (many peasants quickly learned to use them to their own advantage), before the war the peasantry still identified the state with taxes and military service and judged it an "alien entity, impervious to their concepts of right and justice."[11]

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[10] Francis William Wcislo, "*Soslovie* or Class? Bureaucratic Reformers and Provincial Gentry in Conflict, 1906–1908," *The Russian Review* 1 (1988): 1–24.

[11] M. Confino, "Traditions, Old and New: Aspects of Protest and Dissent in Modern Russia," in Shmuel Noah Eisenstadt, ed., *Patterns of Modernity,* vol. II, *Beyond the West* (London, 1987): 121–36.

In fact, as I said, the story of the confrontation between the state and the peasantry could start at the beginning of the century, with the great wave of violent and unexpected peasant revolts of 1902 in the Russian and Ukrainian black earth belt. Many of the great leaders of the 1918–21 revolts—from Maxno to Antonov—emerged in 1905–07. And in 1930 the Ukrainian GPU noted that the villages leading the resistance against collectivization were often the same that had distinguished themselves in 1905 or had produced before 1917 an abnormally high proportion of socialist cadres.[12]

The links between what Professor Danilov has called the Russian agrarian revolution, 1902–1922, and what I am proposing to call the Soviet peasant war, 1918–1933, are therefore a promising field of investigation.[13]

The more so since it seems probable that those left at the margins of the indisputable social and economic progress ignited by the reforms, the hundreds of thousands of landless and angry former peasants which moved about the Empire, did furnish—as Danilov writes—some recruits to the "army of the new social outburst [*armija novogo social'nogo vzryva*]" precipitated by the war.

These people's previous marginalization helps explain this outburst's "plebeian" violence. There were, however, far deeper roots. In fact, while it cannot be denied that the pre-1914 rural world was undergoing a rapid evolution, it must be added that in the countryside *there still remained a strong nucleus of archaism and brutality*, which Bunin

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[12] The latest biography of Maxno, with much new material on his youth, is Valerij Nikolaevič Volkovinskij, *Maxno i ego krax* (Moskva, 1991). Also see "Doklad o volynskax kresťjan v Krivorožskom okruge (po dannym UČOSO s 1 po 16 marta 30 g.)," in Graziosi, "Collectivisation": 531–48. Both Černov and Spiridonova came from Tambov, the seat of the first peasant brotherhoods (*krest'janskie bratstva*) and a socialist-revolutionary stronghold already at the beginning of the century.

[13] See for example his "Agrarnye reformy i agrarnaja revoljucija v Rossii," in Teodor Shanin, ed., *Velikij neznakomec* (Moskva, 1992): 310–21 or his introduction to the beautiful *Krest'janskoe vosstanie v Tambovskoj gubernii v 1919–1921 gg. "Antonovščina". Dokumenty i materialy* (Tambov, 1994). Of course, our interpretations do not always coincide. I am for example convinced that without the war the undeniable peasant unrest would not have grown into a revolution and would have been slowly weakened by the as undeniable social and economic development. This in spite of the latter's many victims and contradictions.

realistically portrayed in his novels. Let us remember, for example, his Sukhodolians, "who skinned the squire's bull *alive* for a joke."[14] Obviously, strong social upheavals could unleash such "archaisms" and many peasants could behave as their forefathers who had followed Razin or Bulavin.

This is the general background against which we must place World War I which, in so far as it was the genesis of the above mentioned Forty Years War, can be considered the century's most important single event. This war was immediately interpreted by some of the best European thinkers—Croce or Meinecke come to mind, but many others could be recalled, including not a few Russians—as the cause of a catastrophic *"regression"*[15] of the European economy and society. Spencer's dark forebodings about history's possible movements backward to what he called "military" states and societies in case of protracted violent conflicts seemed to many to come true.[16]

I would like to underline the *general barbarization* in the behavior of the "masses" and the *élites* alike and the *economic move backward* this regression carried with it. The latter phenomenon took place both at the macroeconomic and at the microeconomic level. For instance, general strengthening of the economic role of the state was paralleled, especially in Eastern Europe, by the return of large rural areas to self-consumption practices.

Movements backward also took place at the ideological level. The belief in the superiority of the state—i.e., of force—in the economic as in the social sphere was widely shared and penetrated, even though in different degrees and with different features, well beyond socialist and traditional bureaucratic circles, leading to what Elie Halévy in 1936 called *étatisation de la pensée*. In this case too, examples and quotations

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[14] For very intelligent remarks on these questions see Dioneo (Šklovskij), "The Russian Peasant—What is He?," *The New Russia* 22 (1 July 1920): 264–69.

[15] Quotation marks are used because, of course, history does not and cannot revert its march. Nevertheless, more brutal conditions can "select" institutions, social organisms and social behaviors that are simpler and thus more "primitive" than previously existing ones in spite of their being much more "modern. "

[16] I discussed this point in "Alle radici del XX secolo europeo," my introduction to the Italian edition (Torino, 1994) of Ludwig von Mises, *Nation, Staat und Wirtschaft* (Wien, 1919).

could be easily multiplied and names like those of Rathenau and Mosley, Keynes, and the many Americans who participated in the organization of the war effort and then became important leaders of the New Deal come to mind. It may be added that often the belief in the state and in force went hand in hand with the cult of special individuals seen, or presenting themselves, as the embodiment of these two principles.

TWO

Overture, 1917

But let us go back to Russia at the end of 1917. These are the months in which the crisis ignited by the war received in the former Russian Empire a *paradoxical solution*: a popular revolution, somebody said a plebeian one,[17] with strong anti-authoritarian and anti-state features landed in power the country's most statist political group. The reasons for this are a fascinating subject of speculation. Certainly, what Plekhanov called the "role of personality in history," Lenin's one in our case, had more than something to do with it.

This paradox is embodied by the *two Bolshevisms* of late 1917–early 1918.

On one side there was that of the peasants and the soldiers, often of the peasant-soldiers but also of the peasant-workers (and of many urban workers, a problem I cannot deal with in this essay).[18]

Three years of war had heightened the villages' perception of the state and of the ruling classes as alien forces. Soon after the beginning of the war, agrarian credit had practically disappeared. Together with the enlistment of many agrarian specialists in the army, this put a stop to land improvements in the countryside, and thus to the evolution which Stolypin's reforms had accelerated. At the same time the countryside had to bear an increasing burden in terms of enlisted men (in European Russia almost 40 percent of male peasants of working age had been mobilized by 1917), casualties, forced procurements (introduced already

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[17] According to Ettore Cinnella, Michal Reiman was the first to use this expression, adopted by Cinnella in *La rivoluzione bolscevica* (Lucca, 1994): 46ff and by Moshe Lewin, *Russia, USSR, Russia* (New York, 1995): 5, 155 *passim.*

[18] See M. Confino, "Issues and Nonissues in Russian Social History and Historiography," *KIARS Papers* 165 (Washington, DC, 1983) and my "Stalin's Antiworker 'Workerism'," *International Review of Social History* 40 (1995): 223–59.

in 1916–17), inflation and taxes.[19] This while repeated defeats were destroying the prestige of the Russian Imperial state and showing its huge weaknesses.

When that state entered the final stage of its collapse, peasants quickly took the initiative into their own hands. Their program was simple: the minimum possible of state oppression and presence, peace and land, that black repartition [*černyj peredel*] generations of peasants had dreamt about.

Peasants thus almost stopped paying taxes and delivering their quotas to the state procurements agents. Increasing numbers of young men failed to show up for recruitment and many soldiers started to desert. Above all, in a few months peasants destroyed what was left of the noble estates and wiped out bourgeois holdings as well as most of the farms created by Stolypin's reforms.

The land which the peasants distributed among themselves was not that much, especially if compared to what they already owned. Yet it averaged about one desyatina per homestead [*dvor*]. Furthermore, poor families were favored in the repartition. This started what was soon to be called the *serednjakizacija* of the countryside, i.e., the trend toward a relative homogenization of its social structure, a trend reinforced by the contemporary and related acceleration in the process of disintegration of the traditional multinuclear peasant family.[20]

The methods employed to carry out this program were often very brutal. Thanks also to the war, the archaic nucleus mentioned above then re-emerged strengthened and revitalized: not by chance, violence was fiercer and made its first apparitions in the vicinity of the front-line. Everywhere nobles' and officers' estates were the first to be struck, together with those belonging to widows and lonely women, priests of "alien" religions and owners with foreign names. Of course, Jewish urban property was not spared.

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[19] CSU, *Rossija v mirovoj vojne* (Moskva, 1925): 19 ff; Nikolaj Nikolaevič Golovine, *The Russian Army in the World War* (New Haven, 1930): 51; A. Stanziani, "Economistes, bureaucrates et paysans: la question des approvisionnements agricoles en Russie, 1914–1917," *Cahiers du monde russe* 36 (1995): 71–94.

[20] Peasant *dvory* had been 8.5 million in 1877 and 12 million in 1905. They were 16 million, many of them mononuclear, in 1916 and nearly 22 million ten years later.

In the non-Russian peripheries of the Empire, and especially in those closer to the front, these features were even more extreme. Following some contemporary observers, one can actually maintain that here this "plebeian Bolshevism" immediately showed direct "national-Bolshevik" traits.[21] The leader of the Ukrainian Bund, for example, noted that in Ukraine, where "the lord [*pomeščik*] was Russian or Polish, and the banker, the industrialist and the merchant were very often Jews," to say "enough with the lords [*get' panov*]" could easily be spelled "enough with the Poles, the Muscovites and the Jews [*get' ljaxov, get' moskalej, get' žydov*]," even though this did not happen automatically and the overwhelming majority of the Jewish population was actually very poor.[22]

These areas thus were ideal breeding grounds for spontaneous varieties of rural-based "national-socialism." This, however, should not make us loose sight of the major contradictions marring the relationships between peasants and nationalism. From Herder onwards, these relationships were rightly considered fundamental. Yet in our case they were soon to show—for example once more in Ukraine—all their weaknesses.[23]

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[21] One could argue that the Russian plebeian Bolshevism shared similar traits, discernible in his "socialist-revolutionary" ideology. They were even more evident in some PSR ideologues, but were generally confused and weakened by factors like the imperial, "cosmopolitan" nature of the Russian national consciousness.

[22] Vladimir Petrovič Zatonskij, "Oktjabr' 1917 goda v Kieve," now in *V zaščitu revoljucii* (Kyiv, 1977): 9–22; *Pravda* (April 30, 1918); *Očerki istorii Kommunističeskoj partii Ukrainy* (Kyiv, 1964): 257; Moisej Grigor'evič Rafes, *Dva goda revoljucii na Ukraine* (Moskva, 1920): 7.

[23] All over Eastern Europe the countryside has been an essential factor in the development of nationalism. Yet, peasants themselves always showed a basically ambiguous attitude and gave an unstable and precarious support to the nationalists' efforts (at least up to the appearance of movements capable of uniting the social and the national questions and thus to involve the peasantry in the "national liberation struggle"). In fact, peasants also shared what could be called a "pre-national" culture and were thus, in a way, unconscious members of a quasi-"anthropological" international of the "obscure" people, to use the term scornfully employed by the Russian (and non Russian) cities to designate them. Paradoxically enough, localism was one of the distinguishing features in the program of this international of behaviors and beliefs.

The second Bolshevism was the "true" one, i.e., that of a small but very effective political *élite* composed by a few intellectuals and a strong nucleus of *praktiki*—as Stalin later said with pride—of popular origin and with little or no formal education.

Among this *élite*'s striking features there were its formidable aggressiveness and its undeniable talents, most notably in state-building.[24] These talents, which cannot be automatically derived from the radical statism of the original Bolshevik ideology, were among the post-1917 major surprises. In order to grasp their extent we may recall the extreme "open-mindedness" of which the Bolsheviks gave proof in building and defending their new state. Contrary to their antagonists, they were then ready to use most of the available materials and to seize most of the relevant opportunities.

The classical examples are Lenin's appropriation of the "reactionary" agrarian program of the socialist-revolutionaries in order to grab power, and Trotsky's use of former Tsarist officers who, as we know, ended up being far more numerous in the Red than in the White armies.[25]

As and perhaps even more important however was the mass promotion of elements of popular origin, that tapping the resources of the Empire's masses which the Whites neither wanted nor could do. This was the way through which the plebeian revolution, the first Bolshevism I spoke of, crept into the regime and imprinted it. It must be added that, given the conditions in which it took place, this screaming of the popular natural *élites* was regulated by mechanisms favoring the most aggressive and resolute elements (see below for what happened in the countryside).

The swift and unprincipled utilization of national contradictions and of the *divide et impera* rule was almost as impressive. The massive resort to Letts and former central-empires' POWs in the repression of local revolts illustrates this point. Even more impressively, already in

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[24] Moshe Lewin comments on this point in his "Civil War: Dynamics and Legacy" (1988) now in *Russia, USSR, Russia:* 42–71.

[25] Aleksandr Georgievič Kavtaradze, *Voennye specialisty na službe Respubliki sovetov, 1917–1920 gg* (Moskva, 1988). Many of these officers were not, however, regular Tsarist ones, whose lower ranks had been wiped out in the first months of the war. They were, rather, more or less educated civilians whose promotions that very war had made necessary. See "The Civil War in Russia. A Roundtable Discussion," *Russian Studies in History* 4 (1994): 73–95.

February 1918 Armenian detachments (one should remember the tragic experience they had just gone through) were used to put down Muslim Kokand and its anti-Bolshevik government.[26] Soon afterwards the Bolsheviks would collaborate with some of the responsible parties of the great Armenian massacre of 1915.

The relationships between true and plebeian Bolshevism went through a rapid evolution. Very soon, the new "Soviet" state (quotation marks should be used because—as we shall see—at least in Russia free soviets were quickly eradicated) entered into a violent conflict with the masses which were supposedly supporting it and from which it continued to extract its cadres.

Gorky's attitude towards the Bolsheviks is a good yardstick of this evolution, on which more will be said in the conclusions. As we know, at first Gorky sternly condemned the new regime precisely because it had unleashed the primitive, "Asiatic" core of the Russian Empire against the thin layer of Western civilization so painfully created in the previous decades. After a few months, however, though continuing to criticize the new government when he saw it fit, Gorky started to change his mind precisely because he noticed that the party firmly intended to hold back those "Asiatic hordes" and was actually the only force capable and sufficiently ruthless to do it (Gorky's problem then became that of "influencing" the new power by facilitating its relationships with "Western" culture and intellectuals).[27]

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[26] Buttino, "Etnicità."

[27] For 1917–18 see the new edition of Gorky's *Untimely Thoughts,* Mark D. Steinberg, ed. (New Haven, 1995). I owe most of the informations on Gorky's evolution in the following years to Daniela Steila, who presented a paper on this topic in a session of the European seminar on Russian and Soviet history (Naples, September 1994).

THREE

Act I, 1918–1922

The first act of the war between the new regime and the peasantry had remarkably common traits, though different chronologies and peculiar features in each of its major "fronts": European Russia, Ukraine, Siberia, the Cossack lands, and Central Asia.

Unfortunately, we do not have a clear picture of the crucial months between the end of 1917 and that of 1918 in the Russian countryside.[28] This is especially regrettable since this was the period in which, by reimposing the authority and the burden of a centralized state in Russia's core regions, the new regime assured its future survival.

The traditional interpretation according to which the new state-peasants conflict started in Russia proper in the spring of 1918 with the launching of a major grain requisition drive, accompanied by tortures which were soon to become standard procedures (we find them identical in the OGPU 1930 reports) seems to me still valid.

Grain, however, was not the war's sole aim: at its heart lay the above mentioned Bolshevik attempt to re-impose the state's presence on a peasantry which had just liberated itself. This does not mean that the peasants were in principle against any kind of state authority. But as the new requisition and centralization efforts indicated, in some crucial spheres the new state was ready to walk in its predecessor's footsteps with much superior ambitions and energy. At the same time, the Bolshevik state signaled to peasants, for instance with its collectivization and anti-religious programs, its willingness to challenge the countryside's hopes and aspirations in new ways. In fact, it was

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[28] In particular, little was known of the Left socialist-revolutionaries, recently the object of a major monograph I was not able to consult. See also E. Cinnella, "The Tragedy of the Russian Revolution. Promise and Default of the Left Socialist Revolutionaries in 1918," *Cahiers du monde russe* 1–2 (1997).

soon to become, in Pasternak's words, a "superstate" of a peculiar and primitive kind.[29]

Among the tools of this reassertion of state power were the poor peasants committees [*kombedy*]. The Bolsheviks used them to break the unity of the rural world by exploiting inner divisions which, though not of class origin, were certainly present. The return, after the Brest-Litovsk treaty, of a new wave of former soldiers interested in rediscussing the repartition carried out in their absence was also put to good use.

Kombedy were also used to implement the 1918 effort at forced collectivization and to liquidate the local soviets elected in 1917, which were generally of socialist-revolutionary orientation and under the control of the peasant *élite* grown in Tsarist times. Of course, this *élite* did not yield without a fight: with the support of the mass of the peasantry, which was incensed by the requisitions, it led a series of revolts which were sometimes of considerable dimensions and which culminated in the Fall.[30]

Correctly I believe, Frenkin defined the Bolsheviks' 1918 agrarian policy the first counter-revolutionary operation successfully carried out after 1917. It may be added that thanks to this policy the Bolsheviks, who did not have any foothold in the countryside, were able to start building a layer of "faithfuls" in the villages. This was done by sending

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[29] Boris Pasternak, *Il dottor Živago* (Milano, 1957): 292. Miljukov came to the conclusion that the Bolsheviks had ensured the survival of the Russian *gosudarvennost'*, endangered by the provisional government (and by the peasant revolution). For my assessment of the role of ideology, and of marxism in particular, in the birth of this new "superstate" see "G. L. Piatakov": 106–19.

[30] M. S. Frenkin, *Tragedija krest'janskix vosstanij v Rossii, 1918–1921 gg* (Ierusalim, 1987). S. V. Jarov, "Kresťjanskie volnenija na severo-zapade Sovetskoj Rossii," in V. P. Danilov and T. Shanin, eds., *Krest'janovedenie. Ežegodnik 1996* (Moskva, 1996): 134–59. Vladimir N. Brovkin, *Behind the Front Lines of the Civil War, 1918–1922* (Princeton, 1994) is the latest addition to the short list of studies devoted to these problems. This list includes Orlando Figes, *Peasant Russia, Civil War: The Volga Countryside in the Revolution* (Oxford, 1989) where, at pp. 61–69, one can find a discussion of how old village structures begot village Soviets in early 1918. William Henry Chamberlin's *The Russian Revolution* (New York, 1935) remains the best "old" book.

back home to important positions a number of recently urbanized elements which the party had filtered in previous months.

Given the tasks these militants were called upon to execute (let us remember the requisitions and their methods), and given some of the psychological levers used to mobilize them (such as power, envy and a share in the division of the booty), there is no need to wonder at the discovery that this new stratum of "rural rulers" would soon exhibit very specific features. To use words that can be found in many Bolshevik reports, devotion to the cause (or, better, to the new state) and undeniable operative capacities often went hand in hand with negligible political or cultural consciousness, careerism and strong "traditional" behaviors, like brutality towards subordinates, alcoholism, favoritism, camarillas, family cliques, etc. We face here one of the main channels of the above mentioned penetration of the plebeian revolution, and of its "spirit," in the new regime.

The presence of a strong criminal element was remarked with surprising frequency: in those same reports we can read of provincial officials convinced that the party, "like a caring mother [*kak zabotlivaja mat'*]," would have condoned their "offences, criminal ones included [*prostupki, daže kriminal'nogo xaraktera*]" and of local representatives, particularly *kombedy* members, "who took bribes, drank *samogon,* played cards, requisitioned for themselves [*brali vzjatki, pili samogon, dopuskali igru v karty, rekvizirovali dlja sebja*]" and, more generally, "considered the citizens' property like the property of a vanquished enemy [*otnosilis' k imuščestvu graždan kak k imuščestvu zavoevannyx vragov*]." [31]

While in European Russia such things were taking place, Siberia was still in socialist-revolutionary hands, and therefore still relatively untouched by the state-peasant conflict (even though there were uprisings against their conscription policies, in Slavgorod, for instance). In the meantime, in Central Asia the struggle between the very small

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[31] See for instance Danilov, ed., *Krest'janskoe vosstanie v Tambovskoj gubernii:* 26, 35–6, 51, but plenty of other contemporary Soviet documents could be cited (I used some of them, about life in 1919 Ukrainian cities, in my *Bolsheviks and Peasants in Ukraine, 1918–1919*). These documents raise what I believe to be very important questions on the realities of Bolshevik power *in loco* even at the height of what is generally presumed to be that power's most ideologically charged, "heroic" stage.

Russian minority, supported by the army, and the Muslim world was flaring.

In Ukraine, instead, a few weeks after the German invasion, the Skoropads'kyj regime came to power. This government enjoyed the support of the traditional, property owning *élites* and was subjected to strong German and Austro-Hungarian pressure for the maximum extraction of raw materials and foodstuffs. It thus followed a harsh anti-peasant policy.[32] The question of the possession of the land seized by peasants in previous months was reopened. Meanwhile food requisitions and punitive expeditions led by foreign troops—Cossack, Russian, German, Hungarian, etc.—exacerbated the peasants' bad moods, hostility, and resistance.[33]

The contemporary strengthening of what Trotsky called the Ukrainian cities' "colonial" character reinforced these feelings of enmity. Contrary to Russia's experience, Ukraine's urban population up to 1919 in fact increased due to the arrival of both Russians fleeing from the Bolshevik-occupied areas and local *pomeščiki* abandoning the estates liquidated by the peasants. The latter were followed by a number of Jewish families that had traditionally earned their living around those estates.

Given this situation, in the late spring of 1918, while the Russian countryside was beginning to experience the new regime's policies, in Ukraine a social phenomenon of extraordinary interest began. With the possible exception of the contemporary Mexican revolution, there developed the *first peasant-based national-socialist liberation movement* of a century which was to see so many of them. Of course, precisely because it was the first one, and because of Ukrainian peculiarities, its traits were sometimes ambiguous, though unmistakable.

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[32] Probably, with hindsight, many of the very peasants who revolted against this policy were later to remember it as a relatively moderate one, especially in requisition matters. See Oleh S. Fedyshyn, *Germany's Drive to the East and the Ukrainian Revolution* (New Brunswick, 1971).

[33] It is worth noting that in pre-war Ukraine city dwellers, i.e., non-Ukrainians, bought a percentage of the noble land much larger than in Russia. At the same time, Ukrainian peasant families were burdened with a proportionally much higher percentage of the conscription (in CSU, *Rossija:* 22).

Neither the majority of the Ukrainian national parties,[34] which at the end of the year rode that movement to power, nor the local Bolsheviks grasped the nature of this phenomenon. The latter, in particular, were mostly Russians or Jews and, because of national and ideological considerations, they held an anti-peasant stance much stronger than Lenin's. Paradoxically, however, a series of contingencies was to make them the possible leaders of the Ukrainian rural-based national and social liberation movement. Among these contingencies were Lenin's land and peace decrees, the prestige acquired by the soviets in early 1918 and the Bolshevik-led anti-German resistance of March. What is more, shielded as it was by the German occupation, the Ukrainian countryside knew nothing of Bolshevik requisitions and *kombedy*. Nor did it know that while the KPbU was calling for a general insurrection against the German-led requisition detachments, Moscow offered Berlin to contract those very requisitions in exchange for a share of the booty.

In Ukraine, therefore, far from falling apart as it happened in Russia, the *équivoque* of late 1917 (i.e., the apparent coincidence in the interests and aims of that year's two Bolshevisms) not only survived 1918 but was actually strengthened by it.[35]

The year 1919 opened with the Bolshevik penetration in the Don region, which—also on the basis of the previous year's successful uprising, that had re-established the rule of the traditional Cossack *élite*—Moscow considered the Russian Vendée. To prevent future problems, the Bolsheviks started what one of their leaders, Rejngol'd, called in a letter to the Central committee "a policy of indiscriminate mass extermination [*politika massovogo istreblenija bez vsjakogo razbora*]." It seems that Sokol'nikov's army alone shot about 8,000 people in a few weeks, and Sokol'nikov was the much hated head of the "moderates," against whose "pro-Cossack" orientation the radicals of the party Donbjuro were then leading a fierce fight.

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[34] The inexperienced and weak Borot'bists were the possible exception. See Iwan Majstrenko, *Borot'bism: A Chapter in the History of Ukrainian Communism* (New York, 1954).

[35] Arthur E. Adams, *Bolsheviks in the Ukraine. The Second Campaign, 1918–1919* (New Haven, 1963) and Id., "The Great Ukrainian Jacquerie," in Taras Hunczak, ed., *The Ukraine, 1917–1921. A Study in Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass., 1977). See also my *Bolsheviks and Peasants in Ukraine.*

By mid-March this so-called decossackization had ignited a great revolt whose nature was significantly different from that of 1918 (even though also in the 1918 one there were elements which it would be difficult to qualify as "right-wing"). This time the uprising started in the Upper-Don, the region whose traditionally more pro-Soviet Cossackry had opened two months earlier the Don to the Red Army. It had a Soviet, but of course anti-communist program,[36] and it enjoyed the support of part of the non-Cossack peasants. Repressive measures were particularly vicious and the Cossack lands—Kuban included—thus became one of the most important, and most ferocious, theaters of the conflict between the state and the countryside. It was to remain such up to the 1933 famine.[37]

In Russia, where *kombedy* had been liquidated at the end of 1918 because of the ill-feelings they generated in the villages as well as because, while achieving some of Moscow's aims, their practices had generated fears about the real degree of control the party exercised over them,[38] 1919 opened with Lenin's decision to look for an appeasement with the "middle peasants."

This seemed to many a sudden about-face, coming—as it did—after months of rumors about Lenin's regrets for his late 1917 "pro-peasant" choices circulating widely in the party. Many party leaders had openly stated that Lenin's support for land repartition was the major cause of the need for requisitions and thus of the fights against peasants. Only a

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[36] According to their own documents, the insurgents were for freely elected Soviets, against Communism, against the Commune, against the Commissars, against the Jews, against requisitions, pillaging, and executions. See Peter Holquist, "A Russian Vendée: The Practice of Revolutionary Politics in the Don Territory, 1917–1921," (PhD Dissertation, Columbia University, 1994): 490–91.

[37] I. I. Rejngol'd, "Dokladnaja zapiska po voprosu o našej 'kazač'ej politike' na Donu v Central'nyj Komitet RKP, July 6 1919," now in O. V. Xlevnjuk, A. V. Kvašonkin, Lidija P. Košeleva, Larissa A. Rogovaja, eds., *Bol'ševitskoe rukovodstvo. Perepiska, 1912–1927* (Moskva, 1996): 107; Aleksander Kozlov, "Razkazačivanie," *Rodina* 6 (1990): 64–71 and 7 (1990): 43–47; A. V. Venkov, *Donskoe kazačestvo v graždanskoj vojne* (Rostov, 1992); V. L. Genis, "Razkazačivanie v Sovetskoj Rossii," *Voprosy istorii* 1 (1994): 29–41; Holquist, *A Russian Vendée.*

[38] In fact, the already mentioned mass promotion of elements of popular origins, criminal ones included, put Moscow before quite serious problems of control and repression, nor could it be otherwise.

large collectivized sector—they added while pushing for collectivization—would have guaranteed the new state's independence from small peasant holdings in matters of supplies.[39]

Reflections upon the social processes fueled by land repartition in the countryside (the already mentioned *serednjakizacija*) and long standing—but not yet openly expressed—incertitudes about the nature of both the 1917 revolution and the regime it originated, were among the ideological roots of Lenin's new policy. This, however, derived from very practical considerations.

On one side, the end of the war and the German "revolution" of November seemed to open the way for the European revolution from which the Bolshevik leaders anxiously awaited the *post facto* validation of the October move. But, as Radek kept repeating, "the bridge to the European revolution [*most, čerez kotorij idet evropejčeskaja revoljucija*]" was a peasant revolution in Ukraine, Romania, Bulgaria, and Hungary. This made a policy of appeasement with the countryside imperative.[40]

On the other side, the recent decision to introduce mass conscription in order to field a multi-million and therefore essentially peasant army against the Whites made it imperative to win the sympathy or at least the benevolent neutrality of the new peasant-soldiers.

The 8th Party Congress of March 1919 eventually approved Lenin's line favoring a *rapprochement* with the middle peasant [*serednjak*].[41] In spite of this, the requisitions—whose continuation was essential to the regime's survival—and the introduction of mass conscription caused in the following months a number of new revolts. They also fed the appearance of a more or less political and/or criminal "brigandage" whose explosion was favored by the conditions obtaining in the country.

The peasants' answer to conscription, i.e., mass desertion, fed both phenomena. It has been reckoned that nearly 1.5 million deserters

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[39] See for example Jakovlev's (Epštejn) statements in M. Ravič-Čerkasskij, ed., *Pervyj s"ezd KP(b)U. Protokoly* (Kharkiv, 1923): 69ff.

[40] V. P. Zatonskij, red., *Vtoroj s"ezd KP(b)U. Protokoly* (Kharkiv, 1927): 96 ff.

[41] "Vos'moj s"ezd RKP (b). Stenogramma zasedanij voennoj sekcii," *Izvestija CK KPSS,* 9–11 (1989); RCXIDNI, f. 17 (CK KPSS), op. 5 (Otdel CK RKP (b) po rabote v derevne, 1919–20).

roamed the countryside in 1919, and that close to 200,000 men deserted *each month* during the second semester of that year. And this just taking the Bolshevik-controlled areas into account. Often identified as "Greens" (but the Green movement was a much more complex phenomenon), deserters were in fact the natural reservoir of the insurgent bands. These concentrated in the regions between the Volga and the Urals, whose early 1919 revolts opened the way for Kolčak's advance. In the second semester, the Whites' defeat opened on the contrary the way to Western Siberia to Moscow's requisitioning detachments [*prodotrjady*]. Up to then untouched by Bolshevik requisitions, these areas had been—after the November 1918 coup—the theater of anti-Kolčak revolts and of a strong partisan movement of "socialist-revolutionary" (i.e., of plebeian-Bolshevik) inspiration.[42]

In Ukraine, 1919 was the year of the retarded explosion of the 1917 *équivoque*. Precisely because retarded, this explosion was especially violent. And because of national factors it took on very peculiar, and often unpalatable, features. The conflagration was furthermore reinforced by the strength and the arms accumulated by the peasants in the 1918 partisan war against the occupation armies and by the Bolshevik governments' policies. In fact, both Pjatakov and Rakovskij stood for gross Russification and tried to push through the collectivization effort which Russia had abandoned.

In the spring and summer of 1919 the rural based national liberation movement we mentioned thus hurled itself against those very Bolsheviks whom in January it had landed in power by helping them defeat Petljura (as Xrystjuk rightly noted, Ukraine had then been the theater of an Ukrainian civil war which combined itself with the Russian conflicts, complicating, and being in its turn complicated by them).

In July, when according to Rakovskij there were more than 200 revolts in 20 days, this movement reached its second apogee (the first one, of December 1918, coincided with Skoropads'kyj's fall).[43] It is

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[42] See the above mentioned works of Figes and Brovkin.

[43] Vladimir Aleksandrovič Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski o graždanskoj vojne,* vol. 1–4 (Moskva, 1924–1933) and Xristjan Rakovskij, *Bor'ba za osvoboždenie derevni* (Kharkiv, 1920) are possibly the most interesting contemporary accounts, but the literature is huge and even bigger is the amount of material now available in the former Soviet archives.

well known that these revolts, and more often the actions of insurgent bands, were accompanied by a number of ferocious anti-semitic pogroms. The urban Russian population played an active role in some of them, and in the following weeks Denikin's troops perpetrated yet new massacres. However, at least in the case of popular, peasant pogroms, we are dealing, I believe, with the consequences of the explosion of the above mentioned spontaneous "national-socialism" in conditions of general regression and barbarization.[44]

In August the Bolsheviks had been defeated. The Ukrainian partisans and peasants then directed their fury against Denikin, who had been able to conquer Ukraine in part thanks to the Bolsheviks' mistaken policies against their own partisan army and to the "holes" opened in the Red front by Hryhorijiv's revolt and Maxno's persecution.[45]

It has been often maintained that the 1918–19 peasant revolts did not articulate any unified program, and that rural movements in general would be by definition unable to elaborate programs. But while it is true that we have to deal with strong regional and national variations, as well as with many different ideological hues rooted in the peasant leaders' and atamans' different world views, the fact that the villages then articulated a series of requests showing a surprising homogeneity seems to me undeniable. The main points of this common "program" were the following:

a) The *černyj peredel*. In Russia this was often carried out by the peasant commune [*obščina*], which thus got a new lease on life. In Ukraine or in Siberia peasant meetings and other traditional institutions took care of it.

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[44] Different sources put the total number of pogroms' victims in between 50,000 and 200,000. See Elias Heifetz, *The Slaughter of the Jews in the Ukraine in 1919* (New York, 1921); I. Čerikover, *Antisemitizm i pogromy na Ukraine, 1917–1918* (Berlin, 1923); Leo Motzkin, ed., *The Pogroms in the Ukraine under the Ukrainian Governments, 1917–1920* (London, 1927); Pipes, *Russia:* 110–12.

[45] V. A. Savčenko, "Izmena 'bat'ki' Maxno i 'železnaja metla' L. D. Trockogo," *Istorija SSSR* 2 (1990): 75–90; Vladislav Fedorovič Verstjuk, *Maxnovščyna: seljans'kyj povstans'kyj rux na Ukraïni* (Kyiv, 1991). Trotsky's responsibility in the May-June defeat possibly opened the way for Lenin's acceptance of Stalin's maneuvers, which had been rebuffed at the 8th Party Congress and whose success emerged in the Politburo crisis of July.

b) The end of the requisitions and of the state monopoly on grain and other foodstuffs and the return to free market. As unusual as this may seem, in those days peasant revolts were fought under the banner of free trade [*svobodnaja torgovlja*]. This, however, was generally identified with the *local* market.[46] Peasants remained strongly opposed to "alien" "speculation" and "speculators" thus drawing a distinction which fits well among those between markets and capitalisms which Braudel introduced in *The Wheels of Commerce*.

c) Free soviets, i.e., self-government. Everywhere this meant soviets without communists. In the former pale of settlement Jews and Muscovites [*moskali*] were added to the list. The extreme popularity of this slogan, already there in 1919 (but anti-Bolshevik Cossacks had been "pro-soviet" already in 1918), indicates that by 1918–19 the Soviet myth had taken a firm hold in the countryside (its appeal probably originated from the capacity to decide—for example in matters of peace and land—associated with the soviets after the October). Western Siberia and the Urals, where in 1919 resounded slogans supporting the Constituent Assembly, and Tambov, where Antonov was still fighting for it in 1921, were the major exceptions.

d) No sovkhozy and no communes imposed from above (the communes in question are not of course the peasant ones). This concept was also spelled as a "No" to the nationalization and a "Yes" to the socialization of the land, the former being often identified with the reintroduction of serfdom and the latter generally being but a sobriquet for the black repartition. The peasant hatred for the Bolshevik communes was actually so acute as to strike the very term *kommunija* out of the acceptable political language.

e) Respect for religion and for local and national customs and traditions.

Particularly in its socio-economic part, this program could be defined "socialist-revolutionary." This does not mean, however, that it was the precise and direct expression of PSR demands which, for instance, certainly at first did not include free soviets. Nor did it mean that the PSR—as a political organization—held the leadership of the peasant insurrection. Following the VČK reports, we could rather say that this

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[46] The peasant quota in long-distance grain trade had declined already in 1914–1917. Nobles and large land-owners had instead curtailed their sales on the local markets, where the peasants' presence had increased.

program expressed what we might call the generic socialist-revolutionary ideology [*eserovščina*] then prevalent in Russian, Siberian, and Ukrainian popular, and often also intellectual *milieux.*[47]

The exceptional brutality and violence practiced by all parties involved was another of the essential characteristics of these events (to say this does not mean that one should forget who was—both in general and case by case—the aggressor).

On their part, the peasants and the rebellious bands—which often had their own "special units"—did commit wild excesses, symbolized by the medieval tortures inflicted upon Jews. The depth of Bunin's insights and the reality of the regression sparked by the war and the subsequent civil and national conflicts were thus once more proved.

The other side (the Bolsheviks in our case, but the Whites were second to none and often led the game), besides the systematic tortures to extract grain, resurrected even the mass floggings *à la* Arakčeev denounced by Herzen and Saltykov-Ščedrin. In conformity with modern times and World War I usages, these floggings were accompanied by the destruction of entire villages (those identified as "nests of bandits"); by the shooting of hostages (i.e., of the relatives of presumed "bandits"); by the decimation of adult males (Kolegaev, the former Russian socialist-revolutionary commissar of Agriculture, dispatched with Rakovskij in Ukraine in early 1919 and then a member of the Southern Front's Revolutionary-military soviet (RVS), asked in the Don for the "percentage shooting of adult males [*procentnyj rasstrel vzroslogo mužskogo naselenija*]");[48] and by massive retaliations. The shooting of dozens, even hundreds of peasants for every dead communist was often threatened and sometimes practiced.

Once more with the possible exception of Central Asia, this ferocity reached its acme in what was then called the Southern front: Eastern and

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[47] My friend Antonello Venturi countered my surprise for the predominance of this *eserovščina* in the secret police's reports by remarking that there was little to wonder about. The PSR was a populist party which tried to echo popular, and especially peasant demands. Therefore, the socialist-revolutionary program was the expression of the popular feelings, not the other way around.

[48] Genis, "Razkazačivanie": 47. Kolegaev also asked that insurgent khutors be burned to the ground, in Holquist, *A Russian Vendée:* 500.

Southern Ukraine, Don and Northern Caucasus.[49] The fact that these were major grain-growing areas, and thus the theater of much more rigorous requisitions, had certainly something to do with it. An even more important role, however, was played by the national factor.

In contact with this violence and because of it, the already mentioned evolution of the Bolshevik leadership proceeded in these regions at a much higher tempo. In a *milieu* where the antagonism between the new regime and a large majority of the local populations was particularly acute, the co-option of elements of popular origin, with little or no ideological baggage but ready to do what was asked of them, soon took over quite specific features. These were determined by another, far from marginal "factor": Stalin. As commissar of Nationalities, thus responsible for the non-Russian territories, and as the most authoritative member of the Southern front's RVS, Stalin directed *in loco* the above mentioned process of selection. Its products were the often personally corrupted Vorošilovs, Budennyjs and Evdokimovs (E.G., the father of that "Northern-Caucasus GPU school" which was in its turn perhaps the most important matrix of the great purges' tortures and torturers).[50]

These men played a fundamental role in the genesis of Stalin's personal following and in that of its methods. Of course, other personal followings then crystallized around other important leaders like Trotsky,

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[49] The Southern Front was created in September 1918 to replace the Northern Caucasus Military District, formed in July. See I. Kolesničenko, "K voprosu o konflikte v Revvoensovete Južnogo Fronta," *Voenno-istoričeskij žurnal* 2 (1962): 39–47 and Isaak Izrajlevič Minc, "Stalin v graždanskoj vojne," *Voprosy istorii KPSS* 11 (1989).

[50] RCXIDNI, f. 558 (Stalin), op. 1, d. 1812, l. 3; M. A. Tuščnis, "Ešče raz o kadrax čekistov 30–x godov," *Voprosy istorii* 6 (1993): 190–91. In the former party archives there are many documents from the early 1920s denouncing the widespread corruption and cronyism of the political and military cliques ruling over the Southern cities. See for example M. I. Muralova's report to Jaroslavskij from Stavropol', then in the hands of a corrupted and degenerated camarilla of drunkards protected by the party gubkom (now in Xlevnjuk et al., eds., *Perepiska:* 194). On Vorošilov's lifestyle in 1919 see Brovkin, *Behind:* 137. On that of Vorošilov and Budennyj in the *konarmija* and on the *konarmija*'s "style" see Pjatakov's report to Trotsky of december 1919 in RGVA (Rossijskij Gosudarstvennyj Voennyj Arxiv), f. 33897 (Sekretariat Predsedatelja RVS SSSR), op. 2, d. 32, l. 533. On Evdokimov see Vadym Zolotar'ov and Jurij Šapoval, "Kar'era Kata," *Rozbudova Deržavy* 1 (1995): 27–36.

but they were smaller and less cohesive for a number of reasons that cannot be discussed here.[51]

Very soon the use of the term *družina* (the prince's companions), which leads back to the state-building processes of apparently bygone eras, seemed to me appropriate to describe these phenomena. It was amply justified—I believed—by the days' realities.[52] Only later did I discovered that these proto-Stalinists used to address each other in their private letters as "friend [*drug*]" while reserving for Stalin the title "our main friend [*naš glavnyj drug*]." These are only words, and therefore cannot prove the validity of any hypothesis, but I must confess that this discovery at the same time surprised and pleased me.[53]

It is also worth noting that many of this *družina*'s middle and lower cadres came from the Donbas urban centers, whose "colonial" character has been already remarked. In the spring of 1918 Luhans'k, Kharkiv, Ekaterinoslav, and Makeevka Red guards, led by Vorošilov, had retreated eastward before the German offensive. They ended up in Caricyn where they formed the core of that X Army which—as Trotsky immediately noted—was to provide Stalin with a number of faithful henchmen.

As attested by the periodic compilations [*svodki*] which the VČK had started to prepare for the Bolshevik leadership,[54] in 1920 the vanishing of the white danger (which also a large majority of the rural population perceived as such) and the extremely unpopular militarization policies

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[51] The most important of them were probably Trotsky's character, ideological "purity," and nationality; Lenin's support for Stalin, especially from July 1919 to the summer of 1922; Stalin's personal abilities and lack of scruples, ideological or other.

[52] Though in different ways, Edward Keenan and Moshe Lewin have interpreted the post 1917 developments as a "return" to the past, correctly I believe.

[53] See "Epistolarnoe nasledie," *Voennye arxivy Rossii* 1 (1993): 404–11 and O. V. Xlevnjuk, A. V. Kvašonkin, L. P. Koševa, L. A. Rogovaja, eds., *Stalinskoe Politbjuro v 30–e gody. Sbornik dokumentov* (Moskva, 1995): passim. On the other side, this is also pure mafia jargon and the coincidence is not fortuitous.

[54] Nicolas Werth, "Une source inédite: les Svodki de la Tchéka-OGPU," *Revue des études slaves* 66 (1994): 27; V. P. Danilov and Alexis Berelowitch, "Les documents des VČK-OGPU-NKVD sur la campagne soviétique, 1918–1937," *Cahiers du monde russe* 35 (1994): 633–82.

adopted by the party caused the explosion of the above mentioned *eserovščina.* I think it may be safely maintained that then took place the biggest peasant insurrection since Pugačev's times. It peaked in early 1921 and subsided only one year later.

The differences between Russia, Ukraine, Siberia, and the Cossack lands were again significant. They had a number of causes, ranging from previous years' events—there were exhausted areas and regions whose energy was still relatively untapped—to the diversity of the Bolsheviks' policies. In Russia, for example, requisitions were enforced over entire villages, thus favoring their united reaction. In Ukraine, instead, the government once more followed the *kombedy* approach in order to break a world that the Bolsheviks had not yet been able to penetrate.

The combination of these factors helps to explain—I believe—both the ferocity of the Ukrainian fights, which often pitted the majority of the village against its minority, and the relative weakness of the general Ukrainian movement in comparison, for instance, with the Western Siberian one, grounded, as the former, in the 1918–19 partisan movement (to understand this it is enough to recall how many armies Maxno had to field between 1918 and 1920 and how many cadres and men he lost fighting the Germans, the Bolsheviks, and Denikin).

In a recently published document of the Soviet General Staff of early 1921,[55] S. S. Kamenev reported to Trotsky that three kinds of "banditry" were active at that time:

1. Six large "fires" with thousands of armed insurgents who enjoyed the active support of the local population and could be joined by

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[55] "Doklad glavnokomandujuščego vsemi vooružënnymi silami Respubliki S. S. Kameneva predsedatelju RVSR L. D. Trockomu o sostojanii borʹby s banditizmom v raznyx regionax strany (9 fevralja 1921 g.)," in N. E. Eliseeva, ed., *Povstančeskie dviženija na Ukraine. 1921 g. Komplekt dokumentov iz fondov CGASA* (Moskva, 1991). I could see the *Obzor Sekretnogo otdela VČK o vosstanijax ("banditizme") na territorii byvshej Rossii,* dated 11 December 1920, only after these pages were written (in CA FSB RF, f. 1, op. 4, d. 159, ll. 1–23). On Antonov and the Antonovščina see also Oliver Henry Radkey, *The Unknown Civil War in Soviet Russia* (Stanford, 1976); N. E. Eliseeva, ed., *Krest'janskoe vosstanie na Tambovščine (1921–1922). Komplekt dokumentov iz fondov CGASA* (Moskva, 1991) and Danilov, ed., *Krest'janskoe vosstanie v Tambovskoj gubernii.*

thousands of other fighters if and when the situation required it (*Antonovščina* in the Tambov province [*gubernija*], with approx. 15,000 cadres;[56] Western Siberia, with 50–60,000 armed rebels; Right-bank Ukraine, with about 2,500 partisans, mostly nationalists; Left-bank Ukraine, where Maxno still commanded nearly 1,500 men; Central Asia, with her approximately 25,000–30,000 "*basmači*"[57] and Dagestan, where nearly 5,000 rebels operated in the spring of 1921).[58]

2. A plurality of smaller and larger bands, acting all over the country, linked to the local population but not enjoying its active support.

3. Criminal banditry in the proper meaning of the term, whose repression was strongly supported by the peasantry.

Actually, the first category should have included the Kuban, where a big revolt, started in the summer of 1920, had just been quelled, and the entire Eastern part of the Black Sea coast which in the spring of 1921 was still partly controlled by the "Greens."[59]

As in 1919, both the revolts and their suppression were extremely brutal. In wintertime Siberian peasants used to soak the communists and the *prodotrjady* they captured with water in order to transform them in ice statues for their comrades' "education." A few months later, in June

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[56] It is worth noting that some of the defeated "Ukrainian" Bolsheviks, like Aleksandr Grigor'evič Šlixter, had ruled over the Tambov region in 1920, taking their revenge on the local paesantry.

[57] The term, literally meaning bandits, was that used by the Soviet forces repressing the local guerrilla. It should therefore be used only between quotation marks. "*Basmači*" called themselves *džigit,* fighters. Of course, some of them did often behave like real bandits, a truth which applies—to a higher or lesser degree—to all partisan movements in history.

[58] The figure for "*basmači*" comes from RGVA, f. 272, op. 2, d. 55, ll. 1–42; that for Dagestan from the VČK *svodka* of April 15 1921. Marco Buttino and V. P. Danilov kindly showed me these two documents. In September 1922 *džigit* were still more than 20,000.

[59] On the peasant movement in the Black Sea Coast see N. V. Voronovič, "'Zelenye' povstancy na Černomorskom poberež'e," *Arxiv russkoj revoljucii* 7 (1922). I found two documents of the Comité de libération du Gouvernement de la Mer Noire in the Archives of the Italian Ministero degli Affari Esteri and published them in *Rivista di Storia Contemporanea* 3 (1988): 436–43.

1921, Tuxačevskij threatened to gas the "bandits" hiding in Tambov's woods, against whom gas was certainly used in August.[60]

More generally, the communists resorted, on a scale exceeding that of the previous year, to mass executions of batches of hundreds of people. Sometimes this was openly done. In Tambov, for example, groups of scores of hostages were repeatedly executed at short intervals in the main squares of local villages to "convince" the inhabitants of the necessity to denounce "bandits" and their families. In other occasions, secrecy was required and victims were killed by machine gun fire in front of open mass graves. At the end of 1920, for example, the government conferred the Order of the Red Banner upon the already mentioned Evdokimov. The secret *ordre du jour*, written by Frunze, praised the performance of Evdokimov's expedition [*ekspedicija*], which had executed close to 12,000 people in a few days.[61] In this particular case the executed were Whites, not peasants. Evdokimov, however, was the head of the Southern Front special department [*načal'nik Osobogo otdela Južnogo Fronta*], had engaged in previous months in the fights against peasant rebels, and soon afterward co-directed the liquidation of the Ukrainian "banditry" (as we shall see he also headed in 1930 the repression of the anti-collectivization revolts in Northern Caucasus).

Already at the end of 1920, Ordžonikidze, Kosior, and other leaders organized what was probably the first mass deportations of "unreliable" elements from the villages. Thousands of Cossacks, divided into three categories on the basis of their supposed "dangerousness," were then deported to the North. A few months later this practice was resumed and perfected by Antonov-Ovseenko and Tuxačevskij in Tambov. It was on this experience that Stalin relied when, ten years later, he decided to extend the same treatment to the whole country with dekulakization.[62]

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[60] For Siberia see Pavlunovskij's report to Dzeržinskij in RCXIDNI, f. 76 (Dzeržinskij), op. 3, d. 167, l. 90. Danilov, ed., *Krest'janskoe vosstanie v Tambovskoj gubernii:* 16.

[61] Alter L. Litvin, "Krasnyj i Belyj Terror v Rossii," *Otečestvennaja istorija* 6 (1993): 46–62 and of course Sergej Petrovič Melgunov, *The Red Terror in Russia, 1918–1923* (London, 1925).

[62] N. Werth, "Specpereselency," Colloque *Nouvelles directions de la recherche sur les années Trente,* MSH, (Paris, May 1996); Danilov, ed.,

Repressions of this scope were generally the preserve of the special units created in the previous years. By 1921, the various armies' special departments [*osobye otdely*], the food army [*prodarmija*] detachments, the special purpose units [*časti osobogo naznačenija*], the troops for internal service [*vojska vnutrennej služby*], etc., included several hundred thousand men, sometimes of very questionable background (deserters and other kinds of offenders were used to fill their ranks). At times the army was called in, but whenever possible the choice fell upon chosen units like Budennyj's cavalry, employed against Maxno and the Ukrainian villages supporting him. Only in the most serious cases, like Tambov, were regular troops deployed.[63]

Even though margins of error are in this case particularly high, it is reasonable to assume that in 1918–21 the victims of the fights and the repression in the countryside were in the hundreds of thousands.[64]

This very scale pushed the party to try to understand its enemy. This may explain why, in between the end of 1920 and the beginning of 1921, the communists analyzed the social and economic situation in the countryside quite perceptively. For obvious reasons, the KPbU went even further. Under many angles, its resolutions were then closer to Čajanov's studies[65] than to the class analyses of the Marxist tradition and of later official documents.

Krest'janskoe vosstanie v Tambovskoj gubernii: 172ff (see especially the *prikazy* nos. 130 and 171).

[63] *Vnutrennye vojska sovetskoj respubliki, 1917–1922* (Moskva, 1971); G. F. Krivošeev, ed., *Grif sekretnosti snjat* (Moskva, 1993) and Pipes, *Russia:* 383.

[64] It has been reckoned that 1.8 million soldiers, including wounded ones who later died, and 1.5 million civilians perished in World War I. In between 1918 and 1922 another 12.6 million died. The military casualties of the "civil war" were only 800,000 and eight million civilians died in 1918–20, i.e., before the famine. The worst years were 1920 and 1921, when mortality rates reached 45.4 and 39.8 per thousand respectively (see Alain Blum, *Naître, vivre et mourir en URSS, 1917–1991* (Paris, 1994): 88 ff). In Central Asia 1–1.5 million people disappeared between 1917 and 1920. Some of them emigrated, but the great majority perished because of epidemics, famine, and repression. See M. Buttino, "Study of the Economic Crisis and Depopulation in Turkestan, 1917–1920," *Central Asian Survey* 4 (1990).

[65] Alexander Vasilevich Chayanov, *On the Theory of Peasant Economy*, edited by Daniel Thorner, Basile H. Kerblay, and Robert E. F. Smith (Homewood, Ill. 1966) is the classic English edition.

In fact, these resolutions presented the countryside—whose share of the population had re-reached the 1897 mark of 86 percent—as the realm of the "small peasant economy of a natural-consumer type [*melkoe krest'janskoe xozjajstvo natural'no-potrebitel'skogo tipa*]," the very product of the above-mentioned historical "regression." And they spoke of a village transformed into "an independent, self-providing and self-contained 'state' of a feudal kind [*samostojatel'noe, samo-snabžajuščeesja, v sebja zamykajuščeesja, feodal'nogo tipa 'gosu-darstvo'*]" inimical to the new Bolshevik regime and ready to fight against it not only for the land but also "for the equivalent of its own labor [*za ekvivalent svoevo truda*]" (i.e., not to meekly surrender the fruits of its toil, already greatly reduced by the war and the requisitions which had caused a decline of 30 percent in the land under cultivation and huge losses of animals, machinery, tools and the like).[66]

These "new" villages were then facing a Bolshevik party which in its turn had been deeply affected by three years of war against the Whites and *the great majority of the population*,[67] and by the already discussed state-building process carried out in extreme conditions. A hard, militarized nucleus of a few tens of thousand cadres had crystallized within it. It was directed by a very small group of major leaders who had been able to survive the trials of 1918–21.

As witnessed by the protocols of the Politburo, this group—about one hundred people among whom Trotsky was very soon an isolated man—continued to direct the party up to the mid-1930s.[68] Therefore, it shared a collective responsibility for the fundamental choices made in the late 1920s and early 1930s, something which at least partially explains why up to the final one, all the reform efforts undertaken in the USSR after 1953 did attack the high Stalinism of the purges but left untouched the previous founding period.

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[66] *Kommunističeskaja partija Ukrainy v rezoljucijax i rešenijax s"ezdov i konferencij, 1918–1956* (Kyiv, 1958): 91–101.

[67] Given its traditionally close ties to the countryside and its hostility to Bolshevik policies, from the spring 1918 onwards a large part of the "working class" was added to the list of the regime's enemies. The point has been fully confirmed by the VČK *svodki*. Some of them are quoted in Brovkin, *Behind*.

[68] The Central Committee's members actively availed themselves of their right to participate in the Politburo "normal" meetings up to 1934–35. See Xlevnjuk et al., eds., *Stalinskoe Politbjuro:* 183ff.

The ideology of this party within the party was also deeply transformed by the "civil war,"[69] which "selected" some of its original parts, made others obsolete and found new substitutes for them. Well beyond the imprinting of the military experience as such, 1918–22 events made acceptable and imposed as necessary an extraordinary level of coercion against the population. A deep distaste and even spite for democracy in general—not just for the "bourgeois" one—thus came to dominate this group of people and terms like "failure of democracy [*krax demokratii*]," referring to both the "petty-bourgeois parties" and to the very idea of democracy, became commonplace, which summed up the lessons of the war (the Bolshevik leaders meant by it the total inadequacy, and even the harmfulness, of the very idea of democracy in the "reality" that the "civil war" had laid bare before their eyes, dissipating the pre-1917 illusions).

In the non-Russian areas this *krax* was sharpened by the national factor.[70] Its common background, however, was the new regime's fear of its own "dark" peasant masses, about whose hostility no doubts could be harbored (by the way, Menshevik leaders like Martov also shared this feeling, convinced, as they were, that Bolshevik policies had caused a radical shift to the "right" of the rural masses).[71]

An emphatic cult of will-power, of resoluteness [*rešitel'nost'*] and of the leader—the *vožd'*—was the natural *pendant* of this distaste for the masses and of the consciousness to be an isolated and often detested group of "conquerors" (Lenin's term). As it was the case for the contempt of democracy, these ideas were indeed present in the Bolshevik original ideological baggage. In time, however, they had become something different and had acquired a new quality. For

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[69] Because of its convenience, the term "civil war" will be probably used also in the future. However, I decided to put it between quotation marks to underline its scientifically misleading nature. Rather than with a simple "Russian civil war" we are in fact dealing with an intricate knot of national and social conflicts.

[70] Here the explosion and the undeniable popular roots of the nationalist movements in Poland, Finland, Ukraine, etc. were among the important factors at play. Rafes, *Dva:* 135.

[71] This attitude was shared also by a number of Bundist leaders who sided against democracy not only because the Polish and the Ukrainian "masses" behaved as they did, but also because their own people had repeatedly shown their preference for the religious and nationalist parties.

Petrovskij, a former Bolshevik deputy to the Duma and in 1921 the chairman of the new Ukrainian state, communism had become "a simple matter of a strong government and determination to execute its will." Many others had convinced themselves that peasants like the Soviet ones could be "attached" to socialism only by chains, as Ordžonikidze was to recall in 1930.[72]

These developments are well illustrated by the unexpected story of a word—*konspiracija*—which deserves a small detour. Pre-1917 Bolsheviks used this term to indicate the set of secrecy rules and codes of behaviors regulating their underground conspiracy against Tsarist autocracy, conducted in the name of the oppressed people. Once in power, however, the term was not abandoned. *Konspiracija* then became the official name for the screen of secrecy measures by which the new "socialist" regime covered its activities before the eyes of a hostile population, against which all sorts of defenses were to be deployed.[73]

Of course, this common ideological background did not rule out profound contrasts and did not hinder the development of different political strategies. It was also the starting point of different psychological evolutions within the Bolshevik leadership. At least a part of it, which often but not always coincided with the intellectual one, viewed this ferocious enmity with a population it had dreamt to liberate as a personal tragedy, and derived from this contradiction (as well as from other causes, like the mass scale resort to violence) a strong psychological frailty, which is well attested by documents. This weakness was generally kept under control, and did not bar the execution of party policies. However, it did break out in moments of tension or under the influence of alcohol and provoked in everyday life

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[72] *Vestnik Narkomvnutrdel USSR* 5 (Kyiv, May 1, 1919); Alexander Berkman, *The Bolshevik Myth, 1920–1922* (London, 1925): 174; Rafes, *Dva:* 134 ff; *stenogramma* of Ordžonikidze's speech of March 24, 1930, RCXIDNI, f. 85 (Ordžonikidze), op. 1/sek., d. 123, ll. 1–9. Later in his life Petrovskij became an ardent anti-Stalinist.

[73] From a formal point of view, at least until the 1936 Constitution the party's leading role was illegal. The care which was needed to hide the fact that the state's, the government's and the higher judicial bodies' acts and decrees were often copies of former party decisions was therefore another important factor in the development of the *konspiracija* and of its apparatus.

uncontrolled behaviors which were once called "hysterical" and were certainly judged as such by those who did not have similar problems.[74]

Among the latter there certainly were many of the men of the Stalinist *družina* which, already in 1920, was an important component of the Bolshevik central leadership. At least as important was the role of its leader. Actually, going through those days' documents it is difficult to believe that for a long period, perhaps under the influence of Trotsky's later self-consolatory writings, scholars could underrate Stalin's status before 1924.[75]

Of course, Stalin's role in the war was not even remotely comparable with Trotsky's. But things stand differently as far as the party is concerned. As we now know, Stalin not only already enjoyed a large and varied personal following. He also personally directed the non-Russian areas of the new state and used his post-July 1919 position as Lenin's lieutenant (that is as Sverdlov's successor) to acquire an even more important status as the prospective leader of the militarized party. Thus very soon Stalin started to become the "Big Stalin," the strong and reasonable man everybody could go to in the 1920s in order to discuss personal and political problems (this "everybody" included many of the above mentioned "hysterics"). Not by chance in early 1921 the VČK addressed the first of the dozen or so copies of its secret, periodical reports on the state of the country to *Lenin and Stalin* and the second one to *Trotsky and Skljanskij*.[76]

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[74] The hundreds of post-1917 Bolshevik leaders' letters gathered by Kvašonkin, Xlevnjuk, and this writer for *Bol'ševitskoe rukovodstvo. Perepiska,* the second volume in the series *Dokumenty sovetskoj istorii,* seem to point in this direction. During a seminar at Yale University Mark Steinberg correctly observed that this kind of behavior was common in pre-1917 intellectual circles. And yet, I still believe that after the "civil war" we are dealing with a qualitatively different situation.

[75] Moshe Lewin reminded me that Trotsky qualified the pre-1922 Stalin as Lenin's "chief of staff." Trotsky, followed by many historians, may have considered it a dismissive expression. In fact it was a precise appreciation of Stalin's growing power and role.

[76] Sergo Mikojan was the first to draw my attention to Stalin's "reasonableness," especially in the 1920s. On the Lenin-Stalin relationships see Graziosi, "At the roots": 102, 129; Mikloš Kun, *Buxarin, ego druz'ja i vragi* (Moskva, 1992): 111ff and Pipes, *Russia:* 464ff. I think that the very closeness of these relationships helps explain the violence of Lenin's reaction once he understood he had made a major blunder in assessing his lieutenant.

In those same months of early 1921, this militarized but also exhausted and insecure party felt it had but two choices:

> either, without waiting for the help of the European working class (. . .), to start an open civil war against the mass of the peasantry (. . .), or, making economic concessions to the peasantry, to strengthen the social basis of Soviet power through an agreement with the countryside . . . [*libo, ne dožidajas' pomošči zapadnoevropejskogo proletariata (. . .), pojti na otkrytuju graždanskuju vojnu s massoj krest'janstva (. . .), libo pojdja na ekonomičeskie ustupki krest'janstvu ukrepit' putem soglašenija s nim social'nuju osnovu Sovetskoj vlasti . . .*].[77]

[77] *Kompartija Ukrainy v rezoljucijax:* 116ff.

FOUR

Intermission (Truce), 1922–1927

Once more thanks to Lenin's personal intervention, the second alternative, i.e., the NEP, was chosen. It seems that this choice was precipitated at the beginning of February 1921 by the reports on the *Antonovščina*, rather than by the later ones on Kronstadt, which confirmed a decision already taken.[78] The choice, however, did not go unopposed: especially but not exclusively on the Southern front, the resistance was much stronger than we used to think. As Osinskij wrote Lenin in May, "a 'requisitioning-poor peasants committees' point of view [*'prodovol'stvenno-kombedovskaja' točka zrenija*]" held sway among local leaders who considered peasants "natural saboteurs of Soviet power [*kak na prirodnogo sabotažnika po otnošeniju k sovetskoj vlasti*]" and thought the tax in kind [*prodnalog*] a temporary trick to appease the villages. These leaders often set the new tax at very high levels, *de facto* keeping the previous requisition [*razverstka*] alive, and still enforced mass corvées. In fact, in the VČK *svodki* of the summer of 1921 expressions like "the carrying out of requisition [*provedenie prodrazverstki*]" were used: not surprisingly, the same *svodki*, while registering that the villages appreciated the content of the NEP, added that peasants met it with distrust [*nedoverčivo*].[79]

This generated major contradictions in the execution of the new policy. These contradictions would have sufficed to delay its real beginning a few months. Their impact, however, was magnified by that of the famine which hit the country in the late spring of 1921.

This famine exterminated nearly five million people and lasted through July 1922. Drought was certainly involved. Yet a number of

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[78] Danilov, ed., *Krest'janskoe vosstanie v Tambovskoj gubernii:* 14–15.

[79] Sergej Vladimirovič Cakunov, *V labirinte doktriny* (Moskva, 1994): 24 ff; for corvées see Graziosi, "At the roots": 119; Osinskij's letter is in *Perepiska:* 204. I could see the VČK *svodki* thanks to the already mentioned project directed by V. P. Danilov.

documents and studies, as well as the famine's very chronology, prove beyond any reasonable doubt that among the decisive factors were the previous years' requisitions, which caused a decrease in production and in the amount of land under cultivation, and the brutal suppression of rural revolts, which devastated entire villages and regions. Because of this, hunger was particularly severe in some of the areas affected by the largest peasant revolts, like the Lower and Middle Volga and Southern Ukraine (which were also hit by drought).[80]

Incidentally, the Bolshevik leaders knew very well that their policies could have such consequences. In 1920, for example, Rakovskij wrote that the 1919 requisitions had caused a number of local famines in Ukraine. In early 1921 the local famine provoked by the "orgy of requisitions of the previous year [*prošlogodnaja prodovol'stvennaja Bakxanalija*]" was listed among the cause of the Tambov revolt. Peasants and workers shared this belief and held the regime responsible for a famine which—we hear them say in police reports—the Soviet power was using to kill them [*Sovetskaja vlast' xočet umorit' ix s golodu*]. [81] Thus started in the summer of 1921 a new wave of hunger-related mass disturbances [*volnenija*] which were in many ways the direct continuation of those against war communism.

In the following months, hunger and diseases, more than repression, slowly strangled these disturbances. Only at the beginning of the 1922 summer, however, the police *svodki* signaled a decisive, positive turn for the government (this was the case also in the cities, which in June had been the theater of the last great wave of strikes).[82]

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[80] Harold Henry Fisher, *Famine in Soviet Russia, 1919–1922* (New York, 1927); Kazuo Nakai, "Soviet Agricultural Policies in the Ukraine and the 1921–1922 Famine," *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 6 (1) 1982: 43–61; Roman Serbyn, "The Famine of 1921–1923: A Model for 1932–1933?" in R. Serbyn and Bohdan Krawchenko, *Famine in Ukraine, 1932–1933* (Edmonton, 1986): 147–78; Pipes, *Russia:* 410 ff; Markus Wehner, "Golod 1921–1922 gg. v Samarskoj gubernii i reakcija sovetskogo pravitel'stva," to be published in *Cahiers du monde russe* 1–2 (1997).

[81] Rakovskij, *Bor'ba:* 58–9; A. G. Šlixter, "Bor'ba za xleb na Ukraine v 1919 godu," *Litopys revoljuciji* 2 (1928): 96–135.

[82] Graziosi, "At the roots": 116–17; "Rapport du département Information de l'O. G. P. U. sur la situation politique et économique de la R. S. F. S. R. pour le mois de mai et juin 1922," in N. Werth and Gaël Moullec, eds., *Rapports secrets soviétiques* (Paris, 1994): 185–87.

This is why this famine must be considered an integral part of the state-peasants war we are dealing with. And this is why, while Lenin's change of policy did certainly play a major role, it was rather the great famine of 1921–22 which closed the period opened by 1918 or, better, by 1914. The fact, already noted by a few scholars like Pethybridge, is today confirmed by archival evidence and raises the problem of a revision of the accepted chronology.[83]

The real NEP, therefore, lasted only five years, and we must remember that in 1923–24 there still were famines and revolts of local but not negligible dimensions. How, from our point of view, is this very brief period, which has been the object of so many studies and has generated so many hopes, to be interpreted?

It has been maintained that the NEP was a *compromise* between the forces which emerged victorious from the previous Time of Troubles. This compromise could have perhaps held. Given the fragile equilibria it rested upon and the deep-seated animosities underlying it, this depended however upon the choices of the power-that-be, in whose hands was the initiative. The premature departure of Lenin, perhaps the sole leader interested in the preservation of this compromise and capable of defending it, irreparably weakened this hypothesis (beside being a weakling, Bukharin converted to this policy relatively late, Dzeržinskij was not, in his own words, a political leader, etc.).

It must also be recalled that the two most important players in the field (three if we take the nationalities into account) resolutely worked towards very different agendas. On one side, at least from 1923–24 on, the economic policies of the Soviet state concentrated upon high and unbalancing tempos of growth for heavy industry, thus paving the way for a procurement crisis. On the other, the "indigenization" [*korenizacija*] policies vigorously carried out by the non Russian Republics nourished the animosity of the Russian minorities. Finally, the peasantry tried to impose their own views upon the country's development.

This was possible because, at least from a socio-economic point of view, the NEP was *partially* a victory of that *eserovščina* which has been many times referred to. This is well illustrated by the RSFSR Land Code [*Zemel'nyj kodeks*] of December 1922 as well as by the fact that

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[83] See also Lewin, *Russia, USSR, Russia:* 42 and Wehner, "Golod. " Major epidemics too disappeared only in 1923.

among its mainstays we find the *černyj peredel* (in Russia the peasant *obščina* now controlled 95 percent of the land), local free trade and ample leeway for handicraft and small industry.[84] Large industry did remain state-controlled, but this did not contradict the tenets of the spectrum of ideologies we are dealing with. Actually, given its populist and socialist orientation, state control of large industry was an integral part of it, as proved by the *Antonovščina*'s official program.[85]

Though in a more contradictory and limited way, the NEP also catered to the peasants' aspirations in matters relating to their traditional cultural heritage. The most conspicuous example is provided by the national-communism of the 1920s, and in particular by its Ukrainian version which was the direct heir of the lesson that 1919 had imparted to the Bolsheviks.

As far as peasants were concerned, at least from the point of view of its economic fundamentals, the NEP was the living demonstration that—in Michael Confino's words—"their utopia worked."[86] They started again to do what they had done before 1917, resuming their active and spontaneous participation in urbanization—of the kind without a clear-cut separation between city and village—and industrialization. This is amply demonstrated, among other things, by the data concerning peasant seasonal migrations [*otxod*] and the veritable explosion of handicraft industry favored by the state progressive concentration upon the production of means of production.

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[84] See also Sergej Albertovič Esikov and Lev Grigor'evič Protasov, "Antonovskij Nep," *Otečestvennaja istorija* 4 (1993): 61–72 on the partial coincidence between Lenin's NEP and the *Antonovščina* program.

[85] Petty producers have usually supported strong forms of control over large production, that is "socialist" demands, while remaining fierce defenders of their way of life. This contradictory behavior helps explain many a paradox of the past two centuries. Danilov, ed., *Krest'janskoe vosstanie v Tambovskoj gubernii:* 79–81.

[86] One should perhaps say "their utopia could work". In fact many peasants, notably the more energetic ones and/or those with larger families, resented the Bolshevik economic policies as tying their hands, reducing productivity and production and, while pretending to favor the weaker elements, often favoring corruption and cronyism, as in the case of collective farms. See A. Stanziani, "Le cooperative di produzione in URSS, 1921–1928," *Annali della Fondazione Einaudi* 22 (1988): 237–64.

At the political level, however, the Bolsheviks did not yield an inch of their power, while many of their choices in the field of economic policy contradicted the compromise upon which the NEP rested, compounding the effect of war communism's vivid memories.

Beneath their relative tranquillity, the mid-1920s were thus marked by a hidden and yet palpable hostility opposing the state to the countryside. As, much to his surprise, a Russian colleague recently found out, even at the peak of the NEP, in the documents the villages sent to Kalinin, "very bitter and pessimistic evaluations of the Soviet policies in the countryside were the rule and positive criticism the exception . . . Estrangement and mistrust were those policies' most important consequences [*kak pravilo, pozitivno-kritičeskoe načalo ustupaet mesto ves'ma gor'kim i pessimističeskim ocenkam politiki vlastej v derevne . . . Otčuždenie i nedoverie—takovy byli važnejšie posledstvija*]."

We now know that the Soviet leadership knew this state of affairs very well: the OGPU *svodki*, those of the Army political directorate [*Politupravlenie armii*] on peasant recruits and a number of other sources provided them with an unambiguous picture.

The peasants, who were *de facto*, and partially *de jure*, disfranchised, felt to be second-class citizens and deeply resented the way they were treated by local bosses who often still cherished "war communist" styles and behaviors. At public meetings peasants already sat in silence [*na obščix sobranijax: sidjat kak peški i molčat*]. But once alone they complained against taxes and procurements, decried the measures hindering the development of their family farms, opposed appointments from above [*naznačenstvo*], asked for free elections, especially at the local level, and demanded the same social protection that the laws *formally* guaranteed to the workers. And they still expressed these requests and complaints in "socialist-revolutionary" terms.[87]

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[87] Danilov and Berelowitch, "Documents"; Andrea Romano, " 'Contadini in uniforme' e potere sovietico alla metà degli anni '20," *Rivista storica italiana CIV* (1992): 730–95; Id., "Peasant-Bolshevik Conflicts inside the Red Army on the Eve of Dekulakization," *Forschungen zur osteuropäischen Geschichte* 52 (1994): 95–121; M. Wehner, "'Die Lage vor Ort ist unbefriedigend. ' Die Informationsberichte des sowjetischen Geheimdienstes zur Lage der russischen Bauern in der Jahren der Neuen Ökonomischen Politik (1921–1927)," *Jahrbuch für Historische Kommunismusforschung* (1994): 64–87; Aleksandr Ja. Livšin, "Mestnaja vlasť glazami ljudej 20–x

The regime, which had liquidated the PSR with the 1922 trial, was afraid of, and persecuted, any expression of peasant moods [*krest'janskie nastroenija*] and tried its best to prevent the formation of peasant unions (those *Sojuzy trudovogo krest'janstva* which had been the *Antonovščina*'s political skeleton) in the villages. A minority of the Bolshevik leaders was indeed, at least partially, changing its mind. And yet the awareness of the regime's unpopularity and of the antagonism between its program and the peasants' hopes and behaviors did make clear to most top party people that sooner or later they had to settle accounts with both peasants and peasant-workers, neutralizing the peasant-soldiers.[88]

This settling of accounts started at the beginning of 1928. The men gathered around Stalin, strengthened by the liquidation of the last opposition and spurred by repeated failures on the international front, then faced a procurement crisis fueled by the contradiction between their ambitions, fears and economic policies and the realities and the needs of the country. They decided to deal with it resorting to "old" methods: to the requisitions, violence and tortures of 1918–21.

This policy immediately generated a wave of peasant protest. Army recruits were, for example, submerged by an avalanche of angry letters from home, complaining about the new measures. According to the *svodki* of the *Politupravlenie armii*, this avalanche started in Ukraine and in Northern Caucasus—where it was to grow into huge proportions—and then spread to other military districts, thus confirming the special role played by non-Russian regions in the resistance against Stalinist policies. The 5,000 men of the Novočerkassk garrison received thousands of letters in a single day.[89]

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godov: pis'ma "snizu" epoxi Nepa" (a French version of this paper is in *Communisme* 42–44 (1995): 95–114); Werth and Moullec, *Rapports:* 95–116; Kun, *Buxarin:* 229.

[88] Graziosi, "Stalin's": 229–30.

[89] The *svodki* of the Army Politupravlenie in the spring of 1928, which Andrea Romano kindly showed me, will be published in A. Romano and Nonna Tarxova, eds., *Krasnaja armija i kollektivizacija derevni v SSSR, 1928–1933. Sbornik dokumentov iz fondov RGVA* (Napoli, 1997). See also Roger R. Reese, "Red Army Opposition to Forced Collectivization, 1929–30," *Slavic Review* 1 (1996): 24–45.

Stalin's initiative at first met with considerable resistance inside the party as well and was thus temporarily halted in the spring of 1928.[90]

The brief lull which followed, however, did not substantially alter the course of events. In a matter of months the "right" opposition had been defeated and Stalin was free to pursue his former policies with renewed vigor. One can thus say that the second act of the Soviet peasant war was precipitated by a push coming from above. *It was therefore quite different from the first one: the initiative was now completely in the hand of the state and the second player reacted, with decreasing vigor, to the attacks aimed at him.*

I think it can be argued that Stalin *consciously* decided to reopen the conflict with the peasantry postponed in 1921. In fact, the exclusion of peasants from rationing, reintroduced in 1928–29, was by itself an indirect declaration of war.[91] But we have also direct evidence that the Soviet leadership knew what it was doing, even though it could not foresee how the conflict was to develop nor how it was going to be decided. I will quote an exchange between Bukharin and Vorošilov at the Central committee plenum of July 1928. The former, who had asked those present to imagine "a proletarian state in a petit-bourgeois country which forcibly drives the peasants into communes [*čto u vas est' proletarskaja vlast' v melko-buržuaznoj strane, no čto ona nasil'no vgonjaet mužika v kommuny*]," was then interrupted by Vorošilov with these words: "Like in 1918–1919, say [*kak v 18–m i 19–m godu,*

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[90] See M. Lewin, *La paysannerie et le pouvoir soviétique, 1928–1930* (Paris, 1968). By 1928 a party of the NEP had grown beside the militarized nucleus produced by the "civil war. " The former was quantitatively strong enough to successfully challenge the latter, which in any case was far superior in terms of will power, stamina and leadership.

[91] While it is true that during WWI peasants had been excluded from rationing all over Europe, nobody then tried to take their land and their animals and to rob them of the greater part of their produce. In the conditions obtaining in the USSR during the 1930s, this exclusion, maintained up to the abolition of rationing at the end of 1934, meant that the Soviet state had formally decided not to consider the peasants as members of its own constituency. On rationing and its impact see Elena Aleksandrovna Osokina, *Ierarxija potreblenija* (Moskva, 1993) and Julie Hessler's dissertation, temporarily titled "Culture of Shortages: Exchange Practices and Material Values in Russia, 1917–1953" (University of Chicago), parts of which I was kindly given the opportunity to read.

skaži]." "Then you shall get a peasant insurrection [*togda vy polučite vosstanie mužika*]," was Bukharin's answer.[92]

As we know from the reports of his conversations with Kamenev, Bukharin was then realizing that this was precisely what the Stalinists were expecting, convinced as they were that this time—unlike seven years before—they could easily suppress such revolts (the spilling of blood was not judged a problem, Bukharin added).[93]

It may be added that Stalin knew also that the combination of excessive requisitions with large industrial investments financed by massive exports of grain could cause in a few years an "artificial" famine. In fact, he had said so already in December 1925, during a polemical exchange at the 14th Party Congress.[94]

It is more difficult to explain why the national-communist leaderships, and especially the Ukrainian one, supported Stalin's anti-peasant about-face. As I already surmised,[95] an important role was played by the disillusions *all* national *élites* experienced in their relationships with their own peasantry during the "civil war." Many then hoped that a speedy industrialization *cum* urbanization would have built, in a few years, a much firmer basis for the national effort while solving once and for all the "accursed" problem of the colonial character of the republics' most important urban centers.

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[92] Kun, *Buxarin:* 247. On Stalin's and the Stalinists' personal conviction that they had been at war with the peasantry see, for example, Winston Churchill, *La seconda guerra mondiale,* vol. VIII, *La battaglia d'Africa* (Milano, 1970): 111–12 or Ždanov's 1934 statement about the *perežitki voennogo perioda* in Xlevnjuk et al., eds., *Stalinskoe Politbjuro:* 55.

[93] Jurij Georgievič Fel'štinskij, "Konfidencial'nye besedy Buxarina," *Voprosy istorii* 2–3 (1991):182–203. At the end of 1927 Bukharin too was convinced that the Soviet state could now easily crush the "kulak." He then told an Italian union man that the party "had the strength, if it so willed, to eliminate the kulak in 24 hours. " In Aristide Delle Piane, *Impressioni di un viaggio in Urss* (Roma, 1933): 91.

[94] "Iz 'Pis'ma k Fedoru'," *Političeskij dnevnik* 25 (October, 1966): 148ff. In the summer of 1928 the fact that the Stalinist policies could provoke a famine was openly discussed (in Fel'štinskij, ed., "Konfidencial'nye": 198).

[95] Graziosi, "G. L. Piatakov": 142.

FIVE

Second and Concluding Act, 1928–1933

Recently, new documents have allowed us to follow almost day by day the development of the attack which the state launched against the peasantry with dekulakization and collectivization. I am thinking of course of the OGPU *svodki*, which were then produced even on a daily basis, of the CIK officials' reports,[96] of those of local party secretaries to the Central committee, etc.

Some of these documents, like Varejkis' reports on the Central Black Earth Region, Balickij's on Ukraine, the *svodki* recapitulating the 1930 data on dekulakization, deportations and peasant disturbances, are already in print. Others are being published with an increasing tempo. It is therefore today possible to sketch a succinct but sufficiently coherent and solid picture of the tragic events of 1929–33, which is what I will try to do in the following pages (as far as 1930 is concerned, I will rely on my introduction to Balickij's reports, published in the *Cahiers du monde russe* to which the reader is referred for more detailed information).[97]

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[96] I have the impression that the CIK officials' reports are generally of a higher human quality. Perhaps, some members of the non-Bolshevik socialist parties, not admitted in the OGPU or in the party apparatus, found refuge in the state one. But this is only a hypothesis.

[97] V. P. Danilov and N. A. Ivnickij, eds., *Dokumenty svidetel'stvujut. Iz istorii derevni nakanune i v xode kollektivizacii, 1927–1932* (Moskva, 1992); Danilov and Berelowitch, "Documents": 657–676; N. A. Ivnickij, *Kollektivizacija i raskulačivanie* (Moskva, 1994); S. V. Kul'čyc'kyj, ed., *Kolektyvizacija i golod na Ukraini, 1929–33* (Kyiv, 1993); Werth and Moullec, *Rapports:* 116–31; Graziosi, "Collectivisation"; V. N. Zemskov, "Specposelency," *Sociologičeskie issledovanija* 11 (1990): 3–16 and Id. "'Kulackaja ssylka' v 30–e gody," *Sociologičeskie issledovanija* 10 (1991): 3–21. It must be stressed that this picture is very close to the one sketched by Viktor Krawchenko in his *I Chose Freedom* (New York, 1946)—possibly the best personal account of those tragic years—and that some of these documents have been available at least since the 1950s. In his fundamental

As shown by its rapid demographic and socio-economic recovery during the NEP, the rural society which was subjected to the 1928–30 attack was still strong. The peasantry was, however, much weaker than on the eve of World War I. From various angles, it was even weaker than in 1920–21, when it had threatened the very survival of the new Bolshevik state. This was true in relative terms—during NEP the state strengthened more than the countryside recovered—and in absolute ones. That very state had in fact disarmed villages which in 1920–21 were armed to the teeth and had eliminated most of the leaders of those days' partisan bands.

The remaining "known enemies of the regime" were the targets of the first step of dekulakization. This contemplated the arrest and sometime the liquidation of the men of the first of the three categories in which the approximately one million "kulak" (quotation marks are mandatory) families of the country were divided.[98]

The fate of these families—the natural *élite* of the villages in "čajanovian" terms—depended precisely on the category they were entered. Those in the first one, deprived of their men, were deported to distant regions. This was also the destination of the men and the families of the second category, while those of the third were to be deported within the boundaries of their own districts.

The attack was executed with great decision and rapidity between November 1929 and February 1930. It was preceded by serious unrest caused by requisitions—the post 1928 procurements were in fact requisitions—and by the "new" methods accompanying them: in the course of 1929 there were in the USSR about 1,300 peasant disturbances in which, as the OGPU remarked on 28 December, the religious question played "a colossal role."[99] This growing resistance

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Smolensk under Soviet Rule (Cambridge, Mass., 1958), for example, Merle Fainsod quoted a number of them and sketched a picture of collectivization which today's findings amply confirm. Part of the Smolensk documents have been published by Sergej Maksudov, ed., *Neuslyšannye golosa. Dokumenty Smolenskogo arxiva. Kniga pervaja, 1929. Kulaki i partejcy* (Ann Arbor, 1987).

[98] See Grant M. Adibekov, "Specpereselency žertvy 'splošnoj kollektivizacii'," *Istoričeskij arxiv* 4 (1994): 145–80, where the documents on *specpereselency* from the Politburo's *osobaja papka* are published.

[99] "Kollektivizacija: istoki, suščnosť, posledstvija—beseda za kruglym stolom," *Istorija SSSR* 3 (1989); N. Werth, "Le pouvoir soviétique et

certainly was a major factor in convincing the Soviet leaders of the necessity to swiftly adopt extreme measures.

The guiding ideas were the neutralization of the peasantry through the annihilation of its *élite* (dekulakization) and the gathering of the highest possible number of families in relatively few large collective units (collectivization).

The former was in many ways a re-application of the formula adopted against Cossacks in early 1919, when central party documents spoke of the necessity "to neutralize the Cossackry through the merciless extirpation of its *élite,*"[100] a formula later refined in the Kuban and in the Tambov region.

As for the latter, it was thought, and rightly so, that it would have eased the extraction of the desired amount of grain, up to then the object of ferocious and endless disputes with millions of stubborn peasant families.[101] Possibly, this idea was Stalin's personal contribution to the solution of the problem raised by Preobraženskij with his "original accumulation." Certainly, he made other say so.

The documents we have prove that at least the first stage of the attack—dekulakization—was a success. This did not depend only on brutality and determination. The undeniable, as much as disagreeable, fact is that by exploiting the jealousies and the social tensions existing within the villages, dekulakization did at first succeed in dividing them, precisely as the *kombedy* had done in 1918.

It was then implicitly said—or at least everybody understood it this way—that the "kulak" belongings were at the disposal of those willing to come forward and grab them. As the very OGPU reports noted, this pushed the villages' criminal elements to join a nucleus of young and more or less enthusiastic believers. The dekulakizing brigades, formed in a hurry, were thus infested by "a socially alien and often criminal

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l'Eglise orthodoxe de la collectivisation à la Costitution de 1936," *Revue d'Études comparatives Est-Ouest* 3–4 (1993): 43.

[100] Holquist, *A Russian Vendée:* 432–37.

[101] As Jim Heinzen rightly remarked, at least up to 1929 this was not the only interpretation of collectivization. At the end of the NEP many party activists, and some non-party rural specialists, "supported the promise of the widespread collectivization of agriculture as 'rational', 'modern' and 'progressive'" (I am quoting from a personal letter). The *équivoque* survived many decades in the literature on the phenomenon but it was rapidly exposed in the villages by the reality of the Stalinist offensive.

element [*klassovo-čuždym i často ugolovnym elementom*]." These people

> drove the dekulakized naked in the streets, beat them, organized drinking-bouts in their houses, shot over their heads, forced them to dig their own graves, undressed women and searched them, stole valuables, money, etc. [*vygonjali raskulačivaemyx golymi na ulicu, izbivali ix, ustraivali popojki na kvartirax raskulačivaemyx, streljali nad golovoj, zastavljali kopat' dlja sebja jamy, razdevali do gola zenščin i proizvodili ličnye obyski, prisvaivali sebe obnaružënnye cennosti, den'gi i t. p.*]

Thus, as Moshe Lewin proved more than 25 years ago, dekulakization was indeed generalized plunder and ravage.[102] Its above mentioned success, therefore, was political, but certainly not economic, and it is possible to maintain that the "tradition" it resumed was that of pogroms, state-instigated pogroms in particular.

The continuity with 1918–21 was also strong, and from more than a point of view. I already mentioned the analogies with the *kombedy*, the decossackization of 1919, the deportations of 1920-21, the suppression of the *Antonovščina* and with the tortures used to extract grain, valuables and tax arrears (reading the OGPU *svodki* of 1930, as well as the documents of ten years before, the deeds of the thugs of the sheriff of Nottingham come immediately to mind). The majority of the leaders of the attack, moreover, were from the "civil war"—promoted cadres now sitting in the various region [*okrug*] and district [*rajon*] committees. And the process of social promotion of elements of popular origin took again wide proportions. It was fueled by the necessity to build a vast apparatus of repression and control in the countryside as by the needs of forced industrialization. At least in the villages, the selection of new cadres was ruled by principles similar to those which had regulated the process ten years before. Once more, the most ruthless were favored.[103]

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[102] Xersonskij Okrotdel GPU, "Dokladnaja zapiska o sostojanii Xersonskogo okruga v svjazi s kolxoznym stroitel'stvom i posevkampaniej," RCXIDNI, f. 85, op. 1/sek., d. 123, ll. 10–21; Lewin, *Paysannerie.*

[103] There were elements of continuity with the 1920s, too. As we know, already during the NEP years "nothing fed the peasants' animosity against Soviet policies more than the local bureaucratic leadership's style of

The official balance sheet of dekulakization speaks of thousands of repressed and often liquidated people in the very first weeks and of 381,000 families with 1.8 million members deported in distant regions in 1930–31. 64,000 of these families came from Ukraine, 52,000 from Western Siberia, 30,000 from the lower Volga and 28,000 from the Urals. Their destination were the special villages (*spec* or *trudposelenie*) administered after 1931 by the OGPU.

Deportations continued in following years. At first, after 20 July 1931 when the Politburo stated that in the main the "kulaks" of the regions of complete [*splošnaja*] collectivization had been liquidated, the deportees mostly came from national areas (Kazakhstan, Northern Caucasus, Caucasus, etc.). In March 1932, for example, from his Central Asian "political exile" Bauman asked for the deportation of 6–7,000 "kulak" families from the local cotton-growing areas. In that very year, however, the dramatic deterioration of the situation in the countryside and the fears that it generated in Moscow, caused a recrudescence of the phenomenon all over the country. The 1932 plan for deportations, discussed by a Politburo commission in April, anticipated the banishment in May-August of 38,300 families, 6,000 of them from Ukraine.[104] Yet another 268,000 peasants were deported in 1933 alone.

Those deported in distant regions were therefore about 2.25 million, while *grosso modo* an equivalent number of people were deported within the boundaries of their district (some of them were later re-deported to distant regions). To these figures we must add those who were directly shipped to the GULag lagers (ITL), which in July 1932 held close to 120,000 peasants.

The deported peasants sent home and to the authorities thousands of harrowing letters of protest. Especially moving are the parts concerning the fate of their children who, according to a Politburo document of January 1932, died at a monthly rate reaching 10 percent in certain regions. A good number of these letters have been recently published together with those of several party members who found the courage to

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'direction' and way of life [*ničto tak ne vozbuždalo vraždebnost' v krest'janskoj srede k politike Sovetskoj vlasti, kak stil' 'upravlenija' i obraz žizni mestnoj bjurokratičeskoy elity*]. " In Livšin, "Mestnaja vlast'. "

[104] RCXIDNI, f. 17, op. 162 (*osobaja papka Politbjuro*), d. 10, l. 126 and d. 12, ll. 30, 126.

denounce a state which called itself "socialist" while perpetrating such horrors.[105]

We know that in 1932–33 alone nearly 250,000 deported peasants died. In 1930–31 things had been perhaps worse, as the fate of children witnesses. In fact, in 1931 the OGPU had been charged with the administration of the special settlements in order to check the ongoing human catastrophe and to muffle the scandal it raised. At least several hundred thousand peasants and as many nomads had therefore already died before the famine struck in the fall of 1932 (see Table 4 below, p. 66).[106]

Table 1.
Deported Peasants Living in Special Settlements Controlled by the OGPU at the Beginning of Each Year (thousands):

	1932	**1933**	**1934**	**1935**
Total	1,317	1,142	1,072	973
Arrived in the course of the year of	201	398	254	246
which: 1. born	18	17	14	26
2. arrived from other regions	71	268	24	67
Lost in the course of the year of	376	467	353	202
which: 1. Dead	89	151	40	22
2. escaped	207	215	87	43

Source: V. N. Zemskov, "Specposelency," *Sociologičeskie issledovanija* 11 (1990): 6

[105] Adibekov, "Specpereselency": 176; N. V. Tepcov, ed., "Ssyl'nye mužiki. Pravda o specposelkax," *Neizvestnaja Rossija XX veka* 1 (1992): 183–269; Danilov and Berelowitch, "Documents": 668–70; Werth and Moullec, *Rapports:* 132–34, 136–45, 356–74.

[106] Adibekov, "Specpereselency"; Zemskov, "Specposelency"; Id. "'Kulackaja ssylka'"; Id., "Zaključennye, specposelency, ssyl'noposelency, ssyl'nye i vyslannye," *Istorija SSSR* 5 (1991): 151–62; Id., "Sud'ba 'kulackoj ssylky' (1930–1954 gg)," *Otečestvennaja istorija* 1 (1994): 118–47; V. P. Danilov, ed., *Specpereselency v Zapadnoj Sibiri, 1930–1938 gg. Dokumenty i materialy,* 3 vols., (Novosibirsk, 1992–94).

In the wake of dekulakization came collectivization, which reached its first peak in February 1930 when close to eight million families were collectivized. Recalcitrants were threatened with mass shooting, a very effective menace given what had happened only a few years before. In general, violence and terror were the usual methods. It is today a striking experience to read OGPU reports which conform to the descriptions left by the victims to the point that they are almost interchangeable.[107]

At the end of February, when up to 60 percent of the peasant *dvory* was collectivized, the Soviet leaders deluded themselves that success was near. At that point however, under the stimulus of repeated requisitions and claims for tax arrears, the villages had united, overcoming their initial divisions.[108] Since mid-February they were actively opposing the attack launched by the state.

The mounting wave of peasant resistance is well documented by the data the OGPU compiled for the party top leadership, recently published by V. P. Danilov and A. Berelowitch.[109] According to these at times ridiculously precise figures, which are however consistent with what we already knew from plenty of other sources, including diplomatic reports, personal memoirs, and accounts left by participants and victims, in 1930 there were 13,754 peasant disturbances (10 times the figure of the previous year) with 2.5 million participants in the 10,000 disturbances for which data were gathered. 402 of them, with four real revolts, took place in January; 1,048, including 37 revolts, in February; 6,528, with 80 revolts, in March and 1,992, with 24 revolts, in April. To these collective actions we must add the approximately

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[107] Compare for example the mentioned OGPU reports with the testimonies collected in *The Black Deeds of the Kremlin. A White Book,* vol. I (Toronto, 1953): 187–308 and vol. II (Detroit, 1955).

[108] It may well be that the "opportunities" of dekulakization had only temporarily shaken a unity that was already there in 1929. According to Kamenev, Stalin's extraordinary measures had pushed the poor peasants toward the "kulak" already in 1928, when—in spite of the spring promises—the state had not helped the *bednjak,* forcing him to rely on the well-to-do peasant for seeds and other advances. See Fel'štinskij, ed., "Konfidencial'nye": 202.

[109] Danilov and Berelowitch, "Documents": 671–76. I have not been able to review Lynne Viola's *Peasant Rebels under Stalin. Collectivization and the Culture of Peasant Resistance* (Oxford, 1996?).

4,000 acts of individual "terrorism"—1,200 murders included—by which the peasants met the abuses they were subjected to.

More than 7,380 of these disturbances were directed against collectivization, 2,339 against the arrest or the deportation of "anti-Soviet elements" and 1,487 against the closing of churches (religion thus played once more a crucial role, as Ordžonikidze stated in one of his speeches).[110] Lack of food (1,220), seizure of seed grain (544) and forced delivery of grain and other foodstuffs (456) were the next most significant causes of peasant actions.

The most affected "region" was Ukraine, with 4,098 demonstrations in which well over a million peasants participated (29.7 percent and 38.7 percent of the respective totals). The Central Black Earth Region, which included the Tambov *okrug*, followed with 1,373 disturbances attended by more than 300,000 people, while Northern Caucasus totaled 1,061 demonstrations and 250,000 rioters. The Middle Volga, the Moscow region, Western Siberia, and the Tatar Republic, with more than 500 mass demonstrations each, came next.

For many reasons, the role of women and of their riots [*baby bunty*], which the OGPU put at 3,712, was crucial.[111] The actions of crowds armed with pitchforks, axes, and other working tools were also numerous. As in the case of the tortures *à la* Robin Hood, we are dealing here with medieval scenes in the middle of the 20th century. It must be recalled, however, that only ten years before those very crowds handled rifles and maxims.

The continuities, down to the geographical one, of this resistance with that of the previous decade—and sometimes even with 1905—are striking. In fact, they also struck the OGPU officials. In the Ukrainian reports, for example, we read that the rebellious villages were often the same which Budennyj's cavalry had "cut" 50 percent in 1920.

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[110] See the *stenogramma* of the above quoted Ordžonikidze's speech. It may be noted that by the end of the 1920s religion and the church were really a peasant affair. In fact, both had been thoroughly "ruralized" by the separation between the church and the state, by the repression of the traditional religious hierarchies and by the break of the latter's centuries-old ties to the traditional *élites* of the country.

[111] Danilov and Berelowitch, "Documents": 677–80; Graziosi, "Collectivisation": 455; L. Viola, "Baby bunty," *Russian Review* 45 (1986): 23–42; Victoria E. Bonnell, "The Peasant Woman in the Stalinist Political Art of the 1930s," *American Historical Review* 98 (1993): 55–82.

The program of the revolts is also strikingly similar to the one advanced ten years before, even though the new situation pushed the peasants to add new demands to the 1918–21 list. Again, the OGPU reports present us with a clear and univocal picture: the peasants demanded the return of the collectivized and requisitioned goods; that of the deported families; the disbanding of the Communist youth, unanimously considered a spying and provoking organization; respect for their religious feelings and practices; free elections of the village soviets; a stop to the requisitions and free trade. There resounded everywhere a clear "No" to the return of serfdom, for this was for the peasants the essence of collectivization (the undeniable fact that they judged it this way, however, should not obscure in our eyes the many differences between the two phenomena).

In Ukraine, as in other non-Russian areas, nationalist slogans were heard in the resistance's strongholds. It is thus reasonable to assume that Stalin and his circle were confirmed in their theory which considered the countryside and the peasants the natural reservoir and breeding ground of nationalism (a hypothesis which we know to be only partially correct).

Also because of the nature of these disturbances, which were often peaceful, relatively unarmed and led by women, their suppression in the field was harsh but not comparable to that of 1918–22. Those killed were in the hundreds, perhaps in the thousands (especially in Northern Caucasus). Much more numerous were those arrested and deported. Deportation was then extended to all the opponents, irrespective of social origin, and cost the life of hundreds of thousands.

In spite of this fundamental difference, there were strong elements of continuity with 1918–22 also in matters of repression. Those who had directed the operations then were still in charge in 1930, Balickij in Ukraine like Evdokimov in Northern Caucasus with the Dzeržinskij division. As the latter case shows, special units were once more employed to quell the revolts. Only exceptionally did the government call in regular troops.[112]

To deal with the peasant challenge Stalin also resorted to a tactical retreat of unquestionable effectiveness, which aimed at slowing down

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[112] Andrea Romano kindly anticipated me some of the results of his dissertation on the army's role in collectivization. See also Romano and Tarxova, eds., *Krasnaja armija i kollektivizacija derevni.*

the mounting of the rebellion. This about-face was caused not only by the real dimensions of the peasant disturbances. Possibly, the memory of 1919–21 and the fear of having to deal once more with a united and rebellious countryside played an even greater role.

As is well known, at the beginning of March Stalin published in the *Pravda* an article ordering the immediate suspension of "excesses" in the countryside and claiming that local cadres were responsible for them. Of course, many of these officials did not like the move, while many in the party central organs resented the fact that the article carried the signature of Stalin alone. Stalin thus presented himself to the villages as the reincarnation of the "good tsars" of bygone days.

The maneuver was carried out—I believe—in a perfectly conscious way (already in previous years Stalin had boasted to be the sole man capable of putting the *mužik* in the sack)[113] and delivered the desired results. Peasant processions left the kolkhozy raising copies of the *Pravda* like icons, praising Stalin and cursing the local communists. Above all, the villages started to release the steam accumulated during the previous months.

At first this led to an increase in peasant demonstrations. However, this was now a symptom of a general cooling down rather than a sign of mounting pressure. In a few months nine million peasant families left the kolkhozy and by the summer the countryside was virtually pacified. At the same time, the regime had to its credit the practical elimination of the peasant *élite* and the collectivization of more than five million families on a total of approximately 23–24 (in the summer of 1928 collectivized *dvory* had been less than half a million).[114]

Beside resisting, peasants responded to the state's attack by fleeing, abroad whenever possible (and it was possible, both along the borders

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[113] In July 1928, for instance, Bukharin told Kamenev that Stalin believed he was the only man who could made the peasants swallow the extraordinary measures [*ja odin ix smogu provesti*]. In Fel'štinskij, ed., "Konfidencial'nye": 198.

[114] Graziosi, "Collectivisation". According to Soviet official data, collectivized *dvory* numbered 0.417 million in June 1928; 1.9 in October 1929; 4.6 in January 1930; 14.5 in early March 1930; 6.0 in May 1930; 5.4 in September of the same year; respectively 6.6 and 12.8 in January and July 1931; 14.9 in July 1932; 22.5 in July 1933 and 23.5 in July 1934.

and for those, like the Mennonites, who had a foreign citizenship),[115] to the cities or to the many new industrial building sites [*strojki*] if there were no other alternatives. Millions fled, often with forged documents. It has been for example estimated that in 1930–31 alone at least 200,000 families "self-dekulakized" themselves by selling their property and fleeing the villages before being struck. Another 400,000 people escaped in 1932–33 from the special settlements where they had been deported. By the way, in the summer of 1931 revolts were flaring in these settlements too with slogans we already know: going back home, down with the communes, free trade, and even long live the Constituent Assembly.[116]

These mass escapes helped feed the growth of a vast illegal world within the rapidly expanding cities. One example may suffice: when in 1933 the inhabitants of the major urban centers were "passportized," authorities thought that Magnitogorsk had about 250,000 residents. However, only 75,000 were counted, something attesting not only the unreliability of Soviet statistics—including secret ones—but also the scope of the illegal population's mass flight caused by that measure. It was later calculated that at least 35,000 people had decided to leave in order not to disclose their unlawful position.[117]

But let's go back to the summer of 1930, when exceptionally favorable weather helped produce a very good harvest, especially in view of what had just happened in the countryside.

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[115] A. Graziosi, "La conoscenza della realtà sovietica in Occidente: uno sguardo panoramico," in Marcello Flores and Francesca Gori, eds., *Il mito dell'URSS* (Milano, 1990): 157–72; Gustav Hilger, *Incompatible Allies. A Memoir History of German-Soviet Relationships, 1918–1941* (New York, 1953): 162–63; Bundesarchiv, Abteilungen Potsdam, Dirksen Nachlass, 90 Di 1, no. 51.

[116] V. P. Danilov, Maksim Pavlovič Kim, N. V. Tropkina, *Sovetskoe krest'janstvo, 1917–1969* (Moskva, 1970): 239; Robert William Davies, *The Socialist Offensive. The Collectivization of Agriculture, 1929–1930* (London, 1980): 247; David Lloyd Hoffman, *Peasant Metropolis* (Ithaca, 1994): 33–42; Zemskov, "Specposelency"; Id. "'Kulackaja ssylka'". On revolts see Werth and Moullec, *Rapports:* 357 and Sergej Aleksandrovič Krasil'nikov and O. M. Mamkin, "Vosstanie v Parbigskoj komendature. Leto 1931 g.," *Istoričeskij arxiv* 3 (1994): 128–38.

[117] Werth and Moullec, *Rapports:* 45; Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain* (Berkeley, 1995): 99.

Pleased by the results reached in spite of the March retreat, the Soviet leaders this time deluded themselves into thinking that the war against peasant had been substantially won. This erroneous belief was contradicted by the new wave of protests generated by the requisitions *cum* collectivization launched immediately after the harvest.[118] Yet, lulled by this illusion, Moscow underestimated the gravity of the impending currency breakdown and of an economic crisis rooted in the disequilibria implicit in the 1928–29 choices (like those in transportation, which at the end of 1930 expressed themselves in approx. two million tons of unshipped grain—the very grain for which the battle against the village had been waged—rotting at various stations). At the beginning of 1931 new great investment plans were thus launched on the basis of the opening of new and massive credit lines to German export in the USSR guaranteed by the German government.[119]

The Soviet leadership thought that the reforms introduced in industrial direction would have soon yielded good results and that many of the new, giant factories under construction would have started operation in a few months without major problems. Meanwhile, the victory in the countryside was to permit large exports of grain and other raw materials, such as the wood produced by exploiting various forms of peasant forced labor. The proceeds of these exports, together with those of the hunt for gold and valuables launched all over the country,[120] were

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[118] On September 8 1930, for example, the army Political Directorate informed Moscow that "the army was flooded with letters of kulak nature asking the soldiers 'to defend the peasantry, to turn their guns against Soviet power' [*v armiju idet massovyj pritok pisem kulackogo xaractera s vopljami o probeže, s pros'bami 'zaščitit' krest'janstvo, povernut' oružie protiv Sovetskoj vlasti'*]." In Romano and Tarxova, eds., *Krasnaja armija i kollektivizacija derevni.*

[119] X. Rakovskij, "Na s"ezde i v strane," *Bjulleten' oppozicii* 25–26 (1930): 9–32; M. Lewin, "The Disappearance of Planning in the Plan (1973)" now in *Russia, USSR, Russia:* 95–113; R. W. Davies, Mark Harrison, S. G. Wheatcroft, eds., *The Economic Transformation of the Soviet Union* (Cambridge University Press, 1994): 166.

[120] See for example E. A. Osokina, "Za zerkal'noj dver'ju Torgsina," *Otečestvennaja istorija* 2 (1995): 86–104. On 11 November 1931 the Politburo approved Stalin's detailed proposal to form a special trust devoted to the extraction of gold in the Kolyma region. In those same months Bubnov was selecting the art treasures to be sold abroad.

to guarantee the payment of the German bills and thus permit the new, great imports of metals and machinery. From more than one angle, therefore, a very primitive, grotesque, and extreme version of the so-called Witte system was then adopted.

The years 1931 and 1932 brought with them a repetition of the cycle of events which had characterized 1930: ever growing procurements and requisitions (which the late 1930 choices made imperative) went hand in hand with repeated waves of repression, deportation and collectivization. But once the 1930 extraordinary weather conditions were over, the damages inflicted upon agriculture from 1928 on made themselves felt. Among these were the liquidation of the most competent layer of peasants, the loss of a large part of the livestock, that of the countryside's reserves, and the non-viability of many of the new kolkhozy (let us remember how and for which aims they were organized).

Forced to come to terms with most of the fallacies and the delusions of late 1930–early 1931 and obsessed by export needs,[121] the Stalinist leadership answered the fall in agricultural production by raising the procurements' quotas. In 1928 procurements had eaten away approximately 15 percent of the crop. In 1930 the percentage jumped to 26.5 percent. It grew again in following years reaching the 33 percent mark in 1931 and the 34.1 one in 1933 (see Table 2 below, p. 60). These are averages. In grain-producing areas, like some Ukrainian regions or Northern Caucasus, already in 1931–32 the state confiscated about half of the harvest.[122]

The peasants, who hated the new system but had learned to fear the cold-blooded treatment of open defiance, resorted to passive "resistance" of unprecedented proportions.[123] Quotation marks are

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[121] The recently released documents of the Politburo's *osobaja papka* from mid-1931 to 1933 reveal the extent of this obsession. The Soviet leaders then devoted an extraordinary share of their time and attention to import-export plans, valutary and foreign trade decisions, etc.

[122] M. Lewin, "Taking Grain: Soviet Policies of Agricultural Procurements Before the War" (1974), in *The Making of the Soviet System* (New York, 1985): 142–77 is perhaps still the best study available. See also Davies, Harrison, and Wheatcroft, eds., *Economic Transformation:* 285–91 and Danilov and Ivnickij, *Dokumenty:* 40.

[123] Of course, small uprisings, mass disturbances and personal revenges did not disappear altogether. Their presence is attested, among other things,

needed because the term is unquestionably ambiguous and covers a reality in which hunger, fear, despair, disorganization and the many factors hampering agricultural production played a major role. Yet several different sources attest unambiguously the growing importance of the countryside's passive opposition, which was often covered or at least tolerated by thousands of local officials later purged in 1932–33.[124]

The phenomenon surfaced for the first time with the serious difficulties of the 1931 procurements. They came after a rather poor harvest and were the harbinger of the terrible crisis looming ahead. By the spring of 1932 it was clear that Ukrainian peasants were not doing what was expected of them. A few months later, in early 1933, a furious Stalin was as usual "personalizing" everything. He then denounced the peasants' "quiet and outwardly harmless (without bloodshed) sabotage," calling it as a "war" against the regime.

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by the list of people whose death sentence was confirmed by the Politburo. On March 26 and 31 1932, for instance, this body sanctioned the executions of several "kulak-bandits" and leaders of "kulak uprisings." The list included Mixail Viničuk, an individual middle peasant (*serednjak edinoličnik*). During the revolt he headed seven communists were killed, two of them burned alive. In RCXIDNI, f. 17, op. 162, d. 12, ll. 69–70.

[124] In the Don area 40,000 party members were expelled between November 1932 and January 1933. In Kuban more than 50 per cent of party secretaries at the kolkhoz level and 45 percent of party members were purged. In Ukraine nearly 20 per cent of the kolkhoz administrators had been removed by the end of 1932. In V. P. Danilov, ed., *Očerki istorii kollektivizacii sel'skogo xozjajstva v Sojuznyx respublikax* (Moskva, 1962): 54–55; Ilarion Iliarionovyč Slyn'ko, *Socialistyčna perebudova sil's'koho hospodarstva Ukraïny, 1927–1932* (Kyiv, 1961): 289–91.

Table 2.
Grain Crops, State Grain Procurements and Exports, 1913–34

	Crop* (million tons)	State Procurements (% of the harvest)	State Procurements (million tons)	Grain Exports (million tons)
1913**	76.5			9.1
1923–26		12–14%	9–11	2.6***
1928	73.3	14.7%	10.7	0.28
1929	71.7	22.4%	16.6	0.17
1930	77.1	26.5%	21.0	4.8
1931	69.5	32.9%	22.8	5.2
1932	69.8	26.9%	19.0 famine	1.73
1933	68.4	34.1%	23.3 famine	1.68
1934	67.6	38.1%	25.8	0.77

* The data for the crops are revised Soviet estimates. Researchers seem to agree on the necessity to revise them downward of nearly 10–15% for the period 1928–32.
** It has been estimated that in between taxes, rents, etc. peasants lost in 1913 about 20 percent of their crops.
*** In 1923–24.

Source: M. Lewin, *"Taking Grain": Soviet Policies of Agricultural Procurements Before the War*, in *The Making of the Soviet System* (New York, 1985): 166–67 and R. W. Davies, M. Harrison, S. G. Wheatcroft, eds., *The Economic Transformation of the Soviet Union* (Cambridge University Press, 1994): 285 ff.

In the following pages I shall quote mostly materials relating to the "Southern front." Because of its important role in grain production and of its national diversity, here everything was—like ten years previously—at the same time more extreme and more tragic. This is true for both the peasant behaviors and the famine later used in order to "reform" them. Yet, the essence of the relationships between the peasants' resistance, its punishment and the state's success was the same everywhere. If in Siberia or in the Urals there was "simple" hunger rather than an exterminating famine, one should remember that also the former caused tens, if not hundreds of thousands of victims. And it suffices to read the pages of many of those days' memoirs, like Victor Serge's on 1933 Orenburg, to understand what was going on beyond the famine-stricken area.

This is why I do not believe that focusing on the Southern front is misleading. On the contrary, its extreme features allow us to grasp more distinctly the essence of the crucial events of 1931–33 and the relationships between them. One should always keep in mind, however, that in Ukraine and in the Northern Caucasus, as well as in Kazakhstan and in Central Asia, everything was indeed much more tragic.[125]

One of the most vivid description of the peasants' passive behaviors can be found in a report of the Italian vice-consul in Novorossijsk, Leone Sircana. In April 1933 he thus summed up the situation in the countryside for Mussolini, who was an avid reader of the dispatches from the USSR:

> The battle-lines remain the same: rural masses who are resisting passively yet effectively; party and government more determined than ever to resolve the situation . . . Peasants have not confronted the army, resolute and armed to the teeth, with any army of their own, not even in the form of the armed bands and brigandage that usually go hand-in-hand with serfs' uprisings. Perhaps this is where the peasants' real power lies, or shall we say, the reason for their adversaries' lack of success. The exceptionally powerful and well-armed Soviet apparatus is quite at a loss to find any solution or victory in one or more open battles: the enemy does not congregate, is widely dispersed, and battles sought and provoked to no avail, all have to run their course in an interminable series of tiny, even trivial operations: an unhoed field here, some hidden quintals of grain there . . .

The fact was, Sircana continued, that

> once kulaks were rather easily liquidated with the destruction (for practical reasons it could not be an expropriation) of their riches, [in the villages, *A.G.*] the antagonism vanished (it had no further *raison d' être*), and Moscow found itself up against a single hostile peasant

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[125] Also the Army Political Directorate, in its 1933 report to Vorošilov on the political-moral conditions of the Red Army, spoke of "the special difficulties of the class-war in Northern Caucasus, in Ukraine and in the lower Volga [*trudnosti klassovoj bor'by, osobenno v Severnom Kavkaze, Ukraine i N. Volge*]." In Romano and Tarxova, eds, *Krasnaja armija i kollektivizacija derevni.*

> mass, of like mind and leveled to a single standard of misery . . . The peasant trusts nothing, works as little and as poorly as possible, he steals, hides or destroys his own products whenever he can, rather than giving them up.[126]

With little or nothing to export, a concrete perspective of bankruptcy (avoided only thanks to Hitler's concessions of early 1933), and growing urban unrest caused by food-supply "difficulties," at the end of 1932 the collapse of the regime seemed very likely. But precisely as the 1921–22 hunger had eventually put an end to the state of open confrontation with the countryside, the 1932–33 famine, after threatening the regime's very survival, assured it by breaking the above mentioned vicious circle.

Again as in 1921–22, its warning signs—local famines, a general deterioration of conditions in the countryside and the like—became evident beforehand. In the spring of 1932, like in that of 1919, the Ukrainian leaders were, for example, dealing with local famines caused by excessive requisitions. Skrypnyk, for example, spoke of them after a tour in the countryside at the beginning of the year. In April-May, while Čubar' was informing Moscow of the growing difficulties with bread supplies, rumors about the sale of human flesh in the city markets were already spreading among the soldiers of the Kyiv garrison.[127]

In the summer the situation was so bad as to push the desperate Ukrainian party to contest Moscow's choices: in July a very worried Stalin wrote Kaganovič that there was a real danger of "losing Ukraine [*poterjat' Ukrainu*]," where more than 50 party local committees [*rajkomy*] of the Kyiv and Dnipropetrovs'k regions had declared the

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[126] Graziosi, *Lettere:* 157 ff. The English translation of a selection of the Italian diplomatic reports may be found in the 2nd appendix to the *Report to Congress* of the Commission on the Ukrainian Famine (Washington, DC, 1988): 395–506. A French one is in *Cahiers du monde russe et soviétique* 30 (1989): 5–106. Recently, two important collections of documents have been published in Ukraine: *Holod 1932–33 rokiv na Ukrajini. Očyma istorykiv, movoju dokumentiv* (Kyiv, 1990) and Kul'čyc'kyj, ed., *Kolektyvizacija.*

[127] Commission on the Ukrainian Famine, *Report:* 74–75; RCXIDNI, f. 17, op. 162, d. 12, l. 109; *Specdonesenie Politupravlenija UVO,* 29/4–3/5/1932, in Romano and Tarxova, eds., *Krasnaja armija i kollektivizacija derevni.*

center's procurements plans "unrealistic." Kaganovič was to immediately go there and redress the situation.[128]

The KPbU was thus forced to swallow what it knew to be, in spite of minor revisions, deadly targets. In the following months, the gloomiest predictions proved right. The 1932 procurements did trigger an enormous tragedy, which took place between November 1932 and June 1933, with a peak in March-April.[129] Nearly seven million died, perhaps even more according to recent estimates of Ukrainian, Russian, and Western demographers. Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and the Northern Caucasus were the most affected areas, but also many Russian areas, like the Lower Volga, were severely hit and all over the country hunger-related deaths became an everyday occurrence.[130]

Even major cities and industrial centers were not spared. Only Moscow and Leningrad were but marginally affected thanks to the regime's fears of their inhabitants' possible reactions: in the first three months of 1933, for example, 165,000 tons of grain were reserved for the city of Moscow and 86,000 for her region [*oblast'*] against the 280,000 allotted to the whole of Ukraine with her much larger population.[131]

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[128] RCXIDNI, f. 81 (Kaganovič), op. 3, d. 99, l. 144. This is one of the fonds that the RCXIDNI recently received from the Presidential archives. Among other things, it contains a number of Stalin's letters to Kaganovič, written mostly in the 1930s, which complete those addressed to Molotov (*Pis'ma I. V. Stalina V. M. Molotovu, 1925–1936. Sbornik dokumentov* [Moskva, 1995]).

[129] See Blum, *Naître:* 102–03 for mortality rates' curves. It is worth remembering that the 1921–22 famine had started in May–June. The two major Soviet famines thus had rather different chronologies, independently of the ARA impact on the development of the first one. The *zasuxa* of 1921 may be one of the causes of this difference which would deserve, however, a special study.

[130] Rossijskaja Akademija Nauk, Institut Rossijskoj Istorii, *Naselenie Rossii v 1920–1950–e gody* (Moskva, 1994): 59–60; E. A. Osokina, "The Victims of the Famine of 1933: How Many?" *Russian Studies in History* 31 (1992); Blum, *Naître:* 95 ff; Davies, Harrison and Wheatcroft, eds., *Economic Transformation:* 57–80, 273–75; Natalia Arkaevna Aralovec, "Poteri naselenija Sovetskogo obščestva v 1930–e gody: problemy, istočniki, metody izučenija," *Otečestvennaja istorija* 1 (1995): 135–46.

[131] RCXIDNI, f. 17, op. 162, d. 14, l. 38. Not surprisingly, the quality of the bread collapsed. This was especially true in the case of the variety still

Table 3.
Population of the Russian Empire/USSR, 1914–37 (millions)

1917* (1926 borders)	: 147.6 (estimate)
early 1920	: 140.6 (")
early 1921	: 136.8 (")
early 1922	: 134.9 (")
1926	: 146.0 (census)
1928 (January)	: 151.6 (estimate)
1929 (January)	: 154.6 (") +20.4 per thousand
1930 (January)	: 157.4 (") +17.9 per thousand
1931 (January)	: 159.8 (") +15.4 per thousand
1932 (January)**	: 161.8 (") +12.7 per thousand
1933 (January)**	: 162.9 (") + 6.5 per thousand
1934 (January)	: 156.7 (") –36.5 per thousand
1935 (January)	: 158.1 (") + 8.6 per thousand
1937	: 162.5 (census)

* In 1914–16 the Russian Empire's population continued to grow, although with quickly decreasing tempos. 1917 was the first "negative" year, but the loss was a very small one.
** According to A. Blum, *Naître, vivre et mourir en URSS, 1917–1991* (Paris, 1994): 99, mortality rates averaged 30 per thousand in 1932 and 70 per thousand in 1933, which was therefore by far the worst year, even if 1918–22 is taken into account.

Source: Rossijskaja Akademija Nauk, Institut Rossijskoj Istorii, *Naselenie Rossii v 1920–1950-e gody* (Moskva, 1994): 59–60 and other sources.

Interestingly enough, this famine is the only case in which the estimates of the regime's victims and opponents—which in the USSR like elsewhere have been generally biased toward overestimation—often fell short of reality. Sadly, it must be remembered that for decades nobody felt the need to study what is probably the 1930s' single most important event, and one fraught with such major consequences. For

circulating in the countryside before the tragedy's culmination. Desperate Ukrainian peasants then started to mail to soldiers samples of what they were forced to eat (in Romano and Tarxova, eds., *Krasnaja armija i kollektivizacija derevni*). Interestingly enough, several years ago I found two of these samples, collected by the Italian consul in Kharkiv, in the archives of the Italian foreign ministry.

years many believed that it was possible to deny or ignore the very existence and crucial role of this tragedy.[132] Afterwards, came the even more disheartening polemics about the victims' number, as if one or two more, or less, millions of deaths could change the global evaluation of the fact and of its meaning.[133] Fortunately, recent years have changed this situation and brought welcome cases of self-criticism.[134]

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[132] See Commission on the Ukrainian Famine, *Report*; Robert Conquest, *The Harvest of Sorrow: Soviet Collectivization and the Terror Famine* (London, 1986); *Holodomor 1932–1933 rr v Ukraïny: pryčyny i naslidky* (Kyiv, 1995).

[133] Demographers have concluded that, given the available data, we shall have to continue to reason in terms of relatively wide margins of errors. However, the nature and magnitude of the phenomenon are by now clear. See Massimo Livi-Bacci, "The Human Cost of Collectivization in the USSR," *Population and Development Review* 4 (1993): 743–66.

[134] Recently, however, some pitiful examples of past practices and "styles" started to reappear. See for example Stefan Merl, "Golod 1932–33 godov—genocid unkraincev dlja osuščestvlenija politiki rusifikacii?," *Otečestvennaja istorija* 1 (1995): 49–61. For a dignified and scholarly way to raise similar issues see Ilija Evgenevič Zelenin, N. A. Ivnickij, V. V. Kondrašin and Evgenij Nikolaevič Oskolkov, "O golode 1932–33 godov i ego ocenke na Ukraine," *Otečestvennaja istorija* 6 (1994): 256–62. My opinion, which this essay hopefully makes clear, is that though one cannot speak of a famine intentionally created to wipe out the Ukrainian nation, it cannot be denied that: a) since at least 1919 in certain areas of the USSR the fight between the regime and the peasants (and other traditional figures like nomads) took over particularly fierce features because of national, ethnic, and religious factors; b) Stalin knew this well, because of direct experience and of his theories about nationalism and its roots; c) some of these areas were also major grain-producing centers, a fact which made the conflict there even more acute; d) when the famine came, it was used to "punish" the inhabitants of the areas which had opposed with the greatest resistance against the regime's policies; e) not surprisingly, these areas often coincided with the above mentioned, non-Russian ones; f) among them Ukraine was by far the most important (even though in relative terms Kazakhstan—a non-Russian area anyway—suffered the most); g) the scale and the concentration of hunger-related deaths in Ukraine, and the policies then adopted by the regime, make the 1932–33 famine a phenomenon which, at least in Europe, can be compared only to later Nazi crimes; h) at least objectively, elements of Russian imperialism were involved, especially in the eyes of foreign populations subjected to deadly policies originating from Moscow.

Table 4.
Absolute Number of Deaths and Births, 1927–36 (millions)

	Deaths	Births
1927	3.984	6.950
1930	4.284	6.694
1931	4.501	6.510
1932	4.786	5.837
1933	11.450	5.545
1934	3.410	4.780
1936	3.223	5.589

Source: From E. M. Andreev, L. E. Darskij, T. L. Xar'kova, "Opyt ocenki čislennosti naselenija SSSR 1926–41 gg," *Vestnik statistiki* 7 (1990): 34–46. (These are considered the best estimates today available. It is however possible that they underestimate the 1931 and 1932 deaths, imputing part of them to 1933. It must be added that, due to the almost complete lack of data on deaths and emigration in Kazakhstan, we shall never know the precise number of those years' victims.)

More than in 1921–22, the causes of what remains the last major European peace-time famine are to be found in the growing requisitions and in the attempt to reorganize the rural world around kolkhozy and sovkhozy. Saying this does not mean that we are in front of a consciously pre-arranged famine. It is certain, however, that once the famine was there, Stalin—while fearing its possible consequences and preparing for them[135]—decided to use it to teach a lesson to the "esteemed grain-growers" called to pay the price of their " 'quiet' war against the Soviet power" (I am quoting from Stalin's famous 1933

[135] In March 1933, for example, in clear anticipation of major peasant revolts, the Politburo decided to immediately send to lagers (ITL) those sentenced to more than two years and detained in "dangerous" places like Ukraine, Northern Caucasus, and the Central Black Earth Region; it granted to the Ukrainian GPU leading troika (Balickij-Karlson-Leplevskij) the right "to deal with insurgency and counter-revolution by applying the death penalty [*rassmotrenija del po povstančestvu i k.—r. s primenenii VMSZ*]" and accepted the OGPU proposal to organize in Western Siberia and Kazakhstan new colonies for another million *specpereselency.* See RCXIDNI, f. 17, op. 162, d. 14, ll. 89–96.

answer to Sholokhov).[136] Contrary to 1931 and early 1932—when some help had been extended to suffering areas, Ukraine included[137]—from the summer of 1932 to the early spring of 1933 no aid reached the starving peasants (as we shall see, aid was then selectively resumed to foster production).

In Ukraine and in other non-Russian major grain-producing regions, where because of national reasons the state-peasants' conflicts had reached its acme, Stalin used the famine not only to teach the above mentioned lesson but also to uproot what he believed to be nationalism's natural breeding ground. This helps explain why Ukraine, Northern Caucasus, and Kazakhstan headed the list of the most severely hit areas. In some of their regions, like the Kuban, leaders like Kaganovič punished local Cossacks and peasants by removing all the available goods while forbidding at the same time the import of new supplies. True artificial famines were thus created.

In these cases too it is possible to establish a direct link with 1919–22. Actually, it was Kaganovič himself who established it. As soon as he arrived in the Kuban, for example, he declared at a meeting of local cadres that

> one should remember that in 1921 we deported the Cossacks who opposed the Soviet power. . . You don't like to work here, and we deport you. Somebody may object and say that this is illegal. Well, this is not true, it is perfectly legal. You are against the Soviet power, you do not want to sow, therefore, in the name of state interests, the Soviet power has the right to fight against this

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136 In Nikita Sergeevič Xruščev, "Vysokaja idejnosť i xudožestvennoe masterstvo," *Pravda* (8 March 1963).

137 In May 1931 the Sovnarkom's grain reserve fund was used to help the Ukrainian regions hit by a flood. One year later 35,000 tons of wheat, already stocked in local harbors and marked for export, were given to Southern Ukraine (but it is not clear whether they reached the villages or were used to feed the urban population). RCXIDNI, f. 17, op. 162, d. 10, l. 43 and d. 12, l. 132. Interesting data on grain stocks have been recently published in R. W. Davies, Mark B. Tauger, and S. G. Wheatcroft, "Stalin, Grain Stocks, and the Famine of 1932–33," *Slavic Review* 3 (1995): 642–57, an article unfortunately marred by a specious line of argument and by its obsession with past—and shameful—polemics.

> behavior. . . We shall reach our aims, comrades secretaries, if not with you then over your heads.[138]

In the following weeks Tuxačevskij was once more involved in the "pacification" of the countryside, participating in the deportation of Cossack *stanicy* and in their replacement with military agricultural colonies like Krasnoarmejsk.[139]

All over the country the lesson was taught by applying a very simple principle—if you do not work, and do not yield, you shall not eat—embodied by the *trudodni.* These were a kind of daily piecework according to which bread was distributed to kolkhoz members only on the basis of actually worked days. Meanwhile, in the villages people died of hunger, and the newly introduced passport system legally denied peasants the possibility of saving themselves by fleeing (it may be recalled that passports were reintroduced at the end of 1932 precisely in order to deal with the mass flight of peasants from famine-stricken areas, and more generally from the countryside, which had started in the spring of 1932).

A report written in May 1933 by a CIK high official after a tour in the Don region thus summed up the impact, and the success, of this quasi-pavlovian mechanism:

> In most villages, the "conspiracy of silence" [peasants had completely stopped to talk to the authorities, *A.G.*] has been broken. People once more speak in the meetings even though, for the moment, they do so in order to ask for

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[138] L. Marcucci, "Il primato dell'organizzazione. Biografia politica di Lazar' Kaganovič," Ph.D. Thesis, Scuola Superiore di Studi Storici, Università di S. Marino (1991–92): 282–83. Marcucci, however, could not use the recently released material from the Presidential archives, which includes—among other things—several *dela* relating to Kaganovič's 1932 missions to Ukraine and the Northern Caucasus (op. 3, dd. 214–16).

[139] Andrea Romano and Nonna Tarxova will publish the relevant documents in their already quoted *sbornik.* Arakceev's name comes naturally to mind.

> bread, or to promise that, if they will be fed, they will work properly.[140]

Three months later a German embassy specialist, Dr. Schiller, reached similar conclusions after a trip in Ukraine and Northern Caucasus:

> Cut off in their villages. . . and deprived of any help, Ukrainian peasants were left with no alternative other than to work for the government, and thus survive, or to literally die of starvation. Here lies. . . the secret of the restoration of Ukrainian agriculture . . . .[141]

By the time these words were written, in the summer of 1933, the Stalinists' victory over the peasants was complete. In the countryside a system was established which made of the peasants—still nearly 70 percent of the population at the end of the decade—a legally discriminated against and subordinated group whose fate was in the hands of the state.[142] In spite of minor conflicts which of course did continue, the Soviet government had eventually fulfilled its 1920 dream. It could now take what it deemed necessary without giving peasants the equivalent of their work.

In September 1935, when procurements were yielding without problems almost 40 percent of the harvest versus the 15 percent of the NEP years, an exultant Lazar Kaganovič thus described the miracle in a letter to Ordžonikidze:

> What is happening, for example with this year's grain procurements, is an absolutely fantastic, stunning victory, a victory of Stalinism [*To čto proisxodit, naprimer, s xlebozagotovkami etogo goda—eto soveršenno nebyvalaja ošelomljajuščaja naša pobeda—pobeda Stalinizma*].[143]

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140 "Rapport de l'Instructeur du Comité exécutif central Brouk sur la préparation de la campagne de semailles dans la région du Don," in Werth and Moullec, *Rapports:* 155.

141 Graziosi, *Lettere:* 192–94. A poor edition of the German diplomatic documents is Dmytro Zlepko, ed., *Die ukrainische Hunger-Holocaust* (Sonnenbühl, 1988).

142 Lewin, *Taking:* 173–77.

143 Xlevnjuk et al., eds., *Stalinskoe Politbjuro:* 146.

It also was Stalin's *personal* victory. Many peasants now "recognized" him as a stern, master-like "father" whom it was impossible to disobey (even though one could still "cheat" him of a small part of the harvest). This is, I believe, one of the roots of the indubitable hold of Stalin's cult from the mid-1930s onward also in the countryside. When famine struck again in 1946, even some expressions of gratitude for a father who, unlike 13 years before, had not completely refused to help his suffering children were to be heard.[144]

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[144] Werth and Moullec, *Rapports:* 162–66. Of course, also victory in the war played a crucial role in this shift of attitudes. As for pre-war years, the grip of Stalin's cult on each successive generation of Soviet urban youth was strong for reasons which did not depend on the events we are dealing with. On the 1946–47 famine see V. F. Zima, "Golod v Rossii 1946–1947 godov," *Otečestvennaja istorija* 1 (1994): 35–52 and Id., "Golod i prestupnosť v SSSR, 1946–47 gg," *Revue des études slaves* 4 (1994): 757–76.

Some Concluding Remarks

I would like to conclude with some far from conclusive remarks. The first concerns the intrinsic meaning of this war against the peasantry. In the introduction I said that it was an important part of the decades-long conflict and of the social, economic and political regression caused by World War I in Europe. Actually, the very fact that a great peasant war, complete with all the attributes usually accompanying this kind of events, could take place in the middle of the European twentieth century, is one of this regression's most visible symbols.

But far from being just a symptom and a consequence of regression, of the geological upheaval which was laying bare, and breathing new life into, the most primitive and archaic elements of the European society, the war against the peasantry was also an *independent source of regression*. Without taking it into consideration, for example, it seems difficult to account for some of the fundamental features of the Stalinist era.

This presents itself as a particularly ferocious variety of *despotism* which used the modern means at its disposal to try to control and regiment a society which its own initiatives had uprooted and thrown into a chaotic state (the example of the mass lawlessness created by collectivization suffices, I believe, to explain what these words mean).[145]

That Stalin's regime resembled this rather than a modern and "orderly" totalitarian regime is indicated by a number of elements: the gathering of a tribute and its methods; the re-imposition of a peculiar kind of serfdom in the countryside (Bukharin called it "military-feudal

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[145] This is not to deny the reality of Stalinist "modernization": but its essence cannot be understood without considering the context in which it took place, namely the war I tried to sketch in this essay. When this is properly understood, the fact that such "modernization" could in the short run produce a political regression to a despotism of bygone days ceases to be surprising. It must also be remembered that the peculiarities of Soviet "modernization" made it a tricky one also in the long run (I discuss this point in "G. L. Piatakov": 162–66).

exploitation of the peasantry"); the appearance of vast areas of quasi-slave labor in industry and building; and—last but not least—many traits in the psyche of the despot himself. This does not mean to deny or undervalue the regime's totalitarian dreams and aspirations nor the veneer of modernity it loved so much (but we shouldn't either let them blind us). Nor should it mean in some way or the other to explain the political system emerged in 1917 and later "perfected" by Stalin with the country's "backwardness" and rural nature. Actually, this system was in itself the product of a move backward of which the Bolshevik ideologies, political cultures and activities were important factors.[146]

These ideologies, and Bolshevism itself, were not static phenomena—something of course unknown to history. The great conflict between the state and the peasantry offers us an interesting perspective on their nature and evolution.

I said that almost immediately, or at least very soon, the party, and above all its leadership, felt to be—and was—*antipopular*, leading a war against the large majority of the population, from which it defended itself also by renewing the methods of the *konspiracija.*

The events of 1928–33 deepened and extended these feelings and this reality, which during the NEP were circumscribed to the party's hard core shaped by the "civil war." I believe it is not an exaggeration—if one keeps in mind what took place at that time—to speak of a *criminalization* of both the party and its militant core.[147]

This core went through another "negative" selection. One does not need to make big efforts in order to realize what happened. Actually, it is enough to go re-reading what Krawchenko wrote of his experiences in the countryside of the early 1930s—a testimony today confirmed by countless archival sources—to understand what many party cadres saw and did as well as the fate of those among them who did not like it (by the way, the latter were far from being a small minority).

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146 For these reasons, the agrarian despotism hypothesis does not convince me. Stalin's despotism was actually the product of a decision to wage war against the peasantry in order to build a new, peculiar variety of industrial society.

147 From a more general point of view, this process could be considered part and parcel of that "criminalization" of the whole Soviet society I referred to while discussing the impact of collectivization on large strata of the population.

The ideologies of the party and of its leadership made also another significant jump backward. I said that many came out of the "civil war" despising both democracy and the masses. In some circles, like Dzeržinskij's, beneath and behind the official rhetoric circulated in the 1920s ideas according to which given those masses' darkness [*temnota*], the party's task was essentially a *modernizing* one, though on a path which was not to follow the capitalist one. The party, therefore, was seen as a modern, and collective, modernizing tsar—a new Peter to make it clear—ready to mobilize the state and its bureaucracies to push the country forward.

In fact, for the many leaders disillusioned with the "working class" (Dzeržinskij thought Soviet workers "dead weights" on the road to socialism)[148] and with repeated defeats in the West, the state and its bureaucracies represented in the 1920s the *sole* active force existing in the country (one may recall the penetrating pages that Rakovskij devoted to these feelings and ideas at the end of the decade).

Thanks also to Gorky and his undeniable talent of cultural "impresario" on a large scale, Stalin was able to present himself in 1929 as the incarnation of these ideas (it is enough to read the first volume of Aleksej Tol'stoj's *Petr pervyj*, published precisely in 1930, to understand what is meant by this).[149]

But as Gorky was to discover with dismay,[150] a primitive cultural baggage and the violence of 1918–22 had pushed other Bolshevik leaders—Stalin and many members of his *družina* included—towards other models and role-models. This is why the new wave of anti-popular violence of 1928–33 and the harrowing doubts on the loyalty of the "great barons" of the Bolshevik old guard—a few personal friends included—could easily resuscitate that *Ivan Groznyj* to whom the Stalin of the mid-1930s felt so close.

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148 In Werth, "Une source inédite": 27.

149 Graziosi, "Stalin's": 244–45, 253–55. On the origin of Tol'stoj's book see also Georges Nivat, "La genèse d'un roman historique soviétique: Pierre le Grand d'Alexis Tolstoï," *Cahiers du monde russe et soviétique* 1 (1961): 37–55.

150 His recently discovered letters of 1934–35 suggest that by then Gorky was at least partially conscious of his misjudgement of Stalin's personality and policies.

Thus was sealed the paradoxical destiny of a party which had started its career as the heir to Stenka Razin[151] and Pugačev but which very soon—when Lenin was still unveiling monuments to the leaders of the great peasant revolts of the past—in the fight against Pugačev-Maxno had begun to find in the great tsars and in their servants like Arakčeev its true predecessors. In fact, already by 1920 this "evolution" was so evident as to allow Černov to denounce its essence in his famous unauthorized speech of May before the British Trade Unions delegation.

Even though in a subordinate and inoffensive position, however, the link with the peasant revolts of bygone days did survive here and there both in the propaganda and in the historiography of a system which cherished Engels as a forefather and published many editions of his *Peasant War in Germany* as well as a number of works devoted to past peasant insurrections.

Returning to the Soviet peasant war, I think that its features enable us to get a better understanding of some later developments, from the purges to the events of 1939–41. This is true from very concrete points of view—let us remember the role of Evdokimov's "school" in the purges' bloodiest aspects—as well as from other, more general ones. As Pasternak acutely noted, for example, the "spirit" of the whole decade bore the imprint of the events of its earlier part:

> I believe that collectivization proved to be a faulty measure, that it was a blunder. But the mistake could not be admitted. In order to cover this failure, it was necessary to force people, by all the available means of terror, to forget how to judge and how to think, to see what was not there, to prove that the opposite of truth was true. Hence the unprecedented cruelty of Ežov's times.[152]

I would like, however, to draw attention to the relation of this war with the national question. *In the long run* the weaknesses of the

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[151] To witness the complexity and the paradoxes of those years' "myth-building," in 1917–18 also right-wing, anti-Bolshevik Cossacks claimed to be the heirs to the great rebel leaders. Kaledin, for example, used a detachment called "Stepan Razin" to quell local revolts against his rule. See Holquist, *A Russian Vendée:* 145.

[152] Pasternak, *Živago:* 659.

opinion according to which the liquidation of the peasant problem would automatically resolve the national question have emerged quite clearly. And the paradoxical fate that history reserved to its defenders surfaced: they ended up building—*via* urbanization and industrialization—new and perhaps firmer foundations for the resurgence of national aspirations. The positions of both left and right nationalists, who in the aftermath of the "civil war" saw in the instability of peasant support to their efforts one of the main causes of their partial failure, were instead *a posteriori* at least partially vindicated.

More generally, since the rural world ended up vanishing everywhere, one could ask which were—and still are—the consequences of the very peculiar way in which this problem was dealt with and "solved" in the USSR. This consisted, as we know, in the maximum repression possible of the peasants' autonomous participation—*on their own terms*—in the process of modernization, i.e., in their own disappearance.

It could be argued that, in spite of the "ruralization" of the cities, the 1930s saw a considerable weakening of that link between the cities and the countryside which had been so strong and so active before 1917, when it had proved a great resource for the urbanized peasants. The 1930s were the years in which great, stable slums made their appearance: in 1939 about one third of the population lived in cities and the overwhelming majority of those who had been able to escape from the new "serfdom" asked themselves "what fool would remain in a sovkhoz [*kakoj durak budet deržat'sja v sovxoze*]" and stopped thinking about going back to the villages.

Those who remained imprisoned in the new collective farms did of course try—as has been recently pointed out[153]—to read in their favor the norms written by the regime. In doing it, they gave their own, powerful contribution to the Soviet agricultural system's stagnation and inefficiency, which were already inscribed in the genetic code of the principles which inspired its construction.

These were, however, rear-guard skirmishes, fought on a ground that—unlike in pre-1917 and in the 1920s—the state had chosen. This does not mean, of course, that the latter achieved all, or even the

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153 Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Stalin's Peasants: Resistance and Survival in the Russian Village after Collectivization* (New York, 1994).

majority, of its aims or that it was immune from the feedback coming from the environment it was trying so hard to transform.[154]

The events of the "civil war," and the ruthless "modernization" from above which followed, help explain—I believe—also the extreme forms taken up in the USSR by a more or less universal fact, namely *popular aversion to modernity in general*, including its positive traits (to which the association with the Soviet system gave a very bad name). As Martov noted, this was the case already in 1920 but, as peasant slogans indicate, the phenomenon exploded in the early 1930s.[155] Perhaps, we are here in front of one of the sources of the persistence in the USSR and in the post-Soviet countries of a great *reactionary* reservoir, both psychological and ideological.

I would like to conclude with a reflection concerning an aspect of the general nature of the 20th century. This has been defined by a ferocious war composed of many ferocious conflicts. Who has been the victim or even just the witness of one of them, has often bore its imprint for the rest of her or his life, unless our century did not subsequently strike her or him in the opposite direction (cases are not wanting, from the Galician Ukrainians who became communist fighting against Polish oppression and entered later into contact with the 1932–33 famine and/or with the 1939 invasion, to the German communists handed over to the Gestapo in 1939–40).

This helps explain—I believe—the extraordinary strength of the *logic of taking sides* which dominated the 20th century. And the blows' violence, frequency, and opposite directions help us explain why very similar people, sharing often identical backgrounds, could evolve in diverging ways. The point was beautifully raised in a letter written in the 1920s by an *emigré* Borot'bist to one of his comrades who had decided to stay and work with the Bolsheviks:

> You will not venture to speak of me as your antithesis. . . And history will agree with you. It will record: K., an elementary school teacher, of peasant origin, a Ukrainian SR, later a Ukrainian Communist-Bolshevik; H., an elementary school teacher, of peasant origin, a Ukrainian SR. Both fought for the victory of the toiling people, for

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154 M. Lewin, "The Kolkhoz and the Russian Muzhik" (1980) now in *The Making:* 178–90.

155 Graziosi, "Collectivisation": 547.

> their government, for a "soviet system", for the Ukraine, for a free world . . . Why did one become a "Janissary", the other take refuge among the "liberators"? . . . It could have been the other way around. *What would history do with us?*[156]

Looking back seventy years later at the written histories of our century, one cannot escape the feeling that even the best ones have been dominated, like the lives of those Borot'bists, by the tragic events of 1912–1956. What even great historians wrote has often been deeply influenced by how they were affected by the great and violent waves of a century they often did not like and certainly did not choose. Personally, I think that today it is both possible and right to try to look at it in its face and *in its entirety*, without being overpowered by it.

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[156] Emphasis added. Majstrenko, *Borot'bism:* 209–212.

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