

to cast a shadow over the rest of Soviet history, for forced-pace collectivization.¹³⁶

Stalinism concept formation

Forced collectivization and 'dekulakization'

During the summer, there was a remorseless increase in the pressure against 'kulaks' and in favour of state and collective farms. Encouragement from the centre was seized upon by provincial activists. Whether from conviction or out of eagerness to please Moscow, they vied with each other in claiming a surge of enthusiasm from middle as well as poor peasants and hailing dramatic progress in enrolling peasants in collective farms.¹³⁷ A chain reaction between centre and periphery was set in motion: the leadership in Moscow was emboldened by the response from below; it publicized instances of dramatic progress; officials in more passive provinces and districts were spurred into action; the early-comers strove to report even greater achievements; enthusiasm in Moscow soared. And at every level, from the Politburo through regional committees to the humble village party cell, it became ever harder for those with reservations to protest against the coercion used; to point to the depth of hostility not only from richer peasants but from the vast mass of 'middle peasants' and even many of the poorest; to expose how often reports of successful 'collectivization' amounted to little more than signatures cajoled from peasants; and to warn about the lack of adequate machinery, preparation and managerial knowledge to establish effective large-scale farms.

Such protestations were overwhelmed by the enthusiasm that the 'great turn' unleashed. That collective farms working open fields would be more productive than household farms working scattered strips had always been a fundamental Bolshevik assumption. The possibility of bringing about the transformation not over decades, as had been almost universally assumed as late as 1928, but now, this winter, overnight, was tantalizing. The current dearth of tractors and other machinery would surely be rapidly overcome by the glittering promises of the Five-Year Plan. And in regions such as the Urals, already suffering mounting labour shortage as new construction and

mining projects multiplied, there was eager anticipation that collectivization would make a large pool of surplus rural labour available to industry. Peasant reluctance and even overt resistance, it was argued, were rooted in the opposition of wealthy peasants who had supposedly grown rich under NEP: greedy, selfish, exploitative 'kulaks' and foolish poorer peasants duped by them. Immediate collectivization seemed a permanent solution to recurrent grain crises both because output would soar and because collective farms would be in the socialist sector under firm party and state guidance. Collecting grain would no longer involve choosing either to submit to 'kulak blackmail' over prices or to mount drastic coercive requisitioning campaigns. It would become automatic.

Between May and November 1929, it was Molotov rather than Stalin who led enthusiasts at the centre, but that month the leader hailed the mass movement of middle peasants in favour of collectivization, the enormous economic benefits that would follow, and the need for a decisive campaign against the 'kulaks'. In mid-November the same Central Committee plenum which expelled Bukharin from the Politburo resolved to recruit 25,000 industrial workers to go to the countryside and take the lead, alongside party officials, returning Red Army men, and committed peasants, in establishing collective farms.¹³⁸ Early in December the Politburo set up a Commission to fix targets for collectivization in different regions, provide guidance on how far peasant livestock and household plots as well as field strips should be socialized, and lay down how 'kulaks' were to be dealt with. Stalin exercised his weight in particular over the latter issue, making the following landmark speech to a conference of agricultural specialists and officials. With the full authority of a leader whose genius had been trumpeted in every forum on the official occasion of his fiftieth birthday six days earlier, he spurned the idea favoured by some on the Commission and at the conference that repentant 'kulaks' could enter collective farms. He backed ruthless treatment for them all.

Document 145 | I.V. Stalin: '... we must smash the kulaks, eliminate them as a class'—from a speech at a conference of Marxist agrarians

27 December 1929

To launch an offensive against the kulaks means that we must smash the kulaks, eliminate them as a class. Unless we set ourselves these aims, an offensive would be mere declamation, pinpricks, phrase-mongering, anything but a real Bolshevik offensive. To launch an offensive against the kulaks means that we must prepare for

136 For four of the most illuminating studies, see R.W. Davies, *The Socialist Offensive: The collectivization of Soviet agriculture, 1929–1930* (London 1980); Lewin, *Making of the Soviet System*; S. Fitzpatrick, *Stalin's Peasants: Resistance and survival in the Russian village after collectivization* (Oxford 1994); and L. Viola, *Peasant Rebels under Stalin: Collectivization and the culture of peasant resistance* (Oxford 1996).

137 See J. Hughes, *Stalinism in a Russian Province: Collectivization and dekulakization in Siberia* (New York 1996), for the view, not widely shared, that the regime succeeded in mobilizing a significant measure of support among poorer peasants.

138 See L. Viola, *The Best Sons of the Fatherland: Workers in the vanguard of Soviet collectivization* (Oxford 1987).

it and then strike at the kulaks, strike so hard as to prevent them from rising to their feet again. That is what we Bolsheviks call a real offensive. Could we have undertaken such an offensive some five years or three years ago with any prospect of success? No, we could not.

Indeed, in 1927 the kulaks produced over 600,000,000 *pudy* of grain, about 130,000,000 *pudy* of which they marketed outside the rural districts. This was a serious force to be reckoned with. How much did our collective farms and state farms produce at that time? About 80,000,000 *pudy*, of which about 35,000,000 *pudy* were sent to the market (marketable grain). Judge for yourselves: could we at that time have replaced the kulak output and kulak marketable grain by the output and marketable grain of our collective farms and state farms? Obviously, we could not.

What would it have meant to launch a determined offensive against the kulaks under such conditions? It would have meant certain failure, strengthening the position of the kulaks and being left without grain. That is why we could not and should not have undertaken a determined offensive against the kulaks at that time, in spite of the adventurist declamations of the Zinoviev-Trotsky opposition.

But today? What is the position now? Today, we have an adequate material base for us to strike at the kulaks, to break their resistance, to eliminate them as a class, and to replace their output by the output of the collective farms and state farms. You know that in 1929 the grain produced on the collective farms and state farms has amounted to not less than 400,000,000 *pudy* (200,000,000 *pudy* less than the gross output of the kulak farms in 1927). You also know that in 1929 the collective farms and state farms have supplied more than 130,000,000 *pudy* of marketable grain (i.e., more than the kulaks in 1927). Lastly, you know that in 1930 the gross output of the collective farms and state farms will amount to not less than 900,000,000 *pudy* of grain (i.e., more than the gross output of the kulaks in 1927), and their output of marketable grain will be not less than 400,000,000 *pudy* (i.e., incomparably more than the kulaks supplied in 1927).

That is how matters stand with us now, comrades.

There you have the change that has taken place in the economy of our country.

Now, as you see, we have the material base which enables us to replace the kulak output by the output of the collective farms and state farms. It is for this very reason that our determined offensive against the kulaks is now meeting with undeniable success.

That is how an offensive against the kulaks must be carried on, if we mean a genuine and determined offensive and not mere futile declamations against the kulaks.

That is why we have recently passed from the policy of restricting the exploiting tendencies of the kulaks to the policy of eliminating the kulaks as a class.

[Source: J.V. Stalin, *Works* Volume XII (Moscow 1955) pp. 174-76.]

On 5 January 1930, the Politburo adopted a formal resolution that collectivization be drastically accelerated. Whereas the Plan approved in April 1929 had envisaged some 10 per cent of the peasant population being collectivized by 1933, now there was to be total collectivization in some of the main grain areas by late 1930 to early 1931, and in the other grain regions by spring 1932. The resolution committed the party to 'eliminating the kulaks as a class' though it did not spell out exactly what was to become of them. Many local officials did not wait for more detailed instructions. Exhorted by the centre, eager to excel in achieving the party's goals, anxious to reach some kind of local stability in time for the spring sowing, and apprehensive about the potential scale of peasant resistance, they threw their efforts into a once-and-for-all crash programme. Even before a further Politburo Commission deliberating on the 'kulak question' had reported, provincial and district party officials raced ahead with frantic and often chaotic campaigns to identify 'kulaks' in their villages, confiscate their land and property, and evict them from their houses.

The following resolution from the bureau of the Urals *oblast'* committee conveys something of the frenetic way in which regional party organizations approached the huge task confronting them. The trigger for the resolution was an urgent telegram from the first secretary, Kabakov, who was on the Politburo's Commission on the 'kulak question'. The local leaders set up a sub-committee which among a host of duties was charged to provide, within five days, target figures for the number of 'kulaks' to be evicted from each of the 168 sprawling districts into which the *oblast'* was divided. The procedure mirrored Moscow's approach to supervising what amounted to a form of social revolution across the vastly varied regions of a country covering nearly a sixth of the earth's surface. Global figures based on formulaic class categorization were rendered even more crude by dividing them up among sub-areas according to scarcely less arbitrary political considerations and rough-and-ready socio-economic statistics. Just how arbitrary and haphazard a form 'dekulakization' took was shown a week later when the Politburo Commission, having come under strong regional pressure to do so, agreed guide figures far higher than those on which the Urals regional bureau had been operating. The Commission indicated approximate numbers to be placed in each of three categories, distinguished according to intensity of opposition, and in mechanistic fashion set overall ceilings on the number to be labelled 'kulak': 2-3 per cent of households in non-grain areas and 3-5 per cent in grain areas.¹³⁹ For the Urals this suggested a figure some ten times greater than that originally assumed.

¹³⁹ Davies, *Socialist Offensive* pp. 232-43.

Document 146 | '... the kulaks are to be evicted...'—from Minute 61 of a closed session of the Politburo of the Urals *oblast'* committee of the CPSU

22 January 1930

Special file. Top secret. No copies to be made.

Item: Telegram from comrade Kabakov on the kulaks.

Resolved:

1. Confirm the text of the telegram on behalf of the secretaries of the *okrug** committees and the chairmen of the *okrug* executive committees. . .
3. Instruct a group from the *oblast'* committee within five days:
 - a. To draw up special instructions for making production inventories and estimates for the transfer and use of confiscated kulak property by the collective farms.
 - b. On the basis of the household, economic and political characteristics of each *okrug* and the rate of collectivization, to determine concretely those *okruga* and districts from which the kulaks are to be evicted, reckoning on 10–15,000 people across the *oblast'*.
 - c. Ascertain the *okruga*, districts and number of kulaks to be resettled in remote northern forest regions (Tobol'sk, Obdorsk, Ivdel', the Northern Upper Kama *okrug*, etc.).
 - d. To draw up a plan for using the kulaks on logging, land and other work and their possible incarceration in concentration camps. . .
5. To send directives through the local Party, Komsomol and Soviet channels and the organs of the OGPU on getting the entire apparatus ready so that they can be sure of conducting a successful campaign against the kulaks.
6. To send instructions through Party and Soviet channels on revising and strengthening the composition of the soviets.
7. To run a political campaign among workers on the shop floor to pass resolutions and statements approving Party and government measures for destroying the kulaks as a class.
8. To instruct the Urals Collective Farm Union to give out directives throughout the collective farm system on the active participation of collective farm organizations in destroying the kulaks. Approval of the draft letter to be obtained from the *oblast'* committee of the Party.

P. Zubarov, Secretary of the Urals *oblast'* committee of the CPSU

[Source: SOTSDOO, fond 4, opis' 8, delo 54, p. 9.]

* The administrative subdivision between *oblast'* and district, abolished later in 1930.

The language of 'kulaks' and class division played a vital role in enabling officials at all levels to cling to the fiction that collectivization was overwhelmingly voluntary. Any opposition was categorized as that of 'kulak elements' and thus by definition not indicative of the attitude of the great mass of middle as well as poor peasants. The fiction remained unshaken even though the scale and intensity of protest led party officials to provide emergency armed backup for the groups of officials, workers, and students cajoling peasants into voting for and signing up to collectivization. The following resolution by the party committee of Sverdlovsk *okrug* typifies the precautions taken. It reflects, too, the ever greater pressures on the committee secretary, the key party official at every level, who is made personally responsible for ensuring adequate detachments of armed workers are available and somehow doing so without affecting industrial and agricultural output.

Document 147 | 'Get... ready for battle...'—circular from the CPSU Sverdlovsk *okrug* committee

6 February 1930

Urgent. Top secret. Return within 24 hours.

In carrying out the policy of destroying the kulaks as a class it is possible that kulak elements in the countryside might try to bring together all malcontents in certain regions with a view to forming bands against Soviet power. Although it rejects in advance that any possible bandit actions could be successful, as a precaution the *okrug* committee proposes to district committee secretaries that within three days of receipt they take personal responsibility for checking on the feasibility of mobilization plans for forming communist detachments. Each district committee must make sure that these communist detachments are brought up to the requisite strength in such a way that they are undoubtedly ready for battle, while at the same time ensuring that if the detachments are formed and used in fighting, the withdrawal of CPSU members does not impact on production. Therefore the lists of members of these detachments should be reviewed immediately, adding those members of the CPSU whose departure would not affect production, but selecting them so that all members of the detachment are able to take part in battle operations, i.e., no invalids. In addition, it is essential to check each detachment's courier communications system to ensure rapid muster and complete readiness.

Measures are to be taken to ensure that all Party members enlisted in the detachment are immediately brought up to battle-readiness by the training units of the Society for Assisting Defence, Aviation and Chemical Construction, so that, should the detachments be required, they are effective fighting units. There should be military training for all communists, as those not enlisted in the detachments will be the immediate reserve for replenishing the communist detachments, should this be necessary.

On request from the GPU, with *okrug* committee sanction (by telephone), district committee secretaries must immediately gather detachments. These will operate under the command of a detachment commander, on instruction from the GPU. Get the communist detachments' mobilization plan ready for battle in accordance with the instructions in this letter and inform the *okrug* committee of implementation after three days.

These measures must in no way hinder the implementation of the economic plans for industry and agriculture.

Potaskuev — Chief Secretary of the CPSU

[Source: SOTsDOO, fond 4, opis' 8, delo 54, p. 38.]

Peasant resistance was widespread, sustained and multiform. It was fuelled by the high-handedness and ignorance of party officials and agents installed to run the new collective farms; by the creation of vast collectives which removed the management far from the traditional village and alienated peasants even further; by peasant fury at being ordered to surrender livestock to the collective, outrage at the frontal assault on religion, priests and churches that accompanied the campaign, and horror at violent 'dekulakization' of fellow villagers, neighbours and friends. There were thousands of cases of peasants carrying out assaults on groups of collectivizers, night-time attacks, assassinations and arson.¹⁴⁰ Ukraine saw by far the largest number of peasants involved, but in the Urals there were almost a thousand recorded acts of resistance in 1930 alone. For the most part, though, the local authorities looked able to mobilize too much force to make armed struggle an option, and peasants resorted to varieties of passive resistance from local demonstrations and disrupting meetings called to institute collectivization, to deceiving collectivization teams, disobeying simple instructions, feigning confusion and, on a massive scale, slaughtering livestock for barter or consumption rather than see it taken over by the collective farm.

The risk became alarming that the spring sowing would be seriously disrupted and the new farms unable to function; even worse was the danger that the thousands of reports of individual 'incidents' would snowball into a threat to the stability of the whole regime. On 2 March Stalin published in *Pravda* an article entitled 'Dizzy with Success', blaming over-zealous local officials for going far beyond their remit and defying party policy by resorting to coercion. Officials were dismayed and peasants delighted by the sudden green light that Stalin gave for peasants to withdraw from the collective farms. There followed a massive exodus. In the Urals region, the proportion of

¹⁴⁰ Viola, *Peasant Rebels* pp. 100–31.

collectivized households fell in March and April from 76 per cent to 32 per cent, and across the country the proportion fell from 57 per cent in March to 21.5 per cent in September.¹⁴¹

Yet once grain collections resumed in the autumn, the violence and coercion of the spring returned. Though the harvest was good, initial reports exaggerated just how good and the authorities imposed enormously ambitious procurement targets to maximize exports. The 'Urals-Siberian' method of extracting grain from the peasantry was again widely employed, and procurement squads found that newly collectivized peasants were considerably easier to manage than individual householders. They, too, tried to evade the quotas imposed but found it much harder to do so given the party's greater presence, closer monitoring of what was grown, and leverage over the politically appointed farm management. With encouragement from the centre, collectivization resumed alongside forcible grain requisitioning. Although the pace was now more moderate, heavy pressure had to be brought to bear on the peasantry before they would consent, and across the country activists made use of the device of isolating and exiling likely opposition ringleaders as 'kulaks'. The (implausibly precise) exile numbers reported to the Politburo Commission overseeing the process, which was headed by A.A. Andreev, chair of the party's Control Commission, showed a considerably greater number for 1931 than 1930—the Urals being by some way the largest recipient. Only from 1933, when the main grain-growing regions had been overwhelmingly collectivized and harassment, discrimination and rates of taxation had made independent households barely viable, would the annual number decline. By the end of the decade, when households outside collectives had been reduced to a small residue, it is estimated the exile total reached over one million families.

Document 148 | Report on the number of evicted kulaks

1931

TOP SECRET to comrade Andreev.

1. Total evictions in 1930	113,013 families	551,330 persons
2. Total evictions in 1931	243,531 "	1,128,198 "
Total evicted in 1930 and 1931	356,544 "	1,679,528 "
Of which: Sent in from other <i>oblasti</i>	245,403 "	1,157,077 "
Resettled within their <i>oblasti</i>	111,141 "	522,451 "
Total	356,544 families	1,679,528 persons

¹⁴¹ Davies, *Socialist Offensive* pp. 442–43.

3. Evicted kulaks have been resettled in the following areas

1. Northern <i>krai</i>	58,800 families	288,560 persons
2. Urals <i>oblast'</i>	123,547 "	571,355 "
3. Kazakhstan	50,268 "	241,331 "
4. Western Siberian <i>krai</i>	69,916 "	316,883 "
5. Eastern Siberian <i>krai</i>	28,572 "	138,191 "
6. Far Eastern <i>krai</i>	9,694 "	48,269 "
7. Yakutia (Aldan)	1,366 "	7,157 "
8. Leningrad <i>oblast'</i>	6,884 "	31,466 "
9. Nizhniy Novgorod <i>oblast'</i>	1,497 "	6,316 "
10. North Caucasus <i>krai</i>	3,000 "	15,000 "
11. Ukrainian SSR	3,000 "	15,000 "
Total	356,544 families	1,679,528 persons

[Source: RGASPI, fond 17, opis' 120, delo 52, p. 59.]

While the motive for 'dekulakization' was to pre-empt and destroy resistance to collectivization, it also offered opportunities to respond to industry's urgent need for new labour. In the early years of the Bolshevik regime, the prevailing ethos, in line with European left-wing critiques of traditional penal policy, was that prison and corrective labour should be designed first and foremost to reform the transgressor. During the 1920s, however, this ethos gave way to more and more emphasis on those who broke socialist law making their contribution via forced labour (see document 161 below). This applied *a priori* to class enemies such as those convicted of belonging to the 'kulak element'. In the course of 1930, as it became clear that tens of thousands of able-bodied men and women would be available for forced labour, industrial managers began to press for suitable exiles to be assigned to their enterprises. Andreev's Commission, which included the OGPU chief, G.G. Yagoda, was responsible for overseeing the transfer of 'kulak' families within and between regions. In practice its control was extremely loose and calls by it and by Sovnarkom for those bidding for labour to ensure basic provisions for exiles were widely ignored. As the following document of summer 1931 shows, at the front of the queue, encouraged by Kabakov, were the major Urals coal, steel and non-ferrous metal trusts. The request for no fewer than 50,000 'special migrants' to work in the timber industry reflected the virtual impossibility of getting voluntary labour to stay for any length of time working in grim conditions in remote regions of the *oblast'*.

Document 149 | From the minutes of comrade Andreev's Commission on the Kulaks

8 July 1931

TOP SECRET

Chairman: comrade Andreev

Present: comrades Yagoda, Evdokimov, Nikolaev, Kogan, Verman, Smol'yaninov, Figatner, Bal'yan

1. Eastern Coal's applications

To satisfy Eastern Coal's applications:

- 1,000 families of special migrants for Cheremkhovo. Satisfy application using Bashkir special migrants. Despatch dates: 30 July–1 August.
- 500 families of special migrants for Bokuchacha, using internal Eastern Siberian special migration. Despatch dates: 15–25 July.
- 2,000 families of special migrants for Anzherka-Sudzhenska, using Bashkir special migrants. Despatch dates: 18–24 July.
- 3,000 families of special migrants for the Prokop'evsk district, using Bashkir special migrants. Despatch dates: 25 July–3 August.
- 500 families of special migrants for the Minusinsk district, using internal Western Siberian special migration. Despatch dates: 15–20 July.

2. Ural Coal's applications

To satisfy Ural Coal's applications:

- 1,100 families of special migrants from Nizhniy Novgorod *krai* for Kizelovsk district. Despatch dates: 2–4 August.
- 1,100 families of special migrants from Nizhniy Novgorod *krai* for Chelyabinsk district. Despatch dates: 5–7 August.

3. Eastern Steel's applications

To satisfy Eastern Steel's applications for 18,200 families to work in the following enterprises:

- 5,000 families of special migrants from the Moscow *oblast'* for Kuznetskstroy. Despatch dates: 20 July–1 August.
- An extra 1,000 families of special migrants from the Central Black Earth *oblast'* for Sinarstroy. Despatch dates: 9–11 July.
- 5,000 families of special migrants from Tatariya for Magnitogorsk. Despatch dates: 16 July–5 August.
- 500 families of special migrants from the Moscow district for Vysokogorsk Ore Administration. Despatch date: 2 August.
- 1,200 families of special migrants from the Moscow district for Bakal'sk Ore Administration. Despatch dates: 3–6 August.
- 1,000 families of special migrants from the Moscow district for Goroblagodatsk

Ore Administration. Despatch dates: 7-9 August.

- g) 500 families of special migrants from the Moscow district for Zlatoust Ore Administration. Despatch date: 10 August.
- h) 1,000 families of special migrants from Nizhniy Novgorod *krai* for Sinarsk Ore Administration. Despatch dates: 30 July-1 August.
- i) Comrade Trakhter, director of Tagilstroy, to be reprimanded for refusing to accept the 3,000 special migrants sent at his request from Ukraine. Consequently, they had to be re-routed to other work.

Eastern Steel must within twenty-four hours provide a specific application, stating when it will accept the special migrant families to Tagilstroy. The OGPU is to ensure that the application is dealt with.

4. Non-Ferrous and Gold's Applications

To satisfy Non-Ferrous and Gold's applications:

- 1. In the Urals:
 - a) 400 families of special migrants from the Nizhniy Novgorod *krai* for Kalata. Despatch date: 2 August.
 - b) 200 families of special migrants from the Nizhniy Novgorod *krai* for Tagil. Despatch date: 3 August.
 - c) 400 families of special migrants from the Nizhniy Novgorod *krai* for Karabash. Despatch date: 4 August.
 - d) 800 families of special migrants from the Nizhniy Novgorod *krai* for Ural Platinum. Despatch dates: 5-6 August.
- 2. In Western Siberia:
 - a) 400 families of special migrants using internal Western Siberian special migration for the Mariynsk district. Despatch dates: 15-20 July.
 - b) 200 families of special migrants using internal Western Siberian special migration for the Ol'khovsk district. Despatch dates: 15-20 July.
- 3. In view of the disgraceful arrangements made for families of special migrants already transported from Aldan, as a result of which 4,000 people, family members, have still not been accommodated and are living on the railway tracks near Bol'shoy Never railway station, Aldan's application for another 1,000 families is to be rejected.

5. Union Peat's Application

Of the 50,000 families of special migrants sent to the Urals for Ural Timber 5,000 are to be sent to work on peat in the Urals in August.

6. Kulaks cannot be used at peat workings in the Central districts, at Avtostroy and Soyuzstandartstroy in the Donbass. Applications refused.

7. Union Timber's Applications

- a) In view of the poor use made at logging camps of the labour of those special

migrants already transported to Union Timber, the latter's application for 17,000 families of special migrants for the Northern *krai* is to be refused.

- b) Comply with the supplementary application from the Vel'sk district of the Northern *krai* for 3,000 families of special migrants for logging work for the Moscow and Leningrad areas.

[Source: RGASPI, fond 17, opis' 120, delo 52, pp. 1-4.]

Famine

The disruption and demoralization of forced collectivization, the expulsion or flight of many of the most able peasant farmers, the drastic decline in live-stock and acute shortage of tractors and other machinery, exacerbated by adverse weather, resulted in a steep fall in the harvests of 1931 and 1932. Requisitioning quotas, however, remained brutally high as the party strove to maintain export levels to pay for vital capital goods imports and to feed the rapidly burgeoning urban population. The result was to leave both individual householders and collective farmers struggling, in the worst months, to find enough to eat. The theft of grain, especially in the form of scavenging from collective farms, soared. In the eyes of many collectivized peasants, the collective farm fields, which they had sown and harvested, were fair game given the derisory prices paid for requisitioned grain. As conditions became more and more desperate, farm managers and indeed local officials in many places proved sympathetic or were themselves implicated in 'theft' to provide for their own workforce. Concern at the disruption and cost of theft mounted; police and judicial officials pressed for action; and in August 1932 a draconian decree, reputedly drafted by Stalin himself, was issued. In time-honoured fashion the harsh measures were presented as being in response to demands from loyal workers and peasants, drawing a veil over the fact that most of the theft was by collective farmers themselves. Stealing could be punished by death ('the highest degree of social protection') and the minimum penalty was to be ten years' imprisonment. There were at least 55,000 convictions (many of them women and children) and 1,000 executions in the last months of 1932, and twice as many in 1933.¹⁴²

read too

¹⁴² Viola, *Peasant Rebels* pp. 222-23.

Document 150 | From a TsIK and Sovnarkom decree: 'On the protection of the property of state enterprises, collective farms and co-operatives and the strengthening of public (socialist) property'

7 August 1932

Complaints from workers and collective farmers about theft have increased recently; theft from trains and barges and of co-operative and collective-farm property; similarly, complaints have increased about violence and threats from kulak elements against collective farmers who do not wish to leave the collective farm...

The Central Executive Committee and the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR consider that public property (state, collective farm and co-operative) is the basis of the Soviet system, is sacred and inviolable and those threatening it must be looked upon as enemies of the people. Consequently, a resolute struggle against those stealing state property is the primary duty of the organs of Soviet power.

Therefore, and in response to the demands of workers and collective farmers, the Central Executive Committee and the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR decree as follows:

I

... 2. The application of the highest degree of social protection as a measure of legal repression against theft from trains and barges—execution by firing squad and confiscation of all property or, if there are mitigating circumstances, confiscation of property and a minimum of ten years' imprisonment. ... 3. Amnesties will not apply to criminals sentenced for the theft of goods in transit.

II

... 2. The application of the highest degree of social protection as a measure of legal repression against theft of collective-farm and co-operative property—execution by firing-squad and confiscation of property or, if there are mitigating circumstances, confiscation of property and a minimum of ten years' imprisonment. 3. Amnesties will not apply to criminals sentenced for the theft of collective-farm and co-operative property.

III

... 2. The application of legal repression against violence and threats against collective farms and collective farmers by kulak and other anti-social elements—from five to ten years' deprivation of freedom in a concentration camp. 3. Amnesties will not apply to criminals sentenced in such cases.

M. Kalinin, chairman of the TsIK of the USSR

V. Molotov (Skryabin), chairman of the Sovnarkom of the USSR

A. Enukidze, secretary of the TsIK of the USSR

[Source: *Sobranie zakonov i rasporyazheniy raboche-krest'yanskogo pravitel'stva Soyuza SSR* No. 62 (Moscow 1932) Article 360, pp. 583–84.]

So dreadful were conditions in the village—especially for those who ran the risk of being denounced as 'kulaks'—that even the truly abysmal urban conditions of 1930–33 seemed preferable. Alongside victims of 'dekulakization' were many more families who chose 'self-dekulakization' and sold or abandoned their property rather than risk being forcibly exiled. They joined the massive tide of migrants who left the countryside in search of safety, work and food in the cities. The scale of urban migration amounted to a virtual social revolution, running in the early 1930s at three million per year. The influx, which dwarfed the number of 'special migrants' formally assigned to industrial enterprises, was welcomed by industrial managers as they struggled to find the necessary labour to meet soaring construction and production targets. But cities already barely able to absorb the annual migration of one million in the late NEP period were overwhelmed; overcrowding became sordid and degrading; rudimentary health and welfare organizations could not cope; and the rationing system introduced in 1928 was stretched to breaking point. In late 1932, during a brief pause in pressure for additional labour from industrial managers, the regime sought to stem the tide and return unwanted peasants to the countryside. The system adopted—a sinister echo of the Tsarist policing method abolished in 1917—was to introduce internal passports.

Peasants had no automatic right to a passport and had to apply for them before migrating, enabling the police and local authorities to slow sharply the rate of urban migration. In the cities and other designated 'passport regime' areas, all residents were required to secure a passport and urban registration card. This gave the police a powerful tool of social control, enabling them to expel not only unauthorized peasant migrants but all those deemed 'harmful elements', from 'socially alien' strata disenfranchised under the constitution—former propertied elements, priests, White Army officers—to 'labour shirkers' with no sanctioned job, vagrants, prostitutes and those with a criminal record, political or civil.¹⁴³ Of comparable long-term significance was the requirement that each passport holder identify his or her nationality. The requirement corresponded to the regime's policy of acknowledging and affirming the significance of national differences. But it made immutable an aspect of each individual's identity which might otherwise have remained far more plastic, especially among a generation which was destined to be the subject of massive social flux, migration, urbanization and military devastation, and with the onset of Nazi invasion in 1941 was to prove highly responsive to transnational, Soviet patriotic appeal.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴³ P.N. Hagenloh, "'Socially Harmful Elements' and the Great Terror" in S. Fitzpatrick (ed.) *Stalinism: New directions* (London 2000) pp. 295–300.

¹⁴⁴ Y. Slezkine, 'The Soviet Union as a Communal Apartment' *Slavic Review* 53 (1994) pp. 415–52.

or special circumstances and then only of those households the members of which are waging an active struggle against the collective farm and organizing a boycott of sowing or grain deliveries. Eviction is permissible only from the following *oblasti* and in the following maximum numbers:

Ukraine	2,000 holdings
N. Caucasus	1,000 holdings
Lower Volga	1,000 holdings
Middle Volga	1,000 holdings
Central Black-Earth region	1,000 holdings
Urals	1,000 holdings
Gor'ky <i>kray</i>	500 holdings
E. Siberia	1,000 holdings
Belorussia	500 holdings
Western <i>oblast'</i>	500 holdings
Bashkiria	500 holdings
Transcaucasia	500 holdings
Central Asia	500 holdings
Total	12,000 [sic] holdings

II

On regulating the making of arrests

1. Unauthorized arrests by executive-committee chairmen, district and *kray* representatives, village soviet chairmen, chairmen of collective farms and collective-farm unions, Party group secretaries, and so on are to be forbidden.

Arrests may be made only by organs of the procuracy, the OGPU and the militia. Investigators may make arrests only with the procurator's prior consent.

Arrests made by militia chiefs must be confirmed or annulled by district OGPU executives or procurators through the proper channels and within 45 hours of the arrest.

2. The procuracy, OGPU and militia are to be forbidden from imprisoning people on remand for trivial crimes. Imprisonment on remand may be employed only for persons accused of crimes of counter-revolution, terrorism, sabotage, brigandage and robbery, spying, leaving the country, smuggling, murder, grievous bodily harm, large-scale misappropriation and embezzlement, professional speculation, foreign currency dealing, counterfeiting, malicious hooliganism and professional recidivism.

3. OGPU organs must seek prior consent from the procuracy when making arrests, except for cases of terrorism, bombing, arson, spying, desertion, political brigandage and counter-revolutionary, anti-Party groupings.

This will come into force only in six months' time in the Far East, Central Asia and Kazakhstan.

4. The Procuracy of the USSR and the OGPU must unswervingly observe the 1922 procedures on procuratorial supervision of arrests and detention carried out by the OGPU...

V. Molotov (Skryabin), Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars
I. Stalin, secretary of the CC of the CPSU

[Source: SOTSDOO, fond 4, opis' 11, delo 181, pp. 149, 149 ob.]

This secret circular was followed by a marked reduction in mass deportations and as the terrible famine receded some semblance of order began to return to the countryside. But collectivization left the Soviet countryside traumatized. Besides the five to seven million victims of famine and up to six million victims of 'dekulakization', the most basic rhythms of the lives of tens of millions of peasant men, women and children had been violently broken. The destruction of their economic independence was accompanied by an assault on their entire culture, religion and traditional village institutions. Some idea of the impact on the dwindling minority in the countryside left outside the collectives is given by this heart-rending plea by a 12-year-old girl from a village in Ivanovo *oblast'*, north-east of Moscow.¹⁴⁹ Addressed to Stalin, it includes the jingle which spread the slogan of the late 1930s, 'Thank you, Comrade Stalin, for a Happy Childhood', and stands in the long Russian tradition of appealing directly to the Tsar, adopting the regime's self-congratulatory rhetoric while simultaneously painting a picture of utter destitution.

Document 157 | '... we haven't got anything to eat'—a schoolgirl's letter to Stalin

13 January 1937

Hello, Dear Comrade Stalin. Our beloved leader, teacher and friend of the whole happy Soviet land. Dear Comrade Stalin, I'm sending you warm and sincere greetings and wish you success in your life and hope that you are always well. I want to tell you about my unhappy life.

Dear Comrade Stalin, I heard you saying on the radio that children have very good lives in the Soviet Union, go to school and that the school doors are always open wide to them. That's true, of course, Dear Comrade Stalin.

Dear Iosif Vissarionovich, me and my brother Aleksandr aren't able to go to school, because, Comrade Stalin, we haven't got anything to eat. The Kurilov village

¹⁴⁹ On the experience of childhood in the 1930s more widely, see L. Siegelbaum and A. Sokolov, *Stalinism as a Way of Life* (New Haven 2000) pp. 256–420.

soviet took away our horse and cow back in 1935. So we've been living for two years now without a cow or a horse. Now at present we haven't got any livestock at all because the village soviet taxed us when they shouldn't have done. They reckoned my father was working as a carrier, which isn't true. One tax was 900 rubles and altogether it came to more than 2,000. We can't pay such big taxes. There are eight of us in our family, Comrade Stalin: six kids, the oldest is a girl of 14 and the youngest a little lad of 2.

Dear Iosif Vissarionovich, we didn't join the collective farm because my father is an invalid. He fought in two wars, his health's gone and so he just can't work on the collective farm. Things aren't going too well for us on our own, they're pretty bad really. We get along somehow. At present we don't have any land—that went to the collective farm in 1936.

Comrade Stalin, I'm in the fourth year at school and my brother's in the second. The rest don't go to school because they're too little. Dear Comrade Stalin, it's ever so difficult for us to go to school, because we haven't got anything to eat and have got really bad anaemia.

Dear Comrade Stalin, I want to tell you how well I've been doing at school: for the first quarter I got 'excellent' in seven subjects and 'good' for the other three. But I want to and I'll try to get 'excellent' in everything in the third quarter. If I had something to eat, Comrade Stalin, I could do even better.

Nobody in my year's joined the Pioneers. But I've told the group leader that I want to join the Pioneers, so they've put me down for the Stalin team in the sixth year, Comrade Stalin.

Dear beloved leader, Comrade Stalin, I think and hope that you'll give us some help. Please don't ignore us.

Comrade Stalin,
Thank you, Comrade Stalin
For our happy lives!
For our happy childhood,
For our wonderful days.

So, our beloved leader Comrade Stalin, I've told you about my life. I hope that you, beloved leader of a happy land, won't ignore my plea. Please do answer, Dear Comrade Stalin. I'm waiting to hear from you.

Nina Vasil'evna Shevtsova (I'm 12),
Ileikino,
Kurilov village soviet,
Ivanovo oblast',
Makar'ev-on-Unzha.

[Source: *Kommunist* No. 1, 1990, pp. 95–96.]

The collective farm and peasant apathy

Life for those within a collective farm, though less desperate than for Nina Shevtsova and her siblings, remained grim even after the famine of 1932–33 receded. Collective farm wages were derisory and the new farms were widely hated. Peasant resistance belies the notion of a 'totalitarian' regime so powerful that its will could not be frustrated. In particular, the peasantry wrung from the regime two permanent concessions. Instead of the wholesale socialization envisaged at the height of the collectivization drive of 1929–30, the version of the collective farm that prevailed was the so-called 'artel' model. Pioneered after the revolution, it had been regarded as only a staging post to full socialization. Each household was permitted to retain a small plot of land for its own use together with some livestock, and local collective farm markets where they could sell any modest surplus were legalized. But this did nothing to soften peasant hostility to collective farms, or overcome their apathy in working collective land, which, despite the legal fiction of collective ownership, they experienced as the property of an alien institution.¹⁵⁰

For the regime, the danger was that as a result of peasant apathy the economic devastation wrought by the initial disruption of collectivization, the slaughter of livestock and the steep decline in output in 1931 and 1932 would become permanent. Its response, despite misgivings among some local officials, was to tighten monitoring of and control over collective farming and to pressurize, harass and, with dizzying speed, to sack and replace local agricultural officials and collective-farm chairmen. Peasant foot-dragging, the 'teething problems' of new farm structures, and the inevitable hiccoughs in the introduction of tractors, combine harvesters and other new machinery could be overcome, it was assumed, by vigorous, hands-on supervision. Farm managers would supervise the workforce; Machine Tractor Stations (MTSs) controlling essential machinery would supervise farm managers; the MTS management and workforce would themselves be supervised by political departments attached to each MTS; and the OGPU, answering to the Politburo, would oversee the entire rural economy.

The following document from a Urals OGPU official—one of a sequence sent every five days during sowing in May and June that year—gives a sense of the mammoth supervisory task involved in just one *oblast'*. It conveys the dire level of motivation among the peasantry. And, addressed to OGPU headquarters in Moscow, it suggests how inadequate punitive investigation and central intervention was as a method of dealing with the bewildering variety of problems confronting Soviet agriculture.

¹⁵⁰ See the detailed study by R.W. Davies, *The Soviet Collective Farm, 1929–1930* (London 1980).

read
too

Document 158 | Note on sowing from Tuchkov, Urals OGPU, to G. Yagoda, OGPU deputy chairman, and others

14 May 1933

13 May 1933 in Urals *oblast'* 94,157 ha sown. Of 9,155 collective farms 8,213 have started sowing. Shown in seed transportation: 55 per cent exchanged, 47 per cent state loan. 262 quintals of rye sent from Krasnopolyansk commune in exchange for grain elevator. Wheat not issued. No sowing done. Measures taken by Political Division. In Borodulino collective farm (Sverdlovsk) 130 quintals of wheat after rubbish removed, not enough to sow 14 ha. In Belozerskoe because of bad organization field teams sitting in offices, young people in fields. Bukhvalov, director of Zaikovo MTS, drunk for two days. Not managing work. Tractors not fulfilling quotas. Answering to Party bodies. In repair shops of Krasnopolyansk MTS kulaks running the management did not ensure quality of repair work. 25 tractors out of action. 713 hours standstill. Team leader Chinov and tractor driver Shusharin arrested. Rest making up time. Of 3,104 tractors available 2,402 involved in sowing. In Varna 11 tractors out of action because of poor repairs and overloading with trailers. Tractor drivers to blame. 18 tractors sent for repair in Troitsk. 2 in Foki MTS, enquiry under way. In Berezovsky MTS 3 tractors out of action because of poor repair jobs. 12 tractors despatched by Stalingrad factory took over month to get to Ust' Uyskoe MTS. Transport police establishing who to blame. Stepnoe MTS wasted 1,200 kg of fuel, no responsibility, lack of fuel pipes. Tractor driver Kalinin used 820 kg for hectare and half. On Chernushka 'Dawn of Brotherhood' collective farm 5 tractor drivers took 13 days to plough 15 ha, using 1,400 kg of fuel. Reason: waterlogged soil, skidding, pointless trips, choice of field.

Quality of sowing: in Krasnopolyansk teams of 'Collective Farm Way' sowing unsorted, untreated wheat seed; soil not turned, seed left on surface. On 'Red Ploughman' collective farm in Kachar 6 ha sown with millet and then wheat on top. On 'Toiler' in Kizil'skoe 75 kg sown instead of 90, 12 of millet instead of 20. Breedy has vermin problem—fleas—on 220 ha. MTS dealing with it. Mass absences of collective farmers in Belozerskoe region because of production difficulties. 2000 *pudy* issued. 'October Path' collective farm in Varna using carrion. Collective farmers not working through exhaustion and swellings. District seed centre sent out 11 quintals of waste as food. Analogous situation in Shadrinsk. Crowds of peasants from neighbouring regions gathering for last three days on fields of Shadrinsk state grain farm to collect surrogate foodstuffs. Marked anti-Soviet feelings have been noticed. Measures being taken against gatherings. Removal of anti-Soviet elements.

Tuchkov, deputy plenipotentiary of Urals OGPU

[Source: SOTsDOO, fond 4, opis' 11, delo 188, pp. 87–88.]

The lengths to which the leadership went to try to convince regional and local officials that Moscow's eyes were everywhere is epitomized by the following document sent to Kabakov in Sverdlovsk. The General Secretary himself, as well as Molotov, head of government since 1931, purportedly takes the keenest interest in *makhorka*, the low-grade tobacco grown in the Urals, setting out in detail the precise steps needed to ensure the target for the *oblast'* is met.

Document 159 | V.M. Molotov and I.V. Stalin: '... complete *makhorka* planting by 20 June...'

6 June 1933

To the secretary of the Urals *oblast'* committee of the CPSU and the chairman of the *oblast'* executive committee. The secret section of the Urals *oblast'* committee of the CPSU.

Your district is behind in *makhorka* planting, which you evidently consider of secondary importance. The Sovnarkom and Central Committee consider fulfilling the plan in *makhorka* planting a matter of great state importance and oblige you to take measures to ensure complete fulfilment of the plan for planting and appropriate processing of *makhorka*. To this end: first, complete *makhorka* planting by 20 June; second, check land allocation for *makhorka* so that manured land is allocated; third, organize *makhorka* processing to the same standard as that of the basic industrial crops to ensure the completion of triple weeding and pruning over the whole area by July; fourth, in view of the usual significant losses of *makhorka* seedlings particular attention is to be paid to sowing and processing, ensuring that pruning and thinning are done, along with hoeing the land between the crops over the entire sown area; fifth, introduce the organization on a wide scale of special *makhorka* planting and processing teams within the landworkers' brigades; sixth, prepare barns and dryers well in advance; seventh, in every instance assist collective and individual farmers sowing *makhorka* with ploughing. Inform of measures taken.

Molotov, Stalin.

6/6/1933

[Source: SOTsDOO, fond 4, opis' 11, delo 81, p. 55.]

13

Industrialization and the Working Class

Accelerating the First Five-Year Plan

Ill-prepared and chaotic though collectivization was, the momentum gathered in the autumn and winter of 1929–30 further inflated the economic ambitions of both the regional and the central leadership. Despite the abrupt reversal triggered by Stalin's 'Dizzy with Success' article in March 1930, that summer the firm expectation remained that collectivization would be largely complete in the course of the First Five-Year Plan. The regime's grip on grain supplies, it seemed, would now be unshakeable, guaranteeing the flow required both to feed a rapidly expanding industrial workforce and to sustain the exports necessary to finance the import of machinery. Preparations for the Sixteenth Party Congress, due in June 1930, saw the pattern of the previous two years repeat itself. Optimism soared: the exhortations of the leadership, the demands for investment and promises of increased production made by competing commissariats and regional officials, the beguiling projections produced by the central planners, and the pervasive atmosphere of euphoria over a break-neck industrial drive all pointed the same way. In May, for example, the Central Committee endorsed plans for the creation of a huge metallurgical base in the Urals which, though not quite on the scale Kabakov and his colleagues bid for, dwarfed the vision entertained just two years earlier.¹⁵¹ Stalin's report to the Central Committee duly listed a battery of new targets for growth far above the already wildly ambitious plans adopted the previous year. Any notion that midway moving of targets was arbitrary or made nonsense of planning was dismissed as the pedantry of 'hopeless bureaucrats'.

¹⁵¹ Harris, *The Great Urals* pp. 101–04.

Document 160 | From the political report of the CC to the XVI CPSU Congress

27 June 1930

The Central Committee's work in this sphere [of economic construction] has proceeded mainly along the lines of amending and giving precision to the five-year plan by accelerating tempo and shortening time schedules, and along the lines of checking the economic organizations' fulfilment of the assignments laid down.

Here are a few of the principal decisions adopted by the Central Committee amending the five-year plan in the direction of speeding up the rate of development and shortening time schedules of fulfilment.

In the iron and steel industry: the five-year plan provides for the output of pig iron to be brought up to 10,000,000 tonnes in the last year of the five-year period; the Central Committee's decision, however, found that this level is not sufficient, and laid it down that in the last year of the five-year period the output of pig iron must be brought up to 17,000,000 tonnes.

Tractor construction: the five-year plan provides for the output of tractors to be brought up to 55,000 in the last year of the five-year period; the Central Committee's decision, however, found that this target is not sufficient, and laid it down that the output of tractors in the last year of the five-year period must be brought up to 170,000.

The same must be said about *automobile construction*, where, instead of an output of 100,000 cars (lorries and passenger cars) in the last year of the five-year period as provided for in the five-year plan, it was decided to bring it up to 200,000...

State farm development: the five-year plan provides for the expansion of the crop area to be brought up to 5,000,000 hectares by the end of the five-year period; the Central Committee's decision, however, found that this level was not sufficient and laid it down that by the end of the five-year period the state farm crop area must be brought up to 18,000,000 hectares.

Collective-farm development: the five-year plan provides for the expansion of the crop area to be brought up to 20,000,000 hectares by the end of the five-year period; the Central Committee's decision, however, found that this level was obviously not sufficient (it has already been exceeded this year) and laid it down that by the end of the five-year period the collectivization of the USSR should, in the main, be completed, and by that time the collective-farm crop area should cover nine-tenths of the crop area of the USSR now cultivated by individual farmers. (Applause.)...

It may be said that in altering the estimates of the five-year plan so radically the Central Committee is violating the principle of planning and is discrediting the planning organizations. But only hopeless bureaucrats can talk like that. For us Bolsheviks, the five-year plan is... merely a plan adopted as a first approximation, which has to be made more precise, altered and perfected in conformity with the experience gained in the localities, with the experience gained in carrying out the plan...

The Central Committee is of the opinion that the reconstruction of the technical basis of industry & agriculture under the socialist organization of production creates such possibilities of accelerating tempo as no capitalist country can dream of.

nical basis of industry and agriculture *under the socialist organization of production* creates such possibilities of accelerating tempo as no capitalist country can dream of.

[Source: J.V. Stalin, *Works* Volume XII (Moscow 1955) pp. 355–59.]

Migration and forced labour

A key ingredient in the industrialization drive was the massive mobilization of under-utilized labour. As we have seen, collectivization played a crucial, if largely unplanned, role here. Above all, it triggered the exodus of millions of peasants in search of non-agricultural work. But it also saw large numbers forcibly exiled to labour settlements, labour camps and prison. This coincided with a rapid increase in the use of forced labour as a standard legal punishment for virtually all forms of crime. As we have seen in the previous section, the increasing stress on ensuring that both short- and long-term prisoners contributed to the labour force was seized upon by economic managers and regional leaders such as those in the Urals who were unable to recruit nearly enough voluntary labour. Shorter-term sentences took the form of periods of unpaid labour without deprivation of liberty; heavier penalties involved periods in labour camps and colonies. The following article in *Pravda* by N.V. Krylenko, the RSFSR's chief prosecutor and from 1931 Commissar for Justice, published in the middle of the First Five-Year Plan period, underlined the emphasis on summary justice and putting offenders to work on 'socialist construction'.

Document 161 | N. Krylenko: '... develop the system of forced labour to the maximum extent'—from his article 'On Certain "Theories" in the Field of Criminal Law and Policy'

March 1930

Hitherto the practical bases of criminal practice have had two points of departure: the practice of deprivation of liberty as the basic method of fighting crime and the practice of implementing this deprivation of liberty according to the principles of so-called 'dosage', that is, of determining, of 'weighing up', the dosage of deprivation for a term of one day to ten years in accordance with the 'seriousness of the crime'. The legislative practice of the last year has, it is true, introduced a number of correctives to these two principles.

On the basis of a resolution of the RSFSR Council of People's Commissars of 29 May 1929, deprivation of liberty for a period of less than a year is no longer practised. It is proposed to develop the system of forced labour to the maximum extent. A number of measures have been introduced to use the labour of persons sentenced to a term of more than three years for socially necessary work in special camps in

remote regions. Nevertheless, the basic principle which obliges courts as before to 'weigh up' the deprivation of freedom on the basis of the 'seriousness and degree of danger' of the crime has remained untouched. That is, the principle which was characterized back in 1924 by comrade Pashukanis, one of the best Marxist theoreticians, as 'the essentially stupid idea that the seriousness of every crime can be weighed on some kind of scales and expressed in months or years of imprisonment' is still sacrosanct (*A General Theory of Marxism and Law*, p. 126).

At the same time the practical absurdity of the idea that one can combat crime and the criminal's 'ill will' by 'weighing out' two years' deprivation of liberty for one and four years' for another and the pointlessness of subsequent arguments in the Courts of Appeal (should he be given 2 or 2.5 years?) has been shown by life itself.

We have contrasted the idea of 'just deserts' and retribution with an obligation upon the court in every concrete case of combating criminal behaviour to seek the most expedient measures in order to:

1. protect our social collective against repeated dangerous acts by a particular criminal, not according to the 'seriousness' of the crime but primarily according to the criminal's character;
2. use the fact of the court sentence to have a certain effect on the environment...

[Source: *Pravda*, 17 March 1930.]

The opening of Soviet archives has brought some clarity to the much-disputed size of the sprawling network of labour settlements, labour colonies, labour camps and prisons under the concentration camp administration or GULAG.¹⁵² The number held in prison stood at 800,000 at its peak in 1933 and repeatedly approached half a million; by the end of the decade, the number consigned to 'special settlement areas' was about a million, and the number in labour colonies and camps, where life expectancy was pitifully low, exceeded 1.6 million—a total in 1939 of some three million. Moreover, since there was a steady flow in and out of detention the overall number to pass through the hands of the OGPU (NKVD from 1934) and GULAG was much greater. The forced labour at its disposal gave the OGPU/NKVD a

¹⁵² See J.A. Getty, G.T. Rittersporn and V.N. Zemskov, 'Victims of the Soviet Penal System in the Pre-War Years' *American Historical Review* 98 (1993) pp. 1017–49; S. Wheatcroft, 'The Scale and Nature of German and Soviet Repression and Mass Killings, 1930–45' *Europe-Asia Studies* 48 (1996) pp. 1319–53; S. Wheatcroft, 'Victims of Stalinism and the Soviet Secret Police: The comparability and reliability of archival data—not the last word' *Europe-Asia Studies* 51 (1999) pp. 315–45. In particular, see pp. 340–42 for a dissection of the implausible figures in N. Davies, *Europe: A history*, referred to above, p. xviii, fn 1.

significant economic base of its own and, although it is not easy to weigh with precision, the economic contribution made by forced labour was clearly significant, notably in the hardest manual labour involved in developing some of the major industrial complexes thrown up from scratch, and in mining and timber in the most inhospitable regions of the north and east.¹⁵³

Shock workers

At the other end of the spectrum from those forced to work were a minority of workers who threw their energies with passionate enthusiasm into the drive to 'build socialism'. This almost missionary zeal was most evident in the atmosphere of revolutionary upheaval of the early part of the First Five-Year Plan period. The break with NEP and adoption of the Plan, broadcast through posters, the press and factory meetings, struck a real chord and succeeded in mobilizing the hearts and minds of a vocal minority. Rank-and-file workers were at last to receive their due as the inferior status of manual labour was repudiated in favour of an egalitarian society in which all working people would pull together to forge a new world. Some enthusiasts, as we have seen, volunteered to assist with imposing collectivization while others vied to increase productivity, raise norms and exceed planned targets. Small groups of workers, initially often with little encouragement from management, trade unions or local party officials, formed 'shock brigades' to act as models of responsibility, initiative and self-discipline, to experiment with new methods and rationalize production, and to urge each other on by engaging in 'socialist competition'.¹⁵⁴

The following recollections of V.Ya. Shidek, a worker involved in construction in the Kuznetsk Basin in western Siberia which was to provide coal for the massive new metallurgical centre based on iron ore in the Urals, capture something of the ethos. His story was selected for a collection of individual accounts (published in 1934) carefully designed to celebrate the achievement at Kuznetsk, create role models and inspire emulation, and his resilience despite bereavement strains credibility. Yet, composed while Shidek was still fully engaged in the huge construction project, its tone and texture are in line with a wealth of testimony about the committed minority: the pioneering spirit of shock workers, their stoicism in the face of physical

153 For the view that forced labour played a major role in Soviet industrialization, especially during the Great Patriotic War, see E. Bacon, *The GULAG at War: Stalin's forced labour system in the light of the archives* (London 1994) pp. 123–44.

154 For two key studies, see V. Andrie, *Workers in Stalin's Russia: Industrialization and social change in a planned economy* (Hemel Hempstead 1988), and H. Kuromiya, *Stalin's Industrial Revolution: Politics and workers, 1928–1932* (Cambridge 1988).

hardship, their work ethic, pride at making innovations and rationalizations, pleasure in time and again overfulfilling quotas and targets, disdain for 'kulaks' as well as the occasional teams of foreigners they encountered, and readiness to denounce inadequate managers even if they belonged to the party.¹⁵⁵

Document 162 | From the memoirs of construction team leader V.Ya. Shidek

1929–31

In October 1929 we—a gang of six bricklayers—arrived at the Kuznetskstroy site.

The train got in in the evening. At that time Kuznetsk station just consisted of two wagons and two lines. Paraffin lamps on posts flickered here and there.

'Where's the site?' we asked.

'Over there,' they said, pointing north, 'at the foot of the hill the other side of the swamp.'

Loading up our knapsacks, we set off in that direction, northward to where the light of a few electric bulbs twinkled.

When we got to the Upper Settlement, we spotted some mud huts and settled ourselves for the time being in a stuffy little room.

After a couple of days we were shifted to better barracks, where we settled in and got down to work.

First I'll tell you how we lived.

We lived in barrack No. 14 in Lower Settlement, all six of us in one room. They put a stove in and hired a woman to cook our lunches and dinners. At that time there was just one separate canteen, and that was in a mud hut. There was no system, we weren't given spoons—we had to take our own, and if you didn't have one you had to slurp it and mop up with a bit of bread. The pots were washed up at the same table where we ate. The woman who washed up would bring her bucket, put it on the table, wash everything up and then move on to another table.

On the site work finished at five in the evening. We stopped work at a signal. The foreman-carpenter would bang one axe against another, others had a rail hanging from a post that they would bang. Off home we went, had a wash, a bite to eat and we'd start reading the paper. Then people would start talking and arguing. Most of the arguments were about the international situation. There was a lot of talk about the Americans who were supposed to work at Kuznetskstroy with us.

At the time none of us was in the Party or the Komsomol, but we weren't religious either and didn't celebrate the religious holidays, unlike a lot of the navvies.

155 For a detailed case study of the chaos, oppression and liberation of labour on the great construction projects of these years, see S. Kotkin's study of Magnitogorsk, one of the most ambitious undertakings of the Great Urals Plan, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a civilization* (Berkeley, CA, 1995).

We were very particular about cleanliness. We slept on trestle beds, but as soon as any bedbugs showed up, we killed them immediately. In the morning we all shook out the bedding. In the barracks we had a collection of portraits of the leaders and historical pictures. There were balalaikas and an accordion, too.

Over tea me and the lads used to have almost daily production meetings in the barrack.

Now I'll tell you how we worked.

We started with the administration block. First we heated the gravel. We had to pour concrete when it was freezing, and since there were no stoves, we used to pour boiling water over the gravel. We put the concrete on cross pieces, and to stop the foundations freezing they were covered with felt and tow and concreted.

They set us a quota of 500 bricks, but we pushed that up to 1,000. We tried to work faster and so didn't stop for a smoke. You needed a couple of minutes to roll your own with *makhorka*—and that was dozens of bricks' worth. So we smoked only *papirosy* and that was on the job.

After the administration block we worked on the stores, the meat store, the Works Industrial School, the Garden City homes and then in the fire-brick shop.

I remember working on the Works Industrial School, where we were laying red bricks. By the end of 1930 we were supposed to have finished 40 per cent of the building, but we had done the full 100 per cent.

We used the Western method and the rest the 'Russian Orthodox' method; the Western method is almost like that of the Central Institute of Labour. We made several suggestions for rationalization on the job. The first one was moulds for the door and window apertures and corner-irons for the corners. The second was the three-quarter brick. This was important, and using such a brick saved about 25 per cent in dressing. The third was introducing asbestos and slag slabs to replace building materials in short supply: planks, blocks, etc. The fourth was special boxes for pouring the mortar.

In December 1930 we finished the Works Industrial School building and went on to the fire-brick shop and started work on the fireproof cladding—something we'd not done before. We couldn't get into the swing of it at first. But we soon did and instead of the 165-brick quota, we were churning out 1,200.

Then misunderstandings started with the management. They started meeting us in our own and other shops.

Why? We were putting forward a counter-plan and wrecking their plans and charts. We were using up ten days' material in a couple. We'd ask for more, but they couldn't get hold of it and started getting uppity. We wouldn't give in. There was a squabble. I've never given in and didn't intend to. That's what led to a row.

Teplov, clerk of the works and an old contractor, was there. He'd brought his gang of workers from Moscow. They were a bunch of kulaks, who were neither able nor willing to do as much as we did. When we started putting the pressure on, they turned against us and threatened to do us in, etc.

They soon got rid of Teplov and made Oleynikov, a communist, boss. He was

no good. He was against the counter-plan, argued with Frankfurt, and our relations with him soon got worse. There was something else involved.

Frankfurt had known our brigade virtually since the first day he arrived at the site. Whenever he came to the fire-brick shop, he always came to us first, had a chat, asked us about everything and only then went to see the head of the section.

We soon unmasked Oleynikov as an opportunist and he was expelled from the Party.

Then they put Teplov's kulaks into our brigade, making it up to sixty people. They tried to disrupt the brigade, but we fought with them and managed to improve some of them.

In May 1931 we were transferred to coke-oven cladding, which is very complicated and none of our bricklayers had ever done such work. Some Frenchmen were working on it and had set up a quota of half a tonne. The planning department raised this to 0.8 of a tonne. But when I worked it out, I realized that however difficult the work was, we could do a tonne—and we did.

The Frenchmen looked askance at us, thought we were crazy and got annoyed when we put forward yet another counter-plan—for 2.2 tonnes. Then we exceeded that figure, and got up to 3.8 tonnes.

The French downed tools several times and stormed off because they couldn't manage to supervise us.

We made gains on the deployment of the workforce. Where the French used six men, four were enough for us. Since we were supposed to do what the French said, we'd start off with six, but as soon as the French had gone, we immediately sent the pair of them off to work somewhere else.

The French finally cleared off completely and we built the shop without them.

At this point we had a competition with Obolensky's Donbass brigade. It was hard for me to keep up with them. His team was made up entirely of young men, instructors from the Central Institute of Labour courses, while my lads were all old fellows who'd never seen such brickwork.

Day and night for two months on end the writers Panferov and Il'enkov watched us work. What they wrote about us wasn't bad, although they missed bits out. There were seventy-four men in our brigade, working in three shifts. There is no writer who could grasp, understand and learn it all.

'When *don't* you work?' Panferov used to ask me.

What was I supposed to say? When we were trying to finish the first battery as a gift to the XVI Party Conference, I didn't leave the kiln for four days on end and didn't go home. A rail served as a pillow for my rest, although to make it softer, I covered it with canvas gloves.

Just before this my wife fell ill, so I sent her off to Tomsk, leaving our 3-year-old and a 7-year-old at home. Then, on the second day after I'd gone, my youngest son fell ill and died suddenly. Under the pressure of work I had forgotten about the kids. I went home on the fifth day and found that my youngest son had died, while

the oldest was wandering around the site looking for me. The neighbours had also been wandering around looking for me, but couldn't find me. The little corpse was already starting to smell. I had no choice but to bury him, and afterwards had to go and get drunk. I drank to victory and grief.

Then we worked on a blast furnace, where things went wrong straightaway. At the Komsomol air injector there were some Komsomol members working in competition with us without us knowing it, until they surprised us. 'You've lost, Shidek,' they said.

They started denouncing our brigade and threw down a challenge. A couple of days later there was a shock-workers' meeting, where they swore at us and put us to shame. They promised to make some sort of cart and to tow us around in it.

I turned to *Rabochaya gazeta* [party newspaper] for help. They helped us and at injectors No. 5 and 6 we overfulfilled our quota by 370 per cent. We got accommodation as a prize. We moved from the barracks to stone building No. 6, where we were given a room each.

Afterwards we were moved to the rolling shop, where we've been working ever since. I'm no longer a team leader, because I was made deputy director for production meetings recently.

I don't like the work yet. I work and work but don't see any results: you lay a brick and can see what you've done. I'd be glad to go back to the shop floor. I miss the lads as well.

Quite a few people don't like us. Why? We've been given a lot of praise. But if they praise one team, the others will lose heart.

At the time when we produced 3.8 tonnes at the coke oven, many people thought one tonne was an achievement. They'd get annoyed at us, but I didn't care. We were doing our job and getting paid for it.

We need to sort out the competition. The more they laugh at us, the harder we work: we're not going to let ourselves be laughed at.

It can't be done without offence. If it can't be done with kindness, then we have to get at people, and worry the life out of them. People need shaking up. If they get shaken up, they give up their old ways and start doing things differently.

If we pick on somebody, let him get angry, but then he will start trying to catch us up—let him.

[Source: *Kuznetskstroy v vospominaniyakh* (Novosibirsk 1934) pp. 93–97.]

As Shidek's account suggests, shock brigades tended rapidly to become diluted or bogged down. On the one hand, other workers, both new recruits from the countryside and older skilled workers, resented the additional pressure which their heroics placed on the rest of the workforce. From 1930 the dynamism and image of the early shock workers was swamped as millions

enrolled as shock workers not from genuine commitment but for form's sake and for the rewards that membership could bring. On the other hand, trade unions, managers and party officials increasingly took over spontaneous worker efforts not only to try to generalize and capitalize on them but also to tame and control them. Their efforts to increase productivity and raise expectations were, of course, in principle welcome. Large wage increases, honorary awards and public praise would continue to be heaped on shock brigades and outstanding workers. In the mid-1930s the most famous symbol of this was Aleksey Stakhanov, a coal miner who produced fourteen times the norm and was accorded massive publicity and quickly emulated by 'Stakhanovites' in other industries.¹⁵⁶ But the Stakhanovite movement would be orchestrated and controlled in a manner that set it apart from the spirit of the early stages of the First Five-Year Plan. From 1931, the boisterousness and potential disruption of spontaneous worker enthusiasm was increasingly at odds with what became the primary preoccupation of the regime's labour policy: discipline.

Labour discipline and labour turnover

Worker productivity—output per man/woman—was the key variable in successive Five-Year Plans. It was confidence that new machinery, energy sources and techniques would unleash a mighty leap in productivity that underpinned the huge optimism behind the industrialization drive. Yet, far from soaring as new machinery came on line, output per worker rose only very modestly in many branches of the economy and in some fell drastically. It could scarcely be otherwise. The main body of workers, who were neither idealists nor forced labourers, had very low levels of industrial skill and the millions pouring in from the countryside were entirely lacking in training or experience of the rigour and rhythms of life in a factory or on a construction site. Many reacted to harsh and unfamiliar working conditions by small-scale, more or less deliberate insubordination and carelessness, slipshod work practices, indulgence in drink and absenteeism. Motivation and even energy levels were also undermined by sheer undernourishment, especially during the First Five-Year Plan period. Rationing, as we have seen, had been introduced in 1929, and by 1930, long before the desperation of the famine, workers were experiencing acute deprivation. This simple plea for help was addressed to Kalinin, formally head of state in faraway Moscow, by a Urals worker.

¹⁵⁶ See the close study by L. Siegelbaum, *Stakhanovism and the Politics of Productivity in the USSR, 1935–1941* (Cambridge 1988).