

Re/fashioning the Enemy: Popular Beliefs and the Rhetoric of
Destalinisation, 1953-1964

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Abstract

This dissertation explores the evolution of Soviet public culture during the decade of destalinisation that followed the great break of 1953. It was a period both of intense political change, as the party sought to create new kinds of legitimacy post-Stalin, and of major social upheaval as millions of prisoners returned from the Gulag to the Soviet mainland. Destalinisation is examined here as a dialogue between three actors: the state, the Soviet public, and the returning masses once regarded as society's outcasts.

Recasting the notion of the 'enemy' was central to this re-conceptualisation of public culture. The enemy had long held a powerful place in the Soviet political imagination. In revolutionary cosmogony, the world was locked in a battle between socialism and capitalism in which good would finally triumph yielding a communist paradise on earth. Where loathing of the enemy had prevailed under Stalin, his successors sought to create a more moderate culture, claiming victory was near and the advent of communism imminent. After 1953, the vilification of political opponents waned, calls for vigilance lessened, and the rabid invective cultivated by the Stalinist press began to subside. The binary division of the Soviet realm into two 'zones' – one for Soviet citizens, a second for its demonic outcasts – was eroded.

The thesis explores the complex nature of these changes. It examines the contribution of Gulag returnees who sought to recreate themselves as decent Soviet citizens, but who brought with them the culture of this segregated, other world. It also studies the reactions of a broader public, whose interpretation of both political and social change often reflected the ongoing sway of the Manichean beliefs cultivated by Stalinist culture.

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Introduction

Show no mercy to these enemies of the people,
enemies of socialism, enemies of the workers. Death
to the rich and to the bourgeois intelligentsia who
sponge off them, death to thieves, parasites and
hooligans.

– V. I. Lenin, 'How to Organise Competition', 1917¹

The death of Iosif Stalin stands as one of the great breaks in Russian history. For an earlier generation of historians who saw him as the epitome of evil and mastermind of the terror, the year 1953 was a moment of 'fresh air' for a stifled Soviet people.² Even if we reject totalitarian models of Soviet history, the death of the nation's leader remains a crucial landmark. In the complex of myths, rituals, and practices that historians see shaping Soviet culture in the 1930s and 1940s, the magical persona of 'Stalin' was central. The cult of the leader was an integral part of Soviet public culture, and his demise inescapably provoked change. The nature of such change, however, is as yet uncharted. Building on recent trends in the historiography of the Stalinist period, this work explores how the political culture and belief systems created under Stalin were to develop in the decade following his death.

¹ V. I. Lenin, 'Kak organizovat' sorevnovanie', *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, 55 vols (Moscow: Gosudarstvenoe izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1962), XXXV, pp. 195-205 (p. 201).

² Images of a nation gasping for fresh air are common place in the secondary literature. See for example, Merle Fainsod, *Khrushchev's Russia. I. Internal Developments and Prospects. 11. Foreign Policy, Directions and Problems* (Melbourne: The Australian Institute of International Affairs, 1963),

Many scholars stress the parlous state of the nation Stalin bequeathed to his heirs. It is argued that agricultural decline, consumer shortages, and the repressive nature of the political system all point to a nation on the brink of crisis. In a disparate range of sources we find depictions of Stalinist society as discontented and desperate, a populace whose anger was only barely contained by 1953.³ A very different picture is offered by Jeffrey Brooks in his recent work on Soviet public culture under Lenin and Stalin. In *Thank You, Comrade Stalin!*, he traces the state's monopoly of the media, the recasting of politics as a magical and ritualistic 'performance', and the powerful way this new culture promoted Soviet life as 'unique and exceptional'. Without denying that some reform was necessary, he argues that the main task of Stalin's heirs was to 'maintain the system' that their predecessors had created.⁴ Following Brooks, I argue that the 1953 watershed is important because Stalin's persona – as an omnipresent, fantastical, prophetic authority – was an absolutely fundamental element in Soviet culture. His disappearance forced the regime to look for new legitimating strategies.

p. 240, Martin McCauley (ed), *Khrushchev and Khrushchevism* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan, 1987), p. 3.

³ In the early 1960s, Merle Fainsod wrote of the public's 'aspirations' which 'Stalin had suppressed and which his successors could not ignore'. In 1992, the labour historian Donald Filtzer began his account of destalinisation with the proclamation: 'when Stalin died in March 1953, he left behind a country in a deep state of crisis. No sphere of the economy, politics, or society was immune.' Vladimir Naumov asserts that 'in 1953 Soviet society found itself on the eve of a social explosion', while Elena Zubkova, the leading Russian historian of the post-war period, claims that the death of the leader merely launched a period of reform that would have been imposed on the Soviet leadership sooner or later by a tide of dissatisfaction that had been climbing steadily from the end of WWII. Fainsod, *Khrushchev's Russia*, p. 234; Donald Filtzer, *Soviet Workers and De-Stalinization: The Consolidation of The Modern System of Soviet Production Relations, 1953-64* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 1; Vladimir Naumov, 'Repression and Rehabilitation', in *Nikita Khrushchev*, ed. by William Taubman, Sergei Khrushchev, and Abbott Gleason (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2000), pp. 85-112 (p. 102); Elena Zubkova, *Russia after the War: Hopes, Illusions and Disappointments, 1945-1957*, trans. by Hugh Ragsdale (Armonk, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 1998), pp. 148-153.

⁴ Jeffrey Brooks, *Thank You, Comrade Stalin!: Soviet Public Culture from Revolution to Cold War* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000), pp. xiii-xx, 233.

The legitimacy garnered by Stalin's cult did not derive from some kind of primordial Russian longing for another 'tsar'.⁵ Emerging from the ideology of a self-consciously Marxist revolution, the images and practices of the cult held together a complex and unique system of beliefs. In the revolutionary myth, the Soviet nation was set on a course that would lead it through struggle and hardship, through battles with many inveterate enemies towards the light of communism. Within this hostile environment, Stalin functioned both as revolutionary visionary and the nation's great defender. With the omniscience of a god, his constant vigilance could instinctively detect the covert enemy, thereby protecting the Soviet people from deadly threats. Idolisation of Stalin thus worked within a revolutionary culture based on a series of conflicts: between socialism and capitalism, the new and the old, light and darkness. Stalin was the vanguard hero in the nation's deadly struggle against a wretched cast of enemies who sought to drag the nation back into the mire of the old.⁶

Manichean beliefs were thus an integral part of the 'performative' culture established under Stalin.⁷ On a collective level, the Soviet people were audience to political rituals where evil was symbolically cast out. Reading newspapers, attending show trials, or glancing at posters they were participants in the theatrical castigation of

⁵ In 1966 James Billington wrote that Stalinist Russia 'fell back on the most primitive aspect of the original tsarist mystique'. James G. Billington, *The Icon and the Axe: An Interpretative History of Russian Culture* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1966), pp. 538-9.

⁶ For an example of the iconic role Stalin played in the struggle against enemies, see the front page of *Pravda* on 25 February 1930, where an illustration by Deni depicted Stalin expelling 'a wrecker, a nepman, and a kulak' through his pipe. Brooks, *Thank You*, fig. 6.2.

⁷ Brooks describes how Stalin and others 'employed rituals of the theatre to draw citizens into public displays of support [...] Journalists created a context in which Stalin could display himself and the new order he claimed to have created, an omnipresent magic theatre in which all active participants in Soviet public life acquired ancillary roles.' Brooks views this 'performative culture' as an alternative to the European socialist tradition where public policy appealed to reason and common sense. Party leaders instead 'demanded belief and respect for authority'. Brooks, *Thank You*, p. xvi.

enemies.⁸ On a personal level, the individual was urged to shape himself as a 'new man' of the future, and to keep vigilant guard against any kind of enemy.⁹ Such binary divisions were even imposed on the nation's geography, with the construction of two 'zones' – the big zone for free society, the little one for its outcasts.¹⁰ The existence of enemies was a crucial part of the regime's authority because it explained the ongoing difficulties of daily life within the Soviet Union, united the people in a heroic struggle to uncover and defeat its foes, and promised a better future once the battle was won.

With Stalin dead, these rituals began to falter, and a political culture based on his 'prophetic authority' was over.¹¹ Without him, moreover, it was no longer safe to see enemies behind every corner. If the nation's great protector could no longer provide security, the presence of the foe did not make the nation rally together, but led to increasing fear and uncertainty. Recasting the notion of the enemy was thus central to the re-conceptualisation of public culture that took place in the 1950s. The rituals of high politics became more moderate, with defeated opponents increasingly condemned for committing mistakes and errors rather than being unmasked as

⁸ On the role of the press see Brooks, *Thank You*; on visual propaganda see Victoria Bonnell, *Iconography of Power: Soviet Political Posters under Lenin and Stalin*, 2nd edn (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1999); on popular participation at mock show trials see Julie A. Cassiday, *The Enemy on Trial: Early Soviet Courts on Stage and Screen* (DeKalb, Ill.: Northern Illinois University Press, 2000); on peasant participation in real show trials, see Sheila Fitzpatrick, 'How the Mice Bury the Cat: Scenes from the Great Purges of 1937 in the Russian Provinces', *Russian Review*, 52 (1993), 299-320.

⁹ In his analysis of a Soviet diary of the 1930s, Jochen Hellbeck traces one man's attempt to refashion himself as a true Soviet citizen. Constantly striving towards his ideal of the new Soviet man, the diarist saw his life as an ongoing 'struggle'. Hellbeck writes: 'In Podlubnyi's life, the struggle took place on several "fronts", to use his terminology: in the first place, he struggled with himself to "overcome" the reactionary part within, but he also struggled against "enemies" at work bent on denouncing him as a wrecker.' See Jochen Hellbeck, 'Fashioning the Stalinist Soul: The Diary of Stepan Podlubnyi, 1931-9', in *Stalinism: New Directions*, ed. by Sheila Fitzpatrick (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 77-116 (p. 101).

¹⁰ Nanci Adler, 'Life in the "Big Zone": The Fate of Returnees in the Aftermath of the Stalinist Repression', *Europe-Asia Studies*, 51 (1999), 5-19.

enemies. The rabid invective of the Stalinist press subsided. The territorial division into two 'zones' was eroded, as millions of prisoners made their way home. Instead of denouncing enemies, Soviet citizens were to aid one another in becoming good communists.

Throughout his rule, Nikita Khrushchev sought to reinvigorate the eschatological myth and to reassure his audience that the Soviet nation was advancing rapidly towards their shining future, yet he no longer exhorted the Soviet population to engage in a continual quest to unmask hidden enemies. Claiming that the nation was now progressing to the next stage on the revolutionary journey, he rejected Stalin's thesis that the nearer the nation came to communism the more deadly the enemy became. In his revised eschatology, fear of covert foes had been exaggerated. Rather than demanding constant vigilance, this next stage required Soviet people to busy themselves with constructing communism and raising new men of the future.

Thus it is not only in the retrospective gaze of the historian that 1953 emerges as a defining moment, but deep within the rhetoric of the time. However, the beliefs nurtured under the aegis of Stalinist culture did not simply disappear, but continued to condition public responses. Investigating the changing notions of the 'enemy', I study the process of destalinisation as a negotiation between the political elite and the public, in which new myths and beliefs were developed and old ones persisted. In this process the rhetorical strategies of each were appropriated, contested, and often transformed.

¹¹ Brooks, *Thank You*, p. 239

Historicising the 'Enemy'

The 'enemy' began to occupy an important place in the Russian political imagination even before 1917. Orlando Figes and Boris Kolonitskii have argued that demonic imagery developed within the traditions of the revolutionary underground, maintaining that in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, both radical subcultures and official Tsarist culture elaborated a 'demonic lexicon' to attack and denigrate one another.¹² Foreshadowing the Stalinist repertoire, pre-revolutionary activists labelled their tsarist and capitalist adversaries the 'dark forces', predators, vermin, parasites, spiders, snakes, and 'gangs of cruel wild beasts'. With the outbreak of WWI they could also accuse them of espionage and treachery. In a more subtle study, Daniel Beer has traced the development of 'languages of illness and contagion', showing that Bolshevik mentalities were embedded in discourses developing in late Imperial Russia whereby dissenting opinions were already held to be the source of a highly threatening and debilitating contamination.¹³ With a choice of zoological, scientific, medical, and epidemiological metaphors, the revolutionaries of 1917 were already armed with powerful rhetorical weapons with which to assail their chosen targets.

As Lynn Hunt has observed, revolutionary rhetoric and rituals can create a 'new community'.¹⁴ One way that a new consensus can be articulated is by reviling the

¹² Orlando Figes and Boris Kolonitskii, *Interpreting the Russian Revolution: The Language and Symbols of 1917* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1999), pp. 153-7.

¹³ Daniel Beer, "'The Hygiene of Souls': Languages of Illness and Contagion in Late Imperial and Early Soviet Russia' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Cambridge, 2001).

¹⁴ Lynn Hunt, *Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1984), p. 27.

imagined 'other'.¹⁵ Donald Raleigh has argued that the initial stages of the civil war formed a crucial moment, when the Bolshevik press began to experiment with many of the rhetorical devices that would later become standard features of the Soviet press. Already by 1918, he suggests, newspaper language was studded with binary images representing the struggle between the old and the new. Uncertain of their own political identity, the Bolsheviks found 'meaning – and unity – in the immediate appearance of an opposition'.¹⁶

Faced with the challenge of creating a 'new community', the fledgling state employed propaganda techniques to vilify those who ostensibly sought to overturn the revolution. Visual images were highly important in a society with widespread illiteracy. Among the first targets were the exploiting classes of the old order. Priests, kulaks, and capitalists were soon firmly established in the Bolshevik rhetorical lexicon; the *burzhui* in his top hat and tails and the corrupt *pop*, paunch bulging out from his cassock, became familiar figures.¹⁷ Ideological opponents represented another important category, and the Mensheviks, Socialist Revolutionaries, anarchists, White Army generals, Kadets, as well as individuals such as Viktor Chernov, Anton Denikin, Nikolai Iudenich, Aleksandr Kerenskii, frequently starred as principal villain in Bolshevik propaganda of the civil war era.¹⁸

¹⁵ This notion of the 'imagined other' is borrowed from Benedict Anderson's theory of 'imagined communities'. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991).

¹⁶ Donald J. Raleigh, 'Languages of Power: How the Saratov Bolsheviks Imagined their Enemies', *Slavic Review*, 57 (1998), 320–49 (p. 321).

¹⁷ Bonnell, *Iconography*, pp. 188–189, fig. 5.1.

¹⁸ Bonnell, *Iconography*, p. 191.

In addition to posters, songs, and skits, the early Bolshevik regime also staged mock show trials, in which Soviet citizens were not only observers, but also active participants in 'instances of revolutionary carnival'. One of the most famous of these mass spectacles was the 1920 mock trial of Baron Vrangeli, the civil war enemy. Ten thousand soldiers took part in the trial with such enthusiasm, that the actor playing the title role, actually 'feared physical harm at the hands of the enraged audience'.¹⁹

Admission to the new community was not only dependent upon holding correct political ideas and possessing the right class heritage. Aspiring to radical social transformation, the Bolsheviks also deployed images of the enemy to vilify the anti-social, deviant, dissolute, and criminal. Increasingly, the Soviet regime employed the same rhetorical strategies used against political opponents to demonstrate that by committing acts detrimental to the social good, individuals became enemies of Soviet power.²⁰ By the end of the first decade of Soviet power, bellicose propaganda regularly listed the thief, the embezzler, the drunk, and the spendthrift alongside the wrecker, the kulak, the landowner, and the priest.²¹ Mock show trials were also used to this end. The *Trial of Stepan Korolev (as a Result of Drunkenness)*, for example, showed the extensive damage done by two 'types': first, Korolev, who stood accused

¹⁹ Cassiday, *The Enemy on Trial*, pp. 51-58.

²⁰ Viewing criminals as society's 'enemies' had long-established revolutionary roots. In his *Social Contract*, Jean-Jacques Rousseau wrote that 'every malefactor, by attacking the social rights, becomes by his crimes, a rebel and a traitor to his country; by violating its laws he ceases to be a member of it; he makes war upon it [...] in putting the guilty to death we slay not so much the citizen as the enemy.' Cited in Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1977), p. 90.

²¹ One poster from 1929 showed a giant red hand grabbing the hand of a man caught in the act of stealing, underneath the slogan 'The enemy is sneaking in – chase him away!' The bottom frame of the poster featured two rats – a well-established dehumanising technique – and a list of 'our major enemies', which included the wrecker and kulak, the bureaucrat and procrastinator, the thief and embezzler, the drunkard and the thriftless person. In the same year, the well-known artist, Deni designed a poster showing 'internal' and 'external' enemies: on the left, the landowner, kulak, drunkard, and priest; on the right, the foreign journalist, capitalist, Menshevik, and White Army officer. Bonnell, *Iconography*, pp. 208-210.

of systematic drunkenness, theft of factory goods and materials, wife-battery, assault, and the attempted murder of a policeman; second, Pavlenko, the bootlegger and bar-owner, charged with drawing Korolev into such a life of drunken debauchery. While the audience was allowed some sympathy for Korolev, Pavlenko was labelled a 'spider that drinks in the worker's body and sucks his blood'.²² As someone who encouraged inappropriate behaviour amongst the weak, Pavlenko was shown to be a dangerous enemy – a 'spider' and 'blood-sucker'.

The Soviet media thus used its maturing demonic lexicon to vilify perpetrators of anti-Soviet behaviour, as well as ideological or class foes. According to Daniel Beer, all three types of enemy – 'social deviants of all shades, their class enemies and political opponents' – were imagined in the same terms, all three regarded equally as dangerous sources of degeneration and corruption.²³

Curing, Isolating, Exterminating

From the outset of the revolution the regime had to decide on the fate of its enemies. In 1917, Lenin seemed to encourage a great variety of approaches, arguing that thousands of different forms of punishment should be elaborated by workers themselves:

In one place they might put ten rich people, a dozen thieves and half a dozen shirkers in prison [...] In another they might make him clean the loos [*sortiry*]. In a third they might give those leaving solitary confinement yellow cards so that the people [*narod*] can keep a close eye on these harmful individuals [*liudi*] until they have been corrected. In a fourth they would shoot one in ten found guilty of parasitism

²² Cassiday, *The Enemy on Trial*, pp. 60-62.

²³ Beer, 'The Hygiene of Souls', p. 99.

[*tuneiadvstvo*]. In a fifth, they might think up a combination of measures; by giving a suspended sentence, for example, they might correct the redeemable elements amongst the rich, the bourgeois intelligentsia, thieves, and hooligans.²⁴

Lenin envisaged a variety of fates for the enemy, including incarceration, death, punishment, surveillance, and correction through labour. His initial impulse was to allow the workers to elaborate their own means to deal with enemies.

The problem continued to plague the party, and increasingly worker control over the act of punishing and correcting waned. The party leaders wrestled with difficult questions. Could a person identified as an 'enemy' be saved? Could enemies one day be readmitted to the revolutionary political community? Did all foes require the same treatment?

Analysing how the party imagined the 'opposition', Igal Halfin has identified two approaches. While the party believed that some heretics were 'politically immature', 'ideologically ignorant', and could be made to 'see the true light of communist truth and return to the fold', it also acknowledged the existence of 'deliberate adversaries' and the 'irredeemably evil' who could never be saved.²⁵ The party invested huge energies in diagnosing the nature of an individual's thought-crimes, before deciding on a course of action: correction or purging. Drawing on the party's own metaphors of contagion, Daniel Beer makes an additional distinction, noting that some could be cured or rehabilitated, but only in a place of isolation.²⁶ After assessing the likelihood

²⁴ Lenin, 'Kak organizovat' sorevnovanie', p. 204.

²⁵ Igal Halfin, 'The Demonization of the Opposition: Stalinist Memory and the "Communist Archive" at Leningrad Communist University', *Kritika*, 2 (2001), 45-80.

²⁶ Beer, 'The Hygiene of Souls', p. 99.

of returning an individual to health, the party would thus decide on one of *three* outcomes: cure, isolation, or elimination.

During the 1920s, the emphasis was on curing, and when Lenin defeated the Workers' Opposition he did not call for their destruction, but for 'a carefully individualised approach, a sort of healing treatment'.²⁷ In keeping with the Marxist regard for work, labour was invariably the key to such rehabilitation. For those found guilty of many offences the remedy was to make them toil within the community, and during the first years of NEP 80 per cent of persons convicted in court received a sentence of compulsory work, which was to be organised by the local authorities.²⁸ Significantly, deviating party members were treated in the same way, and were often dismissed from their more senior office positions to take jobs back on the factory bench.

Gradually, greater stress was placed on treating malefactors in isolation from the rest of society, however. Katerina Clark identifies a transitional period between 1931 and late 1935 in which a combination of rehabilitation and isolation prevailed. Under Maksim Gor'kii's tutelage, there appeared several accounts of how social aliens were despatched to hard labour within the camp system, given intensive re-education, thereby 'reforged' as decent citizens.²⁹ Both class enemies and the socially dangerous could be effectively treated this way, it was alleged. *Belomor*, the literary work edited by Gor'kii, contained the bold claim that 'As a result of the twenty months of work, the country has acquired several thousand skilled builders who having gone through a

²⁷ Halfin, 'The Demonization of the Opposition', p. 49.

²⁸ Peter H. Solomon, *Soviet Criminal Justice under Stalin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 52.

²⁹ Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History As Ritual*, 3rd edn (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 2000), pp. 118-9

school of severe discipline, have cured themselves of the putrefactive poison of the petty bourgeoisie.³⁰ For young deviants, the colony allowed similar opportunities for re-education through labour. *Journey to Life (Putevka v Zhizn')*, a 1931 film based on the writings of the renowned pedagogue Anton Makarenko, told the story of a group of violent street kids who were taken to a remote commune, taught a profession, and transformed into happy and honourable young workers.³¹ Accounts of reclaiming criminals were common in the Soviet press. For instance, in 1935 *Izvestiia* proudly recounted the good work of Matvei Pogrebinski, director of a NKVD labour commune, who devoted his life to converting criminals into loyal members of the Soviet community.³²

Exile, though less brutal, was understood to have a similar function. In 1932, Stepan Podlubnyi, the introspective protagonist of Jochen Hellbeck's innovative work, recorded his own frustration with his father, who returned to Moscow upon completion of his three-year term of exile, still 'old', 'backward', and 'useless' – 'despite the opportunity to remake himself in exile'. In the worldview of this aspiring Soviet citizen, exile from the Soviet capital allowed the former class enemy a valuable occasion to be transformed. Podlubnyi was much happier with his mother who had 're-educated herself a little in the course of her "emigration"'.³³ By temporarily excising them from the social body, exile or incarceration allowed outcasts to turn themselves into active and productive members of working society. Although this

³⁰ Cited in Beer, 'The Hygiene of Souls', p. 157. See *Belomor: An Account of the Construction of the New Canal between the White Sea and the Baltic Sea*, ed. by Maksim Gor'kii, L. Auerbach, and S. G. Ferin, trans. by Amabel Williams-Ellys (London: John Lane, 1935).

³¹ *Journey to Life (Putevka v Zhizn')*. Dir. Nikolai Ekk. Mezhrabprom. 1931.

³² See Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism. Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times: Soviet Russia in the 1930s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 78.

³³ Hellbeck, 'Fashioning the Stalinist Soul', pp. 90-91.

approach divided the Soviet populace into two opposing camps – one socialist, ordered, educated, healthy, and human; the other animal, criminal, archaic, sick, and degenerate – it allowed an individual to make the return journey, to come back from the negative axis to the positive.³⁴ For marginals such as Podlubnyi and his mother, it gave hope that though cast out once, they could eventually be fully readmitted.

Increasingly, however, the construct of the irredeemable and incurable ‘enemy’ seems to have prevailed. Rather than seeking to transform offenders, the growing emphasis was on eliminating them. Even those who had been rehabilitated were now re-imprisoned, exiled or shot, as if the regime could not quite believe in its own capacity to correct its adversaries.³⁵ While the Stalin Constitution seemed to claim that class struggle was over, Stalin’s report to a Central Committee plenum on 3 March 1937 made a fundamental amendment.³⁶ In this revision of revolutionary narrative, the enemy only became more belligerent and more cunning as the Soviet people advanced towards the light of communism. Stalin launched a battle against the ‘rotten theory’ that ‘with every advance forwards, the class struggle will be extinguished, that as we are successful, the class enemy will become more and more tame’. His prognosis was rather more frightening: ‘The further we advance and the more success we have, the more embittered the defeated remains of the exploiting class become, the more treacherous their attack on us will be, the more dirty tricks they will play against the Soviet state, and the more reckless the weapons they will use, as the last attempt of

³⁴ Greg Carleton, ‘Genre in Socialist Realism’, *Slavic Review*, 53 (1994), 992-1009 (p. 1002).

³⁵ On the re-arrest of those formerly sentenced as kulaks, Amir Weiner writes: ‘It seemed no accident that the first salvo of the bursting Terror was directed at those who had already been punished and pardoned.’ Amir Weiner, *Making Sense of War: The Second World War and the Fate of the Bolshevik Revolution* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001), pp. 145-6.

³⁶ Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1995), p. 281.

the doomed'.³⁷ In this cornerstone speech, Stalin argued that if once Trotskyism had been a political current *within* the working class – albeit an erroneous one – the Trotskyists had now become an 'unprincipled and unethical band of wreckers, saboteurs, spies, killers, a band of inveterate enemies of the working class, employed by foreign intelligence services'.³⁸ Stalin's speech, reproduced in *Pravda* on 29 March 1937, was riddled with invective and perfectly articulated emerging 'newspeak'.³⁹ It thus had three important functions: first, it offered a new interpretation of the revolutionary course in which the threat of enemy action was set to remain an important feature of Soviet culture; second, it suggested opponents were guilty not of correctable 'error', but unadulterated enmity; third, it provided a model example of the accusatory mode in which political life was now to be conducted.

This important break had its well-known and tragic results. In the purges of 1936-8 those defined as enemies were radically eliminated from Soviet society, whether by killing them or condemning them indefinitely to hard labour in the Gulag.⁴⁰ Not only members of the political and social elites were culled, but also marginals whose

³⁷ I. V. Stalin, 'O nedostatках partiinoi raboty i merakh likvidatsii trotskistkikh i inykh dvurushnikov: Doklad na plenum TsK VKP(b) 3 March 1937 g.', in *I. V. Stalin: Sochineniia*, 3 vols, ed. by Robert H. McNeal (Stanford, Calif.: Hoover Institution Foreign Language Publications, 1967), I, pp. 189-224 (p. 213). Amir Weiner glosses Stalin's speech in the following way: 'After several decades of socialism, accompanied by continual purges, the fact that these human "weeds" still existed had to be the result of their devious and elusive nature.' Weiner later adds, 'With socialism built, extermination was the only way to cope with those who had not yet redeemed themselves.' Weiner, *Making Sense of War*, pp. 35, 145-6.

³⁸ I. V. Stalin, 'O nedostatках partiinoi raboty', p. 198.

³⁹ Dermot Fitzsimons, 'Shoot the Mad Dogs!': Appellation and Distortion during the Moscow Show Trials, 1936-8', *Slovo*, 13 (2001), 172-187.

⁴⁰ For a review of the different assessments of the terror's scale, see J. Arch Getty, Gabor T. Rittersporn, and Victor N. Zemskov, 'Victims of the Soviet Penal System in the Pre-War Years: A First Approach on the Basis of Archival Evidence', *The American Historical Review*, 98 (1993), 1017-49. Their own archival research suggests that the number of people shot was likely to be a question of hundreds of thousands, rather than the alleged millions (p. 1023).

criminal or antisocial behaviour marked them as enemies of the Soviet state.⁴¹ As we trace the imagined 'enemy' through Soviet history, the *Ezhovshchina* emerges as an absolutely crucial turning point. From this juncture, the 'enemy' was to embody an absolute evil that must either be destroyed, or at least, relegated to almost eternal exclusion from society.⁴²

The fundamental shift of 1936-8 set the tone for the rest of the Stalinist era. Jumping forward to January 1953 and the unmasking of the Doctors' Plot, we find important continuities. Fifteen years on, enemies were still harboured at the very heart of Soviet power, vigilance still demanded from every Soviet citizen. Enemies were still targeted with a string of abusive terms that marked them as unequivocally evil, and they were offered no chance of rehabilitation. On 13 January 1953, *Pravda* labelled the doctors 'criminals, spies, warmongers, traitors, monsters, loathsome vermin, foul degenerates, contemptible hirelings, a band of beasts in human form, members of a terrorist group,

⁴¹ Paul Hagenloh argues that the established picture of the 'Great Terror' as an attack on the political and social elites is far from complete. 'The Terror was also the culmination of a decade-long radicalisation of policing practice against "recidivist" criminals, social marginals, and all manner of lower-class individuals who did not or could not fit into the emerging Stalinist system.' Paul M. Hagenloh, '"Socially Harmful Elements" and the Great Terror', in *Stalinism: New Directions*, pp. 286-308 (pp. 286-7).

⁴² Why the party ceased believing in its own capacity to save sinners, has been the subject of several recent studies. Several historians have examined the intellectual and cultural origins of the radical beliefs that made the terror of 1937 possible. Bonnell has drawn on Iurii Lotman and Boris Uspenskii's explorations into Russian culture to claim that the Bolshevik's inherited a 'binary model of thinking' that compelled them to view humanity dualistically. (Laura Engelstein, however, recently critiqued the neatness of the Tartu model which has 'inspired scholars to find such contrasts everywhere'.) Oleg Kharkhordin stresses the importance of Orthodox traditions. Beer looks to the importation, adoption and modification of certain scientific discourses from Western Europe in the late Imperial period. Halfin emphasises the incontestable nature of the Marxist creed, with its claim to absolute truth. See Bonnell, *Iconography*, p. 187; Iurii M. Lotman and Boris A. Uspenskii, 'Binary Models in the Dynamics of Russian Culture (to the End of the Eighteenth Century)', in *The Semiotics of Russian Cultural History*, ed. by Alexander D. Nakhimovsky and Alice Stone Nakhimovsky (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1985), pp. 30-66; Laura Engelstein, 'Culture, Culture Everywhere: Interpretations of Modern Russia across the 1991 Divide', *Kritika*, 2 (2001), 363-394 (pp. 392-3); Oleg Kharkhordin, *The Collective and the Individual in Russia: A Study of Practices* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1999); Beer, 'The Hygiene of Souls'; Igal Halfin, *From Darkness to Light: Class, Consciousness, and Salvation in Revolutionary Russia* (Pittsburgh, Pa.: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2000).

and a gang of doctor-poisoners', with clear echoes of Stalin's personal tirade against Trotskyists within the party in 1937.⁴³

Even at its most extreme, however, the drive for purification was never absolute. At the height of the Terror, over a million of those labelled enemies were granted the 'reprieve' of the Gulag.⁴⁴ The Gulag thus came to occupy an ambiguous position. While earlier corrective-labour camps had been promoted as the chance for an offender to be rehabilitated, this element was now vastly downplayed. Tales of 'reforging' had disappeared.⁴⁵ With the redemptive nature of the Gulag now in question, it became a place of exile for those rejected from society. Instead of 'curing', it even seemed to corrupt. By the 1930s, the camp system nurtured a criminal network and subculture, where thieving fraternities flourished, and those incarcerated were more likely to emerge as hardened bandits than respectable Soviet citizens.⁴⁶

With the division between the two zones far from absolute, and the waning of the rhetoric of correction, the Gulag came to represent an additional danger to Soviet society. Despite the long sentences, return from the Gulag was possible, and as Amir

⁴³ 'Podlye shpiony i ubiitsy pod maskoi professorov-vrachei', *Pravda*, 13 January 1953, p. 1.

⁴⁴ Getty, Rittersporn and Zemskov suggest that in the period of 1937-8, over a million people were given custodial sentences. Getty, Rittersporn and Zemskov, 'Victims of the Soviet Penal System', p. 1023.

⁴⁵ Katerina Clark writes that by the mid-thirties the theme of the misfit being socialised to become an adopted member of the great family of the state had lost currency. Clark, *The Soviet Novel*, p. 119.

⁴⁶ The *Vory-v-Zakone* (thieves-in-law), for example, were a fraternity who prided themselves on rigid observance of a hermetic communal code of behaviour, and Frederico Varese has compared them with the Sicilian mafia. David Shearer attributes the resurgence of banditry in the 1930s to the prison system, arguing that many of gang-members were kulaks escaped from the labour colonies. Frederico Varese, 'The Society of the *Vory-v-Zakone*, 1930s-1950s', *Cahiers du monde russe*, 39 (1998), 515-538; David R. Shearer, 'Crime and Social Disorder in Stalin's Russia: A Reassessment of the Great Retreat and the Origins of Mass Repression', *Cahiers du monde russe*, 39 (1998), 119-148.

Weiner evocatively puts it: 'the Gulag doors kept revolving'.⁴⁷ Even a ten or twenty-year sentence could eventually be served, or shortened by labour days or amnesty.⁴⁸ Those who offended against the Soviet people were condemned as vile enemies, yet they were eventually readmitted to society, and no assurances were given that they had been corrected.

The legacy to post-Stalinist culture was a problematic one. Soviet public culture had long promoted the notion that the nation was engaged in a deadly battle against a host of deadly enemies, who were irredeemable, dangerous, and elusive. Unable to correct them, the Gulag became a kind of 'holding cell'. Official Stalinist culture interpreted all kinds of unwanted behaviour as signs of a ubiquitous, yet elusive, enemy presence, but while it had conjured up this terrifying 'other', it could claim neither to have destroyed, nor to have reformed it.

The Cultured Self

In the historiography of the Soviet Union, the functioning of power through violence, confinement, and terror has perhaps been overstated. Excision, whether real or symbolic, was not the only method used to construct the revolutionary community. At the same time as constructing the sinister figure of the 'enemy', the Bolsheviks also created his positive counterparts – the Soviet 'new man' and 'new woman'. From the outset of the revolution, the state devoted huge energy to fashioning Soviet heroes;

⁴⁷ Weiner, *Making Sense of War*, p. 147.

⁴⁸ Getty, Rittersporn and Zemskov estimate that during the period 1934–53, in any given year, 20–40% of the inmates were released. Getty, Rittersporn and Zemskov, 'Victims of the Soviet Penal System', p. 1041.

films, novels and newspaper stories provided inspiring examples of this new person.⁴⁹ In addition, citizens were urged to work on themselves, to study and train to become ideal citizens. Drawing on some of Michel Foucault's later insights into the functioning of state power, scholars such as Stephen Kotkin, Vadim Volkov, and Hellbeck encourage us to explore not only the repressive nature of Bolshevik power, but also its 'productive' modalities.⁵⁰

The NEP saw the flourishing of radical projects, as revolutionary ideologues encouraged men and women to transform themselves, to experiment with communal living patterns, and to form new, more 'liberated' personal relationships.⁵¹ With the huge social transformations of collectivisation and industrialisation at the end of the 1920s, however, the imperative to raise the new man and woman became ever more pressing – and the profile of this new persona slightly different. According to Moshe Lewin and David Hoffman, the peasants who flooded into the new urban conurbations during the first five year plan brought with them their own customs and communities, often at odds with the image of the Soviet worker promulgated by the authorities.⁵² The Soviet press frequently voiced its concerns, with reports on life in the communal apartment, where 'gossip, domestic violence, foul language, and [...] even the most

⁴⁹ Lynne Attwood and Catriona Kelly, 'Programmes for Identity: The "New Man" and the "New Woman"', in *Constructing Russian Culture in the Age of Revolution: 1881-1940*, ed. by Catriona Kelly and David Shepherd (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 256-290.

⁵⁰ Stephen Kotkin writes that 'power relations created effects – of experience, identity, resistances', and encourages a focus on what the party and its programmes 'made possible, both intentionally and unintentionally'. Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain*, p. 22; Vadim Volkov, 'The Concept of *Kul'turnost*: Notes On The Stalinist Civilizing Process', in *Stalinism: New Directions*, pp. 210-230; Hellbeck, 'Fashioning the Stalinist Soul'. See also Michel Foucault, 'The Ethic of Care for the Self as a Practice of Freedom', in *The Final Foucault*, ed. by James Bernauer and David Ramussen (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1988), pp. 1-20.

⁵¹ Richard Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams: Utopian Vision and Experimental Life in the Russian Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

⁵² Moshe Lewin, 'Society, State, and Ideology during the First Five-Year Plan', in *Cultural Revolution in Russia, 1928-1931*, ed. by Sheila Fitzpatrick (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1984),

elementary grasp of hygienic principles' were lacking.⁵³ In his seminal work on the new industrial city of Magnitogorsk, however, Kotkin argued that a potential 'ruralisation' of the cities was contested all the way, as the new authorities sought to transform these in-migrants into Soviet workers.⁵⁴

In its project to transform the masses into model citizens, the Soviet authorities increasingly turned away from some of the radical plans of the early revolutionary period, and focused more on creating a productive, modern, urban populace. The regime sought to change daily behaviour, including speech, manners, dress, and even personal hygiene. Volkov has argued that in the context of social upheaval of revolution, industrialisation, and urbanisation, the state was engaged in a 'civilising mission'. In its ongoing struggle to recast the peasant as modern Soviet worker, the party regarded the transmission of 'culturedness' (*kul'turnost'*) a key task. Relocated to the city, the 'traditional rural mechanisms of control and customary law were losing their grip on the former peasants, an epidemic of violent crimes, hooliganism, rape, alcoholism, and other forms of deviance overwhelmed the urban environment in the 1930s'; the regime hoped to inculcate an innate sense of order in its citizens.⁵⁵ If the new Soviet citizen could be taught to internalise Soviet values, he would live an ordered, productive, healthy, and hygienic life of his own volition.⁵⁶

pp. 41-77; David L. Hoffman, *Peasant Metropolis: Social Identities in Moscow, 1929-1941* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1994), pp. 41-77.

⁵³ Attwood and Kelly, 'Programmes for Identity', p. 266.

⁵⁴ Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain*.

⁵⁵ Volkov, 'The Concept of *Kul'turnost'*', p. 214.

⁵⁶ Volkov's view of 'culturedness' is slightly different from the one proposed by Sheila Fitzpatrick. Fitzpatrick shows how a hierarchy of 'culturedness' reflected social status. While a peasant was simply encouraged to wash, brush his teeth, and acquire basic literacy, she suggests, aspiring members of the new elite were expected to speak well, show perfect manners, and demonstrate good taste in their choice of clothing and home furnishing. Fitzpatrick has also argued that the concept of 'culturedness' was linked to a socialist realist conception of how life was changing in the Soviet Union. The lower ranks were encouraged to see the more luxurious lifestyle and domestic comfort their superiors enjoyed

Becoming cultured was no easy task. In his study of Podlubnyi's diary, Hellbeck shows how one Soviet citizen struggled internally to recreate himself. Once labelled and denigrated as a 'kulak', Podlubnyi was desperate to reconstruct himself as a new Soviet man. His diary reveals the great significance he attached to the polar terms of 'culture' – by which he understood a conscientious attitude to work, political consciousness, Soviet virtue, and urban living as opposed to 'backwardness' – indifference to work, drunkenness, peasant ways, and criminal tendencies. Yet even as he denigrated friends and acquaintances whom he regarded as 'backward', he acknowledged that he was drawn to them. Though horrified by the drunken and debauched revelry he witnessed in the neighbours' apartment, he still gained pleasure from his visits and from the company of these 'animal-like' in-migrants from the Kaluga countryside. While the notion of becoming 'cultured' was highly important to Podlubnyi, he did not find it easy to conquer his own backwardness.⁵⁷

Throughout the Stalinist era, the quest to transform all workers into conscious, cultured members of the Soviet collective remained elusive. Yet there are signs that in the late Stalinist era, some Soviet citizens cherished the importance of correct manners and appearance, and were highly angered by public transgressions. In his study of the *stiliagi* – youths who created rebellious identities through their choice of alternative clothing, music tastes, dance-style and slang – Mark Edele suggests that collective pressure could be very powerful. He notes that 'what former *stiliagi*

not as unfair privileges, but as a way of life they could expect in the future. Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism*, pp. 79-83; Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Cultural Front: Power and Culture in Revolutionary Russia* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1992), pp. 216-37. For an earlier interpretation of 'culturedness', see Vera S. Dunham, *In Stalin's Time: Middleclass Values in Soviet Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976).

remember in memoirs and interviews is fear of society, of confrontations with “average Soviet people”, not fear of what the state might do’.⁵⁸ Although the state was highly vigorous in its clampdown on political student groups, it did not intervene in the area of *stiliagi*. With members of the public so ready to intervene in issues of behavioural conformity, the state could stand to one side.

At some future point, it was believed, Soviet citizens would be fully imbued with communist morality, and the state would no longer be required as policeman and prison-warden. In Foucauldian terms, citizens would have acquired the rules of law, the ethics, and the ethos that would allow the games of power to be played with a minimum of domination.⁵⁹ According to Marxist metanarrative, indeed, the state was expected eventually to wither away; yet the Marxist creed offered no suggestions as to how long each stage of the revolutionary process might take. Under Stalin, at least, the use of force remained an important part of maintaining behavioural and ideological conformity.

Khrushchev’s Cultural Revolution

By the late 1940s, party theorists were beginning to think that the socialist stage of the revolution was nearly complete, and that within a period of twenty years, a new historical era would begin.⁶⁰ Preparation for the great event only began in earnest under Khrushchev, however. Stalin’s death was a powerful marker of change, a

⁵⁷ Hellbeck, ‘Fashioning the Stalinist Soul’.

⁵⁸ Mark Edele, ‘Strange Young Men in Stalin’s Moscow: The Birth and the Life of Stiliagi, 1945-53’, *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 50 (2002), 37-61, p. 61.

⁵⁹ Foucault, ‘The Ethic of Care for the Self’.

⁶⁰ Weiner, *Making Sense of War*, pp. 33-4.

landmark on the nation's great journey towards its future, and party leaders used this natural break in order to accelerate towards the great transition.

With Stalin gone, the prospect of a final showdown with the enemy was a disturbing one. Stalin's successors still prescribed to the millenarian goals at the heart of the Bolshevik revolution, still sought to transform Soviet society into a perfect and harmonious collective; yet they shied away from further confrontation with the 'enemy'. The solution lay first in revising Stalin's formulations of 1937. In the Secret Speech, Khrushchev contested the primacy given to 'enemies' under Stalin, directly attacked Stalin's thesis on the intensification of class struggle, and criticised the kind of invective generated within Stalinist culture. He claimed it was unnecessary to 'destroy' (*unichtozhat'*) those who had stepped out against the party line, calling for a return to the policies of correction fostered under Lenin.⁶¹

His ideological amendments did not mean, however, that Khrushchev had abandoned either the goal of radically transforming society or the belief that it was possible to build communism within his lifetime. Indeed, Khrushchev did not seem to accept any limitations on the possibility of transforming human nature or the natural world.⁶²

The late 1950s marked a new burst of utopian hope. There was a renewed belief in the state's power to turn the weak-willed, or the erring, into new men and women. Rather than using violence to achieve the purity of the social body, post-Stalin leaders believed the path to the harmonious and productive communist era was through the inculcation of core Soviet values in all citizens. Renewed attention to the moral

⁶¹ N. S. Khrushchev, 'O kul'te lichnosti i ego posledstviakh', in A. N. Iakovlev (ed), *Reabilitatsiia: Politicheskie protsessy 30-50 godov* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo literatury, 1991), pp. 19-67.

education of its citizens was the order of the day, and belief in the community's power to correct and redeem sinners was restored.

The state displayed a growing attention to the concept of 'byt'.⁶³ A deluge of pamphlets and newspaper articles aimed to teach citizens how to behave at work, to conduct their personal lives, to dress, to arrange their living space, and to spend their leisure time.⁶⁴ The rhetoric of the 1950s and early 1960s established a direct link between internalising 'morality' and building communism. In a recent article on 'taste' under Khrushchev, Susan Reid registers the growing importance of consumer culture, and claims that the party's new intervention in 'seemingly mundane and intimate matters' was part of a project to form 'the fully rounded, socially integrated, and self-disciplined person', linked to the imminent advent of communism. Reid continues: 'Having internalised "communist morality", the future citizens of communism would voluntarily regulate themselves, at which point the state could wither away.'⁶⁵ Although there are certain parallels with the radical projects of the

⁶² The Virgin Lands project is one example of Khrushchev's ongoing belief that it was possible to transform nature through human determination.

⁶³ The term 'byt' translates as 'way of life' or 'everyday life'. Iurii Trifonov has explained that this 'incomprehensible word' means 'how husbands and wives get on together, and parents and children, and close and distant relations too... And the interrelationships of friends and people at work, love, quarrels, jealousy, envy – all this, too, is byt. This is what life consists of! ... We are all enmeshed in byt in our own network of everyday concerns.' It also related to how people spent their leisure time, how much alcohol they drank, what they wore, if they swore, how well they applied themselves at school or work, and so on. With varying degrees of intensity, the Soviet government had endeavoured to define and mould this sphere of personal relationships and daily behaviour ever since 1917. Iurii Trifonov, *Kak slovo nashe otzovetsia* (Moscow: Sovetskaia Rossiia, 1985), p. 102, cited in Adele Marie Baker, 'The Culture Factory: Theorising the Popular in the Old and New Russia', in *Consuming Russia: Popular Culture, Sex, and Society Since Gorbachev*, ed. by Adele Marie Baker (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1999), pp. 12-45 (p. 32).

⁶⁴ In *Refining Russia*, Catriona Kelly sees the growing publication of advice literature from 1954 onwards as a sign of a greater commitment to providing a more sophisticated level of material comfort, and explores the problematic accommodation between communist ideology and consumerism. Catriona Kelly, *Refining Russia: Advice Literature, Polite Culture, and Gender from Catherine to Yeltsin*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001). On the new importance attached to the lay-out and style of the Soviet home, see Victor Buchli, *An Archaeology of Socialism* (Oxford: Berg, 1999).

⁶⁵ Susan E. Reid, 'Cold War in the Kitchen: Gender and the De-Stalinization of Consumer Taste in the Soviet Union under Khrushchev', *Slavic Review*, 61(2002), 211-252 (pp. 216-7).

NEP era, the cultural revolution was now positioned at a different point along the eschatological timeline. Where the cultural revolution of the NEP era sought to recast the peasant as Soviet worker, the new venture aimed to fashion men and women of the communist future. This was a new stage in the unfolding and permanent revolution.

There were also important differences with the campaigns for 'culturedness' of the 1930s. Two decades earlier, Hellbeck's Podlubnyi had understood the revolutionary struggle as a conflict between two binary terms: culture opposed to backwardness. He understood the introduction of the passport system as a 'purge' enacted by the state as a means to eradicate all the useless elements in society, including speculators, alcoholics, thieves, disfranchised persons, and other uncultured types.⁶⁶ The new era ushered in by Stalin's death renounced such a combative approach to those who had as yet failed to acquire consciousness and culture. The new project was to be all-inclusive. Instead of wishing to eliminate or purge the marginals and deviants from the Soviet city, or indeed society more broadly, the goal was to correct, re-educate, and redeem them. Instead of being cast out as anti-Soviet, they were to be transformed by the positive force of the mature and healthy Soviet collective.

This dissertation thus explores this new era of cultural revolution, and the nature of its implementation. Over the past quarter of a century, the party had insisted that beating the enemy was a prerequisite for achieving the communist paradise. State propaganda had repeatedly warned that the enemies were all around, hiding behind the mask of the good communist, and Soviet citizens had continually been encouraged to imagine

their own community as good, defined against a blurred, but dangerously evil 'other'. Would the Soviet public now believe it was safe from enemy plots? Would citizens prove responsive to the new programmes of moral and cultural education? Would they be ready to view those labelled 'uncultured' not as their opponents, but as potential members of the communist collective? And would it be possible to eradicate incidents of social deviance, crime, and political heresy without using the forceful techniques of extermination, excision, and isolation?

The task was made additionally difficult by the legacy Stalin left in the form of the Gulag, which contained those rejected from society as heretical, criminal, uncultured, and un-Soviet. This body of 2,466,914 people would offer the biggest challenge to the new policies of correction and healing within society.⁶⁷ The Khrushchev era was thus marked by revived belief in the advent of communist society, but also by deep fear of the destructive forces contained within the Gulag.

Defining Belief and Rhetoric – Towards a Methodology

Ransacking the archives for petitions and letters-to-the-editor has become a staple part of research into Soviet history, as they seem to offer a ready bank of texts, providing some kind of indication of public opinion.⁶⁸ While they do not allow access to the unprocessed or raw emotion of the subject, they do show how some members of the public wished to present themselves to the authorities, and they offer insight into an

⁶⁶ Hellbeck, 'Fashioning the Stalinist Soul', p. 85.

⁶⁷ This was the number of prisoners held on 1 April 1953, before the March amnesty took effect. GARF f. 7523, op. 89, d. 4408, l. 82.

important point of contact between state and society. Throughout the Soviet era, the system of gaining housing, legal rights, jobs, party membership and so forth depended upon the act of writing letters. After 1953 in particular, the authorities strongly encouraged citizens to contribute their opinions to newspapers or relevant political bodies, and the results of their campaigns provide another growing category of letters.⁶⁹ It seems that the state was actively inviting its citizens to participate in the kind of 'practices of the self' defined by Foucault.⁷⁰ Unlike diary-writing, however, the epistolary form was not a solitary act of self-constitution, but recreated the self through the act of dialogue.

An anonymous letter from one Soviet citizen in April 1953 illustrates this process. Writing to Viacheslav Molotov about the party's recent repudiation of the Doctors' Plot, the author offered his opinion, though he had nothing material to gain from penning his letter. Indeed, choosing anonymity, he deliberately avoided any direct consequences. Why then did he write? What did he hope to gain from the act of writing? In part, it seems, he believed it was his duty. Concerned about the course the party was taking, he thought they needed to hear the opinion of the people. He opened the letter by identifying himself: 'I am the most simple and ordinary Soviet person, Russian, communist and on the whole I think that I am the most common,

⁶⁸ Sheila Fitzpatrick has described the great volume of public letter-writing as a 'treasure trove' for historians. Sheila Fitzpatrick, 'Supplicants and Citizens: Public Letter-Writing in Soviet Russia in the 1930s', *Slavic Review*, 55 (1996), 78-105 (p. 78).

⁶⁹ Zubkova argues that there was new interest in letter-writing after 1953. Some newspapers and journals began to reserve special columns for the publication of readers' letters and the volume of this correspondence began to be considered a matter of prestige. At the XXII Party Congress, the chairman of the Supreme Court, Aleksandr Gorkin, spoke at length of letter-writing, praising citizens who corresponded with the authorities for their political activism. See Zubkova, *Russia After the War*, pp. 161-2; 'Rech' A. F. Gorkina', *Izvestia*, 18 October 1961, pp. 3-4.

⁷⁰ Foucault's describes 'practices of self', whereby the subject 'constitutes himself in an active fashion' through 'patterns that he finds in his culture and which are proposed, suggested and imposed on him by

unremarkable representative of our society.’⁷¹ His representativeness legitimised his act of writing. By taking into consideration his views, he implied, the state would learn something of the popular mood. As we read on, however, we find that this identity that he embraced so dramatically at the start of his letter was not something fixed or unchanging. In order to become this typical Soviet citizen who faithfully submitted his opinions to Molotov, he had to be in ongoing dialogue with the state. In the second paragraph of the letter, he offered the reader a visual image of himself, sitting at his desk with recent copies of *Pravda* spread out before him. In order to *speak* as a Soviet citizen, he also had to be reading and absorbing the words provided by official texts.

The writing, self-constructing citizen drew on official texts. This does not mean, however, that he reproduced them faithfully. His interpretation of what he read invariably reflected pre-existing beliefs and values, whether these came from texts provided by earlier interactions with the state, from pre-revolutionary or imported traditions, or even from subcultures such as the one nurtured by the Gulag. The Soviet citizen who believed he was faithfully speaking the words the party wished to hear, still produced a text or speech-act with significant variation. Comparing the official text with the reader’s response, we find hesitations, discrepancies, distortions, and errors as the writer sought to communicate in the official language.⁷² Even a

this culture, his society and his social group’. Hellbeck’s diary-writers are prime examples of this kind of private self-constitution. Foucault, ‘The Ethic of Care for the Self’, p. 11.

⁷¹ RGASPI f. 82, op. 2., d. 1466, l. 44.

⁷² This approach is greatly influenced by Carlo Ginzburg’s rich exploration into the mental universe of a sixteenth-century Italian miller accused of heresy. For him, the question is not only *what* an individual reads, but *how* he reads it. Taking passages from the books Menocchio has read, and comparing them with the miller’s interpretation, Ginzburg finds important ‘gaps and discrepancies’. In these lacunae and deviations, Menocchio is uncovered as a man both imbued in an oral, materialistic, peasant culture, and deeply influenced by his reading of radical texts of the Reformation. As he tries to express what he has read, Menocchio’s statements – recorded by the dutiful clerks of the Inquisition –

petitioner, desperate for some benefit or other, anxious to prove his credentials as a good Soviet citizen, was idiosyncratic in the way he reproduced the official script, for his own utterance was dependent upon the way he had imbibed Bolshevik ideology. In their written texts, Soviet citizens displayed a broad range of idiolects and dialects as they tried to 'speak Bolshevik'.⁷³ There was enormous potential for misunderstanding, miscommunication, and linguistic variation.

This heteroglossia, I suggest, did not only impact on the way ordinary citizens expressed themselves, but also the production of party rhetoric. Soviet rhetoric is typically viewed as monologue, and the party is seen reproducing its own ideology, seeking to impose it on its subjects. I hope, however, to explore more closely the relation between state and society, between reading and writing. The state itself was constantly engaged in reading the letters, petitions, and autobiographies submitted by the Soviet public. Tremendous energy was spent recording the verbal statements made by party members and ordinary Soviet citizens. What was the purpose of this great infrastructure devoted to gathering the public's thoughts?

are a reworking of written, high culture by medieval, popular culture. Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller*, trans. by John and Anne Tedeschi (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980).

⁷³ My position here is slightly different both to the one held by Stephen Kotkin, who created the valuable concept of 'speaking Bolshevik', and to Hellbeck and Halfin's challenge. In their review of *Magnetic Mountain*, they suggested that by talking of a Soviet 'identity game' and creating Soviet citizens who had acquired the linguistic skills because it was *pragmatic*, Kotkin 'ultimately leaves the Stalinist *subject* unproblematised.' Referring to private as well as public documents from the era, they suggest that individuals did not only adopt this language because it was utilitarian, but that official Soviet discourse pervades 'even individuals' subjective self-conscious.' While I follow Hellbeck and Halfin in believing that 'official' Soviet beliefs fashioned private thinking and dialogue as well as public interaction, I emphasise to a greater extent the heteroglossia of the Bolshevik 'language'. Igal Halfin and Jochen Hellbeck, 'Rethinking the Stalinist Subject: Stephen Kotkin's "Magnetic Mountain" and the State of Soviet Historical Studies', *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, 44 (1996), 456-463; Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain*, pp. 198-237.

In his study of Soviet surveillance techniques, Peter Holquist asserts that the regime did not collect information so as 'to determine which policy to pursue in conformity with public opinion or to win support', but in order to sculpt a better, purer society, to act on people, and to change them.⁷⁴ In this view, feed-back was needed primarily in order to hone the state's own performance. Drawing on Mikhail Bakhtin's insights, I suggest a rather different relationship between state, society, and the Bolshevik creed. Often it seems that the party was permanently engaged in the monologic reassertion of its own ideology, yet if we look more closely at the style of party rhetoric we find the speaker invariably promoted his own argument, by responding to other, undefined voices. Political speeches were structured in response to imagined theories, arguments, or viewpoints against which the speaker struggled. As such, these texts have a highly dialogic quality. The party did not speak into silence, but responded to the criticisms, misunderstandings, or misinterpretations they attributed to their interlocutors within the party or the Soviet public.⁷⁵ I suggest that party officials and ideologues were not totally impervious to the ideas and beliefs of those amongst whom they lived and worked, and whose opinions they investigated with such fanatical interest. Such a model injects dynamism into Soviet history, and enables us to account for the plurivocality and fluid nature of official discourse over the long *durée* of Soviet history. Even if the overarching metanarrative of progress was incontestable, it left huge scope within the Bolshevik project for negotiation, reworking, and adaptation.

⁷⁴ Peter Holquist, "'Information Is the Alpha and Omega of Our Work": Bolshevik Surveillance in Its Pan-European Context', *The Journal of Modern History*, 69 (1997), 415-450 (p. 417).

⁷⁵ M. M. Bakhtin, 'The Problem of the Text in Linguistics, Philology and the Human Sciences: An Experiment in Philosophical Analysis', in *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, trans. by Vern W.

Historiography

Understanding a period popularly labelled 'destalinisation' is inescapably dependent on how we interpret 'Stalinism'. Where Sheila Fitzpatrick's social and cultural history has been pioneering, the works of Stephen Kotkin, Igal Halfin, Jochen Hellbeck, Vadim Volkov, Amir Weiner, and Jeffrey Brooks have gone on to offer exciting new interpretations of what it meant to be Soviet. Emphasising the importance of ideology, their approaches stress the highly interventionist nature of the Soviet state. All explore the revolutionary project of creating Soviet man, whilst purifying society of all that might pollute the social body. Some emphasise the inspiration and technique for forcefully removing the impure (Halfin, Weiner); others explore state initiatives to inculcate Soviet beliefs and behaviour (Hellbeck, Volkov, Kotkin); a third approach examines how the growth of the modern media and mass literacy made such revolutionary projects possible (Brooks). My view of Soviet society in the 1950s is heavily dependent upon their insights. I explore both the Soviet state's ongoing devotion to 'sculpting' model citizens, and the importance of official Soviet beliefs in citizens' own self-definition. However, in contrast to some of their approaches, I do suggest that Soviet identity remained a contested site. Not only could the disparity between lived experience and ideology prove problematic in the search for a stable identity, but the belief system in itself was often multivocal and obscure, making for varied and competing understandings of the Soviet self and his place in the world.

In contrast to the flourishing field of Stalinist history, study of the Khrushchev era is still in its very early stages. There is, of course, a great wealth of literature originating in the tradition of political science. Studying the effectiveness of Khrushchev's reforms and the strength of his political leadership, the works of Carl Linden, George Breslauer, Michel Tatu, Merle Fainsod, Martin McCauley, and, more recently, William Thompson offer a variety of assessments. Despite their differences, however, certain fundamental assumptions seem to underlie their work and distance it from the approaches taken here.⁷⁶ Regarding Khrushchev's Soviet Union as an unequivocally *post-revolutionary* society, they tend to view ideology as a tool with which to maintain power. They understand the aims of the Soviet state as geopolitical ones – namely to create an economically sound, ordered, and well-defended state, enjoying some kind of popular legitimacy. While some works take this cynical approach to the extreme of seeing the new and less belligerent 'terminology' of the Khrushchev era as a concession to foreign propaganda,⁷⁷ even the more sophisticated ones impose a fundamental division between the leader's role as policy-maker or problem-solver on the one hand, and his role as 'ideologue' or spin-doctor on the other. According to Breslauer, for example, it is possible to 'separate empty rhetoric from operative statements'.⁷⁸ These approaches are significantly different from my own for two reasons: first, I follow the recent scholarship of the Stalinist era in viewing the Soviet

⁷⁶ Carl A. Linden, *Khrushchev and the Soviet Leadership* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1966); George W. Breslauer, *Khrushchev and Brezhnev as Leaders: Building Authority in Soviet Politics* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1982); *The Soviet Union Since Stalin*, ed. by Stephen F. Cohen, Alexander Rabinowitch and Robert Sharlet (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1980); Michel Tatu, *Power in the Kremlin: From Khrushchev to Kosygin* (New York: Viking, 1969); Fainsod, *Khrushchev's Russia*; Martin McCauley, 'Khrushchev as Leader', in *Khrushchev and Khrushchevism*, ed. by Martin McCauley (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan, 1987), pp. 9-29; William J. Thompson, *Khrushchev: A Political Life* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan, 1995).

⁷⁷ Tatu, *Power in the Kremlin*, p. 165.

⁷⁸ Breslauer, *Khrushchev and Brezhnev*, p. 4, p. 15.

state's actions as ideologically motivated; second, I view the Khrushchev era not as the cynical aftermath of revolution, but rather as its continuation and extension.

A second approach derives from literary or cultural studies. Because of the leading role that the literary intelligentsia is understood to have played in the process of destalinisation, there is an accepted wisdom: 'the story of Thaw politics is about culture. The story of Thaw culture is about politics.'⁷⁹ Gratified to see the emergence of dissent and disbelief during the cold war, western commentators identified the intelligentsia as potential defectors.⁸⁰ The artistic rebel was often a flamboyant and attractive figure; and through the act of writing or painting, he made his thoughts and ideas at least partially accessible to the foreign observer.⁸¹ In her study of 'permitted dissent', Dina Spechler argues that the post-Stalin political leaders were disorganised and confused, allowing members of the cultural and scientific intelligentsia to feel safe expressing their desire for change, and optimistic that their wishes would be fulfilled. Spechler wants to accept the Russian intelligentsia's own self-definition as 'the conscience of society, its defender against corrupt, immoral, or incompetent political authority'.⁸² The first forays into the archives have continued these trends: Stephen Bittner chooses the Arbat district – an area renowned for its strong cultural

⁷⁹ Nancy Condee, 'Cultural Codes of the Thaw', in *Nikita Khrushchev*, ed. by Taubman, Khrushchev, and Gleason, pp. 160-176 (p. 160).

⁸⁰ Anna Krylova has argued that in the west, Cold War discourse constructed the Stalinist man 'as the opposite of the liberal self'. Repulsed by this spectre of the 'mechanically' believing man, Western commentators desperately searched for signs that the liberal self could be reborn, hoping for a shift to 'liberated disbelief and active resistance'. Interpretations of the Khrushchev era in particular have been dominated by a perceived struggle between ardent believers in the communist catechism on the one hand, and a clutch of nascent dissenters on the other. Anna Krylova, 'The Tenacious Liberal Subject in Soviet Studies', *Kritika*, 1 (2000), 119-146. See also Jochen Hellbeck, 'Speaking Out: Languages of Affirmation and Dissent in Stalinist Russia', *Kritika*, 1 (2000), 71-96.

⁸¹ Priscilla Johnson, *Khrushchev and the Arts: The Politics of Soviet Culture, 1962-4* (Cambridge, Mass: The M.I.T. Press, 1965).

⁸² Dina Spechler, *Permitted Dissent in the USSR: Novyi Mir and the Soviet Regime* (New York: Praeger, 1982).

heritage – for his micro-study of Moscow during the Khrushchev era; and Karl Loewenstein explores the party's literary organisations as a site for the emergence of a nascent civil society.⁸³ While it is indisputable that film, literature and art were exciting spheres of innovation during the 'thaw', it seems that the views espoused by outspoken intellectuals have often been implicitly ascribed to Soviet population *per se*. It is perhaps time to explore the beliefs and ideas of Soviet society more broadly, and to question whether the popular response to the post-1953 changes echoed the optimism of the intelligentsia.

Although there has been little Western study of a broader social or cultural history, several Russian historians have begun to address these issues. For over a decade, historians such as Elena Zubkova, Iu. A. Aksiutin, A. V. Pyzhikov, and N. A. Barsukov, amongst others, have engaged in archival research with the aim of charting aspects of 'public opinion' during the Khrushchev era.⁸⁴ Whilst Zubkova's works are the most renowned in the west, others have also offered insight into public reaction to key events, especially the Secret Speech. Their research suggests that the reactions of the broader Soviet public differed from those of the intelligentsia, and in the place of euphoric *détente* they find distress and confusion. Perhaps the most original contribution is Vladimir Kozlov's study of mass unrest under Khrushchev and

⁸³ Stephen V. Bittner, 'Exploring Reform: De-Stalinization in Moscow's Arbat District, 1953-68' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Chicago, 2000); Karl Edward Loewenstein, *The Thaw: Writers and the Public Sphere in the Soviet Union, 1951-57* (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Duke University, 1999). A similar interest in cultural politics is also evident in post-Soviet Russian approaches. See for example M. P. Zvezina, 'Glottok svobody: Sovetskaiia intelligentsia posle smerti Stalina', in *Intelligentsia v usloviakh obshchestvennoy nestabil'nosti*, ed. by A. I. Studenikin (Moscow: Editorial URSS, 1996), pp. 200-214.

⁸⁴ Zubkova, *Russia After the War*; Iu. V. Aksiutin and A. V. Pyzhikov, *Poststalinskoe obshchestvo: Problema liderstva i transformatsiia vlasti* (Moscow: Nauchnaia kniga, 1999); Iurii Aksiutin, 'Popular Responses to Khrushchev', in *Nikita Khrushchev*, ed. by Taubman, Khrushchev, and Gleason, pp. 177-208; N. A. Barsukov, 'Oborotnaia storona "ottepeli"', *Kentavr: Istoricheskopolitologicheskii zhurnal*, 1993.4, 129-143.

Brezhnev.⁸⁵ Firmly rejecting post-Soviet nostalgia for a way of life that is now remembered as ordered and peaceful, Kozlov's examination of violent social and ethnic conflict depicts the post-Stalin period as an era of struggle in which ordinary Soviet citizens could become – albeit briefly – the principal actors. All these works take us out of the realm of Kremlinology and cultural politics, and Kozlov's work is particularly useful in drawing our attention to the violently disruptive nature of some sectors of Soviet society in the 1950s and early 1960s.

To finish this overview of the historiography, four works deserve greater attention as they examine the return of four different kinds of Gulag returnee: the high-ranking purge victim, the 'ordinary' victim of political repression, the homosexual, and the nationalist insurgent. (It is noteworthy that while a great majority of those returning from the camps had received criminal rather than political sentences, the criminal returnee has largely been written out of the story.)

Describing post-Stalinist Russia, Anna Akhmatova wrote of 'two Russias eyeball to eyeball – those who were imprisoned and those who put them there'. Her metaphor has often been evoked in the American and European literature. As one of the first to study both the impact of the 'great return' and to consider popular reactions to destalinisation, Stephen Cohen uses Akhmatova's image to depict a divided society, imagining pro-Stalinist conservatives pitted against anti-Stalinist reformers.⁸⁶ In

⁸⁵ Vladimir A. Kozlov, *Mass Uprisings in the USSR. Protest and Rebellion in the Post-Stalin Years*, trans. by Elaine McClarnand MacKinnon (Armonk, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 2002).

⁸⁶ Stephen F. Cohen, 'The Stalin Question since Stalin', in *An End to Silence: Uncensored Opinion in the Soviet Union*, ed. by Stephen F. Cohen (New York: W. W. Norton, 1982), pp. 22-50; Stephen F. Cohen, 'The Friends and Foes of Change: Reformism and Conservatism in the Soviet Union', in *The Soviet Union Since Stalin*, ed. by Stephen F. Cohen, Alexander Rabinowitch, Robert Sharlet (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1980), pp. 11-31.

Cohen's view, Gulag returnees formed a powerful community with access to the top leadership, and this 'formidable force' had some success in influencing repentant Stalinists like Khrushchev and Anastas Mikoian. With those bearing responsibility for the terror equally determined and no less powerful, the result was the great political stand-off of the 1950s, in which Cohen finds a powerful contest between reformism and conservatism. This dissertation challenges the notion that there were clearly defined, pre-destined, and universal political identities such as 'reformer' and 'conservative'. Instead I explore how the search to find a legitimising political culture post-1953 produced new myths and revised established beliefs, resulting in a more complex political process than a tussle between two pre-existing political stances.

More recently, Nanci Adler also adopted Anna Akhmatova's 'two Russias' image as the departure for her study of the 'the Gulag survivor'. Focusing on those without access to power, Adler shows the difficulties camp returnees experienced in returning to a normal life, concluding that 'returnees' efforts at reassimilation and readaptation were by and large impeded by individuals, officials, and even family members, to say nothing of their own psychological scars.'⁸⁷ Highlighting the moral failings of the Soviet regime, she concentrates on the limited and grudging nature of reform. Although she acknowledges that some purge victims did not lose their faith in the communist creed, this is clearly counter-intuitive to Adler. She writes that 'from a common-sense point of view, it would seem that a political system should deliver on its political promises and if it does not, faith in that system should be abandoned.'⁸⁸ Adler leaves the question unresolved, seemingly baffled that Gulag survivors could

⁸⁷ Nanci Adler, *The Gulag Survivor: Beyond the Soviet System* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction, 2002), p. 263.

⁸⁸ Adler, *The Gulag Survivor*, p. 213.

emerge from their ordeal still believers. My intention is to explore this very issue, to examine how those once labelled the enemy came to interpret their suffering, and how the party accepted, and even promoted, their tales of heroic martyrdom.

In his study of homosexual desire in the Soviet Union, Dan Healey asserts that within the camps there was a culture of sexual humiliation and rape, and that the Gulag was a site 'for mutual sexual cruelty'. According to Healey, the large-scale returns from the camps in the 1950s contributed to late Soviet perceptions of same-sex desire. Fears were widespread 'that returnees from the brutality of camp life could carry "mental infection" to society, spreading the "perversions" of Gulag existence'. As a result, police activity against men identified as homosexual, and the numbers of men sent to prison for sodomy, increased.⁸⁹ The sad fate of the homosexual returnee exemplifies the problematic nature of repudiating the Gulag during the 1950s, as fears of contamination and perceptions of the Gulag as a source of degeneration escalated.

In an unpublished paper, Amir Weiner explores the return of amnestied prisoners to Western Ukraine.⁹⁰ The state of affairs on this Western frontier was unique for a number of reasons; first, because the contested territory had only recently been conquered; second, because of its proximity to the turbulent events in Hungary and Poland in 1956; third, because a majority of those who returned were nationalist leaders and Uniate priests – anti-Soviet radicals, untempered by their stint in the Gulag. Weiner emphasises the important differences between centre and periphery,

⁸⁹ Dan Healey, *Homosexual Desire in Revolutionary Russia: The Regulation of Sexual and Gender Dissent* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 2001), pp. 229–46.

⁹⁰ Amir Weiner, 'The Empires Pay a Visit: Reform, Revolt, and Rebirth in The Soviet Western Frontier, 1956–57' (unpublished paper presented at Maryland Workshop on New Approaches to Russian and Soviet History, May 3–4, 2002).

and suggests that the nationalist returnees were both more politically hostile and violent than returnees elsewhere. Questioning why the party risked such a dangerous course of action, Weiner argues that the new leadership placed greater confidence in the political worth of local cadres. With growing faith in the indigenous party organisations, Moscow decided to trust them with the task of controlling and reabsorbing the Gulag's heretics.

The work of Weiner and Healey point in different ways to issues that are important to this thesis. While Weiner highlights the state's confidence in its own capacity to deal with former enemies, and in its power to correct and convert, Healey draws attention to popular anxiety about the effect of Gulag culture, expressed in fears of contagion and pollution. Rather than using Akhmatova's metaphor of 'two Russias' to find a nation divided by resentment for the suffering experienced or guilt over crimes perpetrated, I see a nation divided in other ways. Drawing on the oppositions that had been disseminated by Stalinist culture, I find different sets of binary oppositions important in the Khrushchev era, including the conflict between purity and contamination, respectability and criminality, 'culturedness' and vulgarity.

Summary

Three strands are explored in this dissertation. First, I look at the projects of the state, exploring developments in official ideology. Rather than studying the intricacies of political decision-making, I examine ideology in its didactic form – in newspaper articles or official publications. I suggest that in the 1950s, party leaders seemed intent on creating a revolutionary community that was no longer so dependent upon

its imagined 'other'. Second, I turn to those who had been imagined and labelled as the enemies of Soviet society. As both criminal and political outcasts were granted reprieve, how did they seek to construct an identity as Soviet citizens? Third, I try to understand something of the broader responses to the new direction in state policy and to the homecoming of former enemies. Interpreting citizens' reading of official writings and the production of their own texts, I ask if they accepted the erosion of Manichean beliefs. Were they convinced that they need no longer fear the enemy? And how did they respond to the revised status of those previously banished to the other world of the Gulag under the label of 'enemy'?

Chapter I examines the dramatic year of 1953, described by one young Soviet worker as 'the most painful year'.⁹¹ The rehabilitation of the Kremlin Doctors, the March amnesty, and Beria's arrest represent the three key events in Soviet political life in the months following Stalin's death. I examine both their rendering in the official press and the public's reading of such material. In the wake of the great leader's demise, newspaper readers continued to interpret confusing and disturbing events as evidence of enemy activity, and in particular voiced concern about Gulag returnees as a dangerous and disruptive 'other' that should remain excluded from society.

The focus of Chapter II turns to those who had been excised from the collective body. My first point is that the Gulag created its own subculture, language, and ethos, even if all Gulag veterans were not fully acculturated by this other world. Secondly, I suggest that even those who might espouse rebellious positions also became engaged in practices of the self, as the system frequently required them to explain and justify

their lives in the form of a petition. Drawing on myths from revolutionary culture or adapting socialist realist forms, both political and criminal returnees sought to construct their own Soviet selves. In the process, they inadvertently pointed to the heterogeneity of Soviet culture and provided the authorities with new ways of making sense of the Stalinist past.

The Secret Speech is the subject of Chapter III. Seeking to eliminate the confusion of 1953, Khrushchev revised Stalin's version of the revolutionary timeline to explain to the Soviet public why they should no longer fear the enemy. In the process of creating a new legitimising myth, he drew on aspects of former enemies' own narratives, and even appropriated their accounts of revolutionary martyrdom to fortify the party's own story. I use letters-to-the-editor and transcripts of party meetings to explore how the rank and file of the party and the wider public then responded. In a 'performative' culture populated by heroes and enemies, where a conflict between good and evil explained historical change, the introduction of greater neutrality into political culture was alien. Consequently the bewilderment of 1953 was not resolved.

Chapter IV examines the new initiatives taken to create a harmonious and ordered society without the isolation or excision of harmful elements. A propaganda campaign for improved *byt* was launched, and new communal practices, such as comrades' courts and volunteer brigades, were elaborated. By such means the party hoped to inculcate a heightened sense of legality and morality in its citizens which would enable to them to aid in the healing of offenders and transgressors *within* society. As the Soviet public received these new texts on *byt*, however, they read them as citizens

⁹¹ RGASPI f. 82, op. 2. d. 1449, l. 122.

imbued in Stalinist culture. In effect, they reworked the new commitment to morality and respectability proclaimed in Khrushchevist rhetoric from a perspective where notions of contamination, degeneration, and infection were still prominent.

Chapter V finds a resolution to some of these strains and tensions. Radical utopianism gripped the country in 1961, and even the horrors of the Stalinist purges were used to create a new narrative of eschatological advance: the dark days of the terror became another hurdle on the perilous road towards communist paradise. However, there was also a return to the practices of isolation and excision. Reflecting the popular distrust of 'correction' and 'redemption', party ideology and policy now symbolically cast out those whose antisocial behaviour was regarded as an impediment to the building of a pure and harmonious communist society.

Chapter I

1953: 'The Most Painful Year'

The autocracy collapsed upon the death of the
autocrat.

– Robert Tucker, *The Soviet Political Mind* ¹

Suddenly the library was in commotion. The librarians sped from one reading room to the next like whirlwinds: 'Turn in your books! Turn in your books at once! The library's closed!' [...] I ran outside. From the top steps of the Lenin Library, I could see people running. Good Lord! Not two, not three, not five, but an entire street of people running as one man. [...] 'They're letting people in to see Stalin. In the Hall of Columns! They've announced the body's on display!'²

Although a dissenting member of society by 1953, Andrei Siniavskii was nonetheless caught up in the frenzied chase to view Stalin's body. In his memoirs he recounts in detail how he was absorbed into the thronging masses filling the Moscow streets, losing his individuality and autonomy for the few hours that followed. As Brooks writes, describing the hysterical days of national mourning that followed Stalin's

¹ Robert C. Tucker, *The Soviet Political Mind: Studies in Post-Stalin Change* (New York: Praeger, 1963), p. 162.

² Abram Tertz (Andrei Siniavskii), *Goodnight!* (New York: Viking, 1989), p. 249.

death in early March 1953, 'Stalin's final triumph was the enactment of his own funeral'.³

In his account of the 'performative' culture that evolved under Stalin, Brooks rightly identifies the first few days of March as the final 'drama' in this story, a last Stalinist performance which drew on 'the metaphors of past decades, including the path, family, school and construction, to bind the nation to him once more'.⁴ The country's new leaders drafted in all the media resources, with photographers, writers and journalists producing images, poems, and articles for radio and newspaper. Exploiting the public space of the capital city, they transformed the funeral into a mass rally with Muscovites thronging the streets, following events on Red Square through the loudspeakers.⁵ The Hall of Columns at the House of Trade Unions, where Stalin's body lay in state, was transformed into a site for collective displays of grief, reproduced in grainy newspaper images for all those citizens far from Moscow. Over and over again, the press beseeched the nation to remain unified and called for especial vigilance against the nation's enemies.⁶

Citizens grieved in a variety of ways. In addition to the funeral rallies taking place on the streets and in the workplace, many also played out the drama through the act of letter-writing, and newspaper editors and Stalin's former colleagues were inundated

³ Brooks, *Thank You*, p. 233.

⁴ Brooks, *Thank You*, p. 237.

⁵ On the day of Stalin's funeral many participants were crushed in the Moscow crowds. In March 1956, Khrushchev would tell the Polish United Workers' Party that 109 people had lost their lives. See Brooks, *Thank You*, p. 234.

⁶ On 7 March 1953, *Pravda* carried a front page headline 'The Greatest Unity And Cohesion'; on 8 March, 'Let Us Unite Tighter Still Around The Communist Party!'; on 11 March, 'Let The Ranks of the Communist Party Unite Tighter Still!', while the second page bore the headline 'Steel Unity', the third 'Indestructible Cohesion', and so on.

with letters of condolence.⁷ Even as these writers sat alone at home, they presented themselves as participants in a national event. A Leningrad student described how they shared the experience through the radio broadcasts, writing 'it was not possible for us all to be there at this hour in Moscow on Red Square, but in thought, with our hearts, we were all there at the Mausoleum'.⁸ The wireless set, constantly switched on, directed performances of grief within every home, so that even when transposed from public places to the private, mourning became a national experience. One housewife described how a group sat together around the radio, sleepless for five days.⁹ Another woman wrote to Molotov, saying 'There aren't any words to express my warm feeling towards you! I cried so much listening to your speech on the radio and I cry now writing this letter.'¹⁰ Radio broadcasts on the one side and condolence letters on the other constituted a dialogue between state and society, and, in the few days of national mourning, became a channel for intense emotion. Many letter-writers expressed their own sense of inadequacy, claiming to have no words to express their grief – yet they too participated in a kind of national graphomania. Referring to the heavy silence that had descended upon the country, they launched into prolix and often poetic articulations of their woe.

Official and individual formulations achieved remarkable harmony. Model letters published in the press, and unpublished letters, now preserved in the archives, are strikingly similar, both in terms of the emotions expressed and the language used. The

⁷ In his memoirs, D. T. Shepilov, then editor of *Pravda*, recalled 'a flood of telegrams, letters and articles' from people who wanted to publish testimonials to Stalin. See D. T. Shepilov, 'Vospominanii', *Voprosy istorii*, 1998.3, 3-24 (p. 16). Molotov's archive at RGASPI (f. 82, op. 2) preserves 253 condolence letters, substantially more than would be kept relating to any other individual topic.

⁸ RGASPI f. 82, op. 2, d. 1441, l. 23.

⁹ RGASPI f. 82, op. 2, d. 1466, l. 32.

¹⁰ RGASPI f. 82, op. 2, d. 1466, l. 36.

media constantly referred to Stalin as the nation's father and depicted children offering flowers to Stalin, and citizens responded with appropriate lamentations of filial loss.¹¹ One student wrote that she cried more over Stalin's death than when her own father died in 1941.¹² Another young woman told Molotov that she was raised in an orphanage and that she was personally grateful to Stalin for her upbringing.¹³ Other familiar tropes of Soviet culture found confident expression in these unpublished letters. A certain Bitiukov wrote from Sverdlovsk that he, along with his whole of the city, had sworn to build communism in gratitude to Stalin for having brought them to socialism and victory over the Germans.¹⁴ Another composed poetry, promising that 'we won't turn from the correct path'.¹⁵ The struggle against enemies took a prominent place. While *Pravda* editorials reminded readers how Stalin taught them to be vigilant of their enemies, readers in turn promised to remain strong, to 'sharpen their teeth', and to be ever more ferocious with enemies.¹⁶ Despite their sad tone, the letters suggested that the death of Stalin might serve to re-affirm the common values and shared language of Soviet society.

In the first days after Stalin's death, letter-writing was used primarily as a means to participate in this Stalinist performance. Calling for its amplification and perpetuation, many offered their own ideas for new rituals and symbols: Moscow to be renamed after the dead leader; a new military order to be created in his name; every adult

¹¹ See particularly 'Proshai, Otets!', *Pravda*, 8 March 1953, p. 4, an article by the author Mikhail Sholokhov which begins 'Farewell, father! How suddenly and terribly we have been orphaned!'.

¹² RGASPI f. 82, op. 2, d. 1441, l. 24.

¹³ RGASPI f. 82, op. 2, d. 1443, ll. 49-50.

¹⁴ RGASPI f. 82, op. 2, d. 1441, l. 108.

¹⁵ RGASPI f. 82, op. 2, d. 1443, l. 62.

¹⁶ 'Velichaishaia splochnost' i edinstvo', *Pravda*, 7 March 1953, p.1. RGASPI f. 82, op. 2. 1466. l. 23.

citizen to give an oath of loyalty to the motherland.¹⁷ Death, they seemed to claim, should prove no impediment to Stalin's capacity to unify the nation.

For some, of course, Stalin's death promised sought-after change. Despite his involvement with the crowd of mourners, Siniavskii's memoirs also tell of a private and less dutiful response to the news of Stalin's death. Relating how a friend had called at his apartment, led him away from the neighbours and down to the basement, he wrote: 'I double-locked the door. We stood facing each other, our eyes radiant. We embraced silently.'¹⁸ Less restrained forms of dissent could be dangerous. The Procuracy archives contain a number of appeals from those sentenced for the slanderous comments they made in the days following Stalin's death. The incidents often happened in trains or at railway stations, and most of the accused would later deny any anti-Soviet sentiment, blaming intoxication. Somewhere between Michurinsk and Smolensk, Mikhail Prokopov allegedly made slanderous comments against the country's leaders, although he would later claim to only remember boarding the train, bickering with the conductor, and falling asleep – to be woken at the next station by policemen, who took him to a cell.¹⁹ On the same day at Manzovka station in the Far East, Nikifor Popov drank, whistled, and then began to curse Stalin.²⁰ Ivan Skuratov was accused of a similar drunken transgression, though he was later highly aggrieved that anyone could sentence him for a political crime, when he

¹⁷ RGASPI f. 82, op. 2. d. 1470. Many of the suggestions are identical to those made in 1949 to mark Stalin's seventieth birthday, suggesting the desire for continuity with the public rituals of Stalinism. (Of particular note and more original is the letter from one 'Old Bolshevik' in Groznii who asked to dedicate his brochure 'My Method Of Deep Breathing' to Stalin.)

¹⁸ Tertz (Siniavskii), *Goodnight!*, p. 238.

¹⁹ GARF f. 8131, op. 31, d. 59688, ll. 2-10.

²⁰ GARF f. 8131, op. 31, d. 68217, ll. 9-12.

was so clearly an alcoholic!²¹ As they sought to be re-classified as hooligans, not traitors, the petitioners portrayed themselves as hardworking Soviet citizens, temporarily estranged from society and themselves by the dislocating act of travel – and the effects of alcohol. While dissenting attitudes towards Stalin's life and death certainly existed in March 1953, their expression was possible only in the privacy of a locked basement or in the surreal world of the drunken train journey.

Initially few voiced any sort of criticism of the dead leader.²² Over the coming months, however, such harmony would disappear and the triumphant trumpeting of national solidarity in March proved premature. As the media clumsily groped for an effective public culture 'after Stalin', citizens increasingly came to question and debate the meaning of the new terms and ideas they found in the press. In both their letters and the snatches of public chatter reported to the Soviet authorities, people articulated diverse worldviews. Bringing their own core beliefs to the act of reading, their interpretations of the new official rhetoric were heterogenous. Their responses reveal the plurality of beliefs held within Soviet culture and which, as the media faltered, came to the surface.

If, until, 1953 the figure of Stalin had functioned as the source of absolute knowledge and truth, a divinity who need obey no rules exterior to him, Soviet culture was now robbed of its 'prophetic authority'. Seeking a new mandate, party leaders turned to the

²¹ GARF f. 8131, op. 31, d. 68212, ll. 5-6. On the same day, travelling between Moscow and Yaroslavl, Sergei Telenkov, a patternmaker at the Scientific Research Institute of the Electrical Industry Ministry, drunkenly called Stalin a Georgian swine (GARF f. 8131, op. 31, d. 59515, ll. 5-6). A few weeks later Aleksandr Minakov would be found guilty of bad-mouthing Stalin, while drunk in a station buffet (GARF f. 8131, op. 31, d. 43260, l. 6).

²² There was a handful of exceptions to this. One communist from the city of Gor'kii informed Molotov that the great masses were expecting significant change, hoping for a relaxation of the international

notion of the 'law'. Rather than invoking Stalin's infallibility, the press now invoked *zakonnost'*, a term which translates as either 'legality' or 'lawfulness'.²³ Used frequently in party rhetoric and legal debates in the early 1930s, the term *zakonnost'* had largely disappeared from official discourse with the purges.²⁴ The concept was now used to legitimise three important political events: the acquittal of the Kremlin doctors; the arrest of Lavrentii Beria, leading politician and head of the MVD; and the introduction of amnesty and criminal justice reform.

The doctors' acquittal already signalled the changing status of the category 'enemy'. While in January a vicious campaign against several Jewish doctors accused of poisoning their eminent patients had encouraged citizens to see potential foes everywhere, the press now halted its calls for vigilance. Even those now accused of terrible miscarriages of justice were not condemned as enemies in the same way. This was an important psychological shift for it allowed the possibility that people might commit error. Such a change was accompanied by the elaboration of a new kind of language and the rabid invective of the Stalinist era subsided. As we shall see, Beria's arrest proved more ambiguous in some respects, but it too promoted the concept of 'socialist legality' over the arbitrary unmasking of the enemy. The campaign thus marked a fundamental ontological shift. By undermining the spectacle of 'unmasking' and publicly reviling enemies, it broke with the Manichean beliefs that had conditioned public culture for so long, and marked an end to the Stalinist

situation and improvements in their living standards. He even lamented the use of terror within the Soviet system, and called for an end to anti-semitic policies. RGASPI f. 82, op. 2, d. 1450, l. 103.

²³ Although 'legality' is the usual translation, and more elegant in English, 'lawfulness' perhaps gives a better sense of the Russian, as it best conveys the sense of acting in accordance with the 'law'.

²⁴ This earlier, non-official move for 'socialist' or 'revolutionary' legality was short-lived. Its leading light, A. Ia. Vyshinskii, was to become the public face of the show trials and the legal profession co-

performance where all political actors could be divided absolutely into the ‘good’ and the ‘evil’.

The campaign also impacted on the way the state imagined the social body more broadly. With the status of the enemy revised, the party now challenged the need to uphold the powerful segregation between respectable society and those considered unfit to belong, embodied in the ‘large zone’/‘small zone’ division. Society was now sufficiently ‘developed’ to allow a majority of prisoners home, and in the future, it was promised, more moderate measures would be taken to deal with offenders. The state’s new-found promotion of ‘error’ over enmity, of correction over condemnation, paved the way for new practices in criminal justice.

In this chapter, my aim is to study the dialogue between state and society in 1953, focusing on the public response to these changes through the reading of internal memoranda, letters-to-the-editor, and letters to political leaders. First, I find readers expressing their distress as the certainties of Stalinist public culture crumbled. The heterogeneity of opinion held within Soviet culture now became tangible as citizens tried to make the new rhetoric fit with their beliefs. Many responded fearfully to such reform and, paradoxically, some understood the claim that the enemy threat had been over-played to in fact be the sly double-crossing of hidden foes. In a second area of change related to the introduction of new penal practices, we again find real fear of the enemy, as citizens fought to defend their own ‘culturedness’ and society’s purity against the returning outcasts.

The Doctors' Plot Reversed

On 13 January 1953, *Pravda* announced that enemies had been uncovered at the very core of Soviet power. A group of Kremlin doctors bearing Jewish surnames were accused of murdering Andrei Zhdanov and Aleksandr Shcherbakov and of hatching further plots against Soviet leaders. This was the culmination of the post-war anti-semitic campaigns. Although it did not openly admit to attacking Jews, the late Stalinist press had frequently made allusions to 'bourgeois mentality' and 'bourgeois nationalism', or simply showered hostile abuse upon those bearing Jewish names. On this occasion *Pravda* did both, referring in passing to Solomon Mikhoels as 'the well-known bourgeois Jewish nationalist', and in a spectacular performance of Stalinist invective, identifying the doctors as every kind of enemy conceivable, from spy and traitor, to monster and loathsome vermin.²⁵

Just under three months later, on Saturday 4 April 1953, a decree ordered their release and rehabilitation. On the same day, Nikolai Mikhailov, first secretary of the Moscow *gorkom*, sent a special report to Khrushchev on reactions to the reading of the decree in a Moscow factory. It suggested that workers had failed to react appropriately. In keeping with the etiquette of Soviet report-making, Mikhailov first gave examples of the 'correct' responses, citing a worker who expressed gratitude that the party always told them the truth, 'however bitter that truth might be'.²⁶ Mikhailov was soon obliged, however, to turn his attention to the voices of dissent. After the

²⁵ 'Podlye shpiony i ubiitsy pod maskoi professorov-vrachei', *Pravda*, 13 January 1953, p. 1. Mikhoels, a leader of the Jewish Antifascist Committee and director of the Moscow Jewish Theatre, became one of the most prominent victims of post-war anti-semitism when he was assassinated in January 1948.

announcement was read aloud in one factory, workers broke out in noisy protest, posing such questions as ‘Who should we believe?’, ‘Why write that they confessed, and then that they didn’t?’, ‘Who’s guilty then?’. They also shouted ‘They’ll poison again’ and ‘We don’t understand anything’. The report had to be read aloud three times before the workers would be silenced.²⁷

By Monday morning, *Pravda* had published a long front-page editorial, intended to offer answers to the questions workers had posed. The headline ‘Soviet socialist legality is inviolable’ promoted the concept of *zakonnost*’ as the key to understanding the event, although the main thrust of the article in fact highlighted the very fragile nature of Soviet legality.²⁸ The reader discovered how great carelessness and political blindness had allowed MVD deputy M. D. Riumin – a hidden ‘enemy of the people’ and ‘despicable adventurer’ – to fabricate the case. Repudiating anti-semitism in April 1953, the party now accused Riumin and his accomplices of inciting ‘national hostility’. To readers accustomed to reading the Stalinist press, this clearly signalled that anti-semitism was now officially repudiated. Foregrounding ideas of Soviet legality, however, the editorial showed a reluctance to use the media’s normally bellicose rhetoric – even with regard to Riumin. Whilst in January the doctors had been branded with every possible term of abuse, Riumin was rarely designated by anything stronger than the relatively mild ‘despicable adventurer’. In place of the hysterical evocation of enemies, the term ‘*zakonnost*’ was taken up. Those guilty of political blindness were not vilified as enemies, but reprimanded for failing to guard ‘*zakonnost*’. The article had significant implications: firstly, it suggested that that the

²⁶ RGANI f. 5, op. 30, d. 19, l. 10.

²⁷ RGANI f. 5, op. 30, d. 19, ll. 14–15.

²⁸ ‘Sovetskaia sotsialisticheskaia zakonnost’ neprikosnovenna’, *Pravda*, 6 April 1953, p.1.

government was now committed to ensuring legal due process; secondly, it repudiated anti-semitism; thirdly, it introduced into the Soviet press a new and more restrained approach to correcting error.

How far did the article serve its purpose? Did it successfully calm the rather insubordinate mood described by Mikhailov on 4 April? His subsequent reports suggest not. He informed the Central Committee that on 8 and 9 April 1953, *Pravda* had received 52 letters, only 14 of which approved the doctors' release.²⁹ Moreover, most of the letters voicing support for the doctors came from Jews – a group with vested interest.³⁰ Of the letters addressed to Molotov, a majority expressed their concerns over the new course the party was taking.

One anonymous letter addressed to Molotov revealed the deep anxiety provoked by the official admission of error. Displaying a remarkable insouciance for those who died as a result of these errors, he was incredulous that the authorities had opted for such an unprecedented admission of guilt. He wrote that 'it would have been quite sufficient to say to them: "Your guilt turns out to be less than it seemed until now, so go home, work quietly and about what happened – keep silent."'³¹ His distress stemmed not from the admission of injustice, but from the disruption to the established public performance, where all was joyful, and where mistakes were

²⁹ RGANI f. 5, op. 30, d. 5, ll. 23-26.

³⁰ The conventions of Soviet report-making dictated that examples of model letters should appear in the opening pages. Here the letters Mikhailov garnered as evidence of support came exclusively from Jews – people who stood to benefit concretely. In one letter a Jewish communist expressed his satisfaction at the new direction in official policy, while in a second a mother of two Jewish sons articulated her relief that discrimination would finish. It is perhaps telling that in the 14 letters commending the release, Mikhailov seems to have found examples of support only from Jewish correspondents.

³¹ RGASPI f. 82, op. 2., d. 1466, l. 45.

hushed. His letter suggests that the *Pravda* editorial of 6 April, far from resolving the questions that arose in response to the doctors' release, instead sparked new ones.

In the days that followed, readers frequently expressed their frustration with the *illisibilité* of the *Pravda* article and they wrote of the increasing difficulty they experienced in making a correct reading of the press. Three main arguments can be found in their responses: first, concern that the malpractice uncovered within the MVD was more widespread and entrenched than acknowledged; second, anger against the repudiation of anti-semitism; third, generalised fear of increased enemy action and anxiety over the state's reduced vigilance.

Some readers did greet the doctors' release with alacrity, hoping for an end to legal and judicial malpractice. One anonymous letter arrived from the city of Orel and, after briefly praising the amnesty, the author discussed the Doctor's Plot at length, demanding still greater reform within the Ministry of the Interior (MVD). Readily believing in the innocence of the doctors, the author was moved to express his suspicions about the methods used by the MVD more generally.³² He detailed the kind of corrupt practices that existed, describing an incident that had occurred at a factory in the city of Shchigry in Kursk province in which forty people were interrogated 'to find "spies" amongst them'. Placing the word 'spy' in inverted commas, the writer not only criticised the way innocent people were interrogated, but also challenged the language used to vilify them. The writer called for radical change, claiming it was necessary 'to re-examine the present day practices within the investigatory organs, especially at the lower levels'. In many respects, this anonymous

citizen found the reforms mooted by the socialist legality campaign inadequate, but he articulated demands for change with the very concepts that official rhetoric now sought to eradicate as part of an arbitrary and ritualistic culture. Deploring the miscarriages of justice, he wrote: 'It seems that within the investigatory organs there are either wreckers or that excessive zeal and well-meant actions have gone awry. This weakens the rear [tyl] and the state's power, and the people suffers.' Although he considered the problems facing reformers more grave than officially acknowledged in the post-Stalin press, his explanations drew on beliefs nurtured during the Stalinist era. He saw the Soviet state engaged in permanent battle, its weaknesses quite conceivably the result of an enemy presence within.

When a similar letter arrived from a certain Popov in May 1953, Molotov's assistants considered it sufficiently important to type him a summary. Popov's letter brazenly refuted official assurances that *zakonnost'* had been re-established, even suggesting that any opposition to Soviet power was born of the regime's own arbitrariness and injustice. His letter was overtly critical of many aspects of Soviet policy:

Soviet legality has not yet been restored. Where do the enemies within the party and power come from? It is very often as a result of our own bungling. Is it really so difficult to recruit enemies from amongst the Volga Germans when they have been banished to Kazakhstan and are still in exile there, from amongst the Crimean Tatars, Ingushes, Mingrelians and Ukrainian and Baltic nationalists?³³

Again Popov's letter reveals the profound hold the 'enemy' had in the Soviet imagination, even for those who championed change. Although he blamed the authorities for creating antipathy, he did not question the fact that such enemies had indeed been recruited. Later in the letter he wrote:

³² RGASPI f. 82, op. 2. d. 1466, ll. 40-41.

How could it happen that a 'new Ezhovshchina' repeated what happened fifteen years ago, when along with tens of guilty people, hundreds of innocents were arrested and exiled, about whom until now their relatives still have no news whatsoever. This was evidence of the scandalous arbitrariness on the part of various despicable adventurers, working - and who knows, maybe some remain? - in the former MGB-MVD.³⁴

Three years before Khrushchev's revelations at the XX Party Congress, Popov was already beginning to debate the purges, yet even as he wished to condemn the practices of purging and exiling, he spoke as a man imbued in the Stalinist worldview. Popov believed that enemies existed and he considered them the prime cause of all the nation's troubles.

Such appeals for great reform were in fact rare. An overwhelming number of letter-writers were in overt opposition to the socialist legality campaign, primarily because they read it as a break with the anti-semitic beliefs Stalinist culture had condoned. Disturbed by the party's new stance on Jewish nationality, several letter-writers took the opportunity to demand the banishment of Jews. One anonymous letter lamented that Moscow has been flooded with Jews, calling for them to be deported to the 'national state of Birobidzhan', where Lazar Kaganovich would be their leader.³⁵ A letter from the town of Gor'kii, signed 'a group of comrades', enlisted the Soviet constitution in order to denounce Jews. Nowhere, they wrote, did Jews have as many rights as in the USSR, allowing them to become the most wealthy of all the nationalities, take all the best flats, and seize the best jobs in medicine, trade, theatre,

³³ RGASPI f. 82, op. 2, d. 1456, l. 2.

³⁴ RGASPI f. 82, op. 2, d. 1456, l. 2.

³⁵ Addressing Beria, Bulganin, and Molotov collectively, the authors of this letter identified themselves as a group of Russian workers (RGASPI f. 82, op. 2, d. 1446, ll. 42-43). Although it had been said that Stalin was himself planning Jewish deportation to Birobidzhan, these assertions are based on hearsay, perhaps paying greater testimony to the popular mood, than to official policy.

music and so on - 'anywhere where physical work is not necessary'.³⁶ In both examples, the authors considered their views not as anti-semitic, but well within the bounds of Soviet thinking on nationalities.

Others drew on more traditional myths about Jews, and one anonymous letter addressed to Molotov is illustrative of the way Soviet language sometimes broke down to reveal violent and unmodified anti-semitism.³⁷ Although the awkward handwriting and spelling suggest a lack of confidence in writing, the author nevertheless manipulated official categories of class in order to portray himself as an ideal Soviet citizen, claiming to stand for 'all the workers', and elsewhere 'we military workers and peasants'.³⁸ In the opening paragraph, however, he justified his hatred of Jews by dint of a personal anecdote which was articulated in a language long pre-dating 'Bolshevik speak'. 'I was at the front and I was ill', he explained, 'and there was a yid selling vodka. I asked him to sell me some for money, but he said he'd only sell it for my gold watch and rings.'³⁹ The war-time setting suggests his experiences at the front gave such beliefs new meaning, but his formulation draws on age-old stereotypes.⁴⁰ The itinerant Jew selling vodka evoked a banished Russian past, where Jewish peddlers moved from village to village selling vodka; the man's

³⁶ RGASPI f. 82, op. 2., d. 1466, l. 55.

³⁷ RGASPI f. 82, op. 2., d. 1466, l. 38-39.

³⁸ Although some of his formulations are unusual – for example, he addresses his readers as 'Comrades Military Workers and *Intelligenty*' – he has clearly absorbed a worldview where class is an absolutely crucial aspect in defining identity. This is an example of how a Soviet citizen might share the regime's official language, but use it in an idiosyncratic manner.

³⁹ RGASPI f. 82, op. 2., d. 1466, l. 38. The writer uses the offensive Russian word *zhid*, equivalent to the English word 'yid'.

⁴⁰ Weiner argues that the post-war rise in anti-semitism cannot be explained only in terms of the regime's quest for purity, or the deep roots of Russian anti-semitism, and he strongly emphasises the experience of the war. Weiner examines both the impact of German anti-semitic propaganda in the areas of occupation, and also the rise in Jewish nationalism as the survivors sought to remember and commemorate their dead. Weiner, *Making Sense of War*, pp. 191-235. See also Gennadi Kostyrchenko, *Out of the Red Shadows: Anti-Semitism in Stalin's Russia* (New York: Prometheus Books, 1995).

insistence on payment in jewels played into a centuries-old image of Jewish money-lenders, greedy for gold.⁴¹ To make his argument even more compelling, the letter-writer continued: 'And there's still the fact that they bathe their wives in milk and then the milk gets sold in the shops!'⁴² Fearing contamination, he projected onto Jewish culture dangerous and secretive rituals and reviled Jews as unhygienic outsiders. In another letter, a young worker called Anna Karob claimed they love 'bloody feasts'.⁴³ Echoing the Beilis case of 1913,⁴⁴ when a Jewish worker stood accused of the ritual murder of a child, these letters suggest the survival of a popular culture, which had, in some respects, resisted Soviet refashioning.⁴⁵

According to the *Pravda* article of 6 April, no anti-semitic formulations, whether adopting Stalinist conventions or reverting to pre-revolutionaries notions of the Jew, were now acceptable. Letter-writers put pen to paper because they feared the party was making a grave mistake. In fact they suspected that this 'leniency' towards Jews was part of a much wider breakdown in vigilance, and they feared a rise in enemy activity. Anna Karob's visceral anger towards Jews was linked to her broader concern that the nation's new leaders were not on their guard. She went on to describe how

⁴¹ Herbert A. Strauss writes that images of the Jew originated 'in the complex of differences that historically had set Jews apart from their agricultural neighbours in education (literacy!), occupational structures, economic values, and mentalities'. The Jewish community appeared in Russia with the absorption of Poland into the Russian Empire, and they inhabited a clearly defined geographical area, employed predominantly in commerce. See Herbert A. Strauss, 'Czarist Russia and the Soviet Union – Enduring Mentalities', in *Hostages of Modernization: Studies on Modern Anti-semitism 1870-1933/39*, ed. by Herbert A. Strauss, 3 vols (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1993), II, pp. 1177-1187 (p. 1179).

⁴² RGASPI f. 82, op. 2, d. 1466, l. 38.

⁴³ RGASPI f. 82, op. 2, d. 1449, l. 122.

⁴⁴ See Hans Rogger, 'The Beilis Case: Anti-Semitism and Politics in the Reign of Nicholas II', *Slavic Review*, 25 (1966), 615-629.

⁴⁵ William Korey has examined the interviews of Soviet refugees conducted by the Harvard project and finds that pre-revolutionary stereotypes were still entrenched. He suggests that about 10 per cent were ready to voice a violent anti-semitism that might, for example, depict Jews as ritual blood-drinkers. Comparing these stereotypes with materials collected for the Pahlen Commission in the 1880s, he identifies remarkable similarities. William Korey, 'Continuities in Popular Perceptions of Jews in the Soviet Union', *Hostages of Modernization*, II, pp. 1383-1405.

disorienting young people found the rehabilitation of those who had been so combatively labelled enemies only three months previously:

First of all I'd like to tell you a little about myself, and then I will ask you to give me an answer. I am a simple worker on the railways and I live in a dormitory. Lots of signalmen live here, all young boys and girls coming from different districts. And I'll tell you honestly, no one reads any newspapers, books or magazines, though sometimes if there's something alarming on the radio, then you might see the young people gathering round the wireless. And so when it was announced that the doctor-professors were released and that the government had fully acquitted them of the slander the people had cast on them, no one could get their head round it. Seeing as I read a lot of literature, the girls in our group – 12 of them – came to me for explanations. But I couldn't help them, when I myself had lost my head.⁴⁶

According to Anna, young workers may appear impervious to the world of the Soviet media, but they were nonetheless aware of major change and disturbed by the breakdown in public culture. Calling 1953 the 'most painful year of all we have lived through', she went to show that public confidence, already shaken by Stalin's death, was made doubly unstable by the spectre of enemies at large:

We lost our great friend and father, our beloved and dear Iosif Vissarionovich, and the tears on our face were still not dry, the trepidation in people's hearts over our children's future had not calmed, when the stunning news spread, and the terrible thought pierced people's brains – that enemies of the people are free.⁴⁷

Anna Karob was primarily opposed to the doctors' release because she believed in the existence of enemies. Experiencing significant distress, she attributed her anxiety both to Stalin's death and to the inexplicable exoneration of those who had been so unequivocally cast as enemies. When she claimed that 'enemies of the people are free' she did not only fear the doctors themselves, now able to engage in their dastardly actions once more, but also seemed to suspect that the new reform course indicated a more general rise in enemy activity.

The violent reactions provoked by the doctors' rehabilitation was not only the result of anti-semitic traditions, but pointed to wider fears about a breakdown in vigilance amongst the nation's leaders. Significantly, those who *accepted* the doctors' innocence also sought enemies to blame for the confusing and unsatisfactory situation. Without waiting for the usual prompt from the Soviet press, they launched into their own vitriolic attacks. One anonymous letter affirmed:

We, Soviet citizens of Dnepropetrovsk, like all respectable [*chestnye*] people of the Soviet Union and the whole world, heap shame on the former workers of the MGB, raging bourgeois nationalist-antisemites, base betrayers of the multi-national Soviet state, bandits and pogrom-organisers of the same breed as Petliura, Ezhov, Hitler, who committed cruel violence and torture, in contravention of the laws of the Soviet state, against leading figures in Soviet medicine - the professors Vovse, Vinogradov, Egorov, Feld'man, Etingar, B. B. Kogana, M. B. Kogana.⁴⁶

The paragraph begins with an assertion of collective identity, that has several foundations – Soviet citizenship, locality, respectability. However, the collective is primarily bonded by the act of shaming others and branding its enemies. As has been noted, the press treatment of Riumin and his colleagues in the MVD had been restrained, and *Pravda's* criticisms seem insipid next to the string of abuse offered by this letter. Its writers refused to follow the linguistic shift towards moderation, ignoring the press's attempt to base criticism on rational argument, not hysteria. Using all the devices the press had taught them over the past quarter century, the letter-writers unstintingly piled on layers of abusive terms: ones specific to the case – anti-semite and pogrom-organisers (*pogromshchiki*); more malleable labels such as betrayers, bourgeois nationalists, and bandits; a selection of adjectives to add an extra

⁴⁶ RGASPI f. 82, op. 2. d. 1449, l. 121.

⁴⁷ RGASPI f. 82, op. 2. d. 1449, l. 122.

⁴⁸ RGANI f. 5, op. 30, d. 5, l. 30.

dash of condemnation – raging, base, cruel; and reference to some of the big names from the Soviet rollcall of enemies – Simon Petliura, Nikolai Ezhov and Adolf Hitler. They constructed compound terms such as ‘bandits-antisemites-terrorists’ (*bandity-antisemity-terroristy*) which, by chaining together insults, became triply virulent.⁴⁹ The Soviet citizen was, it seems, extremely fluent in this language of hate, and found great difficulty censuring opponents without imagining them as enemies.

Some writers were obedient to the press, calling Riumin merely an ‘adventurist’ (*avantiurist*), but many were more innovative, labelling those who fabricated the cases ‘foul vermin’ (*gnusnaia gadina*) and ‘sadists from the NKVD’ (*sadisty iz NKVD*).⁵⁰ In January, the doctors were vile enemies and Lidiia Timashchuk the national heroine whose vigilance had unmasked these ‘base spies’; with the rehabilitation of the doctors, Timashchuk was now frequently imagined as an enemy. Although some of the more vehemently anti-semitic letters expressed resentment that a Russian woman had been condemned, many other citizens were ready to adopt her as the new foe. Chugunov from Moscow wrote to *Pravda*, saying ‘That base creature, that diploma’d Northerner with Hitlerite ideology, under the guise of a Soviet patriot, committed the most disgusting anti-Soviet acts.’⁵¹ Timashchuk was thus dehumanised and de-Sovietised, linked to Hitler and labelled an outsider.

Despite the press’s apparent attempt to find a more neutral voice, Soviet readers did not immediately modify their way of viewing the world, and a Manichean mentality

⁴⁹ In the rhetoric of the Moscow show-trials Dermot Fitzsimons identifies compound terms as one of the rhetorical tools used to produce the required mood of excited hatred. Fitzsimons, ‘Shoot the Mad Dogs!’.

⁵⁰ RGANI f. 5, op. 30, d. 5, ll. 28-30.

⁵¹ RGANI f. 5, op. 30, d. 5, l. 8.

proved powerful. Not only unleashing a wave of anti-semitic texts, the rehabilitation of the Kremlin doctors spurred some citizens to defend a Soviet identity that relied on its collective vigilance in the fight against enemies.

An Enemy Unmasked

A second political outrage hit the headlines in July, when the tentative triumvirate of Beria, Molotov, and Georgii Malenkov collapsed. Beria was not only removed from the political arena, forfeiting his position as Minister of Internal Affairs, but also became the subject of a criminal investigation which was to end in December with public announcement of the death sentence. In his memoirs, Khrushchev depicts Beria's ousting as a legitimate move against a nascent dictator whose undisguised manoeuvring for power had begun immediately upon Stalin's death.⁵² The ongoing disturbances in Berlin and the unsuccessful role that Beria had played in German affairs offered more grounds to make the case for Beria's arrest.⁵³ In making Beria's arrest public, the authorities chose, however, to evoke the concept of 'socialist legality' once again.

In *Pravda's* rendition, Beria's offences were many and varied: he had attempted a personal seizure of power; he had tried to promote the Ministry of Internal Affairs over the Soviet government; he had even delayed decisions on rural matters in order to increase social strife in the country; crucially, he had disobeyed orders to strengthen legality (*zakonnost'*) and to correct certain cases of lawlessness and

⁵² N. S. Khrushchev, *Khrushchev Remembers*, trans. by Strobe Talbott (London: Andre Deutsch, 1971), pp. 321-341.

arbitrariness within the Ministry. Generous proof was thus presented to demonstrate that Beria had turned away from communism to become a 'bourgeois', a hireling of foreign imperialist powers. These accusations were all made public on the front page of *Pravda* on 10 July 1953.⁵⁴

Beria was the highest ranking political figure to be eliminated since the show trials of the 1930s, and it hit the front pages without any sort of warning or build-up. The tenor of the first article suggests apprehension about introducing this piece of disturbing news. The headline was encouraging – 'The indestructible unity of the party, government and soviet people' – and roughly the first third of the article was spent reassuring the reader of the great industrial and economic strength of the Soviet Union. This uncertainty also manifested itself in the language of the text. To some extent, *Pravda* returned to the hostile and adversarial rhetoric that had been employed under Stalin to condemn enemies and designated Beria a 'bourgeois turncoat', 'a traitor', 'a renegade' and, of course, an 'enemy of the people'. There was tentative reference to a 'cult of personality', as a damaging phenomenon in Soviet life.⁵⁵ As the term the 'cult of personality' (*kul't lichnosti*) had been frequently encountered in the press during the Stalinist purges as a 'battle cry' to incite popular anger, it could be interpreted as the start of a more intense campaign against enemies.⁵⁶ However, the article did not abandon the new terms of 1953, and the more extreme aspects of the

⁵³ Amy Knight, *Beria: Stalin's First Lieutenant* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993) p. 191.

⁵⁴ 'Nesokrushimoe edinenie partii, pravitelstva, sovetskogo naroda', *Pravda*, 10 July 1953, p. 1.

⁵⁵ *Pravda* declared: 'In its party propaganda the Moscow party organisation has deviated from Marxist-Leninist conception of the cult of personality over the last few years. Instead of explaining correctly the role of the party in the building of communism in the country, party propaganda often got caught up in the cult of personality. This meant the role of the party and its leading centre was overlooked and the creative activity of the party rank and file and the broad working masses was diminished.' See 'Kommunisty moskvy i moskovskoi oblasti edinodushno odobriaiut postanovlenie plenuma TsK KPSS', *Pravda*, 10 July 1953, p. 2. Again note that Beria's name does not appear in the headline.

Stalinist lexicon *were* avoided. In official rhetoric, for example, neither zoological labels nor metaphors of disease were used to condemn Beria. Instead the articles repeatedly alluded to the importance of *zakonnost'*, and Beria's disregard for legality in his work at the MVD. Readers were told that Beria had opposed the changes of recent months:

Required to fulfil the directives of the Central Committee of the party and the Soviet government on strengthening Soviet legality and eradicating lawlessness and arbitrariness [*bezzakoniia i proizvol*], Beria deliberately hampered the completion of these directives, and in several cases sought to distort them.⁵⁷

The lexicon of the socialist legality campaign was now expanded, with the notions of lawlessness and arbitrariness (*bezzakoniia i proizvol*) frequently used to condemn Beria's political style. Thus on the one hand the public was encouraged to imagine Beria as an enemy, on the other readers were told to abhor the arbitrary practices of vilifying enemies encouraged under Beria. The ambiguity gave rise to a variety of passionate, and often confused, reactions.

Beria's direct victims were some of the first to respond. A letter signed by A. E. Nikiforov from the town of Syktyvkar in the Komi ASSR opened with a dramatic self-revelation: 'I am not at all Nikiforov and I am no Georgian. I am Nikolai Vasilievich Kokoev, Ossetian, and for twenty years I have been hiding from the enemy of the people Beria under the surname Nikoforov.'⁵⁸ Having fiercely hidden his real identity and endured separation from his family for two decades, he considered the revelations about Beria sufficient proof of reform to risk confession. Nikiforov/Kokoev was one of the first purge victims to write this sort of plea for

⁵⁶ Kharkhordin, *The Collective and the Individual in Russia*, p. 194.

⁵⁷ 'Nesokrushimoe edinenie partii, pravitelstva, sovetskogo naroda', *Pravda*, 10 July 1953, p. 1.

rehabilitation, believing that the attack on Beria and the Ministry of the Interior documented the Soviet leadership's intention to right some of the wrongs of the past. He was not the only purge victim to take such a step, and *Pravda*'s editors reported to the Central Committee that they had several letters, coming in particular from the Caucasus, where Beria worked in the early part of his career.⁵⁹ Others chose to write directly to the Central Committee, believing their story worthy of the leaders' attention. On the whole, however, many seemed to have hesitated in 1953. It was not until 1954 when rehabilitation was firmly under way that large numbers of purge victims despatched their petitions to the Central Committee and other official bodies.⁶⁰

In addition to such personal missives, however, several letters engaged with the question of the enemy broadly construed. Many seem to have greeted Beria's arrest with feelings of relief, welcoming an apparent return to the rituals of condemnation and castigation that had flourished under Stalin. The instabilities of the preceding months could, it seemed, be explained by the unmasking of Beria, an enemy of almost unprecedented stature. Official reports frequently commented on the rapid proliferation of 'absurd' rumours.⁶¹ Between 10 July and 20 August, *Pravda* received 300 letters from readers about Beria's arrest, and many of the extracts they included in their summary reveal a delight in constructing and condemning a new enemy.⁶²

⁵⁸ RGANI f. 5, op. 30, d. 4, l. 133.

⁵⁹ RGANI f. 5, op. 30, d. 4.

⁶⁰ In April 1954, A. A. Kalmykova wrote to Mikoian, dramatically opening her letter with the moment when she first heard about the arrest of Beria on the radio, and claiming to be one of Beria's victims (RGANI f. 5, op. 30, d. 78, ll. 66-69). Her letter is examined as part of a more detailed discussion in Chapter II.

⁶¹ RGANI f. 5, op. 30, d. 4, l. 24, l. 129.

A collective identity founded on a shared urge to revile the 'enemy other' could once more be articulated. It was a community accessible to any literate Soviet person.

Excluded physically from society by illness, P. Loginov saw the collective denunciation of Beria as a chance to join the imagined community, writing:

I am seriously ill, I am bed-ridden, but along with the people, I can still express my indignation over the baseness of the bandit Beria. As a Soviet person, I have the right to voice my anger and have the right to ask the Supreme Court of the USSR to punish this despicable enemy severely, to punish him in accordance with all the laws of Soviet legality. The bandit Beria deserves to be hung like a dog.⁶³

Again a reader's interpretation of the press reveals the powerful nature of Stalinist culture. Although there is a nod to the new insistence on Soviet legality, Loginov labelled Beria a 'bandit', 'dog', and 'enemy', drawing on the rhetoric of the 1930s press in a manner far more extreme than the *Pravda* editorial. Z. A. Shomko displayed equal readiness to engage in violent rhetoric against Beria. Although her letter began conventionally, with images of joyous throngs of Soviet parents unanimously declaring, 'We won't allow anyone to destroy our happiness and the happiness of our children,' she soon transformed these Soviet parents into a blood-thirsty lynch-mob: 'I join my voice to the millions of voices of mothers and fathers who say: "Death to the base enemy of the people Beria. Death to enemies of humanity! Death!"'⁶⁴ The core Soviet values of family and happiness are defended against potential assailants in the most bellicose terms. Confined to composing letters, Shomko not only imagined a community of like-minded parents, but also dreamed of joining a crowd viciously shouting slogans of death.

⁶² RGANI f. 5, op. 30, d. 4, ll. 129-141.

⁶³ RGANI f. 5, op. 30, d. 4, l. 140.

⁶⁴ RGANI f. 5, op. 30, d. 4, l. 140.

Some members of the public seem to have regretted the decline of the 'performative' aspects of Soviet culture, and wished for public rituals to be elaborated. Claiming that Beria was a beast (*zver'*), M. E. Nud'ko in Kazakhstan hoped that the collective hatred of the enemy might be embodied in colourful rituals. Nud'ko wrote: 'He should be put in a cage like a jackal and taken round the cities, the large communist building-sites, factories, mines and collective farms, showing workers his brutal, beast-like [*ozverelyi*] physiognomy.'⁶⁵ Perhaps remembering the revolutionary celebrations of the late 1920s when large mannequins representing various enemies were paraded along the streets in cages, Nud'ko now imagined a pageant enlivened by the performance of a living enemy.⁶⁶

Beria's arrest offered a possible key to understanding the changes occurring in the country. In the identification of a new enemy, people found a scapegoat for the misfortunes that had befallen them over the past four months. By placing Beria's fall as the culmination of a narrative that began so traumatically in early March with the first announcement of Stalin's illness, citizens seemed to hope that this marked a return to more familiar territory. Beria was imagined as an enemy of great stature who could be made to bear responsibility for all the recent ills, from Stalin's death in March to the release of the Kremlin doctors and the amnesty decree.

In a world where evil plots were so frequently uncovered, it is perhaps unsurprising that Stalin's death came to be viewed as suspicious. In a report on workers' reactions to the newspaper readings held in July 1953, Mikhailov listed some of the questions

⁶⁵ RGANI f. 5, op. 30, d. 4, l. 141.

⁶⁶ Bonnell, *Iconography*, p. 210.

posed. One person asked if Beria's 'sabotage' had caused Stalin's sudden death, while at the Voroshilov *kolkhoz* another wanted to know if Beria and his assistants had 'shortened the life of Iosif Vissarionovich Stalin'.⁶⁷ Seemingly reluctant to believe Stalin human and mortal, they preferred to create a more dramatic narrative, in which Beria starred as the evil plotter and where death confirmed Stalin's status as hero and martyr.

At such meetings, many also brought up the Doctors' Plot: What role had Beria played in it? Was it true that the doctors had now escaped abroad? Was the release of the doctors correct, or had perhaps Beria contrived the release in order to slander colleagues in the MVD?⁶⁸ Behind these questions lay the glimmer of hope that the release of the doctors, the repudiation of anti-semitism, and the apparent softening of Stalinist culture, were all part of a loathsome plot concocted by Beria. Beria was also blamed for the amnesty.⁶⁹ One *kolkhoz* member asked: Was the decree on amnesty linked to Beria's sabotage?⁷⁰ Unwelcome to many citizens, the amnesty could be rebuffed as part and parcel of Beria's criminal activity. The unmasking of an enemy was a familiar act in Stalinist culture and was interpreted as a signal that the recent reforms – such as the amnesty and the doctors' release – might be reversed and repudiated.

⁶⁷ RGANI f. 5, op. 30, d. 4, ll. 12-13.

⁶⁸ RGANI f. 5, op. 30, d. 3, l. 74, and d. 4, l. 12. These questions seemed to have appeared in all forums, from the Moscow *gorkom* and *obkom* meetings to workers' conversations. A letter to *Pravda* from B. G. Bulatov, a Muscovite, posed similar questions. See RGANI f. 5, op. 30, d. 4, l. 138.

⁶⁹ This is noted by Mikhailov. RGANI f. 5, op. 30, d. 4, l. 24.

⁷⁰ RGANI f. 5, op. 30, d. 4, l. 13.

One colourful rumour wove a complex narrative, offering an inventive explanation for the difficult events of past months.⁷¹ The rumour, attributed to a Moscow party member named Zen'kovich, began with Stalin's death:

At the time of Stalin's illness there were permanently guards from the MVD in the room where he was lying. After I. V. Stalin's death all the guards took an aeroplane to go on holiday to a resort. During the flight the aeroplane exploded and all the guards died. This was done on Beria's instructions in order to cover up his traces.

Zen'kovich went on to claim that Beria had been the main person responsible for the release of the doctors, asserting they had now been re-arrested. He finished his tale by claiming that 'the amnesty recently decreed was on the whole for Vlasovites and criminals, and Beria wanted to turn them into an army and seize power.' Widely resented as a threat to law and order, Beria's disgrace allowed the amnesty to be discredited as part of a planned coup d'état.

From the report we know almost nothing of Zen'kovich, but the fact that his story was incorporated into a report on the high level of rumours in the capital seems to imply that his version of events was not considered out of keeping with the general mood. Failing to offer a convincing narrative of the events of 1953, the socialist legality campaign left citizens to construct their own explanations. As they did so, they displayed their fear of the changes occurring, and in their exaggerated vilification of Beria, their continued psychological dependency on the concept of the 'enemy'.

Anxiety over the effect of Beria's arrest even infiltrated the higher levels of the party. Mikhailov also reported on the party elite's debates at the Moscow *gorkom* and

⁷¹ RGANI f. 5, op. 30, d. 4, l. 25.

obkom plenum on 9 July 1953.⁷² Although Mikhailov asserted the meeting's unanimous condemnation of Beria, the report hinted at some misgivings, even amongst the highest ranking delegates. While S. N. Kruglov, Beria's replacement at the MVD, admitted that mistakes within the Ministry had allowed careerists and enemies of the people to defame honourable party and state workers, he also considered the meeting an opportune moment to voice his concerns about reform. He reminded the audience that 'the police force has a duty to ensure exemplary public order, to intercept any attacks from criminal elements, to uncover any crimes rapidly and punish the criminals.'⁷³ Beria's arrest, accompanied by criticisms of the MVD and promotion of *zakonnost'* already led some within the party elite to worry that more liberal policies was resulting in social unrest. Speaking three months after the huge amnesty of March 1953, his comments testified to widespread concerns about rising threats to Soviet law and order.

Mass Exodus from the Gulag

Let us now return to the amnesty. Decreed on 27 March 1953 by the Supreme Soviet and announced on *Pravda*'s front page the following day, it had far-reaching effect over the course of 1953 and beyond.⁷⁴ Prisoners who had displayed a conscientious attitude towards work and whose crimes did not represent 'a significant danger for the state' were to be offered amnesty. The first clause released those with sentences under five years, while later clauses amnestied pregnant women, mothers with children

⁷² RGANI f. 5, op. 30, d. 3, ll. 69-74. This meeting took place on the basis of the government decree, prior to the newspaper article. This meant that on 10 July 1953 *Pravda* could also publish a report on Moscow party reactions.

⁷³ RGANI f. 5, op. 30, d. 3, l. 73

⁷⁴ 'Ukaz Preziduma Verkhovnogo Soveta SSSR ob Amnistii', *Pravda*, 28 March 1953, p 1.

under ten, children under 18, men over 55, women over 50, those convicted for certain offences at work or during military service, and those sentenced by laws now under review. The decree also recognised the need to reconsider the length of sentences given to those convicted for some domestic crimes and work-related offences and indicated that criminal justice reform was planned.

Just three weeks after Stalin's death, readers were told that this mass release of prisoners was possible as a result of the 'consolidation' of the Soviet state and society (*uprochneniia obshchestvennogo i gosudarstvennogo stroia*), the improved welfare (*blagosostoianie*) and raised cultural levels of the population, the growth in citizens' political awareness, and their honourable attitude towards their public duty. The wording of this decree suggested that the amnesty should be regarded as a step in the nation's progress towards a harmonious and self-regulating society. Having reached a new stage in its evolutionary development, Soviet society could now be trusted to deal with former offenders and deviants within society.

The Soviet authorities tried to persuade the public that the amnesty was an appropriate decision. Writing in *Pravda* three weeks after the decree, K. P. Gorshenin, Minister of Justice, asked readers to interpret the amnesty in the light of 'socialist legality' (*sotsialisticheskaia zakonnost'*), and lauded the decision to allow prisoners to return to their homes and work as evidence of socialist humanity (*sotsialisticheskaia gummanost'*).⁷⁵ The article promised further reform of the criminal justice system, alongside more assurances that 'socialist legality' would be strictly observed, and citizens' rights defended.

Despite such efforts, the amnesty proved immensely problematic. Not only the magnitude of the release, but its composition caused concern for in practice the amnesty did not only include petty criminals. In reducing sentences by half for *all* prisoners, the fourth clause could be applied to those convicted for even the most serious crimes and serving a twenty-five year sentence. In fact, over a third of those released by the amnesty had sentences of over five years and were amnestied in accordance with the fourth clause.⁷⁶ Although the seventh clause sought to filter out the most dangerous, by excluding those sentenced for large-scale theft of socialist property, banditry and premeditated murder, it was apparently not effective.⁷⁷ Recidivists who had already served many years inside the camps, establishing networks and associations and imbibing the subculture of the criminal underworld, were now heading back from the Gulag *en masse*.

Travelling back across Russia, drinking to freedom and to excess, some shouted anti-Soviet slogans, others brandished knives or committed petty crimes, more again simply hung out around train stations, swearing and smoking. With trains already sites of undesirable behaviour, the railway network was now overrun by a swarm of angry

⁷⁵ 'Sotsialisticheskaia zakonnost' na strazhe interesov naroda', *Pravda*, 17 April 1953, p. 2.

⁷⁶ GARF f. 7523, op. 89, d. 4408, l. 79.

⁷⁷ Roy and Zhores Medvedev note the release of more dangerous criminals. They offer one explanation: 'contrary to the provisions of the amnesty proclamation, Beria ordered that several prison camps simply be closed down, thus releasing thousands of common criminals and recidivists, regardless of length of sentence. When they appeared in Moscow and other cities, crime rates soared along with public indignation. Thus Beria had his explanation: the preservation of order demanded the retention of large contingents of MVD forces in the cities, troops answerable to him'. This explanation was promoted particularly by Kaganovich at the July plenum. Though possible, this claim is unsupported by available evidence, and perhaps reflects more than anything the party's desire to disgrace Beria. In fact, many recidivists might have been released in accordance with the decree's prescriptions; clause seven only listed some categories of serious crime (large-scale theft of socialist property, banditry and premeditated murder), and only excluded them from amnesty if this was the sentence currently being served. See Roy, A. Medvedev and Zhores A. Medvedev, *Khrushchev: The Years in Power* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 9.

ex-convicts, many with no clear destination.⁷⁸ The police did their best to regulate the situation, and on 4 April 1953, an internal circular from the Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs, I. A. Serov, announced several measures to ‘safeguard social order and to prevent displays of criminal behaviour in places with a concentration of prisoners released by amnesty’.⁷⁹ Local authorities were instructed to ensure there were sufficient boats and trains running so that those released did not gather at stations; police were to have a strong presence on trains carrying large numbers of ex-prisoners and at stations where prisoners transferred, so as to prevent them assembling in the parks and markets nearby; station buffets were to refrain from selling them spirits. Returnees were clearly regarded as a major threat to law and order. Moreover, the measures enacted revealed clear concern that the returnees would not go ‘home’ but remain a migrant, menacing mass; police were told to set up surveillance of them using the services of railways officers, local housing committees, caretakers and other trusted people. Special attention was likewise devoted to places where there was a concentration of returnees, including ‘apartment-traps, dens, doss-houses’, ‘attics, cellars, empty places, stairwells and entrances in large building’, and warehouses, dacha areas, and the ‘outskirts of towns and villages’. In the authorities’ imagination, the returnees occupied liminal areas – on the edges of towns, up in the attics, down below ground.

The authorities were clearly ill-prepared to accommodate the returnees once they arrived in the cities. Failing to take pre-emptive measures, and spurred into action only by the escalating crisis, the Council of Ministers issued a resolution in late May

⁷⁸ Vladimir Kozlov describes how in the spring of 1953 soldiers drank to excess during a train journey, resulting in fights with civilians, thefts and even attacks on the local police. He does not present this as an atypical incident. Kozlov, *Mass Uprisings*, pp. 47-50.

1953 on 'the elimination of inadequacies in the resettlement of citizens freed by the amnesty'. The problems continued throughout the summer, however, with more new arrivals every week. Between 20 and 30 of June 1953, for example, 45,400 ex-convicts arrived in towns and cities. Reporting to Khrushchev on the progress made in June and July, the official responsible for the returnees, Pronin, claimed that the situation was improving, but acknowledged that the deadline of 15 June set by the decree had not been met. Towards the end of the report, he suggested that even with the new and more vigorous measures adopted, a core body of unemployed ex-zeks remained.⁸⁰ On 1 July 1953 he explained that sixteen per cent of arrivals had still not been resettled. This was due partly to the sheer volume of arrivals every week, partly to local sluggishness, for he admitted that some local administrations and party organisations were still working unsatisfactorily. In his view, however, this residual core of unsettled zeks also presented a more grave and long-term problem. According to the reports Pronin received from the regions, most of those who were not yet in employment, had in fact been offered work and refused it; mostly people aged between 25 and 30, the report described them as 'fallen people [*upustivshiesia liudi*], thief-recidivists, not wishing to work honestly, but once more to take the path of robbery, theft and other crimes.'⁸¹ Both on the railways lines spanning the Soviet Union and in the cities, the amnesty threatened to produce a mobile underclass that refused to be shackled by either the Soviet registration system or by work.

One result was a rise in crime over the summer of 1953. If in the first quarter of 1953, 2280 cases of violent assault were investigated, the figure rose to 5081 by the third

⁷⁹ GARF f. 9401, op. 1a. d. 521. l. 14.

⁸⁰ The Russian term 'zek' denotes prisoner, an abbreviated form of the Russian word 'zakliuchennyi'.

⁸¹ RGANI f. 5, op. 30, d. 36, ll. 35-7.

quarter; cases of rape from 1272 in the first quarter to 2181 by the third, murder from 1891 to 3103.⁸² Despite the attempts to reform criminal justice throughout 1953, the perceived rise in crime was such that the Council of Ministers issued an order in late August 'On strengthening the protection of social order and the struggle with criminality', which promoted harsher sentences for violent crimes.⁸³

Politicians' assessments of the rise in crime varied. Kliment Voroshilov, for one, believed that the public outcry was exaggerated. At the Central Committee plenum, called in early July to condemn Beria, he criticised the way the former head of the Ministry of the Interior had implemented the amnesty, but gave a moderate assessment of the rise in crime:

There is much talk, and many letters – both signed and unsigned – have been written about the murders, rapes and so on that are supposedly the result of the amnesty. However, when you make inquiries with the various officials responsible for the regions from where these alarming accounts have come, it appears that in reality nothing of the sort has occurred.⁸⁴

Speaking on the same subject, however, the Leningrad party chief, Vasilii Andrianov took a different tack:

On the subject of the amnesty, I think that provocateurs within the Ministry of the Interior left their dirty mark. Out-and-out cut-throats were let out and the police failed to make even the most basic of preparations. As soon as these people appeared in the city, the knives were out. A very alarming situation developed and without a doubt, the letters sent in to local authorities and to the government and the Central Committee were justified.⁸⁵

Voroshilov and Andrianov's commentaries are highly significant in what they reveal about the relationship between state and society, for – despite their differing

⁸² GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 2386, l. 27.

⁸³ Yoram Gorlizki, 'De-Stalinisation and the Politics of Russian Criminal Justice, 1953-1964' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Oxford, 1992), pp. 93-94.

⁸⁴ RGANI f. 2, op. 1, d. 42, l. 12.

interpretations – both leaders articulated serious concerns for the public reaction to the amnesty, and both identify letters as the prime means to gauge society's mood.

Close reading of four letters written over the course of 1953 suggests that the public resisted and even derided official notions of the amnesty as an act of humanity and legality. Citizens in fact demanded a more hostile attitude towards those who violated the social order, expressing fears that the city was becoming a site of crime and deviant behaviour. Two letters from Moscow, one from Leningrad, and a fourth from the city of Kazan, these texts articulate an escalating urban anxiety.

Throughout the Soviet period, as the state struggled to impose order on the city, the trope of 'hooliganism' – first emerging in 'Russian national discourse' at the turn of the century – embodied the nation's ongoing struggle to bring order and respectability to urban space.⁸⁶ The discourse of hooliganism was one possible way to understand the disruptions to Soviet life in the summer of 1953. In May, a Leningrad mother penned Molotov a very tentative letter.⁸⁷ Asking him repeatedly to forgive her for taking up his time, she felt obliged to ask for his help. In Leningrad, citizens were fearful, the police powerless. Emphasising her suffering as a mother, she evoked the collective anguish of the war:

⁸⁵ RGANI f. 2, op. 1, d. 42, l. 4.

⁸⁶ In her seminal work *Hooliganism*, Joan Neuberger describes how in pre-revolutionary Russia the city had functioned as a symbol of both modernity and – with increasing potency – of degeneration and crime. As industrialisation progressed and urban poverty escalated, the streets became a site where lower-class resentment towards the more wealthy strata of society was played out in the form of hooliganism. Likewise, in the middle-brow press, hooliganism came to stand for a threat to an ordered, urban life. Neuberger argues that the trope of hooliganism became an established part of 'Russian national discourse'. Joan Neuberger, *Hooliganism: Crime, Culture, and Power in St. Petersburg, 1900-1914* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1993).

⁸⁷ RGASPI f. 82, op. 2, d. 1466, l. 72.

Dear Comrade Molotov, you know how hard it is for children to lose a father, and for parents to lose children. This isn't the war after all. But every day, parents mourn their children [...] Dear Molotov, we mothers ask you, beg you, please make the police more vigilant, and keep people safe.

The letter spoke for an imagined community of respectable Soviet citizens, who cherished family values and survived the war, but now felt targeted and threatened by an unnecessary danger. This threat was personified by the figure of the 'hooligan'. By calling for greater police attention, she hinted at her own fear that a lack of vigilance was threatening the community.

Other letter-writers presented returnees through the symbolic figure of the bandit, and were more explicit in their fears of the enemies. In contrast to the rather lachrymose tone of the first, a second letter to Molotov manifested an aggressive opposition to the amnesty and labelled the returnees 'bandits'. The anonymous letter-writer claimed that 'night and day, the returnees, these jailbird-bandits [*vernuyshiesia tiuremshchiki-bandity*] kill and slaughter peaceable citizens, carry out armed break-ins at warehouses, and murder guards and policemen'.⁸⁸

A third letter, from a Moscow tram-conductor called Antonova, employed similar terms, claiming that 'such disgraceful horrors happen in Moscow, without even speaking about the Moscow suburbs, where the bandits reign [*tsarstvo banditov*], especially with their lairs in Nikitovka and Obiralovka, stations on the Gor'kii railway line'.⁸⁹ According to Antonova, the bandits had created their own mini-kingdoms within the confines of Moscow. This emergence of local identities within the urban

⁸⁸ RGASPI f. 82, op. 2, d. 1466, l. 71.

⁸⁹ RGASPI f. 82, op. 2, d. 1440, l. 78.

space – often at odds with the intentions of the authorities – is often a feature of the modern city, but how these pockets of criminality were defined is significant. In her treatment of hooligans in turn-of-the-century Petersburg, Joan Neuberger suggests that the hotbeds of hooliganism had then primarily been poor slum areas.⁹⁰ In 1953, in contrast, the danger-spots were not identified by their poverty, but as points on railway lines – ‘their lairs in Nikitovka and Obiralovka, stations on the Gor’kii railway line’. Whereas the hooligan tended to be a figure emerging from within the urban landscape, the bandit was a man in transit, arriving by train as an outsider and an alien in the city. Although the Russian bandit – or *razboinik* – had been a common character in pre-revolutionary popular literature, and held an ambiguous appeal for readers,⁹¹ the term *bandit* promoted in the 1930s as part of the lexicon of Soviet newspeak was categorically hostile.⁹² Constantly reappearing in the course of 1953, the term *bandit* branded criminal returnees with the same hysterical hatred that the

⁹⁰ Neuberger, *Hooliganism*, pp. 216-278.

⁹¹ Jeffrey Brooks’ work on popular literature of the late imperial period includes a study of the ‘bandit’ hero in *lubok* and newspaper serial fiction, read by both urban and rural readers. Although real-life bandits were violent criminals and regarded with fear, they also stood for the conflict between state and society, and – especially as the Russian people geared up for ‘one of the major rebellions in history’ – they were also admired as personifications of ‘the yearning for a better world and a kind of anarchistic freedom’. Jeffrey Brooks, *When Russia Learned to Read: Literacy and Popular Literature, 1861-1917* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1985), pp. 166-213.

⁹² *Razboinik* is the old Russian word, a derivative of the verb ‘*razbivat*’ meaning to ‘break’ or ‘smash’ and in the literature explored by Brooks, popular writers use only this term. Although the word *bandit* was already an established borrowing in the Russian language, it does not seem to have passed over from elite culture into popular speech. In the Soviet period, however, *bandit* eclipsed *razboinik*, producing a crucial semantic shift. Published in the 1930s, the *Explanatory Dictionary of the Russian Language* gives three meanings to the word *razboinik*: firstly, a violent thief – but this usage is noted to be obsolete; secondly, as a ‘rhetorical’ term – giving the example ‘fascist bandits’ (*fashistskiye razboiniki*); thirdly, in colloquial Russian, as an affectionate term which would be appropriate for a naughty child. Carrying affectionate connotations in familiar speech and yet able to denote fascists in official rhetoric, the semantic value of the word *razboinik* was ambivalent. The entry for *bandit*, in contrast, suggests that the word was becoming more viable. The dictionary offers the following definitions: an ‘armed thief’; a member of an enemy partisan band; a rhetorical term e.g. ‘imperialist bandits’ (*imperialist- bandity*). This final use was marked a *new* use. *Bandit* carried none of the affectionate nuance, which weakened the capacity of *razboinik* to castigate the enemy effectively, and was the ascendant term, acquiring new figurative meanings. As a foreign word, *bandit* could more forcibly present complete opposition, and it became a core term in the aggressive newspeak of the 1930s. See N. M. Shanskii’s *Etimologicheskii slovar’ russkogo iazyka* (Moscow: Izdatel’svo moskovskogo universiteta, 1965); Vladimir Dal’, *Tolkovyi slovar’ zhivogo velikorusskogo iazyka*, (St.

press had previously directed at 'enemies of the people', and branded them as outsiders to the Soviet city.

Letters to Molotov not only labelled returnees from the Gulag *bandity*, but also adopted many of the rhetorical devices developed by the Soviet press to castigate political enemies. The anonymous letter cited above opened:

Dear Viacheslav Mikhailovich!

Your gracious [*milostivyi*] decree of the 24 March of this year about the release of criminal-recidivists, degenerates, the dregs of humanity, has turned into a blood-bath, into carnage, inflicted on the workers of the towns and countryside.⁹³

Like a good Soviet journalist, the writer piled on layer after layer of insult, forming a blanket of animosity to entrap the reader. The composition of compound terms like 'jailbird-bandits' indicated enemies so vile that no single word could do them justice. Later in the letter, he invoked one of the great enemies of Russian cultural memory, rating the horrors Soviet citizens were currently experiencing as greater than those 'the blood-thirsty Ghenghis Khan inflicted on his enemies'.⁹⁴

Meanwhile, tram-driver Antonova proved equally eloquent in her attack on 'bandits':

Indeed this dirty water, these Russian 'gangsters' [*gangstery*] are without conscience [*sovest'*] or honour [*chest'*]. We conquered Germany when she was armed to the teeth, can it really be that our state is without the strength to conquer these parasites [*darmoedov*]?⁹⁵

Her metaphors of 'dirty water' and 'parasites' suggest the returnees were a source of dangerous contagion. By invoking the enemy Germany, she drew on the nation's

Petersburg and Moscow: Tipografia M. O. Vol'fa, 1882); D. N. Ushakov, *Tolkovyi slovar' russkogo iazyka* (Moscow: OGIZ, 1935).

⁹³ RGASPI f. 82, op. 2, d. 1466, l. 71. The anonymous correspondent mistakes the date of the amnesty decree.

⁹⁴ RGASPI f. 82, op. 2, d. 1466, l. 71.

recent trauma to whip her readers into a state of unified hostility. The term 'gangster' was more unusual. A more recent borrowing than either 'bandit' or 'hooligan', the word 'gangster' was still regarded as foreign word, and indicated her desire to reject the returnees outright as a foreign import.⁹⁶ Qualifying the gangsters as 'Russian', however, she acknowledged they were a blight too familiar to be cast out as 'American'. Choosing to label them 'Russian' rather than 'Soviet', she dismissed the returnees as part of the old, uncultured past that the Soviet world had supplanted. Antonova tried to find an effective rhetoric with which to repel returnees and the disruptive behaviour they brought as something completely beyond the boundaries of the respectable realm of Soviet society.

These letters embody an outright refusal to contemplate the readmission of returnees back into Soviet society. While *Pravda* editorials claimed that those released from the camps had shown a conscientious attitude towards work during their time in the Gulag, readers were more doubtful. Challenging the claims made in the press, one correspondent from Kazan asked: 'Why didn't Stalin – who so valued the people's labour – do this? In the month or so since Comrade Stalin's death, have the criminals really become 'conscious' [*soznatel'nye*] citizens?''⁹⁷ Distraught that the people had lost their most heroic defender, the author questioned the notion that a criminal could so easily be brought to consciousness. While the party seemed to be using Stalin's death as a break that allowed them to move forwards to a new stage of revolutionary

⁹⁵ RGASPI f. 82, op. 2, d. 1440, l. 78.

⁹⁶ According to N. M. Shanskii's *Etymological Dictionary of the Russian Language* of 1965, this borrowing came from the USA in the twentieth century. He notes that it appeared for the first time in the Dictionary of Foreign Words in 1942. Only a decade previously therefore, it was still very clearly on the margins of what was accepted as Russian.

⁹⁷ RGASPI f. 82, op. 2, d. 1466, l. 58.

development, where all could be brought to consciousness, this correspondent remained unconvinced.

In a similar vein, another letter-writer listed the horrible crimes committed by the returnees whilst ironically referring to them as ‘the reformed’ (*ispravshiesia*). By placing the term in inverted commas within the context of such anger, he clearly derided it. Antonova was equally distrustful of the word, writing that ‘only the grave corrects the hunchback’ (*gorbatogo ispravit mogila*). She also employed the term *gummanichat* ‘(to be humane)’ – a pejorative derivative of *gummanost* – and told Molotov there has been quite enough of it already. Gorshenin’s promotion of Soviet humanity had clearly failed to convince *Pravda* readers, and the term was either rejected or mocked by angry members of the public.

Antonova ended her letter with some suggestions for how the authorities should deal with criminals. Antonova was much more extreme in her recommendations than the Leningrad mother who requested that ‘hooligans’ be punished in keeping with the law. She wrote:

We ask you to decree a law, which says that a thief who is caught, will have five fingers cut off from his left hand, they should be branded, so that people will know that these are thieves and can beware of them. Merciless and severe measures should be taken.⁹⁸

In her work on punishment in the nineteenth century, Abby Shrader writes that a combination of corporal punishment, physical mutilation and Siberian exile ‘served as a mechanism by which autocrats constructed social boundaries by marking those who

⁹⁸ RGASPI f. 82, op. 2, d. 1440, l. 78.

transgressed the parameters of social behaviour'.⁹⁹ Under Stalin, such boundaries had been maintained and intensified by the extensive development of the Gulag as a place of exile, while corporeal punishment and physical mutilation had diminished – at least in theory. With the division between the two zones now unclear, Antonova seemed to see the return of deliberate and overt physical mutilation as the only way left to retain solid boundaries between respectable society and its deviants.

'From the Courtroom'

Concerns about rising crime were not confined to citizens' letters. The year 1953 saw the Soviet press radically increase the inches of newspaper print dedicated to law-and-order news. On Thursday 18 June, the back page of *Pravda* contained the serial rubric 'From the courtroom'. Under the simple headline, 'Thief-recidivist', the reader learned how the criminal Kotov was tried for pick-pocketing and sent down for six years – his sixth sentence.¹⁰⁰ One week later, *Pravda* reported that the organiser of a gang of armed thieves working in the Moscow suburbs had been sentenced for twenty-five years.¹⁰¹ Local newspapers took the cue, and there was a dramatic rise in the number of 'From the courtroom' (*Iz zala suda*) articles over the coming months.¹⁰² *Leningradskaia pravda* published three 'From the courtroom' articles in late June,¹⁰³ and a further five by the end of the year. *Moskovskaia pravda* and the Vladimir local

⁹⁹ Abby M. Shrader, 'Branding the Exile as 'Other': Corporal Punishment and the Construction of Boundaries in mid-19th Century Russia', in *Russian Modernity: Politics, Knowledge, Practices*, ed. by David L. Hoffman and Yanni Kotsonis (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan, 2000), pp. 19-40 (pp. 21-22).

¹⁰⁰ 'Vor-Retsidivist', *Pravda*, 18 June 1953, p. 4.

¹⁰¹ 'Khuligany-Grabiteli', *Pravda*, 24 June 1953, p. 4.

¹⁰² This section is based on a close study of *Pravda*, *Leningradskaia pravda*, *Moskovskaia pravda* and *Prizyv* (the local newspaper for Vladimir oblast') over the course of 1953 and 1954.

¹⁰³ 'Vory Nakazany', *Leningradskaia pravda*, 23 June 1953, p. 4; 'Grabiteli', *Leningradskaia pravda*, 25 June 1953, p. 4; 'Prestupniki Nakazany', *Leningradskaia pravda*, 28 June 1953, p. 4.

newspaper *Prizyv* were somewhat slower to adapt to the new trend, but over the course of the coming half year they would also report on the bands of criminals making the city streets unsafe. *Moskovskaia pravda* had not contained a single crime report between March and August, but six appeared in the final four months of the year. Similarly, *Prizyv* published four reports from the courtroom between October and December, compared to one article in the first half of the year.

The rubric 'From the courtroom' (*Iz zala suda*) was not in itself a new invention. Not only had it been common in the pre-revolutionary boulevard press, the column had also appeared in the Stalinist press.¹⁰⁴ However, crime reporting before June 1953 was only intermittent, and the crimes described posed little real threat to citizens' safety. In February 1953, for example, an article entitled 'Criminal gang' referred to a racket stealing and selling on watches, but the watches were pilfered from a factory, not snatched from passers-by;¹⁰⁵ a second article reported on the theft of a fire-engine.¹⁰⁶ The 'From the courtroom' column was now radically reworked to become a forum to discuss crime, and even to voice the fears of respectable Soviet citizens. A typical report recounted how on Sundays throughout the summer of 1953, a band of 14 criminals terrorised scores of Leningraders as they spent their well-earned leisure time relaxing on the Karelian peninsula.¹⁰⁷

Crime reporting has a didactic element. In his study of the British press, Steve Chibnall writes that crime news is a means to provide the public with their 'moral

¹⁰⁴ Louise McReynolds, *The News under Russia's Old Regime: The Development of a Mass-Circulation Press* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1991).

¹⁰⁵ 'Shaika prestupnikov', *Moskovskaia pravda*, 7 February 1953, p. 4.

¹⁰⁶ 'Plody beskontrol'nosti i rotozeistva', *Moskovskaia pravda*, 12 February 1953, p. 4.

¹⁰⁷ 'Likvidatsiia shaiki banditov', *Leningradskaja pravda*, 10 November 1954, p. 4.

instruction'. According to Chibnall, 'More often than not, the columns of law-and-order news are peopled by heroes and villains, personifications of good and evil acting roles in a symbolic drama.'¹⁰⁸ In distinct contrast to the overall direction of the socialist legality campaign, the back-page crime reports did indeed offer a symbolic confrontation between good and evil. As such, the articles showed a lack of consistency within the 'official' approach towards criminals. At odds with Gorshenin's public promotion of 'socialist legality' and 'humanity' in April, these smaller articles articulated a more severe approach towards offenders. They thus suggest that the press was not only a channel of communication from the authorities to society, but also vice versa. Many of the concerns articulated by citizens in the letters they composed in the spring of 1953, were now voiced in the press. At this point, Soviet journalists seemed to concur that crime was a real threat, and that criminals were inherently irredeemable, and consequently belonged firmly outside of society.

Mirroring the rhetoric of letters addressed to the government in the spring of 1953, these articles employed the term *bandit*, with the headline 'Bandit punished' repeated many times over the coming months. In September 1953, *Leningradskaiia pravda* reported the case of Vinogradov, released from prison by the amnesty in 1953. Although sentenced to twenty years imprisonment for theft and not banditry, he is called the 'bandit' throughout the text.¹⁰⁹ Similarly in December, L. Reirberg and V.

¹⁰⁸ Steve Chibnall, *Law-and-Order News: An Analysis of Crime Reporting in the British Press* (London: Tavistock, 1977).

¹⁰⁹ 'Bandit nakazan', *Leningradskaiia pravda*, 27 September 1953, p. 4.

Shangin, also beneficiaries of the amnesty, were branded bandits, though they had been sentenced for theft.¹¹⁰

Further reflecting public antipathy and indignation, the articles firmly portrayed offenders as outsiders. Even where the amnesty was not directly mentioned, references to 'return' served to identify the offenders as aliens. One article began, 'Having returned from places of imprisonment several years ago, Kazimir Krukovskii...'; a second mentioned that the criminals 'returned last spring to Moscow'; a third that they arrived in Leningrad in the spring.¹¹¹ The criminals worked in bands, preying on the city, but not a part of it. On 2 October 1953, according to *Moskovskaia pravda*, four criminals met on the platform of the Moscow-Kursk-Donbass rail depot, drank, and then set off for Moscow, with the intention of committing a robbery at Kursk station. Once in Moscow, however, they decided to 'travel' (*puteshestvovat*) around Moscow on the tram – and robbed the conductor.¹¹² Corroborating Antonova – the letter-writing tram driver from Moscow – the article asserted that trams were unsafe places; moreover, by presenting them first on the platform of a provincial station, and then in Moscow as some sort of nefarious tourists visiting the capital, the narrative also supported Antonova in her desire to portray the source of crime as external to urban Soviet society.

The possibility of rehabilitating criminals was also challenged in the short biographies included in the crime reports. Tracing their deviance back to childhood, the journalists

¹¹⁰ 'Grabiteli poimany', *Leningradskaia pravda*, 4 December 1953, p. 4.

¹¹¹ 'Bandity nakazany', *Leningradskaia pravda*, 23 June 1953, p. 4; 'Shaika vorov-retsdivistov', *Pravda*, 4 December 1953, p. 4; 'Grabiteli', *Leningradskaia pravda*, 27 December 1953, p. 4.

¹¹² 'Bandity nakazany', *Moskovskaia pravda*, 2 December 1953, p. 4.

implicitly suggested that they had been born criminals. Of Vinogradov, the reader learned:

His biography is simple. He was born in 1928. He didn't want to study, nor to work like all the others in his generation worked during the war. A healthy young man, he lived off his Mummy and Daddy. He preferred idleness, hooliganism on the streets and in cinemas, and fights to honourable work. At sixteen, Vinogradov was sent to prison for the first time. Since 1944 he has been sentenced six times and to a total of 28 years in corrective labour camps.¹¹³

No excuses were offered, no extenuating family circumstances put forward to explain his crimes. In contrast to the promises of greater humanity and legality made in the press in the spring, these biographies refused to accept the possibility that a criminal might be reformed or 'corrected'. With apparent delight, the articles would gloat over the number of years a criminal had spent within the camp system as if this offered indisputable proof that he could never escape the criminal life. The articles derided the idea that a criminal might return as part of the amnesty to become a valued member of society. After recounting the sad facts of his life, the report on Vinogradov's case shifted from the court scene to an imagined family scene:

The amnesty offered Vinogradov the chance to start a new life – to become an honourable worker.

- Work? No way! – Vinogradov told his mother, when he arrived in Leningrad last summer.

By juxtaposing Vinogradov's scorn with the idea of a 'new life' and redemption through labour, the article undermined the official reading of the amnesty.

Throughout 1953 and 1954, crime reports used a combination of rhetorical strategies to cast criminals as marauders, pillaging and ravaging Soviet society. Disregarding its promises of readmission promoted on the front pages under the umbrella of 'socialist

legality', newspapers articulated an intolerance of Gulag returnees in terms similar to those found in citizens' letters.

Conclusion

During 1953, readers already began to suspect that the socialist legality campaign signalled a major break with the past. When the press referred to the existence of a cult of personality in their accounts of Beria's arrest, some readers believed it might be an allusion to other leading figures. Some rank and file party members began to suspect that the discussion of a personality cult, and the new insistence on collective leadership, did not only implicate Beria. They hesitatingly began to detect a posthumous attack on Stalin. At the local party meeting in Kalinin district of Moscow, they asked: 'What are the mistakes in propaganda about the cult of personality? Which personalities exactly are they talking about, and how concretely did this cult of personality propaganda manifest itself?'¹¹⁴ Another party member was prompted to ask 'Why is it that recent *Pravda* editorials haven't been using quotations and extracts from Stalin's speeches and books?'¹¹⁵ Some perspicacious people thus realised that official veneration of Stalin was waning.

On 5 March 1954 there was scant recognition of the important anniversary. Even though the press published some material on Stalin, many members of the Soviet

¹¹³ 'Bandit nakazan', *Leningradskaia pravda*, 27 September 1953, p. 4

¹¹⁴ RGANI f. 5, op. 30, d. 4, l. 20

¹¹⁵ RGANI f. 5, op. 30, d. 4, l. 20.

public felt that the coverage was far from adequate.¹¹⁶ Letters flooded in from people of all ages, from pensioners, workers' collectives, and groups of schoolchildren and students, all lamenting the 'silence' of the newspapers and radios.¹¹⁷

Many seemed acutely aware of the breakdown of the public culture that had bound Soviet society under Stalin. An anonymous group of workers indignantly addressed Molotov, demanding to know why no mourning session had been held at the Bolshoi Theatre, why Stalin's works had been changed, and why when they rushed to the loudspeakers that morning had heard but three words on Stalin's life.¹¹⁸ Over the past thirty years, a public culture had been created in which birthdays and anniversaries were sumptuously commemorated, and failure to observe such rituals could not pass unnoticed. Throughout the letter they constantly compared the ongoing commemoration of Lenin with this creeping elimination of Stalin. In another letter, Lena Kareva, a young Komsomol member, reflected on the past year and the key dates that had gone unmarked, expressing especial outrage that his birthday on 21 December was not even mentioned in the newspapers or on the radio.¹¹⁹ So unequivocal until a year ago, the Soviet symbolic world was becoming confusing. Failing to direct the population to new meanings, the authorities simply started to dismantle the rituals surrounding Stalin. The result was a hybrid, with abundant images of Stalin continuing to decorate public places, yet the blatant disregard for important ceremonies and anniversaries, making their meaning unclear.

¹¹⁶ On 5 March 1954, *Pravda* did carry a front page article and portrait of Stalin, but the anniversary was largely overshadowed by material relating to the Virgin Lands project. 'I. V. Stalin – velikii prodolzhatel' dela Lenina', *Pravda*, 5 March 1954, p. 1.

¹¹⁷ RGASPI f. 82, op. 2. d. 1466, ll. 73-78; RGASPI f. 82, op. 2. d. 1448, ll. 20-21; RGASPI f. 82, op. 2., d. 1455, l. 77; RGASPI f. 82, op. 2., d. 1458, l. 15.

¹¹⁸ RGASPI f. 82, op. 2. d. 1466, ll. 79-80.

¹¹⁹ RGASPI f. 82, op. 2. d. 1448, ll. 20-21.

As a result, doubts over the new leadership were common. V. K. Savchenko, a pensioner who prided himself on having fought in WWI, the civil war and WWII, claimed that everyone was upset and thought that the new attitude to Stalin was evidence of problems between the country's leaders (*mezhdurukovodstvom, shto to ne laditsia*).¹²⁰ Initially ready to blame Beria for the disrespect shown Stalin, by early 1954 one group of workers could only express bewilderment that the situation had not been rectified since the July arrest.¹²¹

As has been suggested throughout this chapter, the preferred explanation was to imagine covert enemies at work. Largely unresponsive to the socialist legality campaign, members of the public voiced their desire to return to the rituals of public castigation and vilification fostered under Stalin. In response to the mass exodus from the Gulag, they expressed sometimes violent opposition to the notion of 'humanity' promoted in the press, and derided the regime's claims that society itself was sufficiently robust to withstand this return of the banished 'other'. Their letters, which could only articulate dissatisfaction or disagreement by reverting to the hostile rhetoric created by the Stalinist press, thus revealed the powerful nature of a worldview based on Manichean beliefs.

¹²⁰ RGASPI f. 82, op. 2., d. 1458, l. 15.

¹²¹ RGASPI f. 82, op. 2. d. 1466, l. 80

Chapter II

Roving, Returning, Writing

My mother starved to death
My father got it in the war
As for me, the guards drive me
Across this tortured land
– Zek song ¹

My whole life came flooding back in that year
When from the depth of the seas and canals
My friends all at once returned
– Ol'ga Berggol'ts, 'Tot god', 1955 ²

Throughout 1953, the party sought to re-establish a meaningful hegemony over public culture. Trying to make sense of this changing world, members of the public provided their own interpretations. As both political and criminal *zeks* returned from the 'little zone' of the Gulag to the 'big zone', a third voice began to be heard. Speaking the vernacular of the Gulag, former prisoners brought their own understandings of Soviet life to the emerging debate.

In a chapter of *The Gulag Archipelago* entitled 'Zeks as a Nation', Solzhenitsyn describes the common attributes binding the community of prisoners. They had their

¹ Gerald Stanton Smith, *Songs to Seven Strings: Russian Guitar Poetry and Soviet 'Mass Song'* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1984), p. 75.

² Ol'ga Berggol'ts, 'Stikhi dnevnikov', *Novyi mir*, 1956.8, 26-30 (p. 28).

own economic way of life, a shared psychology, and their own language, he claims. Solzhenitsyn describes '*matiorshina*' (foul language) as that 'special form of expressing the emotions which is even more important than all the rest of their language because it permits the *zeks* to communicate with one another in a more energetic and briefer form than that provided by the usual linguistic means'.³ When *zeks* came back from this 'native land' to their homes and families, they often continued to converse in this special language. Even Moscow intellectuals returning from the camps spoke differently. In her memoirs, the dissident Ludmilla Alexeyeva wrote of two friends who served time in the Gulag as young men in the late 1940s:

Williams and Gastev had advanced a theory asserting that the word *blya*, short for 'slut', is essential for making the Russian language flow. *Blya* could be divorced from its meaning and inserted in any place of any sentence, as in, "I, *blya*, was raised by a *bonne*," or "I, *blya*, was raised by a *bonne*, *blya*," or "I, *blya*, was, *blya*, raised by a *bonne*, *blya*," and so forth. Sometimes they sounded like drunks at a Moscow beer dive.⁴

Though they were academics who enjoyed 'advancing theories' and came from elite families where children were raised by servants, they now spoke – quite intentionally – like the uncultured masses. In Alexeyeva's mind, there was an implicit division between the educated classes and those who might hang out in the 'beer dives'. The experience of the Gulag had at least partially undermined the 'culturedness' of the young well-to-do intellectuals.

The Gulag not only cultivated different forms of everyday speech, but also provided its own semiotic codes. Many prisoners came home their bodies indelibly marked

³ Aleksandr I. Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago, 1918-1956: An Experiment in Literary Investigation*, trans. by Thomas P. Whitney, 2 vols (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1975), II, pp. 502-533 (p. 505).

⁴ Ludmilla Alexeyeva and Paul Goldberg, *The Thaw Generation: Coming of Age in the Post-Stalin Era* (Boston, Mass.: Little, Brown, 1990), pp. 88-89.

with the Gulag's own system of signs. To the initiated, tattoos could convey much about a man's life and experience, including sexual preference, marital status, the number of prison convictions served, membership of a thieving fraternity, and so on. To the uninitiated they represented an incomprehensible language.⁵ When a prisoner such as Konstantin Petrukhin, released from the Gulag by amnesty in 1953, got drunk at the station buffet in 1953, he chose to rip open his shirt and parade his tattoos through Moscow's *Kievskii vokzal*. With this act, he dramatically reminded Soviet citizens of the existence of a dangerous and impenetrable other world.⁶

Witnessing similar incidents of drunken rage occurring throughout the middle of the decade, citizens might realise that the Gulag also provided an alternative political language. From the judicial cases of former *zeks* convicted for political crimes in the 1950s, we discover that those nourished by Gulag culture expressed dissatisfaction with the regime in quite different ways from other members of society. Other insubordinate citizens might, for instance, slander Stalin on the grounds of his nationality, expressing anger that the Soviet Union had a Georgian at its head.⁷ A Gulag veteran, however, had quite different 'mental tools'.⁸ Invariably under the

⁵ Nancy Condee writes that information about the tattoo subculture was hard to glean in the Soviet period, but 'since the fall of communism in 1991 several small compilations of prison tattoos have appeared, all sections of larger compendia of prison culture, including argot, proverbs, card games, coded toponyms, hand signals, cryptography, ciphers, encoded speech, a prison Morse code, epistolary etiquette, and other sign systems'. Nancy Condee, 'Body Graphics: Tattooing the Fall of Communism', in *Consuming Russia: Popular Culture, Sex, and Society Since Gorbachev*, ed. by Adele Marie Baker (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1999), pp 339- 361.

⁶ GARF f. 8131, op. 31, d. 43168.

⁷ The Procuracy archives offer one example. In May 1953, Aleksandr Minakov, an invalid war veteran in his mid-forties, finished work at the local market and proceeded to the station buffet where he got drunk. He allegedly went on to slander Stalin on the grounds of his nationality, claiming that the Soviet leader should be Russian, not Georgian. GARF f. 8131, op. 31, d. 43260, l. 3-6, 12-13.

⁸ In his study of French culture of the sixteenth century, Febvre frames the question of unbelief in the following way: Did individuals have access to the necessary 'mental' tools needed to express an alternative worldview? He argues that if language – as the property of the collective – lacked the necessary lexical items and the syntactical structures, then an individual would be unable to form a coherent atheist argument. Lucien Febvre, *The Problem of Unbelief in the Sixteenth Century: The*

influence of alcohol, some former prisoners aggressively denounced Soviet power by embracing its nemesis: the USA. Three cases can offer insight into this Gulag counter-culture. Imprisoned initially for theft or hooliganism, Aleksei Ivanov, Viktor Veselov, and Boris Dogadin, were all amnestied and then re-arrested in the period 1953-1955 for allegedly anti-Soviet activity. Their words demonstrate the political language provided by the Gulag.

Aleksei Ivanov, or Aleksandr Tikhonov as he was also known,⁹ a young, semi-illiterate Russian originally from Leningrad with three previous sentences for non-political crimes, was released in late May 1953 by the amnesty. Unable to find work, he was still roving across the country when he was arrested at Manzovka station in the Far East five months later. According to the witness Koshelev, he appeared on the station platform drunk, tried to commit a theft, and then brandished a knife. He was arrested by the station police and escorted to their unit for further questioning. Asked to state his profession, he replied that he had a good specialism – robbing and ‘killing citizens’. Complaining that in the Soviet Union he was refused work, he announced: ‘I hate the Soviet Union, I would sell it for one kopeck. I love America and Truman. Soviet power ‘rewarded’ [*nagradila*] me with tuberculosis. In the Soviet Union young people are hounded into camps and prisons.’¹⁰ His anger was directed against the authorities that had imprisoned him and his peers, damaged his health, and now denied him the means to earn a living, and he articulated a fierce contempt for the values of Soviet society such as productive labour. Even more subversive was his admiration for America and the President. Rejecting Soviet power absolutely,

Religion of Rabelais, trans. by Beatrice Gottlieb (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982), p. 355.

⁹ Many criminal-recidivists took on different names to hide their identity at various points.

Ivanov/Tikhonov welcomed America and Truman as the antithesis of everything Soviet.

His case was not unique. As *ex-zeks* hung about stations, harassed by the police and under suspicion from other citizens, they easily entered into drunken rows. In one such case, Viktor Veselov raucously shared Ivanov/Tikhonov's binary world-view, in which the paradise of capitalist America opposed his Soviet hell. In September 1953, as a 24-year-old recently released from the Gulag, Veselov was drinking beer with a new acquaintance at a station buffet in Kuibyshev *oblast'*, when he became rowdy, attracting the attention of the police. When the police hauled him into their office to check his documents, Veselov spat in the face of one police officer, kicked another, and shouted 'Down with Soviet power!' and 'Long live capitalism!'¹¹ With its ubiquitous slogans, the language of revolution had created the template for Veselov's protest; the Gulag – itself the mirror of the Soviet world – had taught him to invert those official values.

The case of Boris Dogadin, another young man in his early twenties with several years' Gulag experience under his belt, provides another example of this violent pro-American and pro-capitalist sentiment prevalent amongst former prisoners. In court in May 1954 on a further count of theft, and facing a twenty-year sentence, Dogadin began cursing Soviet leaders, shouting that he had been sentenced unlawfully. According to a witness, he went on to claim that Truman would come to free him and

¹⁰ GARF f. 8131, op. 31, d. 43332, l. 18.

¹¹ GARF f. 8131, op. 31, d. 60332, ll. 5-8. Veselov was Russian, from a peasant family in Omsk, and had been sentenced for various non-political crimes, including theft and attempted escape from the Gulag. Back in the Gulag in 1954, he became an active participant in a camp riot.

slaughter everyone, and, finally, that ‘the Trumanites will come and they’ll hang everyone’ in the Soviet government.¹²

The parallels between the cases are striking. When goaded, these *ex-zeks* rallied behind the same idols – America and capitalism. All incarcerated within the camp system during adolescence, they were raised in a radically anti-Soviet environment. Released back into society, they projected themselves as atheists, radical non-believers. Though Harry Truman had vacated the White House in 1953, the name ‘Truman’ continued to resonate in the cosmogony of the *zek* as a mythical figure, an avenging angel who would come to save Soviet unfortunates. In *zek* culture, change was only imaginable through a violent showdown between opposing forces. Political ideas could be condensed into slogans ‘Down with...’ or ‘Long live...’, reduced to a binary conflict between America and the Soviet Union, between Truman and Bolshevik leaders. It has recently been argued that ‘unbelief’ was problematic within the Stalinist system. Jochen Hellbeck has claimed that people lacked ‘an outside frame of reference’ that would allow them to articulate dissent, and he argues that his diarist, Podlubnyi, ‘used the Holy Scripture against the Church in legitimating his unbelief’.¹³ Ivanov/Tikhonov, Veselov, and Dogadin do something rather different. Although they certainly drew on beliefs propagated by official culture, they did not evaluate ‘real’ actions against the foundational scriptures, but instead engaged with the official texts themselves. Although they followed Soviet cosmogony in believing the world to be divided into two conflicting forces, they chose to embrace the ‘pole’ that had been officially rejected and demonised. This was the kind of radical break

¹² GARF f. 8131, op. 31, d. 50509, ll. 22-25.

¹³ Hellbeck, ‘Fashioning the Stalinist Soul’, p.105.

identified by Iurii Lotman and Boris Uspenskii, who claimed that in Russian culture the 'new does not arise out of a structurally "unused" reserve, but results from a transformation of the old, a process of turning it inside out'.¹⁴ As Soviet ideology divided the world into a set of pairs – the new versus the old, the big zone versus the little zone, Russia versus the west – it provided, in the form of the rejected values, ready-made formulas for dissent.

The Gulag system, and the rigid division of the Soviet world into the 'big' zone and the 'little' zone, offered the most palpable manifestation of Soviet binarism. Camp etiquette valued drinking, violence, and swearing – all acts that clearly challenged Soviet *kul'turnost'*. The Gulag produced its own underground culture, both in the form of camp songs and tattoos, and its own radical politics. All that was demonised in the official Soviet belief system was here passionately venerated. The releases of the early to mid-1950s brought elements of this other world back into the big 'zone' of Soviet society.

Much of this dissertation is devoted to showing how society tried to cope with the threat of this dangerous 'other'. This chapter, however, looks at how the returnees themselves tried to present their own experience. Though they might be acculturated to the Gulag to a greater or lesser extent, prisoners in 1953 still hoped to return to the Soviet fold. Through the act of petitioning, prisoners of all categories – from victims of political terror such as Williams and Gastev, to young thieves and hooligans like

¹⁴ According to Lotman and Uspenskii, the antithesis 'the old versus the new' was often transformed in medieval culture into 'the Russian land versus the west', as evil was thought to have come to Russia from outside as the result of contact with heretics. This opposition to the west was retained in a revised form in the binary culture of the Soviet period, and in the Cold War era, America became the ultimate symbol of anti-Soviet culture. See Lotman and Uspenskii, 'Binary Models', p. 33.

Ivanov/Tikhonov, Veselov, and Dogadin – sought to explain their experience of the ‘other world’, and to create life-stories that would allow for their readmission. This chapter looks at the dramatic rise in petitioning from prisoners and their families, and examines the narrative strategies they employed.¹⁵ Their texts were an important – if challenging – contribution to the dialogue that was emerging between state and society in the wake of Stalin’s death.

A New Wave of Petitioning

As soon as Stalin died, there was a marked increase in petition-writing.¹⁶ The number of appeals received by bodies such as the Party Control Committee (KPK) and the Supreme Soviet had been increasing gradually since the end of the war, but snowballed in 1953 and 1954.¹⁷ Statistics from the Supreme Soviet show that the boom started as early as March 1953:

¹⁵ In many cases it is not possible to trace the official response to these petitions. Due to legal restriction on accessing personal material, for example, I was not able to see party members’ individual files. The letters I use were mostly from a collective file located within the Supreme Soviet’s petition department. I chose to concentrate on the narrative strategies employed by petitioners rather than on the outcome of individual cases here, though in subsequent chapters I explore the state’s response to such writings more broadly.

¹⁶ Kathleen Smith also notes this increase. Kathleen Smith, *Remembering Stalin’s Victims: Popular Memory and the End of the USSR* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1996), p. 25.

¹⁷ The number of appeals received by the Supreme Soviet, for example, had increased from 288,241 in 1950 to 337,007 in 1952 (GARF f. 7523, op. 69, d. 174, l. 9). Within the Supreme Soviet Presidium, a special working group (*Gruppa po podgotovke dlia rassmotrenii v Prezidiume khodotaitstv o pomilovanii*) processed petitions.

Number of petitions received by the Supreme Soviet in 1953 ¹⁸

	From relatives	From those convicted
January	3616	11,885
February	3913	11,582
March	4960	13,308
April	10,682	18,306

If they were already heartened by Stalin's death, the March amnesty encouraged prisoners, former prisoners, and their families to hope for even greater change.

Officials within the central organs were disturbed by the rapid increase in petition-writing, not least because of the extra work-load it gave them. One bureaucrat commented wryly that the amnesty seemed to have done little to halt the flood of letters.¹⁹ In fact, quite the opposite occurred. Even those sentenced for counter-revolutionary crime – manifestly excluded from the amnesty – seem to have been encouraged by it, and such cases became the fastest growing area of the commission's work, with 7787 cases processed in December 1953 compared with 2107 cases in January 1953.²⁰ Reports from the Party Control Committee reflect similar patterns. In 1954, the committee tabulated the number of letters they have received from individuals over the past decade:

¹⁸ GARF f. 7523, op. 69, d. 176.

¹⁹ The deputy of the section, Kozhanov, wrote to Voroshilov in April 1953 complaining of overwork, and noting that the amnesty had done nothing to ease it. GARF f. 7523, op. 69, d. 174, l. 9.

²⁰ GARF f. 7523, op. 69, d. 176.

Number of petitions received by the Party Control Committee 1945-1954 ²¹

Year	Petitions received
1945	8010
1946	9350
1947	13330
1948	19413
1949	23158
1950	33579
1951	34568
1952	41216
1953	70326
1954	53143

Although the internal report claimed that the peak of 1953 was due to a rise in party activism following the XIX Party Congress, it seems questionable that a congress so conservative in tone produced such widespread optimism. Instead, it seems more likely that Stalin's death, and the new course taken by party leaders in the following months, were read as an important marker of change. While those who felt at ease within the Stalinist world feared this mood of impending change, those who lived beyond the bounds of society greeted it more warmly.

In composing their lives as texts, a growing numbers of prisoners took the raw material of their life and constructed a narrative that they believed would display their credentials as good Soviet citizens. As they moulded their lived experience into a form they hoped might please the authorities, their narratives illuminated some of the authors' beliefs about both Soviet power and history. These petitions thus give insight into the mental world of some of society's outcasts – criminal-recidivists, victims of

²¹ RGANI f. 6, op. 6, d. 1009, ll. 4-10.

repression, vagrants, hooligans, and political dissenters. Of course they do not offer transparent access to the way prisoners might articulate their identity and experience in different contexts – to fellow *zeks*, to relatives, or, indeed, to local policemen during a drunken train journey. They do, however, reveal how the writers understood official ideology and how they thought their experience of ‘the other world’ could be incorporated into a viable life-story.

While Soviet citizens did try to ‘speak Bolshevik’ in their interactions with the state, there was no single textbook which offered them mastery over this language.

Exploring the practice of depriving rights and selectively reinstating rights to certain categories of undesirables in the 1920s and 1930s, Golfo Alexopoulos finds significant variation in the petitions of *lishentsy* (the disenfranchised), writing that ‘although *lishentsy* reproduced the official discourse in their petitions, these reproductions are not exact. *Lishentsy* manipulate the script and depart from it as well.’²² Although she identifies six genres of petition, Alexopoulos focuses on two main forms: first, a ‘lament’ in which the petitioner is pitiful, desperate, ignorant, and deserving of the reader’s sympathy; second, the presentation of a Soviet self, complete with boasts of loyalty, service, and work achievements. Both forms possessed an echo in the 1950s, but the passage of time had introduced new elements.

Like those disenfranchised as class aliens in the early Soviet period, some prisoners and former prisoners wrote petitions of ‘lament’. One old lady pitifully wrote that: ‘All of us old people revere you Kliment Efremovich [Voroshilov] as a god, and we

²² Golfo Alexopoulos, ‘Rights and Passage: Marking Outcasts and Making Citizens in Soviet Russia’, 1926-1936’ (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Chicago, 1996), p. 298.

have great hope in you as a pure Russian. Please don't reject this plea from old people.'²³ A younger woman also petitioned Voroshilov, cataloguing the cycle of misfortune that had been her fate: she was an orphan, unfairly repressed during the war, her husband had died, her son had TB, her mother was ailing, and her political record meant she could live neither in Leningrad to support her mother, nor in Moscow to get treatment for her son. She wrote plaintively, 'My son already asks me whether I'll start laughing soon, and what can I answer him?'²⁴ Playing on Soviet commitment to childhood happiness, she implored him to review the case. Elements of 'lament' thus did appear in the petitions of the 1950s, but they were more rare than in the 1930s.

When the disenfranchised of the 1930s wished to present a 'Soviet self', this invariably meant claiming they were proletarians and industrious labourers: the syllogism 'I work therefore I am a worker' was implicit. Writing a Soviet self in the 1950s, however, was more problematic. The criminal, for instance, faced the difficult task of showing how he had erred so absolutely from the 'correct' path when he had been born and raised during the blessed era of Soviet power. Meanwhile, the 'political' prisoner wished not merely to show that he was a good worker, but that he was a communist of the first order, an ardent believer in the communist cause. As a result, we find a great variety of styles in the wave of petition-writing that unfurled in the early to mid-1950s. A classification of petition genres is possible, and at least five different categories can be identified, in addition to the 'lament'.²⁵

²³ GARF f. 7523, op. 107, d. 123, l. 16.

²⁴ GARF f. 7523, op. 107, d. 123, l. 59.

²⁵ Sheila Fitzpatrick has approached citizens' letters like a 'botanist exploring the variety of plant life in an unfamiliar terram', noting down new 'species' and giving them a name. Fitzpatrick, 'Supplicants and Citizens', p. 81.

The first of these, the 'Voice of America' petition, suggests that by the 1950s, the Soviet world was not hermetically sealed, and that at least some individuals *did* now have access to 'an outside frame of reference'.²⁶ For example, Vladimir Savin, sentenced in 1949 for theft, later released by amnesty, and subsequently reconvicted for writing anti-Soviet leaflets and listening to Voice of America, disputed his sentence on the grounds that it was expensive and the money could be better spent helping 'the people'. He claimed that his incarceration was costing the state 640 roubles a day, or 14,600 roubles a month. Although Savin did not cite the source of such figures, it suggests the influence of a more western, pragmatic conception of incarceration and its merits for society.²⁷

A second category could be labelled the 'petition of outrage'. For example, in April 1955 a victim of repression, Prokurovaia, wrote to Voroshilov in great indignation over the loss of personal belongings confiscated by the MVD upon her arrest in 1941. Although she received some compensation, she considered it inadequate, and attached a detailed inventory to her letter. The total value of the confiscated items came to 12,632 roubles, and the list included a car, table clock, an expensive alarm clock, carved daggers, 200-300 records, and a commode in carved red wood with a marble

²⁶ Voice of America was an anti-communist station set up in 1953 with the intention of destroying communism from within. Although planned beforehand, its launch coincided almost exactly with Stalin's death. Gene Sosin, *Sparks of Liberty: An Insider's Memoir of Radio Liberty* (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999).

²⁷ Only 16-years-old when he was first sentenced for theft, Vladimir Savin was released by amnesty and returned to the city of Kirov, where he failed to find either permanent accommodation or work. He turned to writing leaflets and marked the Mayday celebrations in 1955 with an indictment of the hardships experienced by returnees. He wrote: 'Comrades! We will transmit the latest message from Voice of America. We are celebrating 1 May, drinking and enjoying ourselves, when thousands of unfortunate Russian people don't have a crust of bread. Look at the stations at how many unfortunates released from imprisonment are dying of hunger there because no one will give them work.' He seems

top. The defiant tone of her letter and her brazen concern for the loss of material wealth was, however, most unusual.²⁸

Three further categories were far more common, and these shall be analysed in greater detail. First, some based their petitions not on notions they found in the illicit foreign press, but on the concepts of socialist legality they discovered in their own Soviet press in 1953. Second, some – primarily young offenders – constructed narratives of a flawed upbringing, emphasising the unfinished nature of their biography and expressing hope that redemption was still possible. A final category, the exclusive domain of the purge victim, was the tale of noble suffering, in which the ordeal endured was not a source of outrage or bitterness, but rather the confirmation of the victim's own saintly devotion to the revolutionary cause.

The Lure of Socialist Legality

The prisoner or former prisoner who read Soviet newspapers in 1953 found the first clues to understanding his exclusion from Soviet society. Convicted repeatedly as a thief and hooligan, Konstantin Petrukhin had been released from the Gulag by the 1953 amnesty, and now worked as a labourer mixing concrete in Moscow. He was soon re-arrested, however, accused of cursing political leaders and parading his tattoos of Lenin and Stalin in the middle of Kiev station. In his petition, though, he argued that he had been politically correct in his drunken shoutings. He disputed the sentence on the grounds that the principal witness, his neighbour in the station buffet,

to have been influenced by listening to foreign radio broadcasts, but he also brought his own experience of exclusion and suffering to make his case. See GARF 8131, op. 31, d. 67339, l. 13.

²⁸ GARF f. 7523, op. 107, d. 123, ll. 49-53.

had provoked the outburst by praising Beria.²⁹ Previously regarded as an illicit outburst against a leading party figure, Petrukhin's rant against Beria now became a just and righteous attack on an enemy of the people. Petrukhin could now cast himself as a defender of official policy and a member of the newspaper-reading Soviet public.

Victims of political repression commonly interpreted events in the Soviet press of 1953 as the key to understanding why they had been wrongly banished from Soviet society. Addressing the Supreme Soviet, one anxious Moscow mother desperately implored Voroshilov to review her daughter's case.³⁰ Teumin had already written to many different places without result, but now believed that events reported in the press presaged a new course:

Considering that the investigation of my daughter's case took place at a time when accusations against the doctors and other public figures (like Mikhoels) were being fabricated, and that when she was arrested enemies of the people like Abakumov and others – later unmasked – were in charge of the MGB and the investigation department, I ask you to reconsider the case.

The mother went on to remind Voroshilov that if her daughter had signed a confession, it was obtained by 'methods forbidden by Soviet laws'.³¹ Teumin's Jewish name perhaps explains why she drew particularly on the case of the Kremlin doctors and Mikhoels. She was not alone, though, in thinking that by accusing leading

²⁹ GARF f. 8131, op. 31, d. 43168. Perhaps because he had succeeded in re-establishing some kind of normal life-style – he lived in the capital and was in employment – Petrukhin felt at ease modelling his defence on the latest political fashions, identifying himself as a newspaper-reading Soviet citizen. Details from his biography suggest in fact that his status as politically 'correct' Soviet citizen was insecure. He had three previous sentences for theft and hooliganism, and a son living in Aleksandrovsk – a city renowned as a haven for former *zeks*; these facts suggest that until recently he had been living on the margins of society.

³⁰ She wrote that her daughter joined the Komsomol at 15 and the party at 20, and held no other interests. She was arrested in 1949, aged 44. GARF f. 7523, op. 107, d. 123, l. 39.

³¹ GARF f. 7523, op. 107, d. 123, ll. 39-40.

figures in the security services, the socialist legality campaign pointed to the imminent release of more victims.

For most petitioners, the key event of 1953 was the arrest of Beria. In April 1954, A. A. Kalmykova began her petition to Mikoian with a reminder that reports on the radio and in the press in July 1953 had revealed senior figures within the MGB and the MVD had long been using criminal methods. She continued:

There is no doubt – and I say this with great certainty – that one of the victims of the vile provocation and the slanderous actions of Beria and his accomplices was my husband Betal Kalmykov and indisputably, in connection with this, I was also a victim of the arbitrariness and lawlessness [*proizvol i bezzakonii*] created by Beria.³²

The media's treatment of Beria's arrest had given petitioners 'approved' linguistic terms with which to make sense of their ordeal. By accusing Beria of arbitrariness and lawlessness (*proizvol i bezzakonii*), *Pravda* enabled Kalmykova to explain why she and her husband had been repressed.³³

Due to her immediacy to those in power, Kalmykova could hold Beria directly responsible for the injustices committed. In 1938 Kalmykova's husband had held the prestigious position of the party *obkom* secretary in the Kabardin Autonomous Republic and the family had very close connections to the Ordzhonikidze family – in fact Sergo Ordzhonikidze's wife took responsibility for the Kalmykov children after the arrest of their parents. In her narrative, Beria's personal hatred for Sergo Ordzhonikidze led to the arrest of the Kalmykovs.³⁴ The wife of the former first secretary of the Komsomol, Aleksandr Kosarev, likewise wrote a version of her

³² RGANI f. 5, op. 30, d. 78, l. 66.

³³ 'Nesokrushimoe edinenie partii, pravitel'stva, sovetского народа', *Pravda*, 10 July 1953, p. 1.

husband's arrest in which Beria played the leading role. Kosareva explained that Beria took offence to a politically risqué toast Kosarev made in front of guests and had contrived Kosarev's downfall within four months of succeeding Ezhov. He even carried out the arrest in person.³⁵

In February 1955, a certain N. E. Korviakov began his petition to Voroshilov in terms that were remarkably similar to Kalmykova's opening line. He too used the terms 'arbitrariness' and 'lawlessness' furnished by *Pravda* in its attack against Beria:

I will tell you something about my 'case'. This tale, in my opinion, should show you the arbitrariness [*proizvol*], lawlessness [*bezzakonii*], and the bureaucracy that exists in our system, and especially in the judicial-procuracy sector.³⁶

However, Korviakov was not a figure of such prominence as Kalmykova or Kosareva, and he had to show greater invention in the writing of his petition.³⁷ A lawyer and journalist before the war, he had been arrested in 1944 for allegedly taking goods from the 'Moscow Benefit Fund for War Invalids', and selling them on the black market; now released, but not rehabilitated, he could not find work. In his letter he claimed that the case was the result of forgeries created by investigators in the Moscow Procuracy. In his case, Beria personally played no role. Although he tried to model his letter on the press articles attacking Beria, he was obliged to incorporate a larger cast of villains. He wrote:

³⁴ RGANI f. 5, op. 30, d. 78, ll. 66-69.

³⁵ A. N. Iakovlev (ed), *Reabilitatsiia: Kak eto bylo. Dokumenty prezidiuma TsK KPSS i drugie materialy* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnyi fond demokratiia, 2000), pp. 79-90. This is a copy of an archival document, referenced APRF f. 3, op. 24, d. 439, ll. 31-32.

³⁶ GARF f. 7523, op. 107, d. 186, l. 4.

³⁷ The fact that Kalmykova's petition was treated by the Central Committee and preserved in the archives at RGANI, whilst Korviakov's petition was reviewed within the regular mechanisms of the Supreme Soviet and preserved in the more extensive archives at GARF is symbolic of the difference in their status.

I didn't doubt for a minute, that I was not dealing with Soviet judges but with the objective or subjective accomplices of enemies of the people. I, a patriot raised during Soviet power (I am now 44), realised that to label an innocent Soviet citizen and invalid from WWII a counterrevolutionary and enemy of the people could only be the work of (actual) enemies of the people and their accomplices.³⁸

Guilt extended beyond the single figure of Beria to the 'Soviet judges' who sentenced him using falsified documents. Korviakov realised he was on shaky ground, and his idiosyncratic term for the judges – 'objective or subjective accomplices of enemies of the people' – points to some uncertainty: did he have the right to point the finger at a whole group of people? In the second half of the letter, he went on to accuse the head of the Supreme Court, Anatolii Volin, of malpractice, claiming that he had been charged with reviewing his case, but was too scared to rehabilitate him.

As a war veteran, Korviakov believed himself to be an upstanding Soviet citizen. If he had been cast out of society, the press campaigns of 1953 suggested to him that 'enemies' within the MVD or judiciary were to blame. In blaming Soviet judges and Volin personally, Korviakov in fact went much further than the prescription of the socialist legality campaign had allowed. He independently identified his own enemies. I suggested in Chapter I that the public often interpreted Beria's arrest as an invitation to whip up collective hysteria against the enemy 'other'; petitioners such as Korviakov were no different. They too imagined a world where Soviet people were locked in mortal combat with their enemies, and they sought a reversal of fates: the victims were to be rehabilitated and welcomed home, their accusers arrested, sentenced, and cast out.

³⁸ GARF f. 7523, op. 107, d. 186, l. 4.

A second example is provided by the case of Ivan Cherkasov. In May 1955, Cherkasov composed a letter to the man he held responsible for his arrest, an engineer named Shteinman. As he did not know Shteinman's address, Cherkasov was 'obliged' to send his letter via the chief Military Procuracy. Cherkasov clearly hoped for intervention in the case. He wrote that he had 'naively' hoped that after Beria's arrest, 'what was left' of Shteinman's conscience would drive him to confess his own crimes to the appropriate authorities.³⁹ He went on to ask Shteinman to assist in his application for rehabilitation and release from exile, begging him to right the wrongs of the past. The letter was clearly intended not for Shteinman, but for the authorities. Indeed, he was not soliciting help from Shteinman, but threatening him:

If my letter falls into the hands of someone tough, strong-willed, influential, and completely dedicated to the party then you will be forced to confess and you will be required to tell the truth about how you hunted down party members.⁴⁰

Although Cherkasov seems fearful to address the party directly, the letter to Shteinman was a transparent device with which to request not only his rehabilitation, but also retribution. It included a very detailed account of the events that led to his arrest, as if to help the party in any forthcoming investigation. In a second letter, Cherkasov explained how he had already brought another guilty party to reckoning. He recounted how Shteinman's accomplice, Pronchenko, had already been summoned to the factory's party committee for questioning. When Pronchenko confessed to his guilt, Cherkasov forgave him.⁴¹ Cherkasov did not only want his own readmission into society, but also for those guilty of miscarrying justice to be identified and treated by the party.

³⁹ RGANI f. 5, op. 30, d. 232, l. 71.

⁴⁰ RGANI f. 5, op. 30, d. 232, l. 74.

⁴¹ RGANI f. 5, op. 30, d. 232, l. 66.

Modelling their texts on clues they found in the press, some victims of political terror blamed individuals for their misfortunes and sought retribution. While former members of the party elite such as Kalmykova and Kosareva could blame Beria alone, others like Cherkasov and Korviakov identified a wider cast of villains bearing responsibility for their suffering. The socialist legality campaign offered the first official explanations for why rightful members of the Soviet community had been excluded, yet it had an inherent danger. Even if the tone of the press was less invective than in the past, explanation based on identifying the 'enemy' had the potential to renew the practices of the Stalin era, presaging renewed purging and punishment. In fact, an extensive witch-hunt of low-level *apparatchiki* never in fact materialised. Alternative ways of explaining the past followed in which there was no requirement for a new round of purging.

The Unfinished Bildungsroman

The petition letters of men like Ivanov/Tikhonov and Dogadin offered a very different way of making sense of the past. Rather than protesting their innocence, they believed that they had not been fully immersed in Soviet culture and had not received a proper upbringing. They presented the war as a rupture in Soviet hegemony that had denied them the necessary acculturation. The war explained how it was possible for men born during the Soviet era to have been drawn towards the negative values of the 'other' pole.

Ivanov/Tikhonov's petition letter is a long and detailed account of his life. He began by supplying both his names, his place and date of birth (either 1928 or 1931), and then continued:

I was born in Leningrad where I lived with my mother and father until the war in 1940 with the German occupiers. Then I was evacuated to Cheliabinsk in the Urals. I was left without the supervision of family or friends who could have put me on the true path in life, so that I could have lived and through work been useful to the Fatherland.⁴²

From the outset he tried to fit his life of deviance and felony into the narrative of Soviet history. A normal Soviet family life was destroyed by the German invasion, and he was deprived of the environment that would have made him a good citizen. In keeping with Soviet eschatology, he recognised a 'true path in life' and regretted that fate – in the form of the German offensive – had diverted him from it. Embarking on a life of theft at the age of twelve when he was too young to realise his error, he had become an outsider. He recounted in detail releases from the camps, his desire to return to Leningrad, the obstructions that the authorities put in his way, and his feelings of loneliness and isolation. After his last release from the camps as part of the 1953 amnesty, he sought work in the mines in the Far East but was refused a passport by the local MVD. He wrote in his petition: 'With sadness in my soul, I was once more to roam the different provinces of the Soviet Union like a gypsy, until I received another prison sentence for something or other.'⁴³ Playing on his role as an outcast, his petition ended with a plea to be allowed back into society. He asked whether he was really worthy of a 58/10 sentence, which he believed was normally applied to people who betrayed the Motherland and killed Soviet citizens in occupied territory during the war. In contrast, he was without family and semi-literate. Promising to

⁴² GARF f. 8131, op. 31, d. 43332, l. 27.

⁴³ GARF f. 8131, op. 31, d. 43332, l. 28.

work hard, he proclaimed 'I will show that I am not a lost person'. Realising that at present he belonged to the 'other world', he hoped that he would be readmitted in recognition of the fact that for him the war had precluded a normal Soviet upbringing.

Whilst Ivanov/Tikhonov spoke as a sinner seeking redemption, Vladimir Podavalov, another young prisoner released in 1953, initially denied that he had said or done anything untoward. Only 22, Podavalov was travelling back to his parents' home after release, when he became embroiled in a drunken argument with a group of demobbed soldiers in the same railway carriage, and, once arrested, he allegedly cursed Soviet leaders and praised America.⁴⁴ The first part of his letter indignantly detailed the long train journey and the dispute that led to his wrongful arrest. After drinking vodka with a lieutenant he met at a station, he had accompanied his new friend to a carriage where a group of demobbed soldiers were drinking. The soldiers robbed him of 700 roubles. When he accused them and threatened them with prison, they retorted that he was coming from prison, and that they could easily get him sent straight back.⁴⁵ In his reading of the incident, he was marked from the outset, an easy target with no chance of self-defence. However, the second half of his petition took an entirely different strategy, sketching a life of exclusion with close parallels to Ivanov/Tikhonov's autobiography. Questioning whether he could really be considered an 'enemy of the

⁴⁴ Podavalov had a rather strange vision of America, allegedly based on an unlikely encounter with American workers who were mining uranium near to the place where he had laboured as a prisoner. He learned from them that all Americans lived very well – 'better than any Soviet manager': 'Each one has his own car, suits, and nice hats. They work for 10 days, then they're able to get drunk [*pianstvovat*] for half a year, whilst here people work really hard but all the same have nothing.' Podavalov dreamt of cars and nice clothing as signs of the wealth and status denied to him, and as he drank vodka on his triumphant journey home, he imagined tolerance for a way of life frowned upon by respectable Soviet society. Yet he could not picture living the good life in an improved Soviet, or even Russian, world. Podavalov seemed to believe this 'good life' was only possible in the fantastical, imagined world of America. GARF f. 8131, op. 31, d. 43334, ll. 11-13.

⁴⁵ GARF f. 8131, op. 31, d. 43334, l. 6. He says that they then restrained him, while one of the group went to find the police and denounced Podavalov for anti-Soviet agitation.

people', he embarked on his own life-story. Born into a white-collar family in 1931 in Novosibirsk *oblast'*, he moved with them to Barnaul at the age of five. The war intervened, broke up the family, and cut the young Podavalov loose. In 1941 his father went to the front, his brother followed in 1943 and was killed; a worker from the age of eleven, he found life very difficult. 'In my stupidity at that time I ran away from my mother and I lived alone, wandering across all of the Soviet Union', he wrote.⁴⁶ In explaining how he ended up in the Gulag, this incident is irrelevant: the war ended, his father returned and somehow succeeded in tracking down Podavalov. He returned to the family and worked as motor-mechanic until he was called up to the Soviet army. Military service progressed well until one night in 1950 when he got drunk and fell asleep during the night watch. The misdemeanour cost him three years in the camps. Although his 'crime' and arrest were in no way narratively contingent upon his wartime exile, he foregrounded this experience because it enriched the petition. Remembering a childhood exclusion created by war, Podavalov pleaded for the chance to be re-included into Soviet society.

Other narrators blamed their corruption on the Gulag itself. In his petition, Dogadin asserted that exclusion from society, and the influence of hardened criminals at an impressionable age, taught him the language he used in court. He wrote to Khrushchev:

I was sentenced several times for theft. From the children's colony, I ended up in the adult camp with fascists, where I learnt the words I said in court. From the age of fourteen I have been in prison, with only a nine-month break between 10 May 1953 and 9 December 1954.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ GARF f. 8131, op. 31, d. 43334, l. 7.

⁴⁷ GARF f. 8131, op. 31, d. 50509, l. 19.

Dogadin recognised the Gulag as an alternative kind of cultural upbringing.

Reflecting the importance officially assigned to the 'happy childhood', Dogadin claimed that if he had become a criminal it was because he had been acculturated to the harmful environment of the Gulag at such a young age.

Even less hardened criminals employed the same strategies as these old-timers. Viktor Topolev, born in 1929 in Moscow province, was sentenced to five years' imprisonment in February 1953 for the theft of an overcoat, two pairs of gloves, and a cheese. Although he claimed that at the time he was experiencing extreme financial hardship while waiting for his first wage packet after demobilisation, he chose to centre his petition on war-time suffering. His petition began:

My two brothers were killed at the front in the Great Patriotic War, my father hung himself in 1941. My mother, who worked in the thread factory in the town of Reutovo, was evacuated along with her factory to the city of Alma-Ata and, unable to bear these heavy blows of fate in 1943, she lost her mind and spent two weeks in hospital where she died.

Rather than focusing on the emotional distress these events might have caused him, he preferred to talk of them in terms of the 'upbringing' they had denied him. The war had deprived him of the moral environment that would produce a good Soviet citizen:

I ask the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet USSR to consider my request for mercy and to take into consideration the circumstances laid out here, and my heavy and unhappy childhood. At an early age I was deprived of my parents and my elder brothers, and I grew up amongst strangers, and didn't receive an appropriate upbringing, experiencing all possible deprivations, both material and moral.⁴⁸

The immediate hardships that led him to steal in 1953 were rapidly glossed over; despite the fact he had been totally penniless, Topolev believed they provide scant justification for his crime. Only an inadequate upbringing could explain why he was

so morally weak as to succumb to the lure of crime. Again it was the war that had prevented him gaining a 'Soviet' education.

Narrating a failure to come 'to consciousness', these autobiographies are fashioned as a type of unfinished *Bildungsroman*. Youth, the age which holds the meaning of life in the European *Bildungsroman*, is also the key to understanding these men.⁴⁹ The petitions inevitably excused their crimes as the rash errors of youth, assuring the reader that the petitioner was now mature and had seen the error of his ways. Dogadin, for example, wrote that 'it was all because I was young then', while Ivanov/Tikhonov explained that 'being young' he ignored his duty towards his country.⁵⁰ In a sense, their narratives were similar to a socialist realist novel where the young hero undergoes a period of self-doubt, error, and challenge, before coming to full-consciousness. Yet as convicted hooligans and thieves, their crimes far exceeded the limited remit of deviance that the socialist realist template allowed. Their petitions thus tried to explain why they had failed to achieve satisfactory socialisation.

According to Franco Moretti, the *Bildungsroman* took a hold on modern European culture at a time when life patterns became less predictable, when young people were less sure what shape their future would take. Thus the main body of the book deals with the hero's peregrinations and his quest to find 'himself', until he accepts the 'comfort of civilisation' and becomes at peace with himself through a sense of belonging to the wider community. The hero realises that 'I exist and I exist happily

⁴⁸ GARF f. 7863, op. 22, d. 2564, l. 2.

⁴⁹ Franco Moretti, *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture* (London: Verso, 1987), pp. 4-5.

⁵⁰ GARF f. 8131, op. 31, d. 50509, l. 19; GARF f. 8131, op. 31, d. 43332, l. 27.

because I have willingly agreed to be determined from without'.⁵¹ Ivanov/Tikhonov, Podavalov *et al.* argue passionately that they want – indeed need – to be determined from ‘without’, but society had failed them, casting them out and depriving them of normal socialisation. To level such accusations at the Soviet state was of course in itself daring, and was only narratively possible if the failures happened during the national trauma of war.

Throughout their picaresque tales, a ‘correct’ path from which they were diverted is implicit. The existence they recount is circular – expelled from their family home, they wander peripatetically between prison camps, places of exile and the occasional provincial rail station – but their petitions embodied the hope that they might soon reach their final destination. These petition letters were not finished autobiographies, but works-in-progress. Hope remained that the authorities would intercede, allowing them back into society to enjoy its corrective and educational influence. The letters often finished with a very personal appeal to those they addressed, pleading to be allowed to return to the true path, and promising to justify the faith shown in them. Ivanov/Tikhonov begged: ‘I ask you as a Soviet citizen to be allowed to work, while I still can, in a factory or works.’⁵² Another wrote: ‘Again I ask you to pardon me and let me return to free work, to my wife and child, and I will work honestly [*chestno*] without sparing myself, and justify your faith in me.’⁵³ All the petitions anxiously repeated that if their authors were allowed home, they would work hard and be good family men. Unlike the petitions of purge victims, they did not imagine a triumphant

⁵¹ Moretti, *The Way of the World*, p. 21.

⁵² GARF f. 8131, op. 31, d. 43332, l. 28.

⁵³ GARF f. 7863, op. 22, d. 2325, l. 5 (petition letter from Ilia Skuratov). Iurii Konstantinov concluded in a very similar fashion: ‘I promise and swear to you that I will justify your faith in me through honest [*chestnyi*] and useful work’. GARF f. 7863, op. 20, d. 1274, l. 8.

or heroic return, but instead expressed a determination to become 'ordinary' members of society. Promising to embrace the Soviet values of family and work, they sought to convince their readers that they had now accepted the 'comfort of civilisation' and were at one with the values of the social world.

The 'unfinished *Bildungsroman*' can be seen to draw on elements from within Soviet cultural heritage. Far from an invention on the part of the petition-writer, it reflected a strand of Soviet culture which had flourished up until the great break of the purges. The possibility of redemption and healing within society had once been a viable way of treating the offender. As the Gulag population fought for its reintegration into society, it asserted that re-education *was* possible, that the social misfit could once more become a valued member of society. Normally too late to deny their wrongdoing, they played the role of the repentant sinner, borrowing old myths of re-education and personal transformation. Naturally they borrowed selectively from these early Soviet narratives of re-education, for while Gor'kii might have his social misfits transformed through labour on the Belomor canal, petitioners were adamant that re-education had to happen within society itself. In their petitions, the Gulag was in fact a site of further corruption, and they could only be brought back to health within society. Frequently denying that they could be considered 'enemies of the people', they presented themselves not as opponents of Soviet power, but as the weak and not fully formed, still in desperate need of society's redemptive force.

The Martyr Prince

Nikolai Kochin typed a fourteen-page petition to Voroshilov in September 1954.⁵⁴ Explaining his reasons for writing, he made no reference to the political changes of the past 18 months, implying that as soon as release from the camps granted him the opportunity, he sought re-examination of his case. The impetus came from within. Although he was angered at the mistreatment he received at the hands of his interrogators, Kochin showed no desire for retribution. He seldom referred to the names of those responsible, and made no requests for the guilty to be brought to justice. Thus he neither relied on the rhetorical props of the media, nor presented himself as one of society's 'unfortunates'. Instead, he wrote his life-story as that of a true revolutionary. Kochin's autobiographical petition narrated his life from birth to the present day. With much of his petition devoted to the torment of interrogation, the ordeal of the camps and forced labour was compressed into elliptic phrases like: 'I lost ten years of my life.'⁵⁵ He chronicled the brutal treatment meted out during the investigation, but the main focus was on his struggle with the investigators to write his testimonial. Above all else, he railed against the re-writing of his life, arguing that the investigator turned his biography 'into one black blot [*chernoe piatno*]'.⁵⁶ Through the act of petitioning, he took the opportunity to take back the authorial rights over his own life.

His petition began by asserting his revolutionary credentials under the subheading 'A little bit about myself'. Born in 1902, he was the son of a peasant family from Gor'kii province. He embarked on Soviet work at the age of nineteen as a member of the

⁵⁴ TsADKM f. 85, op. 1, d. 491, ll. 16-29.

⁵⁵ TsADKM f. 85, op. 1, d. 491, l. 28.

⁵⁶ TsADKM f. 85, op. 1, d. 491, l. 22.

village ‘poor committees’ and later fought against kulaks, counterrevolutionaries, saboteurs, and speculators in the village. As personification of the Bolshevik revolutionary, he was upwardly mobile, receiving an education at the pedagogical institute which allowed him to return to the provinces as a teacher in 1924. His life provided material for various novels and tales, and in the 1930s he became a writer and member of the Writers’ Union. In the most exemplary of Soviet narratives, his transformation reached its zenith in 1939 when he was awarded a state prize for literature, joined the party, and was elected a deputy of the Gor’kii *oblast’* soviet.

As he chose to present it, Kochin’s story reflects socialist realist narrative, though in a very different way from the autobiographies of Ivanov, Podavalov *et al.* for his tale is of a young man *successfully* coming to consciousness. Unlike their tales of heinous deviation from the correct path, any erring committed by Kochin was always well within the bounds allowed to a socialist realist hero:

I have never claimed to be someone who never makes mistakes, or who has no doubts and hesitations. I didn’t become [*sformirovat’sia*] a Marxist-Leninist straight off. I didn’t immediately overcome the many vestiges of the past within me [*ne srazu preodolet’ v sebe mnogie perezhitki*]. But I was never for a moment a counter-revolutionary.⁵⁷

With a certain pride, Kochin narrated his early life as a process of inner transformation, the act of *becoming* a revolutionary. A very similar story emerges from the petition of A. Ia. Sverdlov, even though he was born and bred a Bolshevik.⁵⁸ Proclaiming his utter devotion to the party, Sverdlov admitted to having erred as a youth, when he joined the Trotskyists in 1927. Even after he parted company with them, he failed to ‘save’ himself immediately from certain personal inadequacies.

⁵⁷ TsADKM f. 85, op. 1, d. 491, l. 27.

⁵⁸ He was the son of the leading revolutionary Iakov Sverdlov.

Despite noble birth, he still struggled to become a revolutionary, repeatedly having to recognise his mistakes as he strived to become the fine example of a communist he now believed himself to be.⁵⁹

Katerina Clark suggests that the early socialist realist hero shared similarities with figures from various genres of the old Russian written tradition, including hagiography and sections of the chronicles which recount the secular virtues of princes, especially their sense of honour, duty, valour, and service.⁶⁰ Clark identifies three symbolic patterns surrounding the revolutionary hero in early radical fiction: first, the hero is a relatively naïve person who comes to see the light; second, he is a member of a revolutionary family; third, he experiences some kind of martyrdom, possibly with a quasi-religious death and resurrection motif. Kochin may have been unusual in narrating so coherently the transition from peasant to conscious communist, yet many petitions included at least some of these elements identified by Clark as features of the early Bolshevik hero. Despite their ordeal, these survivors presented themselves not as victims, but as heroes. In their petitions they emerge as highly honourable revolutionaries, tied into the revolutionary movement by strong kinship or family bonds, and ready martyrs to the Bolshevik cause.

Claiming their rights to rehabilitation, many petitioners presented themselves, or their relatives, as honourable and dutiful heroes. In October 1954, N. Z. Pertsovskii wrote to Voroshilov with a request for the rehabilitation of his late father, who was arrested in 1938. In his petition he made no demands for any sort of material recompense, but

⁵⁹ Iakovlev, *Reabilitatsiia: Kak eto bylo*, pp. 66–69 (APRF f. 3, op. 58, d. 224, ll. 93–98).

⁶⁰ Clark, *The Soviet Novel*, p. 47. She suggests, for example, that these qualities are found in Pavel, the hero of Gor'kii's *Mother*.

expressed concern only for his father's honour, writing 'my conscience cannot be clear whilst my father's honour is still stained by these serious accusations'.⁶¹ Despite the brevity of her letter, the issue of honour recurred twice more.⁶² Employing similar language, I. V. Kirenko applied for both her own rehabilitation and the rehabilitation of her late husband, who had been a senior engineer within the military, writing: 'I consider that it is my duty to clean the honour of my husband, even posthumously, as I know how much he valued his stainless [*nezapiatannaia*] honour.'⁶³ The privations she experienced obliged Kirenko to plead for practical aid in the process of finding work and registration, but for her dead husband the issue at stake was only his honour (*chest*).⁶⁴

Indeed, many found it agonising to think they had acted against the dictates of communist honour. Kochin repeatedly stressed his remorse for the false testimonials he signed under duress, for he believed that nothing could 'excuse a communist signing false documents, not even torture'.⁶⁵ Whilst ordinary mortals might succumb to physical torment, a communist belonged to a higher order and should have absolute fortitude. Those who did refuse to sign false confessions used it as further proof of their heroism. S. Filipovich, a doctor who had once worked for Voroshilov, sent him

⁶¹ GARF f. 7523, op. 107, d. 123, l. 20. She was notified the following year that her father had died in 1943, and had now been posthumously rehabilitated (d. 123, l. 22).

⁶² GARF f. 7523, op. 107, d. 123, l. 20.

⁶³ GARF f. 7523, op. 107, d. 123, l. 83.

⁶⁴ The adjective '*chestnyi*' and adverb '*chestno*' are stalwarts of the Soviet lexicon. Meaning to be honest or fair, they are used frequently to denote actions or people considered 'correct' and in accordance with society's values. A '*chestnyi chelovek*' could be translated as a 'respectable person' and '*chestno rabotat*' simply means to labour in accordance with society's norms – rather than any sort of dubious means. The noun '*chest*', however, retains a quite different meaning – honour. The right to honour is exclusive, and remains the preserve of an elite. Thus when the relatives ask for their relative's honour to be cleaned, they in fact want him restored to the honours list, asserting his status as someone unusual and heroic.

⁶⁵ TsADKM f. 85, op. 1, d. 491, l. 19.

an intimate letter in April 1953, reminding him that they had worked together between 1924 and 1938:

In the fifteen long and heavy years since then, I have always remembered you saying that anyone who tells you an untruth, whatever it might be, loses your trust forever. Now I can repeat to you, that I only ever told you the truth.

He continued: 'The desire always to be truthful in your eyes gave me strength in 1938 to resist the 'refined' methods investigators used to force me [*izoshchrenii vymogatel'stv*] into giving false testimonial against myself.'⁶⁶ Reminding Voroshilov of their comradeship, he hoped to bolster his chances of rehabilitation. His formulations suggested the existence of an honour-code between Old Bolsheviks, where commitment to 'truth' was an unbreakable law. Although it would seem that Voroshilov had offered no practical assistance against the repression, Filipovich's petition insisted on the existence of kinship bonds linking Bolsheviks and sustaining them in their most extreme suffering.

Just as the early revolutionary hero belonged to a radical 'family', the letters of repressed communists fiercely asserted their membership to a closed community. Sometimes their entitlement came through blood ties. Kirenko, for example, wrote that she was descended from a family of teachers and that between 1898 and 1911 their apartment had served as a safe house for political exiles on the run and as a store for illegal propaganda, including the underground Bolshevik newspaper *Iskra*.⁶⁷ The wife of a communist repressed in 1937, Antonina Veiner, informed Voroshilov that her husband's mother was a Bolshevik, and that her father was a Baku railway worker

⁶⁶ GARF f. 7523, op. 107, d. 123, l. 1.

⁶⁷ GARF f. 7523, op. 107, d. 123, l. 84.

and party member from 1905.⁶⁸ In both letters, genealogy was used to strengthen revolutionary credentials. In other cases, the journey towards revolution forged these tight bonds. Barkhonov, a senior figure within the military management in 1938, was supported in the petitioning process by Army General Khrulev, who wrote: 'I know Barkhonov from childhood, when we used to go together to the local *zemstvo* school and my brother and I used to stay over at his home. I knew him later when he worked with my father at the Putilov works.'⁶⁹ A childhood friendship initiated in the local school for poor children, flourished in adulthood at the Putilov factory – a key site for the forging of the revolutionary spirit before 1917.

The revolutionary hero of early Bolshevik fiction was expected to lead an ascetic life of extraordinary dedication and self-deprivation. Clark writes that while the hero in mature socialist realism was 'a *bogatyr* figure', 'a dynamic figure, a veritable *perpetuum mobile*' and a 'vessel of inexhaustible revolutionary energy', his precursor in pre-revolutionary radical hagiography had been 'the typical martyr prince'.⁷⁰

Although Soviet prisoners were far from inactive for much of their incarceration, and the years, even decades, of forced labour offered plenty of material for strenuous and dynamic scenes, most petitioners preferred to present themselves as 'martyr princes'. They wrote highly abridged versions of their sentences, often nothing more loquacious than 'I honestly served 17 years in the camps' or 'I spent ten years working honestly in prison'.⁷¹ It was their experience of incarceration and torture that strengthened their life-stories as saintly revolutionary heroes. In the late tsarist era, prison was an inevitable chapter in the autobiography of a committed radical, and,

⁶⁸ GARF f. 7523, op. 107, d. 123, ll. 9-11.

⁶⁹ GARF f. 7523, op. 107, d. 123, l. 13.

⁷⁰ Clark, *The Soviet Novel*, pp. 72-3.

paradoxically, the solitary cell as symbolic site for the formation of true revolutionary identity seems to have retained its potency.⁷² Solitary suffering furnished the prisoner with saint-like virtue. Many of the petitions focus their narratives on the harrowing experiences of Lefortovo and Butyrka, rather than within the camps. It was in the torture chambers, where their right to be called a communist was doubted and disputed, that their faith was most sorely tested. In their narratives, survival required mental and spiritual strength rather than physical might. The faith of the purge victim was thus absolutely central to his identity. Kochin, for instance, described all that he has lost – a decade of his life, his health, reputation, citizenship, family, and friends, work – but then assured the reader:

But not for a moment did I lose faith in the cause of communism, which I have served all my life. I didn't lose confidence that justice would triumph, and being in prison didn't turn me against Soviet power even for a moment. I didn't become bitter for I found inside myself the strength and integrity of a confirmed consciousness [*ubezhdennogo soznaniia*], which makes one recognise the inexorable motion of history and its unavoidable costs [*izderzhki*].⁷³

He wrote that even prison failed to rock his faith in the party, and in the darkest of circumstances he was aided in his battle against internal demons by belief in the Marxist-Leninism creed. If anything, his time banished to the wilderness made him a stronger Bolshevik.

In radical Bolshevik fiction, the positive hero should ideally be ready to make the supreme sacrifice of his life. If he died, the event was commonly followed by a secularised version of the Christian death-and-transfiguration pattern, with the hero's

⁷¹ GARF f. 7523, op. 107, d. 123, l. 14; TsADKM f. 85, op. 1, d. 491, l. 28.

⁷² Susan Morrissey, *Heralds of Revolution: Russian Students and the Mythologies of Radicalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 34.

⁷³ TsADKM f. 85, op. 1, d. 491, l. 28.

'resurrection' symbolised, for example, by a comrade-in-arms taking up his banner.⁷⁴ Some petition-writers hoped that their exclusion could be interpreted as a symbolic death, their return as rebirth. Barkhonov, released early for good work, wrote: 'I was born on earth a second time, everything is new for me, even buses'.⁷⁵ For others, however, 'rebirth' was only possible when their honour was restored, and they could take their place in the revolutionary family. After eight years in prison and six in exile, Aleksandr Langovyi returned to Moscow, but only rehabilitation could offer him rebirth. He explained: 'For 16 years I was disgraced [*oplevannyi* – literally, spat upon] and every further month of bureaucratic red tape lies on my soul like a stone, especially as I still hope to be born again as a human being [*vozrodit'sia chelovekom*].'⁷⁶

Allowed home, returnees clamoured for the restoration of their honour and their party cards. In writing their petitions, they were interested not only in what they hoped the party might do for them, but also in what they might offer the party. Langovyi wrote: 'I am 59 years-old, I have aged considerably, but I am mentally hale and hearty [*dushevno bodr*], and in those years that are left to me I would like to work with all my strength for the cause to which I have devoted all my life.'⁷⁷ Even while waiting for rehabilitation, Kochin devoted all his time to writing his next novel. Not only did he think he could still serve the Bolshevik cause, he dared to believe that his experiences over the past decade gave him *more* legitimacy as a writer: having worked as a prisoner in the state farms (*sovkhozy*) of Karaganda *oblast'* he considered himself to be in a better position to write about the Kazakh steppe than any other

⁷⁴ Clark, *The Soviet Novel*, p. 49.

⁷⁵ GARF f. 7523, op. 107, d. 123, l. 14.

⁷⁶ GARF f. 7523, op. 107, d. 123, l. 33.

writer. He signed off his long petition with a plea to be allowed to be useful to society in the last years of his life. Both as symbols of the party's resurrection and as valuable cadres, the former enemies hoped to serve the revolution.

Elena Stasova, Lenin's former colleague and a senior Old Bolshevik aged over eighty years, received many letters from repressed communists.⁷⁸ In this less formal forum, the returnees might be more explicit about the difficulties they encountered in daily life, but they were just as passionate in their loyalty to the revolution. A former Bolshevik named Rikhter had been in correspondence with Stasova since 1944,⁷⁹ and it was to Stasova that he articulated both his frustrations and aspirations upon return from the camps. Released from the camps in 1954, he was rehabilitated at the end of the following year. He lived in a small room of 6m² in Novgorod, and was disappointed that staff at the *gorkom* and *obkom* failed to treat him with sufficient respect:

I try not to lose heart and be patient, but a bitter taste remains: I expected that after 18 years of undeserved suffering, I would have a right to a minimum of sensitivity, and not to repeated questioning and interrogations, which painfully touch unhealed wounds.⁸⁰

After almost a decade of correspondence with Stasova, he did not hesitate to share the tribulations he faced, and his annoyance with the hostile attitudes occasionally shown by local authorities. Yet none of this led him to question the party – quite the

⁷⁷ GARF f. 7523, op. 107, d. 123, l. 34.

⁷⁸ When it was hoped that a senior Bolshevik might remember a former colleague, he might be targeted more personally. As we have seen, letters addressed to Voroshilov as head of the Supreme Soviet often had a quite personal quality. Victims of prisoners might also nurture an informal correspondence. E. D. Stasova, a senior Old Bolshevik, corresponded with a number of communists who were repressed and released in the mid-1950s.

⁷⁹ He wrote asking her to support his demand to be allowed to go and fight in WWII. She refused, arguing that she did not know him sufficiently well to grant such a request. Their correspondence continued, however, and appears to have become more intimate.

⁸⁰ RGASPI f. 356, op. 2, d. 34, ll. 11-12.

opposite. Patiently battling against these further injustices was also part and parcel of the extraordinary test of faith he had endured for so long. Throughout 1955, he admitted to thinking only about one thing: 'I have been patient and will continue to be patient, but I will never stop striving for the main aim of my whole life: returning to the party.'⁸¹ Elsewhere he talked of the importance of returning to the 'family of the party' (*v rody partii*). His battle to clear his name could thus not be satisfied by legal rehabilitation alone. Until the party admitted him, the torment would continue, and he claimed: 'Compared to Vorkuta, I feel much better here, but it is painful that I, a new person, am still cut off from social life.'⁸² Although he wanted to believe that he had been reborn, he would feel himself an outcast until the party recognised him fully.

Sofiia Shpits, Stasova's former colleague, became another of her regular correspondents in 1954.⁸³ Rehabilitated as early as 1953, her life was governed both by daily privations and ill health on the one hand, and by an overwhelming faith in the party on the other. She wrote:

Nineteen years have passed. From a young woman and passionate revolutionary I have been transformed into an old woman whose health is shattered. Every month, every day, it becomes harder to go to work. I don't have any relatives or anyone close to help me.

My rehabilitation is a bright ray of sunlight in front of the sunset. It is a victory for truth. I am a sick person, and there is already little left to live for.⁸⁴

In the epistolary exchange that followed, the hope of reinstatement into the party became increasingly important to her. As the pension she was eventually granted was insufficient to allow her to stop working, life continued to be onerous, but in the

⁸¹ RGASPI f. 356, op. 2, d. 34, l. 17.

⁸² RGASPI f. 356, op. 2, d. 34, l. 35.

⁸³ The correspondence began when Shpits asked Stasova for information concerning their work in the 1930s which the authorities required to assess her pension.

autumn of 1955 she excitedly announced to Stasova that she had written to the Central Committee: 'I want to tell you that I can't stand by on the sidelines any more. I must be in the party once more and again bear the distinguished title of member of the Communist Party.'⁸⁵ Worried that Stasova might question her delay in addressing the party, Shpits explained in detail the emotional distress she had experienced over the last few months, especially as rehabilitation had brought on a nervous breakdown, the result of years of extreme stress. Many features of her tale are typical of the 'martyr prince'(ess) narratives. First, she interpreted her ordeal as an attack on her honour:

I don't know, Elena Dmitrevna, if you will understand that kind of state? It was a terrible reaction. My misfortunes had dragged on for 16 years. It wasn't just that no one had any sympathy or pity for me and no one needed me – it was the misfortune of a clean, honest revolutionary-communist, who had been shamed, whose honour had been cut off [*chest' otrezali*].

Imagining her honour 'cut off', her words revealed its very tangible reality. Second, she promoted herself as a ready martyr for the cause, a believer whose faith knew no bounds:

Whom could I show that I was clean, without guilt, and that I was ready at any moment to give up my life for the cause of communism, revolution, the working class, the fatherland, for everything that is dear to us? But I had no one to tell, no one would believe me.

Third, she adopted a quasi-religious language, replete with burning souls, death-throes and salvation:

For nineteen years my soul has burnt. And then when salvation came, the organism didn't hold out, and I found myself in hospital. The spiritual death-throes have passed [*dushevnaia agoniia otoshla*], and now I want to live and with all my strength to catch up with everything that I lost, with all my soul and burning love to deserve the title of member of the party, our dear [*rodnoi*] party.

⁸⁴ RGASPI f. 356, op. 2, d. 41, l. 1.

⁸⁵ RGASPI f. 356, op. 2, d. 41, l. 6.

And finally, she cast Stasova as her confessor. 'Elena Dmitrevna!' she wrote, 'Please forgive me for writing so much, and forcing you to read what is in my soul.'⁸⁶ In her narrative, the death-bed scene and the reading of her soul imposed on Stasova clearly have religious overtones. We need not interpret this as some sort of 'hang-over' from pre-revolutionary Orthodoxy, however. It is significant rather that Shpits found the vocabulary of religious belief best to describe the total nature of her devotion. In Shpits' letter, she voluntarily re-entered the rituals that gripped the party in the 1920s and 1930s and forced Stasova to collaborate in what Halfin has labelled the 'communist hermeneutics of the soul'.⁸⁷ Shpits was not alone. Rather than fearing re-trials and renewed interrogation, several petitioners, including Kochin and Sverdlov, implored the authorities to recall them, to read their souls in the 'light of truth'.

With the exception of Kochin's, these are as yet fragmentary autobiographies. Anxious to parade their heroic virtues, the authors were still uncertain how their stories would end. As we shall see in the following chapter, the process of public destalinisation would help to legitimise their life-stories, and many would begin to write fuller and more coherent autobiographies. In 1964, when Shpits finally produced a long and substantial petition to the party, she was able to present the reader with a much more coherent narrative of her life both as revolutionary heroine in Germany, where Rosa Luxemburg had been her mentor, and in the Soviet Union first as a young party activist then, after 1936, as martyr to the Bolshevik cause.

⁸⁶ RGASPI f. 356, op. 2, d. 41, l. 7.

⁸⁷ Halfin, 'The Demonization of the Opposition', pp. 46-7.

Yet destalinisation was in itself dependent upon the noble mood of returnees. Already in these letters, petitioners offered leaders the basis for a new narrative of the Soviet past. Eschewing demands for retribution or pleas for pity, they interpreted the repressions as another heroic battle on the road to communism. Even here, in the darkest chapter of Soviet history, they found – in their own courage and martyrdom – the seeds of a new, even inspiring, version of the past. As the nation's leaders sought to exclude some of the antagonistic elements of Stalinist culture and to downplay the conflict between society and its enemies, these letters suggested new heroes – noble, spiritual martyrs to the Bolshevik cause. Promoting the notions of 'truth' and 'belief' above all else, purge victims led the way in the return to the purity of 1917.

Conclusion

In moments of passionate conflict, some Gulag returnees attacked Soviet power by exploiting the binary values the regime itself had propagated and by expressing their allegiance to the 'negative' axis. As they sought readmission, however, they wrote stories in which they identified with the values of the 'positive' axis. Yet their quite varied narrative strategies reveal the more complex nature of Soviet culture. Official culture did not provide one script to the aspiring Soviet citizen.

Depending on their age, experience, and personality, petitioners drew on different myths and tropes located within the official canon. Some found the explanations proffered by the contemporary press useful. They claimed their conviction was a miscarriage of justice for which enemies within the MVD, the party, or legal profession, bore responsibility. Such an approach, however, brought with it the

spectre of a new cycle of identifying enemies, securing confessions, meting out punishment. Two other kinds of petition narrative drew not on the present-day media, but on the rich Soviet cultural heritage. Those brought up during the war explained their deviance by noting the incomplete or unsatisfactory upbringing they had received, and they appealed to the notions of 'healing' and 'correction' which had been prevalent in the party rhetoric of the 1920s. By blaming the war, they offered the authorities a possible explanation for the existence of criminal behaviour even after almost forty years of Soviet power. Those who had been banished from society as a result of political repression drew on even earlier forms of the socialist realist narrative, presenting themselves as martyrs to the revolutionary cause. By presenting their ordeals as proof of their absolute faith, they suggested to the authorities that the purges might not undermine the party, but actually serve as an affirmation of its own courage and heroism.

Entering into the dialogue of 1953, prisoners, ex-prisoners, and their families offered their own versions of Soviet history. They challenged both the life-story imposed upon them under Stalin, and the ones suggested by the media in 1953. Their contribution would not be ignored. Both the 'martyr hero' of the 1930s and the 'lost sheep' of the war generation would become important figures in the official rhetoric of the 1950s, as the post-Stalin leaders looked for ways to lessen the binary divisions created by Stalinism and sought to develop legitimating and fortifying explanations to deal with the difficult legacies they inherited.

Chapter III

Heroes and Enemies in the Secret Speech

Having returned home from the party meeting, Algaia couldn't stop worrying. She drank a vodka, then took valerian drops, then another vodka. She lay down, then jumped up and ran around the room, thinking, but not understanding, how this had all happened. Things had been said that made it impossible to live as they had done before. Khrushchev had spoken, Mikoian had supported him, and Molotov, Malenkov, Voroshilov and Kaganovich had kept quiet [...] What had happened to them? Had they gone mad? Were they traitors? All of them?

- Vladimir Voinovich, 'Monumental'naia Propaganda', 2000¹

Khrushchev's address at the XX Party Congress dominates the historiography of the era. Historians and contemporaries alike depict it as a radical and unforeseen volte-face in the country's political course, which left Khrushchev's audience in a state of unprecedented shock. The historian Martin McCauley writes:

What he had to say shocked, amazed, and stunned his audience. Their whole world was demolished in front of their eyes [...] Khrushchev got carried away in his wreaking of vengeance on Stalin. One delegate was so shocked by the revelations that she was unable to raise her arm to vote acceptance of the report.²

¹ Vladimir Voinovich, 'Monumental'naia Propaganda', *Znamua*, 2000.2, 8-94, and 2000.3, 9-108, (2000.2, p. 17).

² Martin McCauley, *Nikita Khrushchev* (London: Cardinal, 1991), p. 58.

The Soviet historian and dissident, Roy Medvedev concurs:

To the delegates and guests most of what they heard that day in the Great Hall of the Kremlin was a revelation indeed. They listened in shocked silence, only occasionally interrupting the speaker with exclamations of amazement and indignation.³

All must have been fearfully aware that Khrushchev's speech marked a major and irrevocable breach in Soviet history. Once the doors of the Great Hall opened and the content of the speech began to circulate, the drama was replicated in miniature at party meetings across the nation.

The 'Secret Speech' is, of course, a misnomer. Not only were the contents of Khrushchev's midnight address widely disseminated abroad, they were made known to all members of the Soviet Communist Party. In spring 1956, party members assembled in every workplace to listen as local officials read aloud from Khrushchev's 'closed letter'. There were over seven million members of the Soviet Communist Party and 18 million members of the Komsomol, who were also privy to the document.⁴ There is little to suggest that they kept such astonishing events to themselves. A recent student project has indicated that at least two thirds of Muscovites remember hearing about the Secret Speech in 1956.⁵ At the time, one citizen wrote to Molotov informing him that, though the speech had not been made

³ Roy Medvedev, *Khrushchev*, trans. by Brian Pearce (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982), p. 87.

⁴ Aksiutin, 'Popular Responses to Khrushchev', pp. 182-3.

⁵ Aksiutin cites from a survey carried out between 1994 and 1997 by students in the history faculty of the Moscow Pedagogical University. 568 people who were alive in 1956 were asked what their reaction had been to the speech: 163 said they had approved, 185 had disapproved, and 220 knew nothing at the time of Stalin's demotion or were uncertain how to react – although the two are not the same, they are banded together in the results of the survey. Although the statistics are questionable, they suggest that a vast majority knew of the speech, and that positive and negative reactions were fairly evenly represented. See Iu. V. Aksiutin, 'Novoe o XX s'ezde KPSS', *Otechestvennaia istoriia*, 1998.2, 108-123 (p.120).

public yet, everyone knew its content.⁶ Even children knew of Stalin's dethronement. Two schoolgirls informed Molotov that after Khrushchev's speech was read in the city's factories, children heard out about it from adult conversation and the 'cult of personality' became a 'subject of discussion at home and at school'.⁷

What made the Secret Speech unusual was the lack of commentary in the Soviet press or on the radio. After organising the distribution of Khrushchev's text, Moscow was inordinately slow to make any attempt at exegesis. Not until the end of March did *Pravda* publish a piece on the cult of personality. In it, Stalin was criticised for encouraging adulation and ignoring the principle of collective leadership, but there was no mention of the purges or of Stalin's war-time failures.⁸ The Soviet public was still left to make its own interpretation of the most shocking and controversial sections of the speech.

This 'silence' provoked protest from some within Soviet society. One man wrote to Molotov: 'I am begging you to speak out in the newspapers and to explain to the people how they should regard Stalin, and whether their appreciation of him can continue, or if it is necessary to evaluate him differently now.'⁹ A vehement opponent of the speech believed that the absence of public commentary reflected its dubious political worth, arguing in a letter to Molotov:

⁶ RGASPI f. 82, op. 2, d. 1458, l. 2.

⁷ RGASPI f. 82, op. 2, d. 1461, l. 87.

⁸ On 28 March 1956 pages 2 and 3 of *Pravda* featured a long piece under the headline 'Why Is the Cult of Personality Alien to the Spirit of Marxism-Leninism?' On 2 July 1956 the topic was blazoned across the front cover of *Pravda*, but the reading of the Secret Speech was even more conservative. When letter-writers engaged with an 'official' text in 1956, however, they did not spread out a newspaper article before them, but rather drew on what they remembered of Khrushchev's 'closed' letter.

⁹ RGASPI f. 82, op. 2, d. 1445, l. 104.

The fact that this letter wasn't read out on the radio and in the newspapers like the other materials from the XX Party Congress shows that the person who wrote the letter wasn't certain himself that it would be approved, and it shows the criminality and the slander of the letter. At the congress you weren't afraid to read it in front of the foreign guests, but in front of the people you are afraid to read it at the top of your voice. You whisper like cowards in the corners of party and Komsomol meetings.¹⁰

Hostile to the Secret Speech, the writer's anger was re-doubled by his feeling that he, as a non-party man, was excluded from discussions and debates surrounding it. Indeed some party members realised that the silence surrounding the Speech had only served to heighten the crisis. At the Sverdlov *raion* party meeting in Moscow, one member asked if they should organise explanations of the cult of personality for workers and housewives, as the press's reticence was creating rumours.¹¹ After giving a series of open lectures on the meaning of the Secret Speech, the renowned historian A. M. Pankratova also informed the Central Committee of the need to produce more explanatory material. Attracting over 6000 listeners and with the auditorium bursting, her lectures clearly responded to a need within Leningrad society. Reporting on the opinions she encountered at her lectures she summarised the questions raised in the 800 written notes submitted by those attending and warned that one *Pravda* article was far from sufficient.¹²

Many who entered into dialogue with the state hoped that their letters might themselves serve as the basis for a public debate. Seeking to spark a reaction in the press, one ordered the editors of *Kommunist* to publish his letter.¹³ Another suggested his letter be published alongside the Secret Speech in order for the public to make its

¹⁰ RGASPI f. 82, op. 2, d. 1467, l. 22.

¹¹ TsAODM f. 82, op. 34, d. 12, l. 33. In a letter to Molotov, another party member complained that the speech was being read at open party meetings, and the writer worried that housewives and the rest of the non-working population were present. See RGASPI f. 82, op. 2, d. 1461, l. 88.

¹² RGANI f. 5, op. 32, d. 46, ll. 212-217.

preference in a secret ballot.¹⁴ Just as many were uncertain how the authorities wanted them to respond to the Secret Speech, many also believed that their leaders were unaware of the mood of the people. The need to enlighten their leaders justified writing letters, and they urged their readers to listen to their opinions. Convinced that his own views were widespread, one opponent of destalinisation suggested that leaders should find out the true opinion of rank and file members of the party on the subject of the cult of personality.¹⁵ Another regretted that they did not have an 'institute of public opinion' like they did in America, suggesting his belief that the authorities were unaware of public reactions.¹⁶

This chapter explores the reactions engendered by the ambiguous and unexplained document that circulated in Soviet society in early 1956. The reaction in Georgia was the most explosive. In Tbilisi and other provincial cities, crowds insisted on commemorating Stalin's death as they had done in previous years, and the demonstrations were only quelled by the arrival of Soviet troops, mass arrests, and bloodshed.¹⁷ Elsewhere, events tended to be less violent, but party authorities were still concerned. In Moscow, the primary party organisations were first instructed to organise readings of the material and then urgently told to stop. The grassroots response had caused the city's leaders such anxiety that they considered it prudent to delay the meetings and 'prepare more thoroughly'.¹⁸

¹³ RGASPI f. 599, op. 1, d. 101, l. 67.

¹⁴ RGASPI f. 82, op. 2, d. 1466, l. 106.

¹⁵ RGASPI f. 82, op. 2, d. 1467, l. 19.

¹⁶ RGASPI f. 82, op. 2, d. 1467, l. 25.

¹⁷ Kozlov, *Mass Uprisings*, pp. 112-129.

¹⁸ RGASPI f. 556, op. 1, d. 705, l. 146.

The approach taken in this study is not to divide the responses into two camps: opponents of the Secret Speech on the one hand, supporters on the other.¹⁹ Instead, I find it is more productive to explore the shared beliefs that structured the responses of both those 'for' and 'against'. Indeed, it is not only in the 'conservative' responses that we find beliefs established under Stalin strongly influencing the public's interpretation of the Secret Speech, but right across the political gamut.

The first set of responses engaged with issues of public culture, especially the fate of established rituals and practices. Typically, one man told Molotov it would have been better to leave Stalin in peace and to let him stay in the people's minds as he was when he was alive and 'how you created him in the minds of the people'.²⁰ His focus was thus the cultural artifice of 'Stalin', rather than discovery of the 'truth'. In his study of Soviet monumentality, Mikhail Yampolsky argues that political symbols (such as statues) create 'certain islets of eternity in the movement of time' or 'atemporal islets in the social space'. One of the achievements of Soviet culture was the 'maximal suppression of chronological time and the creation of the illusion of stability and stasis for the functioning of the masses'.²¹ The Secret Speech undermined this illusion of timelessness, and for many the uncertainty engendered by the changes in public space and ritual behaviour was its most disturbing aspect.

¹⁹ In his seminal article 'The Friends and Foes of Change', Stephen Cohen made the division between 'reformers' who supported change *per se*, and conservatives who feared it. This opposition between those 'for' change and those 'against' tends to be implicit in much of the secondary literature. My intention instead is to suggest how divergent viewpoints may in fact share certain fundamental premises.

²⁰ RGASPI f. 82, op. 2, d. 1467, l. 18.

In contrast, a second set of responses focused on the 'truth'. Brooks maintains that '[i]ntellectuals took advantage of Khrushchev's "thaw" to champion "sincerity", the antithesis of the performative culture.'²² Rejecting the 'false' narratives of the Stalin period, the Secret Speech was proclaimed the restoration of truth. Instead of yearning for the eternal nature of Stalin's magical world, some – and not just 'intellectuals' – sought to discover the 'true' story of their past. Terror was condemned, incorporated into new narratives where the party drew strength from the fact that it had overcome the 'evil' within.

It is not my intention to attribute the different kinds of response to particular social groups. It is true, however, that contemporary commentators frequently regarded emotional anxiety over the fate of portraits, bodies, and songs as the preserve of the 'masses'. Later in 1956 a certain Vasilii Taran wrote that 'the masses ask what to do with the portraits and books about Stalin (for there are millions of them!) and with songs about him (for there are thousands of them!)'. He noted that party activists shrugged their shoulders, saying they have received no other instructions from above.²³ There does indeed seem to be some difference between the discussions during party meetings at *raion* or primary level, where issues of 'performative' culture dominated, and those at *gorkom* or *obkom*, where the search for the 'true' narrative was prevalent. This might suggest that the regime's symbols and rites were more important for the less powerful within society, and that the revision of Bolshevism

²¹ Mikhail Yampolsky, 'In the Shadow of Monuments: Notes on Iconoclasm and Time', trans. by John Kachur, in *Soviet Hieroglyphics: Visual Culture in Late Twentieth Century Russia*, ed. by Nancy Condee (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1995), pp. 93-112 (p. 97, p.104).

²² His perceptive comments are no doubt influenced by the 1953 article 'On Sincerity in Literature' published in *Novyi mir* – the journal that would emerge as the mouthpiece of the 'thaw'. V. Pomerantsev, 'Ob iskrennosti v literature', *Novyi mir*, 1953.12, 218-245; Brooks, *Thank You*, p. xviii.

²³ RGASPI f. 82, op. 2, d 1461, ll. 46-49.

myth was more significant for those who had more fully committed themselves to the party. This is not, however, an avenue explored in detail.²⁴ Instead, I examine both the discursive differences and similarities between a worldview based on monumentality, stability and the unchanging nature of time, and one that depended on historicised myths of the revolutionary path.

This chapter will open with a brief rereading of Khrushchev's speech. Turning then to the broader reception and interpretation of this ambiguous document, it will examine the great influx of letters to party leaders and the press, as well as responses at local party meetings. All the texts – from the Speech itself to individual letters and recorded speech acts – are examined with particular attention to Manichean beliefs, whether they be embodied in the form of calls for new iconoclastic rituals and the collective repudiation of an enemy, or in the eschatological quest to overcome the 'cult', to cleanse the party of all its contaminants, and assure the purity of the future.

The Text Itself

Khrushchev's memoirs have long been one of the key sources for understanding the significance of the Secret Speech.²⁵ His memoirs suggest that the prime importance of the Secret Speech was the rehabilitation of innocent victims. His chapter on the XX Party Congress begins by claiming that Stalinist policies were still in force until Beria's arrest. 'No one thought to rehabilitate the people who had gone to their

²⁴ This would in itself form the topic of a separate study as it would require extensive local studies on responses to the Secret Speech.

²⁵ Even a recent study such as Thompson's *Khrushchev* is still heavily dependent upon Khrushchev's memoirs, readily adopting Khrushchev's own explanations of the political process.

graves branded as enemies of the people or to release the prisoners from the camps.²⁶

Explaining how Beria's arrest led to further investigation, Khrushchev writes of his personal shock upon discovering that Kedrov, a hero of the civil war, had been executed as an enemy of the people and of his mounting desire to find out more about the arrests. In his version, therefore, his motivation was almost exclusively remorse for the innocent victims of the purges. In his account of the XX Party Congress, moreover, the most dramatic scene is a hurried Presidium meeting where Khrushchev seeks to convince his colleagues of the need to talk openly about the purges and the fate of Stalin's victims.²⁷ He remembers saying:

‘We now know that the people who suffered during the repressions were innocent. We have indisputable proof that, far from being enemies of the people, they were honest men and women, devoted to the party, devoted to the revolution, devoted to the Leninist cause and to the building of socialism and communism in the Soviet Union. We can't keep people in exile or in the camps any longer. We must figure out how to bring them back.’²⁸

Battling against the opposition of certain colleagues in the Presidium, he further argued that as newly released prisoners would soon start coming home, it would be beneficial for the party to speak out now before the returnees began informing the wider public of the injustices they had experienced. According to his memoir, therefore, he was moved by guilt for the atrocities committed against them and

²⁶ *Khrushchev Remembers*, pp. 342-343.

²⁷ Khrushchev writes that no decision had been made until the congress was well underway. In a recess he assembled the Politburo members and entered into a fierce argument with Voroshilov about the possibility of speaking openly about the purges. However, Russian historian Iurii Aksiutin dispels the myth that the other leaders had not decided to go on with the speech right up to the last minute, using archival documents to show that the Presidium had approved the Secret Speech on 13 February 1956. Aksiutin writes that ‘nothing was improvised by Khrushchev, and there were no secret decisions. Khrushchev followed the norms of collective decision-making.’ Aksiutin is one of the leading Russian historians working on the Khrushchev period, offering new versions of political events based on archival research and – in contrast to the political science approach still dominant in the west – also exploring the reactions of the Soviet public. See Aksiutin, ‘Novoe o XX s'ezde KPSS’; Aksiutin and Pyzhikov, *Poststalinskoe obshchestvo*; V. P. Naumov, ‘K istorii sekretnogo doklada N. S. Khrushcheva na XX s'ezda’, *Novaia i noveishaia istoriia*, 1996.4, 147-1.68.

²⁸ *Khrushchev Remembers*, p. 347.

apprehension over the potential threat they posed to political and social stability. If we return to the Secret Speech itself, however, it emerges as a more complex piece of writing than Khrushchev chose to remember.²⁹ It had important implications both for public culture and party myth in the post-Stalin era.

One of the most important aspects was, of course, the desecration of Stalin's reputation. While official propaganda had proclaimed him a hero of the Bolshevik underground, Khrushchev now questioned his revolutionary credentials; while he had been worshiped as the nation's saviour during WWII, Khrushchev now suggested that he had been a rather flawed military leader, responsible for the catastrophic setbacks of 1941. More devastating still were Khrushchev's revelations about the use of terror within the party. Khrushchev told his audience that Stalin had played a leading role in the atrocities committed against thousands of party members. Indeed, Stalin might even have been responsible for the murder of the leading Bolshevik, Sergei Kirov, in 1934.

Khrushchev reviled the notion of Stalin as 'superhuman' (*sverkhchelovek*). The whole culture of worshipping Stalin was now dismissed as a harmful 'cult of personality' that must be destroyed for the good of the party. The attack on Stalinist performative culture went even further. Not only was Stalin found to be an unsuitable hero, the existence of living idols *per se* was said to be harmful and contrary to Lenin's teaching. Khrushchev reminded his audience that Lenin had counted modesty as one of the most important attributes of a Bolshevik, and criticised the practice of idolising

²⁹ A. N. Iakovlev (ed), *Reabilitatsiia: Politicheskie protsessy 30-50 godov* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo literatury, 1991), pp. 19-67.

living people. Khrushchev condemned the fact that many cities, factories, farms, and Soviet cultural institutions were named after party figures who were still alive and well. Although he prescribed caution, he hinted that re-naming should be undertaken. His speech can thus be read as a tentative attack on one of the central aspects of Soviet culture in which heroes were promoted and revered. Despite the fact that he lauded the noble qualities of purge victims, he questioned the need to construct Soviet identity on the basis of an opposition between good and bad, between heroes and enemies.

In addition to the demotion of heroes, therefore, Khrushchev also queried the practice of labelling and casting out 'enemies'. He told his audience that it was Stalin who introduced the concept of 'enemies of the people'. 'When engaged in any sort of polemic, this term immediately freed him from any need to provide proof of the person's ideological error.'³⁰ Later in the speech he referred to the term 'enemy of the people' as a 'formula' that allowed all sorts of abuses. Deriding Stalin for seeing 'enemies', 'double-dealers' (*dvurushniki*), and 'spies' everywhere, Khrushchev undermined key terms in the established lexicon. In his attacks on Stalin, he circumvented the usual rabid rhetoric used in the press against enemies. Accusing Stalin of 'arbitrary rule' (*proizvol*) and 'lawlessness' (*bezzakoniia*), and of committing abuses or distortions of 'revolutionary' or 'socialist legality', Khrushchev promoted the language first found in the press in 1953. In the place of hostile invective, he deliberately avoided labelling Stalin an 'enemy'. Khrushchev instead identified both positive sides (Stalin 'played a positive role' in the ideological battles of 1928-9) and negatives characteristics (his rudeness and despotism). By depicting a human being

who was neither all good nor all bad, it seemed that the era of absolute evil versus heroic good was over. When he talked of Beria, however, Khrushchev used more venomous terms: 'In the organisation of several dirty and shameful affairs, the out-and-out enemy of our party, the agent of foreign spies Beria, who had wormed his way in Stalin's confidence, played a major role.'³¹ Although he wanted to break with the poisonous invective of Stalinist culture, Khrushchev showed how important the enemy remained in the Soviet political imagination. Although the threat of enemies was downplayed, it had not entirely disappeared.

In Khrushchev's rewriting of party history, the enemy camp became much less dangerous than Stalin had claimed so famously in 1937. Rather than seeing the Trotskyists as a mounting threat the further they progressed along the revolutionary path, Khrushchev believed that the party's opposition was almost defeated by the mid-1930s. It was totally unthinkable, he claimed, that 70 per cent of those elected to the Central Committee in 1934 were enemies. Based on this reading of party politics in the 1930s, Khrushchev claimed that the party had long been moving away from the era of conflict (*bor'ba*), and as a result, he argued, the party should be oriented not towards the extermination of deviants, but towards the goal of correction. Khrushchev re-introduced the idea that people might err, yet not immediately be cast out as 'enemies'. Urging a return to the practices of the Leninist era, he reminded his audience that the early years of the revolution witnessed many occasions when people who had vacillated and erred from the party line were given the chance to return to the party path (*put' partiinosti*). He cited the example of Lenin's forgiving approach to

³⁰ *Reabilitatsiia: Politicheskie protsessy*, p. 24.

³¹ *Reabilitatsiia: Politicheskie protsessy*, p. 54.

Lev Kamenev and Grigorii Zinov'ev after the revolution. Khrushchev's portrayal of Lenin was complex, however, for he also admitted that enemies had existed in the early stages of the revolution, and Lenin had shown no mercy towards exploiters from the old regime. The following argument emerged: in the early years of the revolution there *were* enemies, but Lenin still strove to 'correct' not 'destroy' wherever possible; under Stalin, though the actual threat declined, fear of the enemy escalated, and with it came the most extreme 'terroristic' measures. In recognition of the relatively small threat the 'enemy' represented, the order of the day was now correction, and not punishment. Indeed the Secret Speech itself can be read as a confession of the errors of Politburo members who had failed to resist Stalin, and a plea for universal forgiveness.

Despite his negative assessment of the recent past, Khrushchev sought to create legitimising myth. To this end, he drew on the tales of several victims of Stalinist terror, including leading party figures such as R. I. Eikhe, Ia. E. Rudzutak, M. S. Kedrov, P. P. Postyshev, S. V. Kosior, V. Ia. Chubar', and A. V. Kosarev, all killed as 'enemies of the people'. Drawing on petitions unearthed in the archives, he depicted them as the true heirs of the revolution and reproduced the victims' self-stylisation as 'martyr princes' and embodiments of saintly devotion. Again, we find the motifs of truth, honour, and belief. Khrushchev quoted from Eikhe's letter to Stalin:

If I were guilty of even a hundredth of the crimes they're pinning on me, I wouldn't dare to address this dying letter to you, but I haven't committed a single one of the crimes I am charged with, and there has never been a shadow of baseness on my soul. I have never in my life told you even a half-word of untruth, and now, with one foot in the grave, I am also not lying to you.³²

³² *Reabilitatsiia: Politicheskie protsessy*, p. 35.

Eikhe's soul was clean and pure, a martyr about to die for the cause, still full of loyal devotion. Kedrov, referring to himself as the faithful son of the party, wrote: 'To die in a Soviet prison labelled a despicable traitor of his country – what can be more terrible for an honourable person [...] I believe that truth and justice will triumph. I believe, I believe.'³³ Kedrov struggled against the 'enemy' label forced upon him, and reaffirmed his undying faith in the Bolshevik creed. Using their own words, Khrushchev suggested that those long vilified as 'enemies of the people' must now be regarded as honourable revolutionaries. This image of the purge-victim as martyr and hero was common in the petition letters penned in the wake of Stalin's death, and Khrushchev may have been influenced not only by the letters retrieved from the archives, but also those that arrived daily in the Kremlin postbag.

Khrushchev's Secret Speech was a multi-faceted text. Although he demoted Stalin and resurrected the noble martyrs of the purges, this was no simple reversal of fates. Khrushchev also brought into question the practices of mass hero-worship, and the existence of absolute heroes and enemies. Most importantly for this dissertation, he denied the prime place given to enemies, both in terms of the rituals, symbols, and language governing Soviet public life, and in terms of the party's history and its practices for dealing with internal discord.

Ambiguous Semiotics

Stalin's funeral was the final masterpiece in the Stalinist performance, a media event that created a sense of public solidarity and shared suffering across the Soviet Union.

³³ *Reabilitatsiia: Politicheskie protsessy*, p. 56.

With Khrushchev's Secret Speech falling less than two weeks before the third anniversary, some letter-writers remembered the funeral. For several of Molotov's correspondents, memories of Stalin's funeral came to symbolise the demise of a certain way of life. Reminding Molotov how he had grieved by Stalin's graveside three years earlier, medical workers from a small village in Tiumen province said the people felt betrayed.³⁴ A second letter was likewise nostalgic:

Although three years have already passed since the death of I. V. Stalin, your graveside speech still rings in my ears. You read your speech with such pain in your heart... on the loudspeakers we could hear how your voice shook... We all cried listening to you... we cried because our love for Stalin was boundless.

Evoking a community of fellow mourners, the author recalled how grief had bonded the Soviet public to its leaders. Now, however, doubts had appeared. Whereas three years earlier letter-writers expressed their grief in grandiose rhetoric and even elaborated formulaic poems, here the author repeatedly used ellipsis to break off her sentences, as if failing to find conclusive meaning. She finished her letter:

And now they say – or rather they don't say, and I have to rely on rumours, for I am not a party member, and here in the city of Barnaul Khrushchev's letter was only read to party members – that Stalin was little short of an enemy of the people, and they're taking down his portraits, burning literature and so on.³⁵

Again she voiced doubt – was it just in Barnaul that the people were denied access to the speech? And, implicitly, was it right that Stalin should be rejected as a quasi 'enemy of the people'? Her doubts evoked issues that were common in popular responses. As she inquired whether Stalin ought be labelled 'enemy of the people', she probed the changing nature of political language. When she told how local people

³⁴ RGASPI f. 82, op. 2, 1465, ll. 90-91.

³⁵ RGASPI f. 82, op. 2, 1466, l. 131.

destroyed images of the dead leader and burned his literature, she questioned the fate of the sacred symbols and texts of Soviet culture. Her anxieties were not uncommon.

One of the most important issues was Stalin's body, perhaps because the body of his predecessor had already acquired such significance. On display in the Mausoleum at the very heart of the Soviet state, Lenin's body had become 'a holy relic', allowing his powers to continue beyond his physical death.³⁶ Visits to the Mausoleum had become an enduring ritual in Soviet culture. If Stalin was allowed to remain alongside Lenin after public condemnation, it risked contaminating the sanctity of Lenin's body and undermining the purity of Soviet rites. Although Khrushchev had made no mention of Stalin's body in the Secret Speech, many who read the speech were desperate for an answer. At almost every lower level party meeting, the list of questions posed by the audience included the fate of the body. At the Suzdal *raion* meeting in Vladimir province, for example, one delegate asked how the question of the Mausoleum was to be resolved, while another party member wished to know what was going on at the Mausoleum and whether Stalin was still lying next to Lenin. According to party reports, one of the most popular questions at factory meetings in the city of Vladimir was whether Stalin was still in the Mausoleum.³⁷ As news leaked after the party meetings elsewhere, gossip in one shop-queue held that Stalin was going to be removed.³⁸

For both supporters and opponents of destalinisation, the body was rich in meaning. In a passionate defence of Stalin, one Stalingrader wrote to Molotov that the people

³⁶ Nina Tumarkin, *Lenin Lives! The Lenin Cult in Soviet Russia* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983), p. 173.

³⁷ Vladimir Oblast' Party Archive, f. P-830, op. 3, d. 212, ll. 65-66; ll. 109-110; ll. 170.

still loved Stalin. Pinning his hopes on Stalin's right-hand man, he entreated Molotov to intervene: 'It's clear now that Khrushchev's band is getting ready to liquidate Stalin's body. Speak with Mao Tse Tung, and ask him that if this should happen would he take the body to his country on a temporary basis.'³⁹ For Ishchenko, a poorly educated, middle-aged man working as a night watchman on a building site in Stavropol, Stalin signified something quite different – a 'grasping beast' who stole from the people. In an emotional letter addressed to Voroshilov, Ishchenko asked why Stalin had not been wiped from history yet, and demanded that they disposed of the body because it stank.⁴⁰ Like the decaying body of a religious man once claimed to be a saint, the alleged smell of putrefaction betrayed Stalin as a false icon.⁴¹ The handwriting and spelling of their letters suggest that both men were diffident scribes, yet both risked committing themselves to paper because they believed that they spoke for a Soviet public for whom the body was significant – whether as symbol of rotting leadership or as an icon of great Soviet power.

Although its most powerful embodiment lay in the Mausoleum, Stalin's iconography was reproduced in public places, offices, and homes across the country. As with his body, many were anxious to know what to do with his portraits. A frequent question raised at local party meetings was 'What should we do with his portraits?' or translated more literally, 'How should we be with portraits of Stalin?' (*Kak byt' s*

³⁸ RGANI f. 5, op. 32, d. 46, l. 177.

³⁹ RGASPI f. 82, op. 2, d. 1467, l. 3

⁴⁰ GARF f. 8131, op. 31, d. 82269, l. 42.

⁴¹ In Dostoevskii's *The Brothers Karamzov*, for example, Father Zosima had been considered a great saint during his life, and there was expectation that when he died his body would not rot like ordinary human flesh. Within hours, however, an 'odour of corruption' was emanating from the coffin. Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamzov*, trans. by David Magarshack (London: Folio Society, 1964), pp. 361-374.

portretami Stalina?).⁴² One party member asked what action should be taken with the portraits of Stalin hanging in the red corners.⁴³ Schoolchildren told Molotov that in the neighbouring school, the children were taking pictures off the walls and ripping them up. No one was punishing them. Did this mean it was right, they asked.⁴⁴ One subscriber to *Bolshevik* told the editors that many local party officials were taking down portraits of Stalin, and this ‘upsets the people’ (*vozmushchaet narod*). She described in detail the confusion that reigned at a local factory:

Yesterday workers from Workshop 34 came to the bursar and cursed him for taking down the portraits of Stalin, calling him an over-zealous fool. In my opinion they were right.

Twice a member of the factory party bureau came running up to one of the department managers in the factory’s administration and asked why he hadn’t taken down the portrait of Iosif Vissarionovich Stalin in his office. The manager said that he wouldn’t allow anyone to touch the portrait.⁴⁵

She also described the tremendous fear experienced by the manager’s wife on learning that her husband was acting against orders. Despite his wife’s warnings that he might be arrested as a ‘cult of personality’ (sic), the manager was resolute that the portrait remained where it was.

While in one workplace Stalin’s loyal supporters resisted instructions from local party cells, in another advocates of destalinisation leapt to destroy them. According to the reports of *raion* officials, party members became so impassioned during the readings of the material that they immediately began ripping portraits off the wall. Such incidents were not rare. In the small town of Gus’-Khrustal’nyi, for instance, two incidents were reported to superiors in the *oblast’* capital of Vladimir. In the Red

⁴² Vladimir *Oblast’* Party Archive, P-830, op. 3, d. 212, ll. 50-51; ll. 65-66; ll. 109-110; l. 126; l. 170.

⁴³ Vladimir *Oblast’* Party Archive, P-830, op. 3, d. 212, l. 75.

⁴⁴ RGASPI f. 82, op. 2, d. 1461, l. 87.

⁴⁵ RGASPI f. 599, op. 1, d. 82, l. 117.

Labour workshop, one worker took a poster of Stalin and burnt it in the stove, while at the Lenin Club, 'hooligans' defaced a statue of the dead leader.⁴⁶ At the Volzhskii *raion* meeting in Saratov province, a man tried to remove Stalin's picture from the foyer of the *gorkom* library where the meeting was being held.⁴⁷ There are clear parallels to events in 1953, when some members of the public seized on Beria's arrest as the opportunity for a public hanging, and one idiosyncratic individual eagerly suggested that Beria be carried in a cage from town to town. Those who destroyed portraits in their workplaces went one step further, actually performing their own carnivalesque acts of desecration and publicly displaying their odium for the hero-turned-enemy.

Attempting to channel this energy into more organised form, one party loyalist, a member of the academic staff at the Institute of Russian Literature, expressed his desire to posthumously court martial Stalin.⁴⁸ Alekseev suggested that every party cell should meet and collectively pass judgement on whether Stalin was a 'state criminal'. When the communists of Vasileostrovskii *raion* voted on this issue, only four supported him against a majority of 750, but the fact that his idea came to ballot at all indicates considerable backing from the meeting's organisers. Alekseev coveted public rituals to condemn Stalin, not only suggesting a desire for the kind of spectacle provided by the show trials in the 1930s, but also recognition of the need for public participation in such a performance.

⁴⁶ Vladimir Oblast' Party Archive, P-830, op. 3, d. 213, l. 7.

⁴⁷ RGANI f. 5, op. 32, d. 45, l. 60.

⁴⁸ RGANI f. 5, op. 32, d. 45, ll. 25-26. In November 1956 Alekseev wrote to Molotov (RGASPI f. 82, op. 2, d. 1440, ll. 30-33). Here he expressed concern that the 'people' were losing faith in their leaders.

It is apparent from their reports that party leaders were deeply concerned by the spontaneous desecration of portraits and statues, acts perhaps worryingly reminiscent of the anarchic destruction of Imperial monuments and symbols following the 1917 revolution.⁴⁹ Katherine Verdery has suggested that tearing down statues 'not only removes that specific body from the landscape as if to excise it from history, but also proves that because it can be torn down, no god protects it.'⁵⁰ Some officials perhaps feared this was the case, anxious that iconoclastic acts presented a lack of respect for the authority of the party. However, Mikhail Yampolsky offers a rather different interpretation of such acts:

Attacks on monuments, characteristic for certain stages of change in Russia, cannot, in my opinion, be described in terms of pure iconoclasm. Rather, they express the deep dependence of the masses on the monument they are attacking.⁵¹

With valiant efforts to save monuments alongside attempts to desecrate them, the reactions of the Soviet public in 1956 illustrate the very great importance attached to such symbols. Moreover, they suggest an unwillingness to follow Khrushchev in viewing Stalin as a composite being who had both positive qualities and flaws. The attention paid to public rituals not only shows their importance in daily life, it also suggests the immutability of concepts such as 'hero' and 'enemy'. In Soviet cosmogony, there could be no ambiguity. Stalin was either a true hero maligned by his enemies, or the über-enemy gloriously unmasked. Rejecting his portrayal as a man who both committed errors and achieved great feats, citizens demanded that he either

⁴⁹ In 1917 and 1918 portraits of the monarchy were burnt on huge bonfires as part of the destructive force of revolution. Christel Lane, *The Rites of Rulers: Ritual in Industrial Society – The Soviet Case* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 200; Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams*, pp. 64–72.

⁵⁰ Katherine Verdery, *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies: Reburial and Postsocialist Change* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), p. 5.

⁵¹ Yampolsky, 'In the Shadow of Monuments', p. 105.

be reinstated as the personification of 'good' or be conclusively unmasked as the icon of 'evil'.

Endeavouring to lay to rest the concept of the 'enemy of the people', Khrushchev had criticised the conduct of political life based on defamation and annihilation. Although he found it difficult to discard the passionate rhetoric of Stalinist culture in his venomous attack on Beria, Khrushchev sought to criticise Stalin without labelling him an enemy. Many within Soviet society, however, were unresponsive to Khrushchev's revision of the concept of 'enemies of the people'. Instead, they understood criticism of Stalin as the prelude to fuller denunciation and public condemnation as an enemy of the people. While Khrushchev repeatedly used the terms 'lawlessness' (*bezzakonie*) and 'arbitrary rule' (*proizvol*) to refer to Stalin's actions, they are notably absent here. For many Soviet citizens, the crucial question was rather whether Stalin was an enemy or not.

Believing that the Secret Speech required them to label Stalin an enemy, his defenders rebelled, with one exclaiming, 'We are sure that Stalin wasn't an enemy of the people!'⁵² Another wrote: 'We don't believe that Stalin was an enemy of the people!'⁵³ Others, desperate to understand the essence of the matter correctly, called for clarification. At local party meetings, many were anxious to be told how Stalin should be labelled. At the Ugod *raion* meeting in Vladimir province, for example, of the four questions asked from the floor, three pertained to the concept of 'enemies': Could Stalin be considered an enemy of the people? Were Kamenev and Zinov'iev

⁵² RGASPI f. 82, op. 2, d. 1466, l. 106.

⁵³ RGASPI f. 82, op. 2, d. 1466, l. 120.

still enemies of the people? What would happen to Stalin's family? ⁵⁴ Underlying all three questions are certain fundamental beliefs: if an individual is criticised, he is surely an enemy; if he is an enemy, his family will be arrested, his former adversaries acquitted.

One anonymous correspondent offered the authorities his own analysis of how the populace was reacting to the Secret Speech. While personally opposed to destalinisation, he identified a 'philistine' response, which he thought was particularly common amongst collective farmers. The philistines reduced the speech's message to a simplistic formula which went: 'Stalin is an enemy of the people, Beria's accomplice, and we need to chuck his body out of the Mausoleum and so on.'⁵⁵ The writer rejected such a reading as crude. Although he depicted himself as an independent thinker, he too was susceptible to the lure of Stalinist rhetoric. Interpreting the speech as another chapter in the revolution's great struggle against enemies, he considered Khrushchev's address – which he called 'the notorious "unmasking"' – an extension of the established culture of public denunciation established in the 1930s. Though adamant that Stalin himself could not be considered an enemy, the letter-writer remained bound within an interpretation of Soviet history in which the enemy loomed large: Kirov was a victim not of Stalin, but of 'real enemies'; in his last years, Stalin was a victim of the 'enemy' Beria, and his accomplices Malenkov and Frol Kozlov.⁵⁶ Like Khrushchev then, even those who wished to disassociate themselves from simplistic and vitriolic denunciation of Stalin,

⁵⁴ Vladimir Oblast' Party Archive, P-830, op. 3, d. 213, l. 21.

⁵⁵ RGASPI f. 82, op. 2, d. 1467, ll. 42.

⁵⁶ RGASPI f. 82, op. 2, d. 1467, ll. 42-45.

still found themselves relying on the concept of the 'enemy' to make sense of certain events.

There was marked resistance to the revived rhetoric of correction. Khrushchev had implicitly used the speech to ask for forgiveness for the failings of himself and other leading politicians during Stalin's rule. He seemed to hope it was possible for the party leaders to admit to their own mistakes. Yet the public responded with hostile questions about such errors: Why had the nation's leaders been so full of praise for him while he was alive?⁵⁷ Why was nothing said earlier? Why did Politburo members not try to 'unmask Stalin's cult' at the XIX Party Congress?⁵⁸ The popular response was certainly not to praise the leaders for trying to 'correct' themselves. In fact some believed that the leaders had not simply committed mistakes, but might in fact be the real enemies. In some contexts, the hostile invective Khrushchev had hoped to defuse, resurfaced, and was even directed towards him.

Although he had hoped to neutralise the term 'enemy of the people', the new party leader was soon labelled one himself. For those who opposed the Secret Speech, belief in the omnipresence of enemies offered a very convincing explanation for unwanted change. One letter from Moscow, whose anonymous authors identified themselves as workers and war veterans, began 'Down with Khrushchev!' Drawing on the rhetoric of the Stalinist press, it accused Khrushchev of pouring dirt on Stalin, called him a cunning beast (*ukhidnaia tvar'*), and, more unusually, hoped that everything would come crashing down on his 'bald head'. They threatened to follow

⁵⁷ RGANI f. 5, op. 32, d. 45, l. 69.

⁵⁸ Vladimir Oblast' Party Archive, P-830, op. 3, d. 213, l. 75.

the Georgian example, and demanded a public decree to say that Stalin was not an enemy of the people, and that his body would not be touched.⁵⁹ The Stalingrader who had proposed Mao as guardian to Stalin's body also adroitly adopted the rhetoric of enemies to attack Khrushchev. Referring to Khrushchev's speech as 'unbridled and exaggerated campaign of slander against the great Stalin which only enemies of socialism want', he praised Stalin at length, and concluded that 'only a cretin, an ignoramus or a malicious enemy would deny [his greatness]'.⁶⁰ Both were concerned about Stalin's body, both contested the labelling of Stalin as 'enemy', and both used the established rhetoric of vilification to attack Khrushchev personally as an enemy, or at the very least, a cunning beast.

One anti-Khrushchev pamphlet, which landed its author in the Gulag, also employed Stalinist rhetoric in its attack. Displeased by many aspects of Khrushchev's rule, including the shortages in consumer goods, low pay, rising unemployment, educational reforms, and the re-emergence of hooliganism, banditry, theft, and 'terrible rudeness', Fedor Maniakov set pen to paper three years after the Secret Speech. According to his own confession, Maniakov's path towards non-conformist thought had begun in 1956 when he found himself doubting Khrushchev's treatment of the cult of personality.⁶¹ Despite more sophisticated discussion of the social ills blighting the country, Maniakov's rejection of the Secret Speech drew on the established rhetoric of enemies. If in 1953 rumour-mongers blamed Beria for Stalin's death, Maniakov now blamed Khrushchev:

⁵⁹ RGASPI f. 82, op. 2, d. 1466, ll. 114-115.

⁶⁰ RGASPI f. 82, op. 2, d. 1467, l. 1.

⁶¹ GARF f. 8131, op. 31, d. 86890, l. 31.

The premature death of the great genius of modernity, the wise leader of the Soviet state and party figure I. V. Stalin – which was possibly the work of the vile hand of Khrushchev – sharpened Khrushchev's poisonous sting [...] Once firmly established in the post [of party leader], he surrounded himself with like-minded people and straying from the path laid down by the Leninist-Stalinist party, this galaxy [*pliiada*], like a gang of out-and-out bandits, sought popularity by undermining the authority of old party and state leaders and close colleagues of V. I. Lenin. To this end, they unleashed slanderous accusations against the recently deceased I. V. Stalin, near enough accusing him of being an enemy of the people.⁶²

Maniakov's anger at destalinisation centred particularly on the disregard for public symbols, and his opposition to Khrushchev was articulated by labelling him an enemy. Khrushchev was a poisonous snake, bandit, 'adventurist', and slanderer – all stalwarts of Stalinist invective. Although the medium of the political pamphlet might foreshadow later dissident texts, the mindset of the author here is very different, locked in the rhetoric of the Stalinist era.⁶³

Those who agonised over Stalin's body, his portraits, and songs, did not engage in a quest for the 'truth'. In fact, they were little interested in the cruelties Khrushchev revealed. At most, they gave a passing nod to the atrocities committed under Stalin, evincing scant sympathy for the victims and little curiosity to find out more. In a rare allusion to the victims, one collective farm worker displayed chilling indifference:

Was it not possible to mention the question of the cult of personality without mentioning Comrade Stalin? This is already a completed stage [*proidennyi etap*], and by mentioning these things we won't correct Stalin

⁶² GARF f. 8131, op. 31, d. 86890, l. 30.

⁶³ As someone of contested social status Maniakov might have been angered more than most by the disruption to public culture. Born in 1907 in a village in Orel province to a white-collar family (*sluzhashchii*), he went on to study at the Moscow Law Institute between 1935 and 1938, though he never finished the course. According to one version of his life-story, he later worked within the OGPU and its successors (NKVD and MVD) and on the Gulag staff, later becoming a senior clerical worker in the building division of the electrical power station in Saratov province and a party member. However, this apparently exemplary CV masked a less illustrious past, punctuated by criminal sentences and a previous – concealed – exclusion from the party. With the advent of change, and as Khrushchev promised new narratives of the past, Maniakov was no doubt fearful; he chose to express these fears in the only way he knew how – through a venomous attack on those he held responsible.

and we won't bring back those people who at the present moment aren't among the living. And with the living, it would surely have been possible to sort things out in a communist fashion.⁶⁴

Focused on Stalin's reputation, he had no compassion for the purge victims, be they dead or alive. The *kolkhoznik* was not curious about the past, using a crude form of Marxist theory to dismiss the terror as a 'completed stage' of historical development which required no closer examination. In keeping with Yampolsky's observations on time and monumentality, he not only wanted the stability of Stalinist culture, but also seemed to lack any real sense of temporality when he referred to the victims who died as 'people who at the present moment aren't among the living'. His concern was for the present, and he had no desire to elaborate myths of the past, certainly not in the form proposed by the Secret Speech. It is possible, of course, that the martyr-heroes of the purges held little appeal to him, for his lack of concern might reflect the popular belief that the purges only affected the elite.⁶⁵ Others sneeringly compared the leaders' fear of Stalin with the courage of the ordinary Soviet soldier: one compared the pusillanimity of Khrushchev and N. A. Bulganin with the courage of 'simple people in grey overcoats going to battle'. Similarly, a veteran compared his own wartime exploits with leaders who trembled in front of their Politburo colleague.⁶⁶

Where they did look to the past, it was primarily in order to find ways to salvage their 'performative' culture inside the boundaries set by the Secret Speech. By using

⁶⁴ RGASPI f. 82, op. 2, d. 1446, l. 160.

⁶⁵ Research into popular opinion during the purges of the 1930s has suggested that the lower strata of society often welcomed them as a means to take retribution – almost indiscriminately – against those in power. According to Sarah Davies, the official representation of the people versus enemies of the people was commonly reformulated into the long-established dichotomy between 'us' (the people) and 'them' (those in power). Workers often concluded that they should simply distrust *all* those in power, not just the official enemies. There was even resentment that the judges at the Moscow show trial gave more lenient sentences to political enemies than normal courts did to ordinary workers. Sarah Davies, *Popular Opinion in Stalin's Russia: Terror, Propaganda, Dissent, 1934-1941* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 124-144.

Lenin's 'testament' against Stalin and accusing Stalin of lacking respect for Lenin's memory, Khrushchev seemed to envisage revived reverence for the party's founding father. He reminded his audience that the Palace of the Soviets, planned as a monument to Lenin, had never been constructed. Some Soviet citizens seized on these hints. In a report to the Central Committee, officials in Kalinin province noted that at primary meetings and in discussion with non-party public, they frequently encountered demands for the building of the Palace of the Soviets as a memorial to Lenin to be accelerated. In addition people requested new memorials to Lenin in the places where he had stayed or worked.⁶⁷ Dead before the darker episodes of Soviet history began, Lenin could comfortably fill the empty pedestal left by a disgraced Stalin. Their suggestions were soon taken up. According to Nina Tumarkin, the revived cult of Lenin took shape rapidly, with thousands of publications appearing in shops, as well as paintings, statues busts, posters, and badges decorating the 'political landscape'.⁶⁸

In a revamped Lenin, the Soviet public found it still had a glorious superhero. In the coming years, new recruits would join Lenin in the pantheon of Soviet heroes. Space travel was a particularly prolific sphere in this respect. As they traversed the frontiers of space, Iurii Gagarin, German Titov and their colleagues carried out superhuman deeds and, aided by the advent of television, became some of the most popular heroes of Soviet history. Yet although their deeds increased the scope of the communist venture by conquering new territory, these new heroes were not warriors. As they competed with the Americans, cosmonauts boosted Soviet national pride, but they

⁶⁶ RGASPI f. 82, op. 2, d. 1467, l. 46; RGASPI f. 82, op. 2, d. 1461, l. 91.

⁶⁷ RGANI f. 5, op. 32, d. 45, ll. 38-39.

⁶⁸ Tumarkin, *Lenin Lives!*, p. 258.

were very different from old-style heroes. In popular culture, Vasilii Chapaev, Pavlik Morozov, Aleksandr Matrosov, and Zoia Kosmodemianskaia had achieved heroic status for fighting the Whites, kulaks, and Germans respectively; in the political realm Stalin led the nation into battle against enemies both on the international stage and hidden within the ranks of the party. Soviet cosmonauts, in contrast, fought no one. The new hero did not engage in mortal combat with the enemy, and he no longer had to exhibit vigilance and courage in unmasking and combating hidden foes.

Over the coming years, Soviet newspeak continued to eschew the use of hostile invective to identify and vilify iconic enemies. While new heroes emerged in the official media, they were not counter-posed to evil super-enemies. Although Manichean beliefs remained in the collective imagination, they were no longer given official sanction in the kind of theatrical rituals and defamatory language that had governed public life until 1953.

Contested Narrative

At the party meeting of the Moscow publishers 'Soviet Writer', there was little interest in the symbols and rites of Soviet culture.⁶⁹ Instead, members articulated concern for the fate of purge victims. When the discussion was opened to the floor, several expressed profound concern for purge victims. Many drew on personal experience or on the tales of friends who had survived prison and the camps to talk about the importance of overcoming the cult of personality. Demanding greater

⁶⁹ TsAODM f. 8132, op. 1, d. 6.

dynamism from his colleagues, a certain Rudnyi, for example, referred to the critic Charnyi, who had been repressed and recently rehabilitated:

He needs moral support. But when I, as the deputy secretary of our party organisation, talked with Comrade Kedrina at *Literaturnaia gazeta* and asked her to ring him and commission an article she passed me on to someone else, saying it needed approval [...] Why haven't Subbotskii, Isbakhu, Brovman and others who have also been rehabilitated and readmitted to the party had articles commissioned?⁷⁰

The hall erupted in applause. Direct references to the ordeals of fellow writers clearly drew emotional responses from the audience. Later in the meeting, Comrade Voitinskaia likewise spoke of their many colleagues, including one present, who were still unable to find work because previous convictions or doubts over their political reliability continued to deter employers. Lamenting the fact that those rehabilitated were still subjected to extensive questioning and re-interrogation, she talked of one acquaintance who had spent eighteen years in camps. When asked by the Party Control Committee what had given her the strength to survive, Voitinskaia recounted, the friend replied 'the party'.⁷¹ Voitinskaia not only demanded recognition of purge victims' right to fair treatment, but also presented the returnee as the 'martyr prince' whose very survival was an act of faith.

Following Khrushchev's cue, it seems, Moscow writers embraced new narratives whereby former enemies became heroes. Voitinskaia was not alone in regarding those rehabilitated as the true sons of the party and martyrs to the cause. At the same meeting, Comrade Ermalov concluded that the party had proved that Leninism was 'stronger than Stalinism' (which brought applause), and that the Secret Speech had

⁷⁰ TsAODM f. 8132, op. 1, d. 6, l. 65.

⁷¹ TsAODM f. 8132, op. 1, d. 6, l. 77.

‘saved the party’.⁷² Their resurrection imbued the party with fresh glory, for *their* courage was the *party’s* courage. Here at least, party members welcomed these returning heroes, cast them as the party’s saviours, and professed that, far from being damaging, a re-writing of party history was fortifying.

The search for truth was not confined to the intelligentsia milieu, but also found its supporters amongst party members. In the transcripts of party meetings, especially at *gorkom* and *obkom* level, we discover an active quest to uncover the ‘truth’ about the past. Members frequently called for further information over the events detailed in the Secret Speech. They wanted to know, for instance, which of the Central Committee members shot had now been found innocent, which military leaders sentenced in 1937-8 were now rehabilitated, how many had died as a result of the Leningrad affair, and whether any Leningrad party leaders repressed in 1937 were still alive.⁷³ Meetings offered communists the opportunity to inquire about the fate of individuals they had known personally and to garner information about events in their own locality during the *Ezhovshchina*. In Magadan, for instance, one asked if a certain Berzin, the former head of Dal’sroi, was really an enemy of the people.⁷⁴ In Irkutsk, one delegate inquired after Kroshenko, presumably a local party figure.⁷⁵

Although the restorative powers of this quest for truth were proclaimed, it brought its own dangers. At other meetings, delegates asked if former *obkom* secretaries would

⁷² TsAODM f. 8132, op. 1, d. 6, l. 70.

⁷³ RGASPI f. 556, op. 1, d. 304, l. 142; RGASPI f. 556, op. 1, d. 601, l. 133. One speaker at the Leningrad meeting observed that Kozlov, the chairman of the Leningrad *obkom* and Presidium member, had only mentioned those rehabilitated posthumously. Kozlov tried to answer this question. Even such a high-ranking political figure struggled to find an answer, admitting that personally he only knew of two, and he believed that there were no others. At least, he conceded, he had not met them.

be brought to justice, and some wondered if there would now be a new *chistka*.⁷⁶

Indeed this association between the restoration of truth and the excision of the 'bad' was not uncommon. One man wrote to Khrushchev, repeatedly thanking him for telling 'the truth':

On behalf of many citizens, I thank you for openly telling the people the whole truth about Stalin. This is your big service, and everyone will remember it. The fact that you have said this truth will guarantee that everything bad will be thrown out – and only the good will remain.⁷⁷

For this letter-writer, re-establishing truth also meant engaging in the act of purification. Paradoxically, renunciation of the terror brought a revival of purge rhetoric. Writing about the purges of the 1930s, Igal Halfin tells us that 'Messianic truth, according to party doctrine, spoke in a single voice. Since there was only one path to the light, and only one platform indicating that course, it followed that [...] disputants had somehow to be "in opposition" to what subsequently became proletarian "truth".'⁷⁸ When party members embraced the Secret Speech as the restoration of truth, they imagined that the XX Party Congress marked a return to the correct path, a victory of light over darkness, and an instance of purity after the degeneration of the Stalin years. In Molotov province, the deputy director of the Stalin factory, praised the speech, claiming that the Soviet people had fulfilled their historical mission by successfully liberating themselves from the 'grave illness' of the cult of personality.⁷⁹ However ironic, the rediscovery of Bolshevik honour and truth resurrected the rhetoric of the purges. The drive towards purity might once more mean the ejection of the impure.

⁷⁴ RGASPI f. 556, op. 1, d. 638, l. 93.

⁷⁵ RGASPI f. 556, op. 1, d. 304, l. 142.

⁷⁶ RGANI f. 5, op. 32, d. 45, l. 62.

⁷⁷ RGANI f. 5, op. 30, d. 140, ll., 185-186.

⁷⁸ Halfin, 'The Demonization of the Opposition', p. 48.

⁷⁹ RGANI f. 5, op. 32, d. 45, l. 67

In their petition letters, those who had endured political repression frequently cast themselves as martyrs to the cause who had no desire for retribution, and in the Secret Speech, Khrushchev adopted this representation of the noble victim. In choosing to cite from Eikhe, Rudzutak, Kedrov, and Kosior, Khrushchev showed a preference for those who had perished, and he rarely drew on the experiences of survivors.⁸⁰ The lives of those who had died a martyr's death provided completed and heroic narrative. Yet as party members met to discuss the Secret Speech, often with rehabilitated victims present, the rhetoric evolved. As they began the task of re-formulating party experience, there were frequently suggestions that 'overcoming' the errors of the past could not only be a rhetorical act. It also had to involve some kind of reckoning with the perpetrators of the purges.

At *gorkom* or *obkom* meetings, the extent and mood of debate depended greatly on the lead given by the party secretary chairing the session. The first secretary invariably opened the meeting with his own evaluation of the XX Party Congress. Some party leaders were conservative, repeating almost word for word Khrushchev's text, and limiting free discussion. In Moscow, for example, the *gorkom* meeting suppressed discussion, and its chair, a candidate member of the Presidium, E. A. Furtseva, stuck close to Khrushchev's text.⁸¹ In Irkutsk and Vladimir, both lead speaker and delegates

⁸⁰ Khrushchev did cite from Comrade Snegov's petition, and mentioned that he had recently been rehabilitated after seventeen years in the camps. The role played by Snegov is discussed further in Chapter V.

⁸¹ RGASPI f. 556, op. 1, d. 705. Chaired by Furtseva, the meeting made little mention of the Secret Speech and the floor was not opened to delegates. Their views could only be expressed in written notes handed to the speaker. Furtseva referred to these in her summing-up and gave answers to selected questions, but her determination to control proceedings is evident.

reproduced Khrushchev's words faithfully, and debate was limited.⁸² At the meeting of Gor'kii *obkom*, the opening speaker, Ignatov, focused on the financial tasks posed by the XX Party Congress and paid scant attention to the cult of personality, so most delegates followed suit, with the exception of a publishing editor who dared to challenge his priorities.⁸³ Elsewhere, however, some party secretaries wrote their own 'speeches'. The transcripts of *obkom* and *gorkom* meetings in Rostov, Magadan, and Stalingrad and reports from other regions provide insight into how former enemies were now promoted, producing new narratives of party history.

On 10 March 1956, Comrade N. V. Kiselev, *obkom* secretary, opened proceedings in Rostov. Like Khrushchev and first secretaries everywhere, he described the torture inflicted on show-trial victims and others in Moscow, but Kiselev was quick to remind his audience that atrocities occurred in their city too. Going beyond mere regurgitation of Khrushchev's narrative, it appears he had commissioned his own research into local archives. In a five-month period in 1937, he informed the party faithful, no less than 1006 communists had been excluded from the Rostov party and arrested on the grounds of fabricated confessions. By February, a further 1178 had joined them and many were shot. Presumably on the basis of contact with purge survivors or possibly their petitions, he continued:

Those who stayed alive recount the terrible torture that went on in Rostov prisons. Here there were the same horrors of which the Old Bolshevik Kedrov wrote about from within Lefortovo prison, where the enemy Beria was handling his case. Here we had cretinous hangmen (*kretiny-palachi*) of the same ilk as Rodos, about whom Khrushchev talked in his speech.⁸⁴

⁸² Irkutsk *gorkom* (RGASPI f. 556, op. 1, d. 304); Vladimir *obkom* (RGASPI f. 556, op. 1, d. 197).

⁸³ RGASPI f. 556, op. 1, d. 243 (especially ll. 91-93).

⁸⁴ RGASPI f. 556, op. 1, d. 875, ll. 86-87.

Where Khrushchev quoted from the interrogation transcripts of Postyshev, Rudzutak, Eikhe, and other leading party figures, Kiselev used the words of a Rostov communist, I. T. Efimenko, party member since 1920 and formerly a plenipotentiary of the Ministry of Supplies for Rostov *oblast*. From inside a Rostov prison Efimenko had written: 'Comrade Stalin, I am obliged to turn to you for a second time in search of the truth, for Rostov investigators are afraid to look truth in the face and [instead] fabricate rotting, cowardly cases.'⁸⁵ Like Eikhe, whose letter to Stalin was cited in the Secret Speech, Efimenko also invoked 'truth', and through Efimenko's own words, Kiselev allowed the former prisoner to embody integrity in a rotting world.

The choice to write his own narrative of local party history when other colleagues – in Moscow, Leningrad, Irkutsk, Gor'kii, and Vladimir – used Khrushchev's words, suggests Kiselev's profound support for the Secret Speech. Rejecting the safe option, he committed himself to radically new versions of the party past and promoted a former enemy as hero. By taking statistics from the region's archives and words from a local victim, Kiselev showed that the text of the Secret Speech was not 'closed'. Indeed, he interpreted it as an invitation for party members to rethink and reformulate its own experiences. Local party members proved enthusiastic.

Three days later many of the Rostov party elite met again, this time at the *gorkom* meeting.⁸⁶ The opening speech, made by *gorkom* secretary Comrade Lobanov, also included research from the local archives. Briefly detailing the lives of a number of the Rostov party's victims, he promoted the city's own heroes. He commemorated A.

⁸⁵ RGASPI f. 556, op. 1, d. 875, l. 88.

⁸⁶ At the *gorkom* meeting, one delegate mentioned that many of them had already heard Kiselev speak at length about Rostov's victims. RGASPI f. 556, op. 1, d. 881, l. 53.

A. Semiakin, party member since 1917, A. I. Larichev, party member since 1911, V. S. Viktorov, party member since 1917, and A. A. Konovko, party member since 1918, former chairman of the Rostov soviet.⁸⁷ With the mood of the meeting set by Lobanov and Kiselev before him, others present at the meeting spoke of former colleagues. One delegate spoke of Ivan Chentsov. A party member from as early as 1904, Chentsov had been sentenced to seven years in 1906 for owning a printing-press, and had 'served his sentence, as a Bolshevik ought, asking no one for pardon. He had never been a part of any opposition, and had always behaved as a revolutionary.' The speaker listed other purge victims, adding the date they joined the party for each one, and it was invariably prior to 1917.⁸⁸ If revisionist research on the purges has shown that Old Bolsheviks were not singled out during the purges, but were victimised primarily as a result of their job or status, this is not reflected in their portrayal here.⁸⁹ Party members chose to depict purge victims as almost exclusively Old Bolsheviks, unswerving in their commitment to the party, unquestioning in their faith.

Not content with praising Chentsov, however, the same delegate went on to demand retribution against those who had participated in the terror. He said of purge victims:

Now they are rehabilitated. But they were considered enemies of the people. Why have I raised this question? I raised this question because there were lackeys who in fact had no party qualities. If these members of the party slandered people, then it is necessary for our party organisations at town and *oblast* level to take retribution against them for those who

⁸⁷ RGASPI f. 556, op. 1, d. 881, l. 32.

⁸⁸ RGASPI f. 556, op. 1, d. 881, l. 53

⁸⁹ J. Arch Getty and William Chase write: 'Although the individuals may have changed, Old Bolsheviks as a group retained the most privileged and powerful position. When the terror erupted in 1936-7, Old Bolsheviks were among the victims because of where they worked rather than because they were Old Bolsheviks. In short, speciality or 'position' in 1936, rather than Old Bolshevik status, was the crucial determinant of purge vulnerability.' J. Arch Getty and William Chase, 'Patterns of Repression Among the Soviet Elite: A Biographical Approach', in *Stalinist Terror: New Perspectives*, ed. by J. Arch Getty and Roberta T. Manning (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1993), p. 243.

died in vain.

His suggestion was popular, receiving applause and shouts of 'hear hear'. Someone called out; 'And were you arrested too?' Responding by telling his own story, the speaker recounted how they had tried to stitch him up with Chentsov, to prove that he too was an 'enemy of the people'. He drew the conclusion that the party organisation should investigate thoroughly, and that 'maybe there will be more than one swine to find.'⁹⁰ Thus for a second time he called for measures to be taken against those who had labelled others 'enemies'. The implications of this are highly significant. At meetings where the leading officials chose to engage in a re-writing of party history, calls for a new witch-hunt began to surface. Khrushchev had made no reference to finding the guilty, but to some party members this was a crucial step towards restoring the party to health. Moreover, by labelling the guilty as 'swine' and calling for 'retribution', the delegate suggested that the new importance Khrushchev attached to 'correction' as a means to deal with error within the party had found little resonance.

At the Magadan *oblast'* meeting, the debate likewise became heated. In the course of discussion, one of the *raion* officials took the floor and offered his own interpretation of the Secret Speech. He detailed the purges in Magadan and hinted at a new round of purging. Comrade Markov, secretary of Pen'kin *raion*, told how 70 per cent of the Dal'stoi party had been arrested in 1937-8, how the head of Dal'stoi, Pavlov, had personally ordered the shooting of every third prisoner in the mines without any sort of investigation or trial, and how those really guilty of terrible crimes – like Medved' and Zaporozhets, responsible for killing Kirov – had been greeted with open arms and a brass band. He concluded:

We are submitting to the *oblast'* party committee a proposal for the creation of a commission to review the cases of all communists shot on the territory of Magadan *oblast'*. We don't doubt that many will be rehabilitated posthumously, and request that their families also be rehabilitated, and that those guilty of massacring communists and honourable Soviet people in Kolyma be held responsible. These are our conclusions from Comrade Khrushchev's speech on the cult of personality.⁹¹

Although his wording was cautious, his demands – like those made in Rostov – also pointed to some sort of further purging. In the question time that followed the speeches, another delegate asked what measures would be taken against those who participated in mass terror.⁹² Markov appears to have had found support for an initiative that not only sought the truth about the past, but would also bring to justice those responsible for the crimes committed.

At some meetings, it was the purge victims themselves who made such claims. In Kalinin province, the chief engineer of the Kalinin Artificial Leather Complex told his story at some length, also coming to the conclusion that some sort of retribution was needed. He began:

I have been a communist since 1928, I am from a worker family, educated by the Komsomol and I was made out to be an enemy of the people, a spy, and a saboteur [...] I am happy that I kept a profound belief in the party. When it was possible, I applied to the Central Committee with this faith intact.

In keeping with the language of victims' petitions, he presented himself as an almost saint-like believer who had retained his belief through all the trials and tribulations thrown at him. Whereas petitioners tended to portray themselves as the infinitely

⁹⁰ RGASPI f. 556, op. 1, d. 881, l. 54.

⁹¹ RGASPI f. 556, op. 1, d. 638, ll. 66-68.

⁹² RGASPI f. 556, op. 1, d. 638, l. 90.

forgiving martyr, the returnee here, however, suggested that he might wish for some sort of revenge:

I returned joyful and contented in September 1955, but my happiness was clouded [*omrachen*] when I saw KGB Major Aleksandrov walking the streets of Kalinin in uniform. He had tortured me and knew better than me my innocence.⁹³

Concluding that further investigations were needed into the KGB staff, his contribution to the meeting also raised the issue of the 1937-38 conspirators. The returnee might present himself as a martyr, but he now believed in his right to claim some kind of reckoning with those who had inflicted his suffering. Readmission to the party in itself could not, it seems, bring the returnee the unalloyed happiness he had anticipated.

In these instances, the demand for retribution was posed tentatively. Elsewhere, however, a more bellicose rhetoric began to emerge. When members of the Stalingrad *oblast*' party organisation met on 12 March 1956, Comrade Zhegalin talked extensively about repressions and recalled several of the city's victims, including Stepaniatov, party member since 1918, Division Commander during the civil war and head of the city's soviet at the time of his arrest. Reactions were mixed. One *kolkhoz* chairman questioned the need to denounce Stalin to the collective farmers. While himself critical of many aspects of party life, including the bullying tactics used by local party officials and the pressure put on agricultural life, he was concerned about popular reactions to the Secret Speech. He remembered how he had spoken in glowing terms about Stalin's life in March 1953, reducing the *kolkhozniki* to tears,

⁹³ RGANI f. 5, op. 32, d. 45, ll. 37-38.

and he admitted his reluctance to go to them and say the complete opposite.⁹⁴ The head of the *oblast*' soviet soon intervened to criticise the *kolkhoz* chairman – both for his reluctance to convey the Secret Speech to his subordinates, and for the failure of his *raion* to meet their meat targets!

At first reading, a speech made by Comrade Dubrovina, lecturer in Marxism-Leninism, seems more in keeping with the tenor set by Zhegalin's opening speech. Dubrovina welcomed the new mood of innovation. Hoping that local history might flourish, she lamented that there were still no collected memoirs of Stalingrad's Old Bolsheviks, compared to the huge number of texts recording the revolutionary movement in Leningrad and Moscow: 'Until now it was difficult for historians to work on local material, of any period, because 'enemies of the people' – formerly leaders of a variety of organisations and institutions – would speak out and scaremonger.'⁹⁵ She thus understood the Secret Speech as an occasion to write new accounts of the party's journey, to work more freely, and to write new narratives based on local experience and local heroes. On closer reading the implications of her statement are radical. She labelled those who had previously been in positions of authority as 'enemies of the people'. Although she welcomed the Secret Speech, she relied on the 'formula' condemned by Khrushchev – 'enemies of the people' – to condemn those who had hindered her work. Moreover, she did not apply this label to a handful of individuals indicted for their roles in the purges, but to a whole stratum of the local elite – former 'leaders of a variety of organisations and institutions'. She imagined the Secret Speech ushering in widespread changes within the party *apparat*,

⁹⁴ RGASPI f. 556, op. 1, d. 1031, l. 95.

⁹⁵ RGASPI f. 556, op. 1, d. 1031, l. 72.

and she believed those demoted would be cast out as 'enemies of the people'. Again, the rhetoric of purging appears to have overshadowed the notions of correction nurtured in the Secret Speech.

At party meetings within the universities and institutes, particularly in Moscow and Leningrad, the search for truth also led to more demagogic approaches. At the Gor'kii Institute of World Literature, a speech made by Comrade Bialik caused substantial concern at the highest levels of party organisation. Asserting that the party *apparatus* included a layer of people whose careers were built on the purges, he said that many responsible for the deaths of thousands of innocent people were still in power. Moreover, he remarked, they were now charged with fulfilling the tasks of the XX Party Congress. As the party had not organised a purge (*chistka*) for over twenty years, he suggested one be implemented. Like Dubrovina in Stalingrad, Bialik did not envisage token retribution against a handful of individuals, but far more sweeping changes within the party ranks. The renunciation of terror could not in itself purify the party, it needed to be cleansed through renewing the practices of questioning, investigating, and expelling. Apparently his comments were acceptable to members of the audience, as party authorities noted their failure to condemn Bialik: two others made 'demagogic comments' and no one spoke out against him until the final summing up led by the chief editor of *Kommunist*.⁹⁶ This support from the audience was particularly disturbing for the officials reporting on the incident.

The party meeting of the Institute of Oriental Studies was perhaps even more heretical, and reports once more show how concerned party officials were about the

meeting's failure to rebuff the dissenting delegates. Party member Mordvinov laid responsibility for the terror on the nation's leaders who had failed to speak out in defence of the victims. 'They are responsible for the shootings', he said. 'Comrade Khrushchev showed himself to be a coward.'⁹⁷ Rather than accepting Khrushchev's admission of error, Mordvinov chose to attack the leader and to challenge his integrity.⁹⁸

Khrushchev's call for a return to Leninist practices whereby those who erred were subject to 'correction' and guidance seems to have fallen on stony ground. Although incidents of dissent were relatively rare, they certainly occurred and they caused significant concern at the highest levels. It even led the Presidium to question if it was advisable to encourage these notions of 'uncovering the truth'. At a meeting between representatives of the Writers' Union and party leaders on 10 December 1956, Khrushchev's colleague P. N. Pospelov criticised the chief editor of *Novyi mir*, the writer Konstantin Simonov. Along with other writers such as the poet Ol'ga Berggol'ts, Simonov had claimed that the time had come to write 'only the truth' (*tol'ko pravdu*). Pospelov admonished Simonov, however, reminding him that there was no such thing as abstract truth, just as there was no such thing as abstract democracy.⁹⁹ Heralded by members of the intelligentsia and party members alike as the cornerstone of revived party integrity, 'truth' was now considered a potentially dangerous heresy by some party leaders.

⁹⁶ RGANI f. 5, op. 32, d. 45, ll. 1-3.

⁹⁷ RGANI f. 5, op. 32, d. 46, l. 82.

⁹⁸ The case was passed on to the Moscow *gorkom* where a detailed investigation into Mordvinov's past was undertaken. RGANI f. 5, op. 32, d. 46, ll. 83-7.

⁹⁹ Aksiutin and Pyzhikov, *Poststalinskoe obshchestvo*, pp. 137-138.

This growing anxiety culminated in an important Central Committee document issued to all party organisations in late December 1956, entitled 'On the intensification of party political work amongst the masses and the prevention of incidents by anti-Soviet, enemy elements'. By claiming there had been a rise in 'enemy activity' over recent months, the letter introduced a more cautious tone.¹⁰⁰ The Hungarian uprising was identified as the main cause of increased anti-Soviet sentiment, and Voice of America, the BBC, and Radio Free Europe blamed for spreading 'imperialist propaganda'.¹⁰¹ Problems were not limited only to the wayward minority who listened to these degenerate broadcasts, however, for the Kremlin also voiced concern over the political mood within the party's own ranks. As a result of discussions of the Secret Speech, the letter asserted, communists themselves were erring towards anti-Soviet positions. The party intelligentsia, including novelists, poets, and historians, was condemned first, followed by students, and then Gulag returnees. While the majority of those who returned as a result of amnesty or rehabilitation were now engaged in productive work and leading politically and socially active lives, the document said, there were some returnees who bore malice towards Soviet power. Former Trotskyists, Right opportunists, and bourgeois nationalists were allegedly the most active in their anti-Soviet agitation. Warning that the most decisive measures should be taken against those who were hostile to Soviet power – 'just as they always have been' – Khrushchev seemed to reverse some of points made in the Secret Speech.

In itself, the letter is curious. There is little evidence elsewhere that *political* returnees were presenting a problem, except in the case of the 'bourgeois nationalists' returning

¹⁰⁰ RGANI f. 89, op. 6, d. 2.

¹⁰¹ Aksiutin and Pyzhikov, *Poststalinskoe obshchestvo*, pp. 125-134.

to territories such as Western Ukraine and the Baltic republics.¹⁰² Archival documents do not suggest that former political prisoners were actively engaged in anti-Soviet activity, or that the authorities considered them a particular threat. Rather, the decision to question their political reliability in this important circular can be seen as an attempt to subdue the politically unstable mood engendered by the Secret Speech and events in Hungary. Just as Pospelov urged party intellectuals to moderate their promotion of truth, Khrushchev now seemed to distance himself from the heroisation of Gulag returnees. The narrative and rhetoric that he had introduced so dramatically at the beginning of the year were now blamed for discord within the party.

Conclusion

If the Secret Speech was an attempt to resolve the confusion in evidence ever since 1953, it was not entirely successful. The search for truth brought worrying calls for purging, something that the party leaders seem to have had little intention of doing. In addition, there was mass anxiety over the revision of Soviet semiotics, as citizens expressed their uncertainty about how to speak and act in the changing public arena. In both cases, beliefs nurtured by the Stalinist system were articulated, whether in the vilification of Khrushchev as a cunning beast and bandit, or in the demand for new measures to cull the guilty. As in 1953, the ontological importance of the enemy was apparent.

Party leaders responded to the apparent failings of the Secret Speech in at least two ways. First, they launched the new Lenin cult as a means to satisfy the public demand

¹⁰² Weiner, 'The Empires Pay a Visit'.

for meaningful monuments. Hunger for an imagined 'enemy', it should be noted however, went unabated. Second, they rebuked leading members of the intelligentsia who were promoting the rhetoric of 'truth' and they alluded to the questionable loyalty of the returnee. This undermining of some aspects of the Secret Speech reflected the trepidation generated by public reactions in 1956, but the back-track was brief. Slurs against the returnee did not prevail, and the concept of 'restoring truth' was not discredited publicly. Moreover, Khrushchev did not revise the fundamental premises of the Secret Speech. He did not revoke the idea that the threat of the 'enemy' had been grossly exaggerated under Stalin, nor did he abandon the principle that conflict lessened as the revolution progressed. In fact, the notions of correction he promoted in the Secret Speech continued to be a highly important aspect of his rule for several years to come.

Chapter IV

Crime, Punishment, and Correction

‘So, what do you think,’ asked Manskii, ‘does Misha hold anything sacred?’

‘He must do,’ replied Kirill Petrovich decisively.

‘What does that mean, he must do?’

‘It means that it is easier to see the thief within a man than the other way round – to find the man within the thief.’

‘But we must?’

‘We must. We must dig it out.’

- G. A. Medynskii, *Chest*’¹

Although the amnesty of March 1953 shook Soviet society, the authorities did not retreat from the process of reform they had initiated. In fact, the Gulag population continued to shrink dramatically. From the inflated figure of 2,466,914 in April 1953, the number of Gulag inhabitants had already fallen to 781,630 by January of 1956. In less than three years, the Gulag empire had been scaled down by over two thirds, and almost two million *zeks* released back into society.² Reflecting on the early ‘thaw’, Khrushchev later claimed that the Party was scared of a flood that could have ‘washed away all the barriers and retaining walls of our society’.³ Though Khrushchev’s

¹ G. A. Medynskii, *Chest*’ (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel’, 1960), p. 408.

² GARF f. 7523, op. 89, d. 4408, l. 82.

³ *Khrushchev Remembers*, pp. 78-79.

memoirs focused entirely on the issue of political returnees, it was primarily the criminal contingent that many feared would submerge Soviet society.

The criminal population of the Gulag benefited significantly from the new measures introduced. While the party commissions created in 1954 to rectify miscarriages of justice primarily affected victims of political terror,⁴ a series of amnesties set free large numbers of less illustrious prisoners. Over 1954 and 1955, amnesty was granted to several categories of prisoner, and a total of 279,311 people were released as a result of such acts, in addition to the 1,201,738 set free as a result of the March 1953 decree.⁵ A further 6,423 were granted personal amnesty by the Supreme Soviet.⁶

This erosion of the boundaries between the two zones was in part a means to deal with the legacy of the Stalinist era and the heavy burden of the Gulag. It also reflected the regime's new philosophical stance. The days of vilifying and banishing offenders to lengthy exile seemed over. Techniques of 'excising' offenders from the social body, so common in the Stalinist period from 1937 onwards, gave way to renewed belief in the possibility of rehabilitating offenders. With the Ministry of Justice encouraging a less stringent line, lighter custodial sentences were gradually introduced in the period

⁴ On 9 May 1954, a decree ordered the creation of commissions to review of all cases of those held in camps or places of exile for counter-revolutionary crime. Where appropriate, the commissions were to rehabilitate the individual fully, re-classify his crime, or shorten the sentence. They were not to wait for records from the MVD but to proceed immediately with their work, using the petitions received. As a result of their investigations, 21,797 personal amnesties were granted, 8,973 verdicts rescinded, and 76,344 sentences shortened. For the full statistics on the commissions' work, see Iakovlev (ed), *Reabilitatsiia: Kak eto bylo*, p. 213 (this is a copy of an archival document, referenced APRF f. 3, op. 57, d. 109, l. 39). On the creation of the committees, see GARF f. 9401, op. 2, d. 450, l. 30; f. 9401, op. 1a, d. 526, l. 97.

⁵ GARF f. 7523, op. 89, d. 4408, ll. 78-81. Amnesty was granted to the following groups of prisoners: to 22,670 juvenile offenders in April 1954; to 117,570 prisoners, including both 'counter-revolutionaries' and bandits, in July 1954; to 2,128 petty thieves in May 1955; to 77,333 prisoners unfit for hard labour, including the ill or ageing, pregnant women and young mothers on 3 September 1955; to 59,610 alleged war-time collaborators on 17 September 1955.

⁶ GARF f. 7523, op. 89, d. 4408, l. 144.

1953-1955.⁷ In accordance with Gor'kii's emphasis on rehabilitation through labour, the prisoner could now hope to reduce his sentence further through hard work. Established in 1919, but abandoned under Stalin, the 'work-day' system was re-introduced in July 1954, and allowed prisoners who met their targets to win early release.⁸ Although some officials passionately deplored the practice, arguing it favoured the physically strong, it remained in place and allowed offenders the chance to return home quickly. One report claimed that it was possible for a ten-year sentence to be reduced to little over three years.⁹

The underlying principle was correction. Promoted in the Secret Speech as the most appropriate means to deal with political deviants, it was extended to those convicted of criminal acts. Rather than seeing the criminal as an inherently dangerous individual, the new emphasis was on reforming him. The initiative raised important questions: Could social order be maintained without the behemoth of the Gulag? Could antisocial behaviour be curbed with the threat of the prison camp so tempered? Would the Soviet public – so angered by the 1953 amnesty – assist in the process of re-educating and healing those who erred?

Initial indications were disheartening. Little suggested that the crisis engendered by the mass return of prisoners in 1953 ever really abated. As suggested in Chapter I, the nation had witnessed a wave of violent crime in the months following the first amnesty, and though it ebbed temporarily, this upsurge in criminal behaviour failed to

⁷ Gorlizki, 'De-Stalinisation', pp. 78-92.

⁸ GARF f. 7523, op. 89, d. 4403, ll. 12-17.

⁹ GARF f. 7523, op. 89, d. 4403, ll. 1-7.

disappear. In comparison to 1953, 1954 was a less turbulent year, but statistics show crime rising steadily from 1955 onwards.

Statistics on the number of registered crimes 1953-1957 ¹⁰

	Overall crime	Hooliganism	Murder
1953	373,359	128,381	1250
1954	331,316	108,768	1048
1955	364,783	115,735	1050
1956	511,081	198,978	1570
1957	518,733	175,492	2501

The overall number of crimes registered in 1954 decreased by 13%, but the annual total then climbed steadily until by 1957 it was 39% higher than in even the 'painful year' of 1953. The figures for murder are particularly startling, with the number doubling between 1953 and 1957.¹¹ A great deal of correspondence between the Supreme Soviet and the Ministry of the Interior was devoted to debating the causes of these worrying trends. Officials were consistently concerned not only that those released from the Gulag were themselves likely to re-offend, but that they cast a deleterious influence on young people, luring them away from their respectable Soviet families into criminal subcultures. Concerns over the spread of criminal behaviour, and even fears that a cult of criminality was prevalent amongst young people, were frequent in MVD reports. N. P. Dudorov, Minister of Internal Affairs, wrote to the

¹⁰ These statistics were sent from the Ministry of the Interior to the Supreme Soviet in 1958. See GARF f. 7523, op. 89, d. 7494, l. 54.

¹¹ Vasil'ev, the report's author and a senior official within the Ministry of the Interior, explained away the remarkable rise in crime by arguing that over recent years certain misdemeanours had recently been reclassified as crimes. In itself this argument is curious, as in fact the period saw the decriminalisation of several offences. Moreover, his explanation does little to explain the huge rise in murder recorded. His comments serve to remind us, however, that crime statistics should be used with caution. They often reflect more about official classifications, police efficiency in registering crimes, and the extent of public reporting, than about the actual levels of criminal activity. This dissertation focuses more on how the party, Soviet officials, and the broader public constructed the problem, than on determining whether the perceived rise in crime was real or not.

Central Committee in April 1956: 'Many crimes and infractions on social order are committed in public places by former convicts and people without permanent living place or work [...] These people do not just commit crimes themselves, but entice unstable citizens, most commonly young people, into criminal activities.'¹² It was feared that the great Gulag return would import into the Soviet mainland the hostile and criminal *zek* culture.

Such anxieties were not limited to the corridors of power. In 1953, the Soviet public responded angrily to the amnesty with a barrage of letters so ferocious that it produced commentary from Voroshilov and Andrianov at the July 1953 plenum. As more moderate policies remained in place and crime levels continued to climb, the public articulated their displeasure with growing force. Apparently in tandem with the level of offending, public outrage abated only temporarily after the shock of 1953. At the end of 1955, an official wrote that 'after a significant increase in the number of such letters in 1953 and the beginning of 1954, the number of letters received decreased until the present time when it has begun growing again'.¹³

In this chapter, I suggest that faced with this crisis, the Soviet authorities employed new techniques to retain respectable law and order. As it continued to reduce the Gulag population, the party came to recognise the importance of engaging the public in its fight against crime. Seeking to convince citizens that the huge Gulag complex was unnecessary, the party discouraged them from seeing offenders and transgressors as dangerous bandits or enemies. With almost four decades of Soviet power under its

¹² GARF f. 9401, op. 2, d. 479, l. 334. The same year, a typical report from the provinces lamented that young people so often fell under the influence of 'criminals elements'. See GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 4593, ll. 53-64.

belt, official rhetoric claimed, society was now sufficiently healthy and robust to take a more active and independent role in treating transgressors and deviants. There were two stages. First, the party encouraged greater vigilance – though not the enemy-spotting of the Stalinist era. Citizens were to show much greater activism in ensuring that everyone – from family and friends to work colleagues and neighbours – was leading a moral, clean, and respectable way of life, and a kind of self-policing was encouraged. In a second and more radical stage, the party claimed that as they neared the communist era, the public had even more potential. No longer considering it necessary to isolate the offender from society, the party gave the public a key role in healing the sick and saving sinners. The site of redemption was re-located from the Gulag to within the bounds of Soviet society.

The second part of this chapter suggests this new rhetoric was far from hegemonic, however. Opposition to this version of ‘correction’ existed amongst legal professionals, journalists, and writers, and old notions of banishment and exclusion rivalled the utopian visions promoted by Khrushchev. Even once implemented, the new measures provoked significant resistance, and the public protested against the return of the criminally deviant. Fears that the enemy ‘other’ might contaminate the Soviet community continued to be widespread.

The Turn To *Byt*

In 1954, the party launched a campaign for healthy *byt*. On 17 August 1954, the front page of *Leningradskaiia pravda* led with the headline ‘Towards Soviet man’s healthy

¹³ GARF f. 7523, op. 107, d. 189, l. 65.

byt' (*Za zdorovyi byt sovetskogo cheloveka*).¹⁴ Although the article opened with a positive picture of the 'cultured' way most Soviet citizens lived, it soon went on to lament the fact that vestiges of the capitalist past still remained within Soviet society. Claiming it was imperative to fight against all that impeded the Soviet man's 'cultured' leisure time, the article identified drunkenness as a social ill that must be eradicated without delay. In the same year, the publication of a series of new pamphlets and books reflected the current importance of *byt*. The *Yearbook of Soviet Publications* included the category of '*byt*' for the first time in 1954, with fourteen new titles in that year and a steady increase recorded over the decade.¹⁵ The new publications included titles like *Communist Morality and Byt, Towards A Healthy Byt, The Culture of Correct Behaviour amongst Soviet Young People*, with many texts devoted to the dangers of alcoholism.¹⁶

This new emphasis on *byt* was reflected in an important shift in crime-reportage. In 1953, 'From the courtroom' reports had consistently portrayed the criminal standing trial as bandit, inveterate criminal, and veteran of the Gulag. In every respect this 'bandit' stood outside of Soviet society. While such depictions did not entirely disappear in 1954, new sorts of offenders began to populate crime reportage.¹⁷ Not all transgressors came out of the underworld of the Gulag, it seems, for increasingly reports depicted ordinary citizens taking to a life of crime. Rather than strangers from

¹⁴ 'Za zdorovyi byt sovetskogo cheloveka', *Leningradskaiia pravda*, 17 August 1954, p. 1.

¹⁵ Kelly, *Refining Russia*, appendix 5.

¹⁶ *Ezhegodnik knig SSSR 1954: II-polugodie* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo vsesoiuznoi palaty, 1955), p. 256; *Ezhegodnik knig SSSR 1955: II-polugodie* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo vsesoiuznoi palaty, 1956), p. 294.

¹⁷ One example is 'Bandit nakazan', *Leningradskaiia pravda*, 26 May 1954, p. 4. This is typical of the model established in 1953: a beneficiary of the 1953 amnesty with a string of sentences behind him, he returns home to lead a 'parasitic' life of crime. Other examples include: 'Likvidatsiia shaiki banditov', *Leningradskaiia pravda*, 10 November 1954, p. 4; 'Grabiteli', *Leningradskaiia pravda*, 19 June 1954, p. 4; 'Prestupniki nakazany', *Leningradskaiia pravda*, 25 March 1954, p. 4; 'Grabiteli', *Moskovskaia pravda*, 7 September 1954, p. 4.

an alien world, aggressors might be members of the Soviet community who had been allowed to lapse into an unhealthy and un-Soviet way of life. Instead of simply lamenting the rise in crime as they had done in 1953, citizens were taught that society could play a positive, instructive role in preventing the emergence of these new deviants.

In August 1954, an article headlined 'In drunken intoxication' opened by telling readers that 'young joiner V. Eroshin was often seen drunk. He didn't spend his free time with his family, but with his drinking companions.'¹⁸ With neighbours cast as witnesses to his debauched ways, Eroshin was identified as a member of the Soviet community, not an outsider. The reader was given to understand that Eroshin's problems began with his antisocial behaviour, but his transgressions soon escalated dramatically. While drunk one summer evening, he insulted a young girl on the street, and when one of her young companions tried to reason with him, Eroshin stabbed him.

In a second article entitled 'Hooligan', an eighteen-year-old from Leningrad was sentenced for attacking a young girl who had rejected his amorous advances at the youth-club dance.¹⁹ Again the roots of the problem lay with the protagonist's daily conduct. Preferring 'hooligan' behaviour to hard work or study, Gennadii Fedorov drank, insulted passers-by on the street, and organised parties (*deboshi*) at home during the night. The reader was to infer that it was only one short step from these hooligan acts to violently assaulting a schoolgirl. Neither Eroshin nor Fedorov were

¹⁸ 'V pianom ugame', *Moskovskaia pravda*, 7 August 1954, p. 4.

¹⁹ 'Khuligan', *Leningradskaia pravda*, 5 June 1954, p. 4.

presented as members of a prison subculture, yet their dissolute life-style led them to commit heinous crimes.

Replacing the marauding bandit of 1953, the press now presented the 'hooligan' who was a product of an urban habitat. The publication of such articles seemed to remind citizens of the importance of *byt*. Drinking, swearing and rowdy behaviour, readers were implicitly warned, must be strongly discouraged for they were the first warning signs that an individual was on the path to full-blown criminal acts. If people took greater interest in promoting correct behaviour within their localities, criminal tendencies could be eradicated before they came to fruition – or so the theorists hoped.

Members of Soviet society were thus encouraged to take an active role in raising moral, healthy citizens of the future. The first responsibility naturally lay with the parents. Already in 1954 a feuilleton in *Moskovskaia pravda* showed how two young people slid towards crime as a result of their families' failure to teach them Soviet morality.²⁰ The article also suggested, however, that the wider Soviet community had a part to play. Unruly youths and inattentive parents were visible to everyone, it concluded, yet the vast majority of people said and did nothing. In the task of stamping out 'unhealthy and amoral' tendencies amongst the young, the Soviet community (*obshchestvennost'*) had a great and, as yet, underused potential. When they witnessed abuses, Soviet citizens must henceforth speak out.

²⁰ 'Kto vinovat?', *Moskovskaia pravda*, 29 October 1954, p. 3.

The role of the Soviet community, or *obshchestvennost'*, became a key motif. If previously *obshchestvennost'* was associated with the voluntary work of the elite, the party hoped it would now become a broader mass movement.²¹ Initially the task involved mutual surveillance. Citizens were encouraged to be vigilant and to 'whistle-blow' wherever they saw transgression of Soviet *byt*. Over the course of 1956, a series of articles urged the Soviet community on to greater vigilance in the struggle against hooliganism, drunkenness, and other indiscretions. In the feuilleton 'After midnight...', *Moskovskaia pravda* called on Muscovites to evince greater intolerance towards those who held responsible positions by day, while indulging in public displays of drunkenness by night.²² The railway station, a site of disruptive behaviour for the bandits of 1953, was reconfigured here as a night-time refuge for urban inhabitants who wanted – temporarily – to shed their identity as upstanding Soviet citizens. In its conclusion, the article entreated readers to 'name and shame' all those who sought to turn the capital's stations into places of rowdy drunkenness:

We must speak out against them at full voice. At stations and in other places that remain open overnight, there are still those nocturnal heroes who roam in search of 'adventures'. If you meet them, don't just give these degenerate idlers a wide berth, proclaim their names, whoever they

²¹ In his exploration of *obshchestvennost'* in the pre-revolutionary decades, Joseph Bradley shows how the growth of voluntary associations nurtured a sense of public duty and civic spirit amongst the new entrepreneurial, professional, and cultural elites. This kind of *obshchestvennost'* continued to be highly important in the Soviet era, where a high value was placed on activism. Under Stalin, the term *obshchestvennost'* tended to refer to the activities of party and Soviet officials, or their relatives. Mary Buckley has studied the *Obshchestvennitsa*, a public spirited woman or female activist, who was invariably married to a manager, engineer, stakhanovite, or member of the armed forces. Indeed it was almost inevitable that these female volunteers came from society's elite, as only women from more comfortable families could afford to labour without pay. The activities encouraged in the 1950s were to be in addition to work, however, and as George Breslauer has noted, by the late 1950s the word *obshchestvennost'* developed a rather different meaning. Now it 'referred to a stratum of mobilizers drawn from all groups in society', and became associated with a broader mass movement than had been the case either in pre-revolutionary or Stalinist Russia. Joseph Bradley, 'Voluntary Associations, Civic Culture and *Obshchestvennost'* in Moscow', in *Between Tsar and People: Educated Society and the Quest for Public Identity in Late Imperial Russia*, ed. by Edith W. Clowes, Samuel D. Kassow, and James L. West (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1991), pp. 131-148; Mary Buckley, 'The Untold Story of *Obshchestvennitsa* in the 1930s', *Europe-Asia Studies*, 48 (1996), 569-586; Breslauer, 'Khrushchev Reconsidered', p. 57.

²² 'Posle dvenadtsati nochii...', *Moskovskaia pravda*, 21 October 1956, p. 2.

may be, whatever position they may hold.

Over the year, there were several articles calling for the public to denounce hooligans and brawlers: 'The community's vital task', 'Don't walk on by!', 'The duty of each and every one: Intensifying the struggle with violators of social order'.²³ The press encouraged readers to sign up to new voluntary brigades established to patrol the city streets and intercept dubious characters.²⁴ Charged with apprehending hooligans, the new brigadiers, should never let pass even the most minor of transgressions.

In fact, not only brigadiers, but all of society must be vigilant. One typical article berated the inhabitants of Rybnikov lane who turned a blind eye to their neighbour's conspicuous consumption. Despite a quite ordinary job in a Moscow workshop, Leopold Glazenberg took manifest pleasure in his car and driver, the lavish décor of his home, his elegant clothing, and the long and expensive holidays he spent with his new, young wife. Why, the article demanded indignantly, did it take so long to discover his deceptions at work? How could a conman be at large for so long in Moscow? In addition to the work of the street patrols, public vigilance was plugged as a vital force in eradicating crime.²⁵

In the same year as the Secret Speech was discouraging citizens from seeking out enemies, the press was urging citizens to be vigilant towards neighbours and colleagues. The target was not a hidden or masked foe. In fact, drunken behaviour or

²³ 'Krovnoe delo obshchestvennosti', *Leningradskaya pravda*, 7 September 1956, p. 2; 'Krovnoe delo obshchestvennosti', *Pravda*, 26 August 1956, p. 3; 'Ne prokhodite mimo!', *Moskovskaya pravda*, 17 January 1956, p. 3; 'Delo vseh i kazhdogo', *Moskovskaya pravda*, 4 September 1956, p. 2.

²⁴ 'Krovnoe delo obshchestvennosti', *Leningradskaya pravda*, 7 September 1956, p. 2. The first volunteer brigades established had close links with the police and were considered as auxiliaries in the task of apprehending offenders. This changed significantly by 1959 when volunteer brigades were set up independently from the police and charged with aiding the moral guidance of erring individuals.

fancy clothes made these people clearly visible to all. Such transgressors were not enemies, but in the quest for an ordered society, they must be intercepted before they committed more dangerous acts.

From Vigilance to Salvation

On 2 March 1959, a joint decree from the Council of Ministers and the Central Committee 'On the participation of workers in the maintenance of public order' introduced a range of new measures.²⁶ Already established on an *ad hoc* basis in some areas, voluntary brigades were now to be organised in every factory and farm across the nation. Charged with patrolling the streets, they would identify troublemakers and, where necessary, inform the offender's work place, or even the police. Comrade courts were also re-established, and instead of finding themselves in front of a Soviet judge, small-time offenders might now be tried by their own colleagues and neighbours. Reflecting the belief that the force of collective disapproval could often be more effective than a prison term, non-custodial sentences were also revived. A 'collective' – such as a workplace or housing block – could save an offender from incarceration by offering to become his guardian.²⁷ Likewise, a prisoner might be granted early release if a collective guaranteed to take responsible for his 'probation'.

²⁵ 'Ne prokhozite mimo!', *Moskovskaia pravda*, 17 January 1956, p. 3.

²⁶ 'Voluntary Militia and Courts', *Soviet Studies*, 11 (1959), 214-217.

²⁷ The 'community organisation' could apply for 'guardianship' of an offender during the police investigation, or if the matter came to trial, the judge could decide on this as a form of social rehabilitation.

Attached to every soviet, new commissions 'for the protection of socialist legality and social order' were to implement, co-ordinate, and monitor these measures.²⁸

Explaining that the scope of their censure was extensive, Oleg Kharkhordin argues that the people's patrols and comrades courts created in the 1950s could in some respects be more ruthless than the police.²⁹ According to him, Khrushchev's dream was to create a system of 96 million controllers watching each other so that not even a mosquito could escape notice.³⁰ Whereas the police were in theory limited to apprehending those who breached Soviet laws, the patrols could reprimand passers-by for wearing inappropriate clothing, throwing litter, playing cards, or even dancing 'with unnatural, jerky movements'. In addition, anyone could join in the censure, every passer-by could 'become a patrolman', potentially making 'mutual surveillance' an absolutely ubiquitous force.³¹ Yet Kharkhordin's study misses the important shift that occurred in the late 1950s. By the time of the XXI Party Congress in 1959 and the promulgation of the new decree, Khrushchev was no longer content with simply

²⁸ For example, the Moscow soviet (*Mossovet*) created a commission that met for the first time on 3 April 1959 to elect a deputy and secretary and to decide on a work plan. (TsGAMO f. 2157, op. 1, d. 5311, l. 11)

²⁹ Kharkhordin, *The Collective and the Individual*, p. 280.

³⁰ Kharkhordin, *The Collective and the Individual*, p. 299.

³¹ Kharkhordin's work applies aspects of Michel Foucault's argument that the Enlightenment rejection of public, punitive spectacles in the name of greater 'humanity' in fact disguised the development of a highly extensive system of behavioural control. Kharkhordin identifies similar patterns in the transition from 'terror' to 'reform'. In some respects his argument holds. Although the brutal punishments of Stalinism were never administered publicly, the 'performance' of punishment was enacted through language, and the year 1953 brought a rejection of this performative aspect, the decline of the media's deadly persecutions, and the promotion of 'humanity'. Telescoping Foucault's broad historical patterns to explain the reforms of the 1950s, Kharkhordin misses important aspects of Khrushchev's innovative project, however. Jan Plamper has recently pointed to the difficulties implicit in making the Gulag fit into Foucault's models based on historical change in western Europe. Plamper shows how at one point Foucault associated the Soviet Gulag with pre-Enlightenment mechanisms of punishment, at another with nineteenth-century penal practices, and argues that the Gulag 'ultimately remained a paradox to Foucault, for methodological and epistemological reasons'. See Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*; Jan Plamper, 'Foucault's Gulag', *Kritika*, 3 (2002), 255-80.

extending 'the net'.³² In the second half of the decade, the project to engage the public in fighting crime and deviance took on a highly utopian nature, and by over-emphasising the restrictive nature of Soviet power, Kharkhordin neglects these more creative aspects.

Foucault writes that it is possible to 'imagine that there are societies in which the way one determines the behaviour is so well determined in advance, that there is nothing left to do'.³³ While Soviet reality might still be far from such an idyll, it was a society founded on the premise that paradise on earth was achievable; the new measures aimed at bringing that paradise closer. It was believed that by educating citizens more thoroughly, inculcating communist morality, and ensuring that the spiritually weak felt the wholesome influence of the Soviet collective, criminality would disappear almost entirely. With the communist future allegedly so close, Khrushchev focused on creating the 'new man'. In the place of exclusionary practices encouraged under Stalin, whereby those who offended were cast out from the Soviet family, new attention was devoted to 'saving' those who erred. Citizens were now urged to participate not so much in apprehending or arresting those who committed misdemeanours, but to aid in the task of transforming them into valued members of the communist collective. By 1959, the role of the volunteer brigades was less to aid in the arrest of law-breakers than to exert moral pressure on a whole range of social deviants, helping them to reform before a real crime had even been committed.

³² *Pravda*, 28 January 1959, pp. 2-10.

³³ Foucault, 'The Ethic of Care for the Self', p. 64.

The shift was reflected in the metaphors and tropes used in the press. With the established Manichean rhetoric undermined, the Soviet community was reconfigured as an ensemble of fellow travellers collectively embarking on a journey towards the communist future, yet all at risk of stumbling onto the wrong path. The new rhetoric confirmed communist eschatology, but now rendered collective progress contingent not upon fighting the enemy, but on ensuring that every member was living in accordance with Soviet moral codes. Those already set upon the correct path must look out for those who erred, and young people in particular must be deterred from straying onto the wrong path. Rather than catching villains, the community's main task was now to guide transgressors back onto the correct path that would lead them all towards communism.

Although this rhetoric reached its apotheosis towards the end of the decade, it was already presaged in earlier propaganda texts. The story of Liudmila Raikh, subject of a 1956 feuilleton entitled 'On the slippery slope', offers a prime example of the new rhetoric.³⁴ Until recently an exemplary Soviet schoolgirl, Liuda had been enticed into the company of young thieves. With a taste for money, nice dresses, make-up, and dances, she gradually lost interest in sport, study, or work. Thus the two paths were counterposed; on the one side was the correct Soviet lifestyle devoted to physical activity and hard work, on the other lay vanity, greed, and frivolity. Having taken the wrong path, her life spiralled out of control, ultimately ending up in a courtroom drama. Not only were her parents berated for taking insufficient interest in their daughter's upbringing, the whole community was taken to task. All were invited to

³⁴ 'Na skol'zkom puti', *Moskovskaia pravda*, 23 October 1956, p. 3.

help return Liuda to the right path. Repeating the headline's metaphors, the authors concluded:

The girl made a mistake, she got off onto the wrong path. But she is only eighteen. And while it is not too late, we should come to the girl's help. We must help all that is good and clean in this young girl flourish. Liudmila herself, her parents, and the whole community [*obshchestvennost*] must battle for her, and for her bright future [*svetloe budushchee*].

Liudmila had a bright future ahead, but she would only reach it if she lived in accordance with Soviet laws and according to Soviet *byt* and rejected the false values – cosmetics and dancing – that had taken her off track in the first place.

Over the next three years such metaphors became ubiquitous. A typical article on the activities of the newly formed *druzhiny* described the work of one brigade. In October 1959, the unit received a letter from a certain Shatrova who begged for help with her wayward brother who had recently indulged in some heavy drinking bouts, often cursing and threatening both her and her children. That same evening, members of the brigade visited the Shatrovs' apartment and rebuked the brother, thus demonstrating to him that the 'collective' had firmly decided to 'sober him up once and for all'. The painstaking work of the volunteers did not stop there and, in addition to further visits to the Shatrov residence, they ensured that the brother's work 'collective' also discussed his misdemeanours. The story ended with Shatrov a polite and sober individual. The article concluded: 'This short story is just an episode. There are no "brigands" involved, no talk of "arrest", or "convictions"... But the deed is done. One man was prevented from veering off the path.'³⁵ As Kharkhordin has argued, the Soviet community was urged to become actively involved in the way every citizen

³⁵ ' "Proisshествii ne bylo..."', *Moskovskaia pravda*, 19 December 1959, pp. 2-3.

lived even within his own home; volunteers had the right to enter the family hearth and concern themselves with the daily life of every citizen. Yet their goal here was not to arrest or condemn those whose *byt* was undesirable. Charged with raising Soviet morality in the local community, the volunteer brigades were challenged to use the techniques of re-education and collective pressure to eradicate transgressions. The very title of the article – “No incidents to report” – promoted the utopian dream that there would soon be no crimes at all.

Propaganda pieces showed how many individuals experienced radical personal transformation. Under the headline ‘Collective justice’, the conversion of worker O. S. Makarenkova was recounted.³⁶ As forewoman in a workshop, she would swear at her team, humiliate them, and even slap subordinates. As the article reminded the readers, the aim of the comrades’ courts was ‘not to punish, but to educate [*vospityvat*], to deter from further, more serious acts’. After many official warnings, the case was transferred to the comrades’ courts where the board heard her pleas and promises to reform. It was only when the case was heard in front of the whole collective that Makarenkova realised the error of her ways. In the half year since the hearing, Makarenkova had stopped cursing and bad-mouthing other workers, becoming a sociable and friendly member of the team – ‘the past has been cancelled out’.

Another article, optimistically entitled ‘Towards perfect law and order in the capital’, recounted the reformation of several anti-social characters. In one workshop, the collective met to debate the behaviour of drunken worker Osipov a full three times;

experienced and respected work-mates talked with him; attention was paid both to his progress in the work-place and in his personal life. Soon Osipov also became a sober worker. In the same article, a party member managed to 're-educate' the addled Morozov, whose transformation was so complete that he became a candidate member of the party himself. Eager to show how these tales of personal transformation related to the issue of eradicating crime in the capital, the article cited from Aleksandr Gorkin, the current president of the Supreme Court:

Listening to criminal cases in the peoples' courts it is evident that in the vast majority of cases law-breakers can be dealt with by means of collective pressure. Instead of imprisonment, the pressure of the collective can in many cases be a more effective means to re-educate a man [*perevospitanie cheloveka*].

Correcting a man who is on the slippery path, preventing him from going downhill, keeping him under a friendly but firm control, showing him the trust of the collective – this is the genuine battle for a man and for his moral education [*vospitanie*].³⁷

Once more promoting the vision of the offender as 'erring' or 'slipping', Gorkin unequivocally rejected the notion of prison as an effective means to correct offenders. Soviet society was now to become the primary site for re-education.

This campaign coincided both with Khrushchev's claims that communism was no longer 'over the hills and far away' (*ne za gorami*) and, with the launch of the Soviets' first rockets, the Soviet conquest of new territories. In 1959, the pages of the Soviet press were filled with images of space rockets, slogans about the rapid advent of communism, and stories of individuals who were transformed from egotistical and lazy deviants into Soviet citizens worthy of the beautiful communist future. Believing it was no longer acceptable for great swathes of the population to be banished from

³⁶ 'Pravosudie kolektiva', *Moskovskaia pravda*, 30 June 1959, pp. 2-3.

³⁷ 'Za obraztsovyi obshchestvennyi poriadok v stolitse', *Moskovskaia pravda*, 2 December 1959, p. 2.

society, Khrushchev in particular distanced himself from the Manichean formulations of the past. In the place of aggressive rhetoric against wrong-doers, Khrushchev led the nation on a radical mission to save all souls. Khrushchev did not promote his policies as 'liberal' ones and did not present himself as a 'reformer'. Instead, the new approach to criminality was promoted as a crucial part of the communist project, a necessary step in bringing the idyllic future nearer. Although Soviet society had not been entirely ready for such a task in 1953, the party hoped that, as a result of the new propaganda campaign and popular participation in the brigades and courts, the Soviet public would warm to the task. If the communist era was near, party leaders argued, Soviet society must now be sufficiently healthy to resist the negative influence of a few contaminated elements and even, indeed, to restore them to health.

A Tale of Redemption

At the Third Writers' Congress, Khrushchev made a long speech that *Pravda* published on its front pages in May 1959.³⁸ In a long and convoluted introduction, Khrushchev first rebuked the writers for getting entangled in lengthy wrangles between themselves, only to remind them that while capitalism still existed in the world, conflict would always remain. Realising the ambiguity of his words, he rhetoricised, 'You're probably wondering what I'm calling you to do – to ignite the passions of battle, or to promote reconciliation?' In response to his own question, he first answered, 'If the enemy doesn't surrender – then destroy him'. Citing this battle-cry, typical of the Manichean hostilities encouraged in the 1930s, Khrushchev repeated that in the class war with capitalism, the Soviets would never capitulate.

Then, however, he turned to the adage 'Don't kick a lying dog' to encourage a less ruthless approach within the Soviet Union. If the opponent shows a readiness to take the correct position, Khrushchev said, he should be given a helping hand, encouraged to join the ranks of Soviet society. He concluded:

I'd like to say that in our socialist society, where there are no enemy classes or groups, where our whole life is built on the principles of comradeship and friendship, we need to deal more sympathetically with those people who have let the devil get the better of them [*'dat' sebia chertu zaputat*].

Retaining a Manichean viewpoint only in relation to socialist society's relations to the external, capitalist world, Khrushchev portrayed the Soviet world as internally harmonious. He encouraged his audience – both delegates at the congress and *Pravda* readers – to follow Dzerzhinskii in believing that every individual, 'including both political opponents and criminals', could be re-educated. 'We believe', he said, 'that no such thing exists as a person who cannot be corrected.' Choosing to frame the question as he did, Khrushchev suggested that those who made mistakes should no longer be treated as enemies. Real 'enemies' only existed in the form of capitalists. His argument was thus absolutely in keeping with the Secret Speech where he claimed that the threat of internal enemies had been greatly exaggerated. Those who committed mistakes, even crimes, should be treated not as enemies, but with concern and sympathy; *vospitanie* (moral education) and even *perevospitanie* (moral re-education) were the order of the day.

Even though he addressed writers, and not criminal experts, judges, or policemen, Khrushchev went on to devote yet more of his speech to the question of the 'criminal'. Choosing the writers' congress as a suitable occasion to discuss the merits

³⁸ 'Rech' N. S. Khrushcheva na III s'ezde pisatelei 22 maia 1959 goda', *Pravda*, 24 May 1959, pp. 1-3.

of 'correction' over 'imprisonment', he detached it from the narrower issues of penal policy. By implication, he presented the revised treatment of offenders as a profound, philosophical shift in how society defined itself. By addressing writers, the debate became a question of how society's 'interpreters' should view the Soviet world and its inhabitants. Rather than presenting society as a battleground, they should see it as a school for new citizens.

The candidate for re-education chosen by Khrushchev was rather different from the frivolous Liudmila Raikh, Shatrova's drunken brother, and other stray individuals profiled in the press in the late 1950s. Konstantin Nogovitsin was the author of a petition to Khrushchev – and a self-professed recidivist. A petition, that staple of the Soviet criminal justice system, was now used to broadcast his life-story, and Khrushchev read out the letter in its entirety. From the age of twelve, we learn, Nogovitsin committed thefts, and as a result had been sentenced four times. Having recently finished a six-year stretch, he returned home to his mother, wife, and daughter, and found work as a carpenter; but with his wife pregnant and his wages low, he quickly sank into debt and ran away to the 'easy life'. Somehow he found himself unwilling to take up his old life of thieving again, yet was equally unable to return home to the family he had abandoned. In a limbo between two lives, Nogovitsin's petition was a plea for advice. As he informed the congress, Khrushchev invited the man to meet him. Additional biographical information was garnered at the interview: thirty years old, sensible and pleasant, Nogovitsin talked of how he had lost his father, and of the negative environment that had influenced him. Explaining that he continued to be labelled a thief, which prevented him from finding normal work or

acquiring reasonable lodgings, he concluded his little speech: 'I promise you that I will become a decent man [*chestnyi chelovek*]. I will prove it to you.'

Choosing to believe the man, Khrushchev offered him practical help. He telephoned the local *gorkom*, instructing them to help Nogovitsin find work and acquire qualifications. He offered him credit so he could build himself a little house (*domik*). When he checked on the progress of his protégé, Khrushchev learned that the man was working well. From his story, Khrushchev concluded that the days of draconian discipline were over. What would this approach have achieved, he asked:

It would have meant that a man who had erred from the correct path ended up back in prison, improving his professional qualifications only in the business of thieving, while all the time we are in need of extra men for our own matters. In order to return this man to the correct path, a different approach is needed. You need to believe in a man, in his good side. Can this man be an active participant in the construction of communism? He can, comrades! (Noisy applause).

Eyes set firmly on the future, Khrushchev painted a rosy picture of communism. In an environment of absolute harmony and prosperity, there would no longer be any temptation to commit crime. While he could not guarantee complete absence of criminals under communism, he suggested that such behaviour would be so strange and rare, society would consider the perpetrators mentally ill.³⁹

Up to the point of Khrushchev's intervention, Nogovitsin's story in itself was not uncommon. After losing his father, he came under the influence of a 'bad' environment and started thieving during the dislocations of war. As his lack of

³⁹ The practice of diagnosing deviant behaviour and thought as symptoms of mental illness flourished in the 1960s and 1970s, resulting in the abuse for which Soviet psychiatry was famed. Sidney Bloch and Peter Reddaway, *Soviet Psychiatric Abuse: The Shadow over World Psychiatry* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1984).

qualifications, coupled with society's distrust, made it difficult to build a normal life for himself, he became locked in a transitory existence, interspersed with stretches in the Gulag. In his desperate plea for readmission to society and his promises to become a '*chestnyi chelovek*', his petition had much in common with those of Tikhonov/Ivanov, Podavalov, and Topolev.⁴⁰ In their cases, however, pleas for a happy ending went unheeded, their promises of personal transformation rarely believed. In this public manner, Khrushchev chose to re-write the ending to one life-story, allowing Nogovitsin to become a respected member of Soviet society. In 1962, the full story of his conversion was published in *Izvestiia*. It showed how the incomplete 'Bildungsroman' could be happily concluded when society was prepared to take an active role in forming the individual, cultivating in him the correct moral values, and educating him in the ways of the Soviet world.⁴¹

Describing their arrival at the Novorossiisk docks, the authors of 'Konstantin Nogovitsin's new life' impressed on the reader the stunning industrial landscape, deftly setting the scene for a socialist realist tale of personal transformation. The reader first glimpses the protagonist from afar, singing as he masterfully operates one of the huge cranes towering over the docks. Nogovitsin finishes his shift, greets the journalists, and begins to relate his new story – not his life as a thief, but the story of his conversion. His first days as a stevedore were painful. Physically unable to keep up the pace and ashamed by his weakness, he was dependent upon the support of the collective. Their help was forthcoming; no one evinced curiosity about his past and members of his brigade were ready to tutor him. When he took his breaks alone his

⁴⁰ See Chapter II.

⁴¹ 'Novaia zhizn' Konstantina Nogovitsina', *Izvestiia*, 8 September 1962, p. 6.

work-mates drew him into their group, offering him food and friendship. In his private life, important changes also occurred. With his wife and new baby home from the maternity hospital, the family moved into a new little room. To celebrate their housewarming, the couple invited Nogovitsin's foreman to tea and he not only showed great warmth towards the family, but also encouraged Nogovitsin to train as a crane operator. Settled into a new home with his family around him, learning new skills at work, and attending night school, Nogovitsin was on track to becoming a model worker.⁴² However, no socialist realist conversion story could be resolved so easily, and our protagonist would have to undergo several trials and tribulations before he could fully emerge as *homo sovieticus*.

A year went past, but Nogovitsin remained aware that he had not yet been fully transformed, later explaining 'I felt in my soul that I had not yet become a real working person'. He still lacked the 'proletarian consciousness' of which his new friend and workmate, Valentin Dubinin, spoke. When problems arose – arguments with his mother-in-law, financial worries, his daughter's ill-health – Nogovitsin embarked on a drinking binge. Old friends somehow get hold of him and took their former comrade-in-arms on a drunken train journey. Horrified by his friend's behaviour, Dubinin identified it as the 'lure of the old'. Nogovitsin's life was thus configured as a battle between the forces of the 'old' life – in which he was 'Kos'ka', member of a vodka-drinking, criminal gang riding the rail network – and the new life, where he had become Konstantin Nogovitsin, a budding worker, settled, loyal to family, friends, and sobriety. Nogovitsin explained to the journalists, 'it was as if I

⁴² It is interesting that in the 1959 encounter with Khrushchev, Nogovitsin and his wife already have children. In the 1962 story of his transformation, however, a new child is born, and any pre-existing

were reborn but didn't believe that everything was behind me'. A full transformation of consciousness was required before he could truly become a new man.

Rejecting life on the trains, Nogovitsin immediately returned home, but faced a frosty reception. Those who had assisted him were disgusted by his relapse. However, the foreman encouraged them to give him a second chance, refusing the urge to cast Nogovitsin out:

'We should fire Nogovitsin. But if we push him aside [*ottolknut*], where will he go? Off thieving? And will we be able to sleep easy if he ends up in prison again? And after all, he did return to us. This shows that he is not a completely lost man.'

Paraphrasing Khrushchev's words from 1959, the foreman argued that the collective had a responsibility to save Nogovitsin from a life of crime and prison. Prison was clearly presented as a site of corruption and degeneration, Soviet society a breeding-ground for healthy new citizens.

The first time, Nogovitsin learnt how to work; this second time, the transformation was a spiritual one. He became utterly dedicated to his work, remorseful for the wasteful way he had spent so many years. When he showed the journalists the certificate proving his status as fully-trained crane-operator, Nogovitsin commented 'so it looks like I made myself into a person [*chelovekom sdelalsia*]' . The story ended with a dramatic finale in which – like any good socialist realist hero – he triumphed against the natural elements. Though modest about the incident, he explained that in the middle of a ferocious storm, he and three colleagues had battled to save the crane

ones forgotten. For the aesthetics of this socialist realist tale, he starts a new, happy family with the new life granted him by Khrushchev.

from ruin. When he saw a letter of thanks to the four workers hanging on the notice board the following day, he was filled with pride.

At one now with Soviet society, Nogovitsin's story could end. His certificate and the notice-board tribute offered two official recognitions of his new identity as a Soviet worker. Khrushchev's intervention had made the story unusual, but the message was universal: even the most 'fallen' of individuals could be restored to the Soviet family. The path may be thorny, but all could become respected members of Soviet society. The article praised those who made this transformation possible, those who saw their task in 'saving' him, not rejecting him – *spasti*, not *ottolknut*'. Khrushchev was lauded for having uncovered the good side underneath the 'mask' of a criminal: 'Under the heap of convictions, beneath the dirty skin of the criminal, Nikita Sergeevich Khrushchev saw the Man [*uvidel Cheloveka*].'⁴³ Whereas the rhetoric of the Stalinist era incited the public to 'unmask' enemies concealed under the guise of ordinary Soviet citizens, here the reader was encouraged to find the 'man' secreted within even the most unappealing of 'dirty' criminals. Now the rhetoric of 'unmasking' remained, but its new application revealed a significant change in Soviet philosophy. In order to build communism, the main task facing the collective was not to hunt out hidden enemies but rather to seek out the natural – if buried – good within each person.

Contesting Correction

Khrushchev's belief that all Soviet sinners could be redeemed was radical. Within the legal profession, different views of what 'correction' should mean rivalled his utopian

position, and a heated polemic simmered throughout the decade.⁴⁴ A half-year prior to Khrushchev's own foray into narrative, an alternative version of crime and 'correction' came in a short story from Vera Shaposhnikova in the specialist periodical *Sotsialisticheskaia zakonnost'*.⁴⁵ The story began with Shaposhnikova travelling from Moscow to the snow-bound camps to investigate prisoner life. In the course of the journey she engaged in discussion with an elderly worker from the camps. Probing her companion's views, Shaposhnikova took the opportunity to articulate complaints she commonly heard from ordinary citizens about the difficulties of living alongside offenders. In response, the camp worker professed himself a follower of Makarenko, telling her that the 'school of reforging' (*shkola perekovki*) had witnessed many successes and dangerous criminals had 'become people'. Initially Shaposhnikova paid tribute to the merits of 're-forging', but from her conversations with the prisoners she concluded that many *zeks* would only reform as they grew old. Although her article included an impassioned eulogy to Gor'kii and the *Belomor* vision of re-forging through labour, her views strongly reflected Stalinist revisions. Where Gor'kii had claimed that rehabilitation could be successful in a period of two years, Shaposhnikova harboured a much deeper fear of the criminal's recidivist nature and envisaged sentences of up to ten times those celebrated in *Belomor*.

⁴³ 'Novaia zhizn' Konstantina Nogovitsina'.

⁴⁴ One contemporary British observer saw it as a conflict between those who advocated 'restoring to the defendant the rights impaired by the misuses of the Stalin period' and those more concerned with fighting especially violent crime. In the specialist journals such as *Sotsialisticheskaia zakonnost'* and *Sovetskaia iustitsiia*, there was great debate between those who favoured social rehabilitation and those who campaigned for longer sentences. Those who argued for shorter sentences included B. Utevkii, L. Smirnov, and I. Goliakov (see B. Utevkii, 'Voprosy nakazaniia v ugodovnom zakonodatel'stve', *Sotsialisticheskaia zakonnost'*, 1958.7, 3-9; L. Smirnov, 'K osnovam ugodovnogo zakonodatel'stva SSSR', *Sotsialisticheskaia zakonnost'*, 1957.5; I. Goliakov, 'K proektu Ugodovnogo Kodeksa RSFSR', *Sovetskaia iustitsiia*, 1957.2). Advocates of a return to twenty or twenty-five year sentences included M. Shargorodskii and P. Romashkin (see M. Shargorodskii, 'Voprosy nakazaniia v proekte Ugodovnogo Kodeksa', *Sovetskoe gosudarstvo i pravo*, 1955.1, 51-8; P. Romashkin, 'Osnovnye problemy kodifikatsii sovetskogo ugodovnogo zakonodatel'stva', *Sovetskoe gosudarstvo i pravo*, 1957.5, 71-84). For the British point of view, see: R. Schlesinger, 'The Discussion of Criminal Law and Procedure', *Soviet Studies*, 10 (1958), 293-306 (p. 293).

For a time concessions were apparently made to these voices of caution, but, as we have seen, by 1959 concerns about violent crime and recidivist criminals lost out to Khrushchev's more radical formulations.⁴⁶ Instead of incarceration, re-education and 'correction' within society became the order of the day. The emptying of the Gulag accelerated. When the total number of prisoners dipped to 550,882 in 1960 it was at its lowest since 1935, and the distension of the Gulag generated by Stalinist repression had now largely been undone.⁴⁷ The example of Nogovitsin triumphed over Shaposhnikova's more recalcitrant *zeks*.

From the outset, however, local officials doubted the efficacy of Khrushchev's measures, fearing they signalled a worrying degree of leniency. In Leningrad, for example, local procurators were unconvinced by the policy of transferring offenders to social organisations instead of into the hands of the penal system. On 8 April 1959, a meeting was organised by Leningrad's head procurator to discuss the introduction of new policies, and initially debate progressed smoothly as delegates planned the new volunteer brigades and shared their experiences of setting up 'socialist legality' committees. The concept of rehabilitating offenders within society, however, caused

⁴⁵ Vera Shaposhnikova, 'Lisheniye Svobody', *Sotsialisticheskaia zakonnost'*, 1958.10, 56-51.

⁴⁶ After the traumatic effect of earlier decrees, the amnesty of November 1957 was more prudent, excluding several categories of prisoner and taking into account all previous convictions for the past ten years. The decree amnestied all women with children under eight, pregnant women, younger offenders up to 16, men over 60 and women over 55. It excluded the following categories: those sentenced for state crimes, banditry, premeditated murder, robbery, grievous bodily harm, malicious hooliganism (*zlostnoe khuliganstvo*), rape, the large-scale theft of socialist property; those with more than two sentences; those who had been granted early release and then re-offended; prisoners who broke camp discipline. In the discussions provoked by the 1958 draft of the 'Foundations of the Criminal Code', it seemed possible that 25 year sentences so common under Stalin would be re-instated. This was clearly what Shaposhnikova was hoping for. In fact, though the draft placed some restrictions on early release, the ten-year maximum sentence advocated by Lenin was upheld. R. Schlesinger, 'Documents on Amnesty and Pardon', *Soviet Studies*, 12 (1960), 443-446; P. Romashkin, 'Primenenie amnistii', *Sotsialisticheskaia zakonnost'*, 1958.1, 5-14.

⁴⁷ GARF f. 7523, op. 95, d. 109, l. 27.

consternation. Comrade Lototskaia, the procurator of Zhdanov *raion*, said that she did not understand the new practice of transferring offenders to the guardianship of community organisations. ‘Don’t these measures indicate a tendency to undermine our fight against dangerous criminals?’ she asked the assembled. She was supported by the Moscow *raion* procurator who declared that such practices would not be adopted in his dominion.⁴⁸

On 18 July 1959, just two months after Khrushchev’s speech at the writers’ congress, members of the new ‘observation committees’ from across the Moscow *oblast*’ came together to discuss the state of corrective-labour camps and prisons in the province.⁴⁹ One member, G. U. Kalinin, made a long and impassioned speech. He reminded his audience that their work had become even more important in the wake of the XXI Party Congress as the task of building communism was now urgent. ‘We won’t be taking any thieves, bandits or robbers forward with us to the future communist system’, he told listeners.⁵⁰ In keeping with the utopian rhetoric articulated by Khrushchev in 1959, he thus opened his speech by configuring the issue of crime in relation to the creation of earthly paradise. He boasted that the Soviets had been the first in the world to build a Soviet state, ‘the first to launch a satellite and a ballistic rocket’, and would be the first to build communism, eradicate crime, and destroy prisons, camps, and labour colonies.⁵¹ Yet the body of his speech revealed important doctrinal differences with Khrushchev about how this utopian state would be achieved. Kalinin was highly suspicious of prisoners *per se*. Charging fellow

⁴⁸ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 6199, ll. 130-131.

⁴⁹ TsGAMO f. 2157, op. 1, d. 5311, ll. 148-159. The ‘observation committees’ were set up by a decree from the Soviet of Ministers on 24 May 1957. Their goal was to strengthen public (*obshchestvennyi*) control over the work of the corrective-labour institutions.

⁵⁰ TsGAMO f. 2157, op. 1, d. 5311, l. 153.

committee members to be more cautious when considering prisoners' requests for early release, he told them:

Amongst them [the prisoners], there are people who can't be discerned [*razgadany*] at first glance, who try to hide their face from us, and very often they hide it so well that it is initially very difficult to work them out. It is hard to know how this group will behave after release[...]

It is our first task to master this difficult group so that when they are released from the camps or prison, they will be on the correct working path [*pravil'nyi trudovoi put'*] and won't lead our young people astray. But now they are beginning to behave in a very cunning way. When they are released from the prisons and camps, they don't immediately go about their shady business themselves, but instead try to involve our young people.⁵²

Where Khrushchev had hoped to unearth the 'man' within the criminal, Kalinin still saw the prisoner as a potential enemy who cunningly hid behind the mask of a reformed citizen. Kalinin tended to see the prisoners' tales as skilful invention and considered it the task of the 'observation committees' to unveil the face of the true criminal. Unlike Khrushchev, Kalinin did not imagine unmasking the 'man' inside the criminal and in fact went so far as to express overt anxiety over the impact of Khrushchev's speech at the writers' congress. Lots of prisoners, he warned his colleagues, would try to manipulate Khrushchev's speech in order to plea for their own release. Such prisoners should be reminded that when Nogovitsin approached Khrushchev he had already reformed himself, having run away from his family yet resisted the lure of crime, thus proving from the outset his determination to give up his life of crime. Promoting a quite different method of re-education from official policies, Kalinin argued that the best means for re-education was through labour and strict discipline (*rezhim*). In his view, the endeavours of the collective to 'correct' and 'save' an offender were appropriate only for young people who had committed a

⁵¹ TsGAMO f. 2157, op. 1, d. 5311, l. 156.

⁵² TsGAMO f. 2157, op. 1, d. 5311, l. 154.

single error. On the whole, he advocated that the application of 'early release' should be more limited than at present. Where rehabilitation or re-education was possible, it should occur in the isolation of a prison or camp and could only be achieved through the act of forced labour, and not through the cultural activities and 'amateur dramatics' he feared some colleagues might support.

Kalinin's reservations were not unique. Over the coming months, local authorities regularly reported on the progress of the new practices. Their reports sometimes included stories of personal transformation that mirrored the tales of conversion publicised in the press, describing how the guidance of the 'collective' could return lost sheep to the Soviet fold. More commonly, however, they turned to the perceived failures of the new policies.

Officials were aware that a lack of consistency undermined the initiative. At the local level, some procurators were ridiculously cautious, others almost reckless. In the autumn of 1959, a report from officials in Kalinin *oblast'* criticised local procurators for their failure to implement the new policies in a coherent manner. The official explained how in one *raion* individuals guilty of attempted murder, rape, and grievous bodily harm might be granted reprieve and bailed out for re-education, while in a neighbouring district a man was brought to trial for failing to pay alimony for two months.⁵³ The Leningrad procurator was initially more positive about the reforms, asserting that in the vast majority of cases offenders 'repent' (*raskaivaetsia*) in front of the collective and promise to 'correct themselves', yet he too identified a number of problems. He criticised managers who applied to take inveterate criminals on

probation, sometimes without consulting the members of the collective. Courts were accused of making insensitive decisions, as in the case of A. N. Subbotina who was assigned to her housing collective for re-education, even though these were the very people whom she had drunkenly abused in the first place.⁵⁴ An inquiry in Moscow found similar problems, and again judges were criticised for letting opportunities for re-education slip by. The author of the report questioned the appropriateness of convicting a factory worker who stole a jar of jam, or of sentencing a deaf and mute woman whose 'offence' was to knock down the partition dividing the room she shared with her ex-husband.⁵⁵

In addition to successful conversion tales, it was common to find the criminal relapsing into his old ways. Some reports blamed the level of re-education on offer. In a report on the issue of crime in Vladimir *oblast'*, a State Councillor of Justice, Komarov, noted the high level of crimes committed by previous offenders, and suggested they had received unsatisfactory help. Komarov argued that there had been a break-down in communication between the police, courts, and social organisations responsible for re-education, and he regretted that 'the police and courts often transferred to communal guardianship people who had committed serious crimes and also people who had previous sentences and had already resisted correction'.⁵⁶ A subsequent report from the city of Kol'chugun offered individual stories to illustrate this failure. In January 1960 N. N. Chuzlov was released early from prison on the grounds that Workshop 10 at the Ordzhonikidze factory would become his 'guardian'

⁵³ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 3200, ll. 42-45.

⁵⁴ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 6199, ll. 208-229.

⁵⁵ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 6226, ll. 1-18.

⁵⁶ Vladimir Municipal Archive, f. 3789, op. 1, d. 2007, l. 49.

and take responsibility for his re-education.⁵⁷ For almost two months, however, he was without work and he re-offended. According to the report, delays in finding returnees work were not uncommon.

Some reports, however, held the offender and ex-convicts themselves to blame. Even when the collective showered them with assistance, some still simply failed to change. The case of a twenty-eight year old man, A. I. Feniushin, is typical. After serving five sentences, Feniushin was granted early release in May 1959 and found work at the Ordzhonikidze factory in Kol'chugun, where he was given 'all the help he could wish for'. In October 1959 he was even given a sanatorium holiday worth 1200 roubles and a further 130 roubles for travel expenses. Despite the generosity shown him, he re-offended in January 1960. Another returnee from the Gulag, Telegin, managed to re-offend in little over three weeks after his release, even though he received 100 roubles to tide him over until he was allocated work.⁵⁸

The problems with the new procedures were thus two-fold. Both local officials and members of the collectives charged with the task of re-education seem to have been at best half-hearted, and many offenders consequently missed out on the 're-education' they deserved. At the same time, the recipients of these new efforts were also flawed. Very few, it seems, were proving to have the potential for personal transformation displayed by Konstantin Nogovitsin. Even before the first year of the experiment was over, there were widespread misgivings amongst those charged with its implementation.

⁵⁷ Vladimir Municipal Archive, f. 3789, op. 1, d. 2007, l. 68.

⁵⁸ Vladimir Municipal Archive, f. 3789, op. 1, d. 2007, ll. 60-68.

Calls for Banishment

If doubts existed amongst officials about the merits of correction, they were even more widespread amongst the broader public. From the end of 1955 onwards, the Soviet public increasingly expressed its own concerns about crime in collective and individual letters addressed to leading political figures. Time and again, letters voiced anger that 'decent Soviet' citizens were under threat from a growing criminal population. A letter informed Voroshilov that the city of Stavropol was taken over by criminals at night:

It is no secret that the morgues are full of the corpses of people murdered. After nine o'clock in the evening, life stops for peaceable citizens. On the street come out those who have spent their whole lives in the camps. They don't allow us to live peacefully [...]⁵⁹

Describing scenes of death and killing, the writer blamed Gulag returnees for the carnage. Inhabitants of Shchekino in Tula province expressed similar sentiments, lamenting that 'at night you get the impression that bandits and hooligans are the ones in charge [*khoziainichaiut*]'.⁶⁰ In 1953 the threat was presented as one external to the Soviet city. The criminal was imagined as an elusive bandit raiding the metropolis, but not a part of it. Now citizens became doubly outraged for malefactors seemed not only an established feature on the urban landscape, but almost its lords.

They were concerned about a whole variety of unsavoury behaviours. F. Ia. Filonov from Khar'kov, complained that his neighbour Odinetskii's home had become a hang-out for scores of layabouts. Instead of working, these people 'play cards for days on

⁵⁹ GARF f. 7523, op. 107, d. 189, l. 74.

end, and if the weather permits, chase doves [...] they throw sticks, stones and lumps of earth at them'. In the evenings, Filonov lamented, they drink and engage in hooligan activities, including poking out dogs' eyes.⁶¹ Iurii Smirnov from Krasnodar was frightened to leave his house because of the groups of men openly drinking vodka and cursing on the streets, even encouraging young people to use 'the same foul language'.⁶² The inhabitants of Shchekino wrote that 'they attack decent [*chestnyi*] Soviet citizens, insult them, steal, and even kill'.⁶³ Bracketing together less serious transgressions like swearing with grave ones such as murder, the letters suggested that public anxiety was not always occasioned by specific acts, but by the presence within their communities of individuals whom they regarded as outsiders. They wished to blame all untoward events on this imagined army of pariahs.

In some respects this was in keeping with propaganda campaigns of the mid-1950s which called on Soviet citizens to be alert towards a range of inappropriate behaviours, and to treat hooligan acts as the precursor to more bloody crimes. There were, however, important differences. Deploring hooliganism, the press had abandoned depictions of the 'bandit' and showed offenders as family members or work colleagues. In contrast to the official rhetoric, letter-writers were loath to see the malefactors as erring members of their own 'Soviet' family. These were impostors deserving only of collective wrath. Although letter-writers acknowledged that they might live across the street, they continued to view them as uninvited outsiders. The pariahs might have taken control of some locations within Soviet towns and cities –

⁶⁰ GARF f. 7523, op. 107, d. 189, l. 66.

⁶¹ GARF f. 7523, op. 107, d. 189, l. 87.

⁶² GARF f. 7523, op. 107, d. 189, l. 67.

⁶³ GARF f. 7523, op. 107, d. 189, l. 66.

certain areas such as alley-ways and parks were frequently designated as off-limits to ordinary Soviet citizens – but they were not part of the community.

Despite the media's depiction of offenders as fallen members of the Soviet family, letter-writers increasingly labelled them as the enemy 'other'. In 1955 a group of citizens wrote that 'a hooligan-bandit who has been convicted two or three times, should be isolated from society as an enemy of the people [*vrag naroda*]'.⁶⁴ V. V. Polynev, writing from the troubled city of Dnepropetrovsk,⁶⁵ lamented that after forty-three years of Soviet rule, it was shameful that crime not only existed, but was in fact growing. He wrote: 'We are in essence failing to carry out Lenin's bidding. He urged us on to a relentless battle against enemies of the people – hooligans, parasites [*tuneiadtsi*], speculators, and so on.'⁶⁶ Attacking official policy as a betrayal of Leninist norms, Polynev argued for an approach that treated law-breakers of any description as enemies.

The authorities took such views seriously. In December 1957, Voroshilov considered one letter he received of sufficient importance to forward it on to the most senior figures – the chief Procurator, the Minister of the Interior, the head of the KGB, and the Chairman of the Supreme Court. The collective missive came from the Institute of Mining in Moscow and listed a series of attacks suffered by colleagues over the past

⁶⁴ GARF f. 7523, op. 107, d. 189, l. 73.

⁶⁵ Local reports suggest that the southern areas of Russian and industrial zones in Ukraine were particularly afflicted. In 1955, when the Dnepropetrovsk city soviet met to investigate claims that the city was overrun with criminals, one delegate blamed not only the 'liberal' sentencing practices Moscow had encouraged since 1953, but also the location of the city. Demonstrating that most crimes were committed by those with previous convictions, he explained that released prisoners 'come to the city of Dnepropetrovsk, which is located in southern Ukraine, arriving without document or tickets in trains or on the roofs of trains from all corners of the Soviet Union, especially the eastern and northern areas'. See GARF f. 7523, op. 89, d. 4406, l. 51.

⁶⁶ GARF f. 7523, op. 95, d. 73a, l. 184.

two years, asserting that many crimes went unreported because the victims feared reprisals. Writing of these violent assaults carried out by 'hooligans' and 'bandits' on the city's streets, they cautioned their eminent readers that, 'We shouldn't forget the fact that the hands of bandits are often being directed by foreign spies and are acting for the benefit of foreign enemies.'⁶⁷ Whether individual authors genuinely believed that street stabbings and brawls were planned by foreign intelligence services is impossible to determine, but they clearly thought of the offenders as 'enemies of the people'. They concluded their letter with a slogan worthy of any Bolshevik agitator: 'Show the bandit-enemies of the people no mercy!' (*Banditam – vragam naroda – ne mozhët byt poshchady!*).⁶⁸ As their letter received such high-level attention, equating street crime with enemy activity seems to have found favour amongst readers at the Supreme Soviet.

The tendency towards more lenient measures was thus contested. As in 1953, letter-writers frequently expressed their dissatisfaction with the 'humanity' of the new laws. A certain Smirnov from Minsk exclaimed: 'How much grief these swine [*merzavtsy*] inflict on our people! And this needn't be, if it wasn't for our humane laws.'⁶⁹ A group of workers from the Nikol'skii factory in Taganrog told the Moscow authorities that 'the workers are deeply indignant that they as decent [*chestnye*] people are valued so little, while bandits are shown such humanity'.⁷⁰ Again promoting a polar distinction between offenders and decent citizens, the workers claimed there was popular dissatisfaction with the criminal justice reforms and the notions of 'humanity' with which they had been promoted in 1953. An inhabitant of Michurinsk in Tambov

⁶⁷ GARF f. 7523, op. 89, d. 7272, ll. 7-8.

⁶⁸ GARF f. 7523, op. 89, d. 7272, ll. 7-8.

⁶⁹ GARF f. 7523, op. 95, d. 109, l. 13.

oblast' also indicted 'humanity', writing that 'our laws are too humane towards people (if we can call them people?) who don't want to work, who live off theft, deception, speculation and so on'.⁷¹ The urge to de-humanise and vilify offenders won out over the lauded concept of 'humanity'.

Tales of correction and re-education promoted in the press in the late 1950s also fell on stony ground. Members of the Komsomol organisation in the town of Cherepovets, Vologda *oblast'*, collectively wrote to express their anxiety with the state of affairs in their hometown:

The police in our town probably aren't in a position to cope with such widely developed banditry, which makes people live in fear, as they did during the war. All this is the fault of hooligans, let out from prison before the end of their sentence and without learning their lesson. We know that our country is now conducting significant work in the sphere of moral education [*vospitatel'naia rabota*], but we mustn't chose to educate some [*vospitat*] at the cost of others' lives.⁷²

More temperate than some letters-writers, the Komsomol members did their best to acknowledge the merit of early release and re-education, but ultimately believed that the policies of correction endangered their own lives as law-abiding Soviet citizens. From the town of Turinsk in Sverdlov *oblast'*, a certain Stizhevskii wrote that 'If severe measures aren't taken against those who disrupt the lives of decent citizens, then other measures of moral education [*vospitanie*] won't help'.⁷³ A collective letter from Ivanovo *oblast'* argued that the time for re-education was over: 'We workers ask you to grant us a quiet life. Apply the most severe measures to banditry – public execution. Moral education [*vospitanie*] has already gone far enough – it's time to

⁷⁰ GARF f. 7523, op. 95, d. 99, l. 55.

⁷¹ GARF f. 7523, op. 95, d. 73a, l. 180.

⁷² GARF f. 7523, op. 95, d. 73a, l. 174.

⁷³ GARF f. 7523, op. 89, d. 7494, l. 104.

punish!’⁷⁴ Almost before the policies of re-education and correction were implemented, the public outcry claimed enough was enough.

Expressing serious dissatisfaction with the failure of local authorities to ensure public safety, miners from Stalinskii *oblast*’ asked Voroshilov to send them ‘a battalion of good soldiers from the MVD’s internal forces’.⁷⁵ Others suggested it was necessary to ‘bring in the army in order to eradicate banditry as was done in Moscow immediately after the war – but this time across all the country’.⁷⁶ One citizen wrote that the volunteer brigades introduced in 1959 were simply ‘not strong enough to stand up to the armed bandits’.⁷⁷

In addition to labelling offender ‘bandits’ and ‘enemies’, letter-writers also labelled them ‘parasites’. As early as 1955, such metaphors were common in letters addressed to the Supreme Soviet. One letter began by praising the high ‘ideological and moral’ level of Soviet people, which it quickly contrasted with the murky ways of thieves and bandits – ‘morally fallen people who have lost all appearance of being human [*poteriavshikh oblik cheloveka*]’. Using terms that were becoming common, they wrote: ‘They hold nothing sacred, they are parasites on the body of society.’⁷⁸ Calling for more dramatic measures to be taken against a broad and often ill-defined group of offenders, letter-writers frequently wrote of the need to ‘isolate these parasites’.⁷⁹

⁷⁴ GARF f. 7523, op. 89, d. 7494, l. 108.

⁷⁵ GARF f. 7523, op. 89, d. 7494, l. 105.

⁷⁶ GARF f. 7523, op. 89, d. 7272, ll. 7-8.

⁷⁷ GARF f. 7523, op. 95, d. 73a, l. 168.

⁷⁸ GARF f. 7523, op. 107, d. 189, l. 80.

⁷⁹ Letters from Arzamasskaia *oblast*’ and Stavropol’ wrote of the need of isolating parasites. GARF f. 7523, op. 107, d. 189, ll. 73-4.

In 1957, the rendering of criminals as ‘parasites’ was briefly given official sanction in the publication of a proposed law against parasites. Entitled ‘On intensifying the battle against anti-social, parasitic [*paraziticheskie*] elements’, the draft law intended to give power to local communities, in the form of street committees with the mandate of sending into exile those considered to lead a ‘parasitic’ way of life.⁸⁰ The proposed law was not implemented until 1961, however, and the press, as has been demonstrated, overwhelmingly promoted notions of correction over ‘isolation’.⁸¹ Yet both *before* and *after* 1957, Soviet citizens used this rhetoric to cast out anti-social elements. In 1960, a certain S. E. Taranov, aged 66, a former miner and war veteran, wrote from Novocherkassk: ‘The people aren’t happy with such mild measures against parasites, and I think that a bandit and anyone who kills a man are class enemies. We need to wipe them from our earth.’⁸² By labelling offenders class enemies, bandits, and parasites, Taranov deprived them in the process of any human attributes and denied them the right to exist. Employees from the communal bank in Stavropol complained about a broad cast of offenders, including ‘thieves, recidivists, murderers, pillagers, hooligans’, whom they too labelled ‘parasites’. Calling for new measures, they told readers at the Supreme Soviet that it was necessary to ‘clean our society of the rotten parasites’. Arguing in favour of life-sentences, they totally dismissed notions of correction, whether within society or through imprisonment. They considered prison a ‘breeding-ground for infection’ (*rassadniki zarazy*), but this was not a reason to reduce custodial sentence in their eyes, but rather grounds for

⁸⁰ This was publicised in the press: see for example *Moskovskaia pravda*, 23 August 1957, p. 2.

⁸¹ The anti-parasite law was introduced almost immediately in some of the smaller republics, but not until the summer of 1961 in Russia, Ukraine, Belorussia, Lithuania, Estonia and Moldavia.

⁸² GARF f. 7523, op. 95, d. 73a, l. 180.

keeping the two worlds apart.⁸³ Using established metaphors of infection and disease, they called for anti-social elements to be isolated indefinitely.⁸⁴

Many championed a return to the segregations of the Stalinist era. In keeping with the portrayal of criminals as 'parasites', many called for them to be isolated from the healthy body of society. The Komsomol members from Cherepovets suggested that in place of re-education policies, 'there should be a law that if you end up in prison a second time, then you lose your freedom for the rest of your life'. They proposed creating 'separate settlements for them'.⁸⁵ The Stavropol bankers wanted hooligans, thieves, murderers, and pillagers to be sentenced to special camps for the rest of their lives, living 'in strict isolation from society'.⁸⁶ V. V. Polynev, the Dnepropetrovsk inhabitant, suggested that the 'hooligans' should not be allowed to return to the south, but 'be sent off only to the north, and after the end of their sentence, made to stay there for ever'.⁸⁷ Whereas once isolation had been regarded as a temporary solution, these citizens wanted those rejected from society to be cast out indefinitely.

Calls for the death sentence to be applied more frequently were also widespread. One letter demanding murderers be sentenced to death was signed by 625 citizens.⁸⁸ Not only was the death sentence to be used to rid the country of its worst criminals, it was

⁸³ GARF f. 7523, op. 89, d. 7494, ll. 103-4.

⁸⁴ Beer, 'The Hygiene of Souls'.

⁸⁵ GARF f. 7523, op. 95, d. 73a, l. 174.

⁸⁶ GARF f. 7523, op. 89, d. 7494, l. 103.

⁸⁷ GARF f. 7523, op. 95, d. 73a, l. 184. It seems a greater number of letters came from the industrial zones of southern Russia and Eastern Ukraine, and from towns at 101 kilometres from a major city, where those denied access to the metropolis would congregate. These areas would prove more volatile. Unrest reached a climax in Moscow's satellite towns in Vladimir *oblast'* in 1961 and in the Novochoerkassk riots of 1962. For a detailed account of events in Novochoerkassk see Samuel H. Baron, *Bloody Saturday in the Soviet Union: Novochoerkassk, 1962* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2001); on the riots in Murom and Aleksandrov (Vladimir *oblast'*), see Kozlov, *Mass Uprisings*, pp. 193-214.

to be applied as a public spectacle, allowing the collective to express its antipathy to those who broke its laws. One inhabitant of the town of Bogoroditsk in Tula *oblast'* suggested that people who had committed murder be publicly shot, 'as they do in China'.⁸⁹ From the city of Tula itself, workers demanded that 'criminals who slaughter people' be 'hanged in front of the whole people on the town square'.⁹⁰ A collective letter from Novosibirsk stated:

In Leningrad at the end of the war four Germans were hung on the central square for their evil deeds. Why can't the bandits be punished for their bestial [*zverskii*] crimes in the same way? We Soviet citizens demand public punishment like this [...]⁹¹

Even harsher proposals came from E. A. Zotova, an inhabitant of Stalino, who had been robbed of her savings. In a somewhat confused sequence, she wanted 'these animals [...] executed, quartered, and exiled for life'.⁹² References to China and war-time executions of Germans remind us that there was no precedent of public execution even under the most brutal years of Stalinist rule. Under Stalin, the 'performance' of punishment had been enacted through language and symbolic acts. Now, however, some Soviet citizens wanted a spectacle that could be reproduced in their own localities and in which they could participate. It would become a means to reaffirm their identity as 'decent citizens' or 'decent workers' in stark contrast to the 'animals' so violently contesting their control of public space. At the same time it would satisfy the desire for new collective rituals to replace those disappearing with the decline of performative culture ushered in by Stalin's death and the Secret Speech.

⁸⁸ GARF f. 7523, op. 95, d. 73a, ll. 168-9.

⁸⁹ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 5663, l. 12.

⁹⁰ GARF f. 7523, op. 95, d. 73a, l. 76.

⁹¹ GARF f. 7523, op. 95, d. 73a, l. 172.

⁹² GARF f. 7523, op. 95, d. 73a, l. 179.

Many writers set pen to paper to defend the imagined boundary between law-abiding citizens on the one hand and offenders on the other. Within early Soviet debates on how to treat offenders and enemies, the notion of correction and cure had been continually threatened by demands for the diseased to be either isolated or exterminated. During the 1950s, as the state proclaimed its commitment to healing within society, the Soviet public became highly vociferous in its demands for them to be isolated once more and for their banishment to be a permanent exile. More extreme still were the demands for extermination, often imagined as a public spectacle that might satisfy the popular demand for new rituals of vilification in this post-Stalin era.

The Retreat from Radicalism

Chapter I explored how party leaders and newspapers were loath to ignore the rise in letter-writing that followed the 1953 amnesty. Throughout the 1950s, both continued to pay attention to the incoming letters. By 1958, officials at the Supreme Soviet charged with handling these letters, considered them of sufficient significance to write to the Central Committee, drawing its attention to the worrying levels of crime across the nation and the public outrage that accompanied it.⁹³ Newspaper editors equally paid tribute to the public angst manifested in such letters. In the same year, the editors of *Moskovskaia pravda* chose to publish a collective letter from members of the Institute of Oceanology, in which the authors demanded that the ‘swine’ who killed one of their young colleagues be sentenced to death.⁹⁴ Later the same year,

⁹³ GARF f. 7523, op. 89, d. 7266, l. 21.

⁹⁴ ‘Show Murderers No Mercy!’, *Moskovskaia pravda*, 14 March 1958, p. 3.

Komsomol'skaia pravda printed a collective letter from surgeons at a Moscow hospital, outraged by the murder of a young Komsomol member.⁹⁵

By late 1959, alongside the deluge of propaganda materials on re-education, there an occasional challenge was made to the prevailing rhetoric of rehabilitation. After the first negative reports from procurators across the nation arrived in Moscow in December 1959, the press tentatively voiced criticism of the new policies. Under the rubric 'From the courtroom', the story of Pavel Lavrukhin, for example, can be read as a challenge to the whole rhetoric of 're-education'.⁹⁶ A drunkard and hooligan, Lavrukhin had been taken into police custody six times. He appeared drunk at work, created scandals at home, and assaulted his neighbours. Despite work-place meetings devoted to his behaviour, he failed to change and after a particularly violent evening, he was arrested and sentenced to three years' imprisonment. At odds with the message so often proclaimed in the press articles of 1959, the reformation of a drunk hooligan was here placed beyond the scope of the collective organs. When the community met to discuss his misdemeanours, Lavrukhin made 'a speech of repentance', promising not to touch a drop of vodka ever again. Depicting him in a violently drunken state the very same evening, the article invited the reader to treat such confessions as mere theatrics. At his trial, the accused complained that he 'wasn't given a moral education' (*menia ne vospityvali*). In Lavrukhin's mocking manipulation of the rhetoric of 'correction', the concept itself was undermined. Just as back page crime reports had subverted the official commitment to 'humanity' in 1953, depicting those

⁹⁵ *Komsomol'skaia pravda*, 5 October 1958.

⁹⁶ 'Kogda obshchestvennost' ne mozhet poruchitsia', *Moskovskaia pravda*, 20 December 1959, p. 3. It is perhaps significant that this article appeared after the negative reports arrived from the provincial procurators in December 1959.

amnestied as out-and-out criminals, the rubric was now used to question the party's commitment to correction within the community.

The following year, an article entitled "I want probation", was even more emphatic.⁹⁷ The story told of four offenders who sought to avoid incarceration by persuading their work collective to apply for guardianship over them. Their crimes were varied, and included the deputy director of a shop who consistently swindled the firm, a burglar, a conman, and a young factory worker who had attacked a group of young girls and threatened to knife them. In each case, the article not only showed how their crimes made them totally unsuitable for rehabilitation within the community, but also demonstrated how each offender manipulated the rhetoric of 're-education'. The shop deputy-director, for instance, begged the local procurator to let him be adopted by his old workplace, asking 'Why are you planning to sentence me, if the 'people' [*narod*] will take responsibility for my probation? I need to be re-educated, not judged!' Out of the mouth of such a reprehensible character, the words were clearly to be distrusted. Meanwhile the burglar was told to 're-educate himself', and 'do it behind bars!' Correction was thus once more relocated to the site of imprisonment. In the place of the rhetoric of conversion, in fact, a highly antagonistic approach was taken to these offenders. The reader was told that the burglar was a 'swine who should be isolated from society and punished with all the severity of the law!' Even though the article conceded that 'when a man has stumbled, not understanding that he has erred onto the slippery slope of crime, it is possible and necessary to rehabilitate him within society', it firmly concluded that this 'does not mean that we should mollycoddle hardened bandits'. While still paying tribute to the

official backing for the practice of social rehabilitation, this 1960 article already began to adopt a position of greater severity, calling for the isolation of bandits and swine.

Within a year, the official line was beginning to reject the policies of social rehabilitation, and this turn seems, at least in part, to be a reflection of the public response. On 7 March 1961, Kalinychev and Savel'ev, senior officials within the Supreme Soviet wrote to Leonid Brezhnev, now its chairman, voicing concerns about both crime itself and the epistolary outcry it had generated. Initially praising the measures adopted in 1959, they swiftly moved on to doubt their effectiveness, noting rising crime in 1960 and the accompanying influx of letters, mostly coming from large industrial cities in Russia and the Ukraine. This led Kalinychev and Savel'ev to question the practices of re-education within society. Weak participation on the part of the collective, they wrote, frequently resulted in those on probation re-offending.⁹⁸

Already, the heyday of re-education *within* society was over. By 1961 the number of prisoners granted reprieve from custodial sentences and transferred to the auspices of community organs for probation and re-education, had almost halved in comparison with the preceding year.⁹⁹ Minor offences were now to be rewarded with short stretches in prison, rather than re-education or probation, and the inevitable result was a dramatic increase in the Gulag population. While in 1960 the prison population had

⁹⁷ '«Khochu na poruki...»', *Leningradskaiia pravda*, 26 June 1960, pp. 2-3.

⁹⁸ GARF f. 7523, op. 95, d. 99, ll. 49-53.

⁹⁹ GARF f. 7523, op. 95, d. 109, ll. 25-27.

been at its lowest in thirty-five years with 550,882 inmates, by 1961, it was back up to 674,080, and by early 1962 as many as 968,080.¹⁰⁰

On 4 May 1961, the draft law of 1957 'On intensifying the battle against anti-social, parasitic elements' was finally passed.¹⁰¹ Assemblies were to be formed in each street or housing-block, and on their collective ruling citizens deemed to lead a 'parasitic' life, could be exiled for periods of up to five years – twice as long as the original 1957 draft would have allowed. Rather than targeting specific offences, the new act allowed Soviet communities to rid their neighbourhood of those whose behaviour they considered anti-social. This represented another highly important shift in the way community action was understood. Instead of acting as mentors to the 'erring', community activists were now encouraged to act as judge and jury. They could play a decisive role in ejecting undesirables from the Soviet 'family'.

Over the summer of 1961, newspaper headlines publicised the revised rhetoric. Typical articles proclaimed 'Parasite, get out of Leningrad!' and 'The people convict a parasite'.¹⁰² In these tales, the protagonists were not on trial for any specific crime, but for a failure to conform to the profile of a good, hard-working citizen. In 'Parasite brought to justice', another example, the reporter opened with a courtroom scene, pouring scorn on Oleg Oparin for the way he was sitting, his bored expression, and

¹⁰⁰ GARF f. 7523, op. 95, d. 109, ll. 25- 27.

¹⁰¹ The law passed by the Supreme Soviet of the RSFSR on 4 May 1961 gave collective assemblies the power to resettle the 'parasite' elsewhere. Similar laws were passed in May and June 1961 in Ukraine, Belorussia, Lithuania, Estonia, and Moldavia. (The other republics had passed earlier laws that were now amended to conform to the RSFSR version.) See Harold Berman, *Justice in the USSR: An Interpretation of Soviet Law* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1963), pp. 291-298.

¹⁰² 'Narod sudit tuneiadtsa', *Leningradskaia pravda*, 7 June 1961; 'Tuneiadets von iz Leningrada!', *Leningradskaia pravda*, 17 July 1961.

his generally lackadaisical attitude in the courtroom.¹⁰³ The reader was told that Oparin has already been sentenced for several crimes in the past, including hooliganism, possession of firearms, and contravention of the passport regime. As he did not have any official work, the court deduced that he must make money out of illegal activities, through it had no duty to provide evidence. His persona and past record were sufficient grounds for exiling him from Leningrad for five years. In 'Parasite, get out of Leningrad!' the leading man was a beneficiary of the 1953 amnesty, and although he was not depicted as a dangerous criminal, this dubious past contributed to his negative profile. Returning to the city, the young man had been repeatedly fired from jobs for drinking, and had relied on the limited resources of his ageing mother to support his dissolute life-style. In both cases, the individual's life-story included previous convictions, and this was very important in constructing their profile as un-Soviet individuals. Even if they had not committed major new crimes, those once cast out were considered unworthy to be members of the Soviet family.

In fact, the type of negative behaviour the 'parasite' demonstrated was often little different from the protagonist's transgressions in the conversion tales of 1959. With a previous conviction for hooliganism, Anatolii Selenkov, the anti-hero in 'The People Convict a Parasite' was already a marked man. His antisocial activities were catalogued: he rarely stayed more than a few days at one job; he stole his mother's belongings and sold them at the market; he drank heavily and beat his mother and wife. These might contravene Soviet laws and norms, but in the late 1950s a newspaper article might easily have told of Selenkov's reprehensible actions and subsequent rehabilitation. No longer was he offered the sanctuary of 'correction' or

¹⁰³ 'Tunciadets privilechen k otvetsvennosti', *Moskovskaia pravda*, 3 June 1961.

're-education'. When the collective met to judge him, one factory worker spoke out against him, shouting 'He has lost his conscience. My opinion is this: Parasite – get out of Leningrad!' There was no longer any hope of a sinner reforming, and he must be ejected from the Soviet city.

'Parasite – get out of Leningrad!' (or Moscow, or Dnepropetrovsk, or Stalingrad...) became a frequent formulation. The imagined Soviet realm was once more divided into two 'zones' – one an urban enclave for decent, hard-working Soviet citizens, the other an ill-defined wilderness for offenders, parasites, and all other undesirables. This new topography pointed to the decline of the more radical aspects of reform. Belief in the inherent goodness of every Soviet citizen, however much he may have erred, lost out to widespread fears of social degeneration.

Conclusion

Over the 1950s, the repeated challenges to the new rhetoric of 'correction' and 'redemption', and the contempt for perceived incidents of 'liberalism' and excessive 'humanity', undermined attempts to reform criminal justice. With the re-introduction of more severe measures in 1961-62, the authorities sought to control the unruly sectors of the Soviet population, by assigning them to exile or imprisonment.¹⁰⁴ By granting street committees an important role in policing these new policies, the law on

¹⁰⁴ Yoram Gorzlik notes the raising of the minimum sentence, the increased severity towards serious recidivists in the RSFSR criminal code of 1961, and the introduction of longer sentences in February 1962. Harold Berman details the extension of the death penalty in 1961 to a wide variety of crimes, including theft of state and social property, counterfeiting money and violent attacks in places of imprisonment. The following year, the death penalty was also extended to attacks upon the life of a policeman or *druzhinnik*, various forms of rape, and bribe-taking. He also notes the increased penalties for lesser crimes. Gorzlik, 'De-Stalinisation', pp. 114-118; Berman, *Justice in the USSR*, pp. 85-6.

'parasites' also recognised the public's desire to participate in the practice of condemning and banishing.

In established wisdom, the years 1961-2 are regarded as the heyday of liberalisation and reform, yet in terms of criminal justice 1959-1960 was the moment of greatest change. Although often overshadowed by the XX and XXII Party Congress, the XXI Party Congress in fact ushered in a brief era of supreme radicalism. The Gulag reached its lowest level since the purges and visions of universal salvation were celebrated. Almost immediately, however, the reforms were reversed and what Yoram Gorlizki has dubbed 'the backlash' began.¹⁰⁵

In 1953, 'socialist legality' had referred to the new controls placed on the legal and security apparatus and the proclaimed end to arbitrary terror. By 1959, 'socialist legality' had changed dramatically in meaning. The organisations created to monitor the new mechanisms for collective pressure and re-education were called 'socialist legality' committees, and the term was associated with the utopian mission to correct and redeem all sinners. In 1962 'socialist legality' underwent another reincarnation, as reflected in its use in a 1962 crime report. Detailing a workplace scam in which crooks underweighed products and pocketed the spare, the journalist wrote:

When these and other criminals were punished with all the severity of the law, they began to scribble off petitions, reckoning [*spekulirui*a] on the words 'legality' [*zakonnost'*], humanity [*gummanost'*], and so on. But in fact they were sentenced for the sake of socialist legality, for the sake of genuine humanity and justice.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ Gorlizki, 'De-Stalinisation', pp. 114-118.

¹⁰⁶ 'Poimany!', *Leningradskai*a pravda, 15 June 1962, p. 3.

Ridiculing legality and humanity as textual ploys used by scheming petitioners, the article claimed that 'socialist legality' now meant strict discipline.

Although an unlikely hero, the figure of Konstantin Nogovitsin encouraged readers to have some sympathy for those young men who had erred into a peripatetic and unstable life of crime. Nogovitsin's charms soon faded, however. The picture of offenders as 'lost souls' who had somehow missed out on a Soviet upbringing – perhaps as a result of war-time losses – rapidly lost its appeal. In a pamphlet entitled *In a Society Building Communism there should be No Place for Law-breaking and Crime*, A. L. Remenson wrote:

Some prisoners claim that: 'I'm not the one who's guilty: it was the war, I got a poor upbringing [*plokhoe moe vospitanie*], the wrong kind of teachers and so on. Poor, unhappy old me – I'm not to blame.' We should say straight out to these people: 'Don't deceive yourself!' The war brought almost everyone unhappiness and there were shortcomings in the way millions of people were raised [*nedostatki vospitaniia vstreliis' milliony liudei*]. But the absolute majority of Soviet people overcame the difficulties, rather than bowing down before them.¹⁰⁷

The strategies of prisoners who sought readmission and socialisation were now undermined. *Vospitanie* no longer occupied such a primary role. The key to being a Soviet man lay not in the way he was raised, but in the individual's own inner resources.

¹⁰⁷ A. L. Remenson, *V obshchestve, stroiashchem kommunizm, ne dolzhno byt' mesta pravonarusheniim i prestupnosti* (Moscow: Politotdel MZ MOOP RSFSR, 1963), p. 19.

The pinnacle of destalinisation came at a point where the party was already realising the failure of re-education and correction. The attempt to create an all-inclusive society had broken down, and the partition between the 'big zone' of Soviet society and the 'little zone' of the Gulag was once more paramount.

Chapter V

Destalinisation at its Peak

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Pravda, 8 August 1961, p. 5

During the 1953 investigation into Beria's crimes in Georgia, one of the few surviving victims, A. V. Snegov, was transported directly from the camps to the inner sanctum of the Kremlin. According to legend, he was interviewed by Khrushchev while still wearing his prison clothes.¹ He was subsequently reinstated into the party and made a lieutenant-colonel in the KGB. In the Secret Speech of 1956, Snegov was one of only two living purge victims Khrushchev mentioned by name. With Khrushchev as his champion, he became politically active in the late 1950s, a self-appointed voice of reform and a stern critic of Stalin. In July 1961 he urged Khrushchev, Kozlov, and Nikolai Shvernik to make a full denunciation of Stalin,

¹ Medvedev and Medvedev, *Khrushchev*, p. 11.

writing that it was necessary ‘to decisively shatter the myth of an infallible deity’.²

Attached to his letter was his own version of Soviet history based on his work in the archives at the Marx-Lenin Institute.³ He was soon to expound this damning indictment of Stalin’s revolutionary record to a much wider audience.

The triumphant nature of Snegov’s return was, of course, unusual. Few of those who returned from the camps had the opportunity either to explore archival materials or to share their opinions with the party’s leading lights. Nevertheless, Snegov’s celebrity in the winter following the XXII Party Congress offers insight into the mood of Moscow party circles. According to a denunciation from another Old Bolshevik, N. G. Alekseev, Snegov spent the winter of 1961-2 publicly deprecating Stalin’s entire party record.⁴ Snegov had made his first speech on 30 November 1961 at a meeting of Old Bolsheviks at the Lenin Museum, followed by a further six or seven similar appearances in locations across the capital. ‘There are rumours,’ wrote Alekseev, ‘that in view of the popular demand for Snegov [*v vidu sprosa na Snegova v narode*], he will speak at a meeting for all Old Bolsheviks at the Kremlin Palace of Congresses.’ Alekseev was vociferously opposed to Snegov, but his letter suggests that in late 1961 and early 1962, Snegov was enjoying significant popularity as a heroic purge victim and critic of Stalin. Snegov, claimed Alekseev, was now considered a voice of authority; his writings were read, discussed, and digested at mass meetings as if an epistle coming directly from the Central Committee.

² RGANI f. 5, op. 30, d. 350, ll. 56-57.

³ RGANI f. 5, op. 30, d. 350, ll. 58-78.

⁴ RGANI f. 5, op. 30, d. 378, ll. 38-44.

Outraged by Snegov's views, Alekseev contested the notion that Stalin based his rule on 'bloody tyranny'. Likening the current situation to the years 1924-7 and the party's 'fight against the Trotskyists', he deliberately cast Snegov and his supporters as outright heretics, repeatedly showing how their views diverged from the official pronouncements of Khrushchev and Leonid Ilichev.⁵ Yet it seems that such views did not seem so profane to Snegov's audiences. Alekseev could only mention one other party member who shared his opposition to Snegov. As he condemned the celebrity status Snegov was enjoying, Alekseev inadvertently indicated to his eminent readers that few of his party colleagues shared his outrage. With the "Snegov show" apparently that season's hit, and demands rising for a performance in the celebrated venue of the Kremlin Palace of Congresses, it seems a purge victim could now become a party hero himself.⁶

The XXII Party Congress is often viewed as the most radical moment of destalinisation.⁷ Whereas the Secret Speech had occupied an ambiguous, only semi-official position, condemnation of the cult of personality was now made public. As Stalin's body was removed from the Mausoleum, former 'enemies of the people' like Snegov were fêted as exemplars of true revolutionary heroism, victims who, despite it all, returned home more committed to the Bolshevik cause than ever before.

⁵ Leonid Il'ichev headed the party's department of propaganda and agitation between 1958 and 1961.

⁶ It is interesting that Alekseev was also a purge victim. Despite his dislike of Snegov, he was proud that following the XX Party Congress he had written a letter to the party suggesting that prizes awarded in Stalin's name now become Lenin prizes instead.

⁷ Breslauer, Medvedev and Medvedev, and Fainsod all consider the XXII Party Congress as the 'culmination' of processes that began in 1956. Fainsod, *Khrushchev's Russia*, p. 238; Breslauer, 'Khrushchev Reconsidered', pp. 52-58; Medvedev and Medvedev, *Khrushchev*, p. 146.

Perhaps the now public nature of destalinisation prevented the kind of crisis engendered by the XX Party Congress. In the wake of the XXII Party Congress, party organisations at all levels met, as usual, to discuss, clarify, and applaud the speeches and resolutions made in Moscow. Comparing the lists of questions posed at party meetings in the autumn of 1961 with those of March 1956, we find the situation significantly less volatile. At the Gor'kii *obkom* meeting, for instance, there was just one question regarding Stalin's theoretical works, while the rest focused on wider issues, such as relations with Albania and China.⁸ When members of the Mari *obkom* met, the list of questions posed included several on agriculture, three concerning relations with China, one on Marshall Zhukov's position, one on the rate of US economic growth, three on the Anti-Party Group, one on the provision of food, and one seeking further clarification on how the cult of personality had ever been possible.⁹ In Moscow, at the meeting of the Dzerzhinskii *raion* party *aktiv*, the pattern was similar: there were four questions about Molotov and the other members of the Anti-Party Group, two on Albania, two on China, several on housing issues, industry, local factories, and local political figures.¹⁰ A few hundred miles away at the meeting of the Iurev-Pol'skii *raion* meeting in Vladimir province, delegates did evidence interest in the cult of personality, with four of the nine questions posed at the meeting concerning the origins and nature of the cult of personality. Yet the topic did not predominate exclusively, with international relations and the supply of consumer goods to the town also ranking highly.¹¹ The wider range of questions discussed intimates that the issue of Stalin's reputation was no longer as dominant as it had been in 1956 when delegates were so shocked that they focused almost exclusively on the

⁸ RGANI f. 5, op. 32, d. 174, l. 29.

⁹ RGANI f. 5, op. 32, d. 174, ll. 259-260.

¹⁰ TsAODM f. 65, op. 46, d. 28, ll. 57-62.

topic. Indeed, at the party meeting in Karelia, no questions whatsoever were registered on the topic of either Stalin or the Anti-Party Group.¹²

At these meetings, moreover, support was apparently voiced for the transformed status of the purge victims. At the meeting of the Ivanovo *oblast'* party *aktiv*, one delegate suggested that local factories be renamed after rehabilitated members of the local party apparatus. In his proposal, the Zhidelev factory could once more become the Bubnov factory, while other works would be named after Postyshev, Kolotilov, and other purge victims.¹³ Another party member present asked for more information about the local victims of the 1937-9 purges, while a third suggested that collected memoirs of local Bolsheviks be published. At the Leningrad *obkom*, a party member asked whether a monument would be erected to the victims of the Leningrad Affair.¹⁴ In an emotional letter to Khrushchev, a certain Shtil'mark rejoiced that the last remnants of sadness were now washed away, and in their place, a 'granite monument to the fallen warriors' was to be erected.¹⁵ Public reverence for monumental propaganda, knocked off-balance by the Secret Speech in 1956, resurfaced.

Party leaders were once more able to stage a confident and reassuring performance, and members of the public responded emotionally. When the Martirosian family in Moscow wrote to Khrushchev telling him 'We have just listened to your concluding speech on the radio, and listened to your every word without breathing', they might

¹¹ Vladimir *Oblast'* Party Archive, P-830, op. 3, d. 824, l. 166.

¹² RGANI f. 5, op. 32, d. 175, l. 65. Of four questions noted, one was on the problems with China, and three concerned issues related to housing and the provision of consumer goods.

¹³ RGANI f. 5, op. 32, d. 174, l. 178.

¹⁴ RGANI f. 5, op. 32, d. 175, l. 34.

¹⁵ RGANI f. 1, op. 4, d. 67, l. 22.

easily have been describing their response to Molotov's graveside speech in 1953.¹⁶

Others explicitly stated that their greatest joy lay in the fact that the official sources now seemed to give them a clear and comprehensible message.¹⁷ On 28 October 1961, Shtil'mark wrote:

Why should I hide it? I'm writing, and tears get in my way. I listened to the concluding words standing next to the loudspeakers, not daring even to sit down. I couldn't hold back my burning tears. Then I got hold of a newspaper, and I read it through again and again, word for word, and again I was crying. I had to write to you. In all my long working life, I never felt such agitation, and never had such feeling towards a political leader. I simply couldn't *not* write!¹⁸

He presented himself in a state of emotional exultation as he listened and absorbed the new interpretation of the past being disseminated from Moscow. In the same letter, he wrote: 'Please understand me correctly. I didn't hear anything that was new factually or anything unexpected, but I couldn't believe that I was hearing it all on the radio from the party's first secretary.' Shtil'mark was thus aware that his sense of triumph came not from the acquisition of new information, but from the fact that the party had resumed its authoritative voice.

Party leaders had cultivated this new aura of consensus over several months. Whereas in 1956, the Secret Speech had appeared without any preparation or explanation in the press, in 1961 the build-up began three months before the congress opened. First published in an extended edition of *Pravda* on 30 July 1961, the draft of a new Party Programme represented a major attempt to shape public opinion. It explained to Soviet citizens the nature of their past, their present location on the road to

¹⁶ RGANI f. 1, op. 4, d. 87, l. 35.

¹⁷ One citizen wrote that after Khrushchev's speech 'everything is clear and comprehensible.' RGANI f. 1, op. 4, d. 87, l. 33.

¹⁸ RGANI f. 1, op. 4, d. 87, l. 22.

communism, and the steps necessary to ensure successful arrival at the destination.¹⁹ In August and September, party meetings were held in every workplace to propagate the message contained within the Party Programme and to involve rank and file members in the act of endorsing the new party dogma. In Moscow alone, there were 400,000 propagandists and agitators.²⁰ By publishing extracts from 'letters-to-the-editor', each citizen was constantly reminded that his own faith mattered. Excerpts of letters from ordinary Soviet citizens on the subject of the Party Programme filled the pages of *Pravda* throughout the early autumn.²¹ Apparently successful, the campaign elicited a significant response, with a total of 123,000 letters sent to party organs and newspaper editors.²²

In a retrospective account of the 1960s, two Russian émigrés began their narrative of the 1960s from 30 July 1961, claiming that all the month's other news events paled before the publication of the new Party Programme. Petr Vail' and Aleksandr Genis argue that the practical possibility of creating a communist utopia was irrelevant: the new programme was read with enthusiasm as a work of art whose beauty lay in its universality, aspirations, and renewal of faith.²³ 'With all the mastery of an experienced preacher, the programme touched the right spot in every soul.'²⁴

¹⁹ 'Programma Kommunisticheskoi Partii Sovetskogo naroda', *Pravda*, 30 July 1961, pp. 1-9. Here it explained that the first Party Programme, adopted in 1903, aimed to create a workers' revolution in Russia. After this goal was attained with the 1917 revolution, a second programme was adopted in 1919 with the new task of creating a socialist society. By 1961, the article proclaimed, socialism had been achieved and a third programme drafted. The task now lay in constructing a communist society.

²⁰ RGANI f. 1, op. 4, d. 27, l. 1.

²¹ From 16 September 1961 onwards, *Pravda* devoted the third page of most issues to the Party Programme, and almost daily it contained the rubric 'Lines from your Letters' (*Stroki iz pisem*). In a period of just two weeks, *Pravda* received 1290 letters, of which 61 were published. RGANI f. 1, op. 4, d. 73, l. 5.

²² RGANI f. 1, op. 4, d. 23, l. 46.

²³ Petr Vail' and Aleksandr Genis, *60-e: Mir sovetskogo cheloveka* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Ardis, 1988), pp. 3-6.

²⁴ Vail' and Genis, *60-e*, p. 6

This chapter opens with the exultant mood generated by the XXII Party Congress and the publication of the Party Programme. I explore the new revolutionary myths and the rhetoric of rebirth and renewal, suggesting how they were also reworked and adapted – according to the particular ‘spot’ they hit in each soul. Joining Khrushchev in his vision of the communist future, members of the public accentuated the elements in the Party Programme that fit with their beliefs. In particular they embraced the notion that the future paradise was contingent upon eradicating any signs of a non-communist mentality, be it in the form of hooliganism, drunkenness, or laziness. Its popularity stemmed from the fact that it combined promises of a better life with a return to the rhetoric and practices of expelling the uncultured and un-Soviet from the imagined community. These ideas are brought together in a short case-study exploring the publication of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn’s *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*. The reactions to this text allow special insight into the nature of public support for destalinisation. Although the novella was widely condemned as a seditious text, it was not reviled because of what it said of repression and terror, but rather because the author appeared to condone the uncultured behaviour and language belonging to the ‘other’ world of the Gulag.

Having established that a demonic ‘other’ still remained in the collective imagination, the second part of this chapter examines the language of condemnation. I suggest that ongoing popular demands for a return to the political culture of the Stalinist era, whereby fallen heroes would have been incorporated into public rituals of castigation and annihilation, were ignored. Instead of being denounced as inveterate enemies, political figures were denounced as ‘brakes’ or ‘obstacles’ hindering the nation’s

progress towards communism. Equally dependent upon eschatological narrative, an individual might now be cast out as a 'parasite', whose deviant, lazy and un-Soviet way of life impeded the construction of communism. The portrayal of two different foes is compared: first, the members of the Anti-Party Group, denounced as the perpetrators of the purges; second, Iosif Brodskii, a young and allegedly dangerous poet.

Signposting the Future

As Genis and Vail note, the XXII Party Congress was advertised triumphantly as a great moment of truth. 'The undoubted bestseller of the Soviet press of the 1960s was Khrushchev's concluding speech at the XXII Party Congress, which drew on the dramatic conflict between his desire to tell the truth and the intention of Molotov-Kaganovich to hide it.'²⁵ Despite concerns over its 'abstract' nature in December 1956, truth became the byword of the era. At the congress itself, a leading Georgian communist Dzhavakhishvili echoed Khrushchev when he proclaimed that 'for the sake of justice, for the sake of Leninist truth and in the interest of our triumphant advance, the party had no choice but to honestly and openly tell the people the whole truth so that in the history of our great party, this will never be repeated'.²⁶ The notion that truth had been restored met with public approval. When party members at school No 299 in Leningrad met in the autumn of 1961, the director bragged that the XXII Party Congress showed that 'the strength of our party lies in the fact that it relies on the people, that it tells the people the truth and the people are highly appreciative and

²⁵ Vail' and Genis, 60-e, p. 139.

²⁶ 'Rech' tovarishcha G. D. Dzhavakhishvili', *Pravda*, 31 October 1961, p. 2

proud of this trust'.²⁷ Other individuals wrote directly to Khrushchev, euphoric that 'Truth has triumphed' (*Pravda vostorzhestvovala*).²⁸ Shtil'mark claimed that 'when, in the auditorium of the XXII Party Congress, delegate No 1 told the whole people, things previously divulged to the 'faithful' [*posviashchennye*], then TRUTH came'.²⁹ Capitalising the word 'truth', Shtil'mark understood it to signify something almost sacrosanct, revered by the people and now restored to them.

Claiming a return to Leninism, the XXII Party Congress became a moment of spiritual rebirth. A Leningrad party member since 1902, D. A. Lazurkina spoke at the congress, explaining that she had 'shared the lot of many' Old Bolsheviks. As she retold her life-story, she created the narrative of a true revolutionary hero. Imprisoned as a political enemy both under tsarism and Stalinism, she ascribed her survival to an unshakeable belief in the party. Tying up her emotional speech, she explained: 'The only reason I survived is that Ilyich was in my heart, and I sought his advice, as it were. (Applause.) Yesterday I asked Ilyich for advice, and it was as if he stood before me alive and said: 'I do not like being next to Stalin, who inflicted so much harm on the party.'³⁰ With Lenin speaking through Lazurkina's intercession, the XXII Party Congress dramatically bore out the belief that 'Lenin lives'. In his letter to Khrushchev, Shtil'mark echoed the motif of resurrection, writing:

Do you remember how in olden time, believers used to greet each other at Easter with the words 'Christ has risen'. Today I feel like saying: 'Good wishes, Lenin has risen! [*pozdravliaiu, Lenin vokres!*]³¹

²⁷ RGANI f. 5, op. 32, d. 175, l. 5.

²⁸ The son of a Ukrainian purge victim, now rehabilitated, wrote a short telegram of congratulations to Khrushchev, euphoric that 'Truth has triumphed' (*Pravda vostorzhestvovala*). A Moscow communist used the identical formulation. RGANI f. 1, op. 4, d. 67, l. 23, l. 27.

²⁹ RGANI f. 1, op. 4, d. 67, l. 23.

³⁰ 'Rech' tovarishcha D. A. Lazurkinoi', *Pravda*, 31 October 1961, p. 2.

³¹ RGANI f. 1, op. 4, d. 67, l. 23.

Shtil'mark's religious analogies suggest that the new atmosphere within the party created a sense of renewed, exalted belief. In metaphors of resurrection, the 'death' endured during 'the cult of personality' became a prerequisite for the day's euphoric spiritual rebirth. Terror was thus embedded into the overarching narrative of humanity's epic struggle towards salvation.

According to Igal Halfin, 'the Marxist metanarrative assigned a beginning and end to history and marked out the landmarks between the two points'. Consequently, 'no event escaped the Marxist eschatological prism'.³² As first secretary and the party's appointed exegete, it was thus incumbent upon Khrushchev to interpret the repressions in a way that confirmed the party's odyssey towards the light of the future. In his speeches at the XXII Party Congress, Khrushchev constructed a coherent eschatological myth, in which revelations about the terror fortified the party in its struggle towards the communist utopia. Rather than detailing the flaws in Stalin's character, Khrushchev simply labelled him a 'brake' (*tormoz*); Stalin's guilt thus lay in slowing the party in its inexorable journey forwards.³³ Commending the party for courageously correcting its wrong turns (*izvrashcheniia*) and returning to the path set by Lenin, he condemned the Anti-Party Group for trying to divert the course of revolution. Khrushchev explicitly reiterated the eschatological nature of history. Successful revolution involved three stages, he reminded the congress: first, the overthrow of the exploiters and the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat; second, the building of socialism; and third, the creation of communist society. Identifying the Soviet Union's location on the timeline, he told his audience that 'our

³² Halfin, *From Darkness to Light*, pp. 8-9.

³³ 'Doklad N. S. Khrushcheva', *Pravda*, 18 October 1961, p. 9.

party and people have already completed the first two stages' (*pervye dva etapy nashei partiei i narodom proideny*), and he attributed their successes to the fact that the party had a 'faithful compass' (*vernii kompas*) – the doctrines of Marxism-Leninism.³⁴

Throughout his speeches, Khrushchev consistently presented history as a journey, using topographical metaphors to show the party moving forward. The cult of personality was a dangerous leg of that journey, but one that had now been successfully traversed. In his concluding speech, he said:

The time will come when we will all die for we are all mortal. Until then we must do our work, and we can and must tell the party and the people the truth. We need to do this so that nothing like this can ever be repeated.³⁵

Khrushchev's emphasis on individual mortality served to remind the party of its own immortality: repetition of the past was impossible, history was linear, the ranks of the party were moving collectively and inexorably towards the promised future. As in revolutionary lore, the individual may die, but the party lives on, going forward to the light of communism.³⁶ Khrushchev's sound-bite would be repeated frequently over the coming months.

Inspired by Khrushchev, many communists made sense of the horrors of the party's past by locating them on the historical timeline. At the congress, P. N. Demichev, first secretary of the Moscow *gorkom*, claimed that the party had traversed a 'difficult, but glorious and victorious path' (*nelegkii, no slavyi pobednyi put'*). Undeterred, he

³⁴ 'Doklad N. S. Khrushcheva', *Pravda*, 19 October 1961, p. 1.

³⁵ Tvardovskii's preface to 'One day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich', *Novyi mir*, 1962.11, 8.

³⁶ Clark, *The Soviet Novel*, p. 49.

continued 'the Party Programme has opened up even wider horizons before the people. It is almost as if Soviet people have grown wings on their backs'.³⁷ Perhaps inspired by Titov's recent exploits in space, Demichev drew on the prevalent images of flight, imagining the boundless horizons opening up to the Soviet people. Yet he also rendered the 'difficult' past a source of pride: having survived an arduous stage on the journey towards the light, the party had new reason to be confident in the legitimacy of its mission. The first secretary of Ukraine, Podgornyi, used similar formulations:

We communists are proud that the honour fell to us to build mankind's bright future. Whatever kind of obstacles we encounter on the way, they will be overcome, because our party is the party of Lenin, the party of unstoppable movement forward, the party of victory in the name of communism and the happiness of all the people of the earth.³⁸

Reiterating the inexorable nature of their mission, these leading communists assured their audience that the exposure of the cult of personality confirmed the future because it proved the party's capacity to overcome any obstacle placed in its way.

All across the Soviet Union, party meetings appropriated these myths of fortitude and reiterated their faith in the advent of the communist future. At the Amur *obkom* meeting, for instance, the party secretary was jubilant that by criticising the cult of personality and overcoming the distortions (*izvrashcheniia*) and mistakes of the past, the party had ensured a better future.³⁹ A letter from Tambov party members even more euphorically embraced the new eschatology. The town's *gorkom* wrote to Moscow commending the congress's repudiation of the cult of personality, adding that now 'the path has been cleared [*raschishchen*] for an even quicker advance

³⁷ 'Rech' tovarishcha P. N. Demicheva', *Pravda*, 20 October 1961, p. 2.

³⁸ 'Rech' N. V. Podgornogo', *Pravda*, 20 October 1961, p. 4.

forward towards communism'.⁴⁰ When party members in *Chavash oblast'* met, a party member since 1917, comrade I. E. Efimov, a victim of repression, said:

Thank you to the great Leninist party, and from the bottom of my heart thank you to the Leninist Central Committee and personally to Comrade N. S. Khrushchev, for making it possible for us old communists, whose lives hung by a thread, to live to see these happy and triumphant days, when the banner of Lenin's party is emblazoned with the words: 'The present generation of Soviet people will live under communism.' Glory to the Leninist XXII Party Congress which has paved the way to communism!⁴¹

Even a victim of repression could interpret his own suffering in terms of the collective path towards communism and see the XXII Party Congress as an important landmark on their journey.

In this euphoric environment, many purge victims felt inspired to contribute their own stories of symbolic death and spiritual rebirth under Khrushchev. In the early 1960s, many of those who had undergone the ordeal of the labour camps put pen to paper. They wrote not to indict or condemn the party, but to enrich the party's own narrative. As they despatched their writings to party headquarters or to the editors of a Soviet journal, they believed they were contributing to the collective re-writing of the past. In December 1962 Aleksandr Zuev wrote to *Novyi mir* with his recollections of 1938, asking if the time had come for the publication of such material – if not, for his manuscript to be returned to him.⁴² The journal's editor, Aleksandr Tvardovskii, replied that he read the text with interest but was unable to publish it, partly because the journal was simply inundated with such memoirs, partly because Zuev named his persecutors and that created 'additional problems for the editors'. Despite the

³⁹ RGANI f. 5, op. 32, d. 175, l. 201.

⁴⁰ RGANI f. 5, op. 32, d. 174, l. 46.

⁴¹ RGANI f. 5, op. 32, d. 174, l. 270.

impossibility of publishing his work, Tvardovskii told Zuev that it was still ‘correct and necessary’ that these pages had been written.⁴³ When one of Tvardovskii’s colleagues wrote a rejection letter to another memoirist-purge victim, he too claimed that the journal had received ‘hundreds’ of such memoirs over the past year, but assured the author that even if it remained unpublished, ‘the manuscript was worth writing’.⁴⁴ The journal’s editors seemed to claim that even if publishing such detailed material on the purges was inadvisable, the act of writing was in itself valuable.

Zuev also sent a copy of his manuscript to the Central Committee, and he was not the only purge victim to do so in the wake of the XXII Party Congress. In the central party archive at the Institute of Marxism-Leninism a special fund (*fond*) was created for ‘manuscript materials relating to miscarriages of justice committed during the cult of Stalin’s personality’.⁴⁵ Some hoped that the manuscripts they submitted would be published, others wished to clarify things for the party itself. Fedor Lisitsin had no view to publication, but hoped that by describing his own experiences of repression in 1938-9, he could clarify exactly what happened within ‘the walls of the NKVD’. He felt the terms ‘lawlessness’ and ‘arbitrariness’ (*bezzakonie i proizvol*) used in the press were vague, and hoped to give a clearer understanding of what they meant in reality.⁴⁶ Some felt they had a duty to recount their experiences, both to the party and to their fellow citizens. Submitting an account of his ‘dark past’ to the party, M. A. Panich entitled his memoirs ‘Letter to a Friend’. He began:

⁴² Memorial f. 2, op. 1, d. 68, l. 1.

⁴³ Memorial f. 2, op. 1, d. 68, l. 2.

⁴⁴ Kondratovich wrote to Boris Oliker a rehabilitated party member from Minsk in May 1963. RGALI f. 1702, op. 9, d. 109, l. 20.

⁴⁵ Now housed at RGASPI f. 560, op. 1.

⁴⁶ RGASPI f. 560, op. 1, d. 24, l. 2.

Finally I have picked up my pen. It is hard for me to do, for I find it difficult to remember my dark and terrible past. Yet I must tell everything to my comrades, friends, and acquaintances at work, as this all has a socio-political importance.

At the XXII Party Congress they said that it was our duty to carefully and thoroughly deal with cases like this which relate to the abuse of power. A time will come, we will die, we are all mortal, and while we live, we can and must explain a lot and say the truth to the party and people... We must do this so that this kind of phenomenon can never be repeated in the future.

For many years before this I could not talk to you of this. Now I will try and put everything briefly.⁴⁷

The congress encouraged Panich to think that his contribution to the party's history was important, and despite the pain involved, he came to believe that remembering and articulating his ordeal was valuable. When he spoke of mortality, he adopted Khrushchev's words, echoing the leader's belief that the 'truth' must be told. As he recounted his emotional response to rehabilitation in the concluding pages of the memoir, Panich wrote that he sobbed 'out of happiness that TRUTH had triumphed, genuine Leninist truth.'⁴⁸ Again capitalised, the concept of restoring 'truth' had great meaning for Panich.

Although the party took a rather ambiguous approach to publishing purge victims' memoirs, this did not prevent a flurry of writing in the early 1960s.⁴⁹ Having spent

⁴⁷ RGASPI f. 560, op. 1, d. 30, l. 1.

⁴⁸ RGASPI f. 560, op. 1, d. 30, l. 25.

⁴⁹ Some memoirs were published in the years immediately following the XXII Party Congress. Although the main thrust of her work is to demonstrate the ongoing suffering inflicted on 'the Gulag survivor', Adler admits that in the 1960s the thick journals 'propagated "heroic epoch" tales which extolled the virtue of victims of the terror who, despite it all, "returned home having preserved the flame of their devotion to the revolution."' One communist, Boris D'iakov, introduced his memoir in the journal *Zvezda*, by saying: 'My chief aim is to show true communists always remain communists no matter what terrible experiences are thrown at them.' Quite often, published works were the stories of purge victims who had returned home to prestigious positions. For example, *Novyi mir* published the recollections of A. V. Gorbатов, a Red Army General briefly repressed at the height of the purges, who returned to take up a leading position in the Soviet Army. Some grass-roots initiatives at publishing memoirs were, however, repressed. In 1963, camp survivor and human rights activist, Simeon Vilensky first attempted to publish an anthology that included writings by people who had been repressed, but his initiative was blocked at the last moment. Adler, *The Gulag Survivor*, p. 215; Boris D'iakov,

much of the 1950s composing petitions for release, rehabilitation, housing and work, many purge victims were not ready to lay down their pens. No longer considering themselves outsiders to society, they found the act of writing a meaningful way to join in the celebration of truth and openness. As they wrote they hoped both to make sense of their distressing ordeals, and to support the party in its victory over the darkness of the past.

In the early 1960s, the press frequently labelled the congress a 'compass' or 'beacon'.⁵⁰ The XXII Party Congress was presented as a key landmark: truth was restored, Lenin revived, and the relentless advance towards the communist future back on track. After the doctrinal uncertainties engendered by the Secret Speech, the party once more had a road map directing them to the communist paradise they sought.

The Moral Code

In response to the Secret Speech in 1956, not all had welcomed the revision of party narrative. Amongst those who attached importance to the fate of Soviet symbols and rituals, the stories of party trials and tribulations held little meaning. However, the eschatological narratives of 1961 proved more popular. In the rhetoric of 1961, the communist future was imagined as a haven safe from any crime or delinquency.

'Perezhitoe', *Zvezda*, 1963.3, 177-196; A. V. Gorbatov, 'Gody i voiny', *Novyi mir*, 1964.3, 133-156; 1964.2, 99-138; 1964.3, 106-153); Semeon Vilensky (ed), *Till My Tale is Told* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1999), p. x.

⁵⁰ For example, on 18 November 1961, *Pravda* carried an article on the XXII Party Congress written by a Canadian communist entitled 'Workers' beacon'. On 14 October 1961, the *Pravda* front page depicted a large ship, called Lenin, sailing through rocky seas. From the ship, search lights are directed

Increasingly, those who might threaten this coming utopia were to be excised from the advancing collective. Although hailed in the west as a moment of reform and liberalisation, the destalinising rhetoric of 1961-2 in fact signalled a return to greater stringency. Where the XXI Party Congress had claimed that all might be transformed into Soviet citizens of the future, the doctrines of 1961-2 united 'respectable' citizens against any nefarious influences that might derail progress towards communism. While in 1959 Khrushchev's eschatological visions of the future had embraced the whole of society and extended the promise of correction and re-education to all, access to the future paradise was now restricted. Only if those who failed to comply with the Moral Code were excluded could the Soviet collective dedicate itself fully to the task of constructing communism party rhetoric claimed. At the XXII Party Congress, Khrushchev showed his own intolerance for those who refused work, saying that 'some people seem to think that under communism, man won't have to sow or reap, just sit about eating pies.'⁵¹ He went on to back demands for a more aggressive 'battle against idlers and parasites, hooligans, and drunkards'. Instead of wishing to see them reformed within the Soviet community, he now advocated their banishment: 'There is no place for these weeds in our life.'

When the draft of the new Party Programme was published on 30 July 1961 it contained a long section devoted to 'inculcating communist consciousness' (*vospitanie kommunisticheskoi soznatel'nosti*). It listed at least six characteristics to this new Soviet man: a scientific worldview based on the doctrines of Marxism-Leninism; a love of labour; communist morality; international proletarian patriotism;

upwards to form the letters XXII against the night sky, across which whiz three rockets. Next to it, read the headline 'Faithful compass (*Vernyi kompas*)'.

⁵¹ 'Doklad N. S. Khrushcheva', *Pravda*, 18 October 1961, p. 11.

a thoroughly developed personality, spiritual richness and physical perfection; intolerance for capitalist ideology and behaviour. The draft programme allotted significant attention to the third of these: communist morality, and it became an important topic in the coming weeks. The draft provided Soviet citizens with a Moral Code, including twelve principles they should follow:

1. Devotion to communism and love for the socialist Fatherland and socialist countries.
2. Conscientious labour for the good of society; he who does not work, does not eat.
3. Concern for protecting and accumulating communal property.
4. A developed sense of social duty, intolerance towards those who violate collective interests.
5. Collectivism and a comradely attitude to helping others; all for one and one for all.
6. Humane relationships and mutual respect between people: each human being is a friend, comrade, and brother to all.
7. Integrity and truthfulness [*chestnost' i pravdivost'*], moral cleanliness, simplicity, and modesty in public and private life.
8. Mutual respect within the family, attention to the upbringing of children.
9. Intolerance towards injustice, parasitism, dishonesty, and careerism.
10. Friendship and brotherhood amongst all the peoples of the USSR; intolerance of any kind of nationalist or racial hostility.
11. Intransigence towards the enemies of communism.
12. Brotherly solidarity with all the workers of all peoples.⁵²

Under the headline 'The Builder of Communism's Moral Code', a *Pravda* editorial repeated the importance of these twelve principles a few weeks later.⁵³ A didactic text, the Moral Code sought to mould citizens of the communist future.

⁵² 'Programma Kommunisticheskoi Partii Sovetskogo Soiuza', *Pravda*, 30 July 1961, p. 8.

⁵³ 'Moral'nyi Kodeks Stroitelia Kommunizma', *Pravda*, 26 August 1961, p. 2.

Throughout August and September, agitational workers and propagandists were hard at work conducting informal discussions door-to-door and leading official party meetings in the workplace. Because of the general nature of the Party Programme, the meetings provided an unusual occasion for members of the public to express their views on a range of topics. Of all the issues raised in the draft Programme, the Moral Code produced the most passionate responses. One worker from the Krasnopresenskii Construction Complex in Moscow proposed writing the Moral Code out in golden letters and hanging it in all public places.⁵⁴ With portraits of Stalin perhaps already removed in his factory, this worker seemed to believe that shared moral values could become the new binding symbol of Soviet identity. If the nation's security was no longer ensured by the ever vigilant gaze of the leader, then this new rule-book could act as a new form of defence. Each and every citizen must be constantly reminded of the rules of conduct by which he and his fellow workers must abide.

Considering the tide of outraged letters penned over the course of the 1950s, it is perhaps unsurprising that the publication of a Moral Code once more unleashed passionate contempt for notions of correction and re-education. Participants in the debates took the meetings as an opportunity to demonstrate that their fury against 'injustice, parasitism, dishonesty, and careerism' went beyond the mere intolerance demanded in the ninth point of the Moral Code. A *Pravda* article suggests that there was significant support for more radical formulations. Under the headline 'Against vestiges of the past', Ts. Izraileva, a party member since 1919 and a worker at Chernigov Housing Committee No. 3, described the energetic propaganda work in which their group was engaged. Izraileva claimed that in almost every home they

⁵⁴ RGANI f. 1, op. 4, d. 27, 13.

visited they encountered demands for more stringent measures to be taken against those who hindered the construction of communism and calls for a more aggressive struggle against ‘parasites, drunkards, and hooligans’.⁵⁵

In a summary of the reports received from primary meetings nationwide, a Central Committee official commented that there were widespread demands that ‘punitive measures should be used against parasites, thieves, bribe-takers, speculators, hooligans, and drunkards, alongside educational work [*vospitatel’naia rabota*].’⁵⁶ As suggested in Chapter IV, Soviet citizens had used the practice of letter-writing to reject the notions of *vospitanie* advocated by the party in 1959-60; now they found a new forum to articulate their fears about social degeneration. Time and again, members of the public took the publication of the proposed Party Programme as an opportunity to reiterate their concerns about rising crime and to call for more aggressive measures against allegedly antisocial behaviour.

Information from the provinces suggests that demands for ‘the party to announce a decisive battle against any kind of antisocial acts’ and for more aggressive measures against parasites were common. Reports cited various such comments:

We should clean society [*ochishchat’ obshchestvo*] of parasites and petty thieves. Instead of taking them on probation, we should judge them with all the severity of the law and banish them from the towns, so that the negative influence of these elements does not harm young people.⁵⁷

Again rejecting the practice of ‘probation’, petty thieves were rendered as harmful, contagious ‘elements’ for whom there was no place in the Soviet city. Another read:

⁵⁵ ‘Protiv perezhitkov proshlogo’, *Pravda*, 8 October 1961, p. 3.

⁵⁶ RGANI f. 1, op. 4, d. 27, l. 11.

⁵⁷ RGANI f. 1, op. 4, d. 29, l. 121.

Where it [the Party Programme] talks about parasites, it should add that these people are liable to be shunned by the workers of communist society and sent to distant places in the country to take care of themselves.⁵⁸

In Magadan *oblast'* there were demands for a 'tougher battle against parasites' – alongside pleas for cheaper cinema tickets, better books for students, and free breakfast for children. One Leningrad official noted that when the party conducted discussions across the city and province, they frequently encountered calls for the revised draft to include 'more concrete statements about the measures to be taken in the struggle to strengthen social order', in particular the practice of taking offenders on probation.⁵⁹ While the programme's Moral Code simply stated that the 'new man' should show intolerance towards 'injustice, parasitism, dishonesty, and careerism', the Soviet public demanded stronger formulations.

Articulating these demands for 'punitive measures' was not, however, deemed at odds with the rhetoric of destalinisation. Severe punishment of those who displayed criminal or anti-social behaviour was rarely considered an indication that the state was 'repressive'. In all the debates, one lone voice suggested that the anti-parasite measures were an abuse of 'governmental and revolutionary legality', akin to the repressive methods used during the cult of personality.⁶⁰ Such a heretical suggestion was wholly drowned out by those who claimed that such stringency was a necessary precondition to building communism. V. Belousov, the chairman of a village soviet in Saratov province called for greater severity by invoking the party's own commitment to the future:

⁵⁸ RGANI f. 1, op. 4, d. 28, ll. 120-122.

⁵⁹ RGANI f. 1, op. 4, d. 51, l. 16.

⁶⁰ GARF f. 7523, op. 95, d. 95, l. 8.

In a society that is building communism, there should be no place for law-breaking and criminality. But while criminal incidents still occur, it is necessary to punish severely those people who commit dangerous crimes, who break the rules governing the socialist community and who don't wish to be a part of a decent [*chestnyi*], working life.⁶¹

Belousov certainly did not associate the ruthless treatment of criminals with repression, but with commitment to the revolutionary cause of building a brighter future. Although he praised the Party Programme for devoting such attention to 'raising people of the communist tomorrow' (*vospitanie liudei kommunisticheskogo zavtra*), one Leningrader also wanted something added about the 'use of force against those who maliciously prevent us from moving forward'.⁶² Again intolerance of criminality was required for progress along the revolutionary path. A certain Domacheva, a cook in a communal dining room, commented:

In our country there should be no place for parasites, idlers, skivers, and other parasitical elements who are hindering the building of communism. If these types won't respond to educational measures [*ne poddaiutsia vospitatel'nomu vozdeistviu*], they should be punished by judicial means.⁶³

Imagining a people actively constructing their future idyll, Domacheva maintained that there was no 'place' for those who were unable or unwilling to participate in the collective mission. As the nation accelerated towards a golden future, the practices of exclusion were thus ever more imperative.

A year later *Pravda* printed another long piece on the Moral Code, this time expressing even greater hostility towards those who violated it than had been the case either in the original code or in the editorials of 1961. Entitled 'The most important principle of the Moral Code', the 1962 article seemed to present itself as some kind of

⁶¹ RGANI f. 1, op. 4, d. 72, l. 39.

⁶² RGANI f. 1, op. 4, d. 51, l. 38.

response to the public outcry.⁶⁴ Explicitly stating that '*Pravda* receives many letters from decent labourers [*chestnye truzheniki*] who express indignation about idlers [*lodyri*], parasites [*tuneiadtsi*], and petty thieves [*zhuliki i khapugi*]', it articulated a position of even greater intolerance than before:

Lenin saw in them the damned enemies of socialism [*zaliatye vrugi sotsializma*]. The parasite lives off others. He is a thief who lives off other people – not off a single individual, but off the whole people and society. He is given food, drink, clothing, and footwear, but he himself creates nothing. The parasite corrupts [*razvrashchaet*] those around him. He regenerates [*vozrozhdaet*] the psychology of parasitism, which is deeply alien and enemy to the socialist order, and if he goes without punishment, the parasite encourages the illusion that you can live happily without working.

Those who refused to work were not simply layabouts, but 'the damned enemies of socialism'. Drawing on psycho-medical discourses to label those who refused work as alien bodies and sources of contagion, the article went on to suggest that the Soviet people were dissatisfied with a merely chastising role, and eager to become more severe judges. Hostility towards those who refused to take their place in the respectable, hard-working collective of Soviet society had been growing throughout the decade. *Pravda* now not only sanctioned such hostility but also recognised its popular character.

Responses to the Moral Code reveal the problematic nature of viewing the XXII Party Congress as a moment of 'liberalisation'. In fact, the same eschatological rhetoric that condemned terror and repression in fact also nurtured increasing intolerance towards various forms of anti-social behaviour.

⁶³ RGANI f. 1, op. 4, d. 52, ll. 7-8.

⁶⁴ *Pravda*, 20 September 1962, p. 1.

Fighting Ivan Denisovich's Vulgarly

When Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* was published in the November 1962 issue of the literary journal *Novyi mir*, it entered this complex cultural climate. While many praised the work as a 'moment of truth', there was deep resentment of the moral degeneracy allegedly displayed by Solzhenitsyn's characters and outrage at the uncultured and uncouth manners he depicted. For this reason alone, many considered Solzhenitsyn's text a challenge to the line set by the party. It was not his depiction of the Gulag or even his condemnation of prison guards, but his negation of the moral codes that marked Solzhenitsyn's work as seditious.

In *Oktiabr*, a literary journal of conservative reputation, N. Sergovantsev opened his review article by indignantly condemning the 'cult of personality' and lamenting the suffering of many thousands of honest Soviet people.⁶⁵ He too believed that it was necessary to say the 'truth' about the repressions and the camps. This did not prevent Sergovantsev from fundamentally objecting to *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*. In his view, Shukhov's character had more in common with the *muzhik* of the patriarchal village than with Soviet people of the 1930s and 1940s. Where the new Party Programme encouraged citizens to be 'spiritually rich', Ivan Denisovich lived in a 'spiritual world that was highly restricted'. Instead of a passionate sense of the collective as prescribed in the Moral Code, Shukhov was 'a terrifyingly lonely man'. Reviewing the literary achievements of 1962, another critic, Lidiia Fomenko,

⁶⁵ N. Sergovantsev, "Tragediia odinochestva i "sploshnoi byt", *Oktiabr*, 4 April 1963, pp. 198-206.

considered the torments of camp life described by Solzhenitsyn a 'tragedy'.⁶⁶ Though she proclaimed that the time had come to 'tell the truth so that this will never happen again', she too was dissatisfied with Solzhenitsyn's depiction of Soviet man, however. In fact she preferred the protagonists of a short story by Georgii Shelest' in which, repressed communists, though half-starved and ill, 'could by their very nature not stop being *Komsomoltsy* and communists'.⁶⁷ In quite similar terms, another reviewer, Fedor Chapchakhov, felt it would have been better if Solzhenitsyn had taken as his heroes people who had somehow remained 'brave citizens of their Fatherland, never losing faith in the inevitable triumph of the great truth of the people and the party'.⁶⁸ Instead he found a world where the bad language and thieves' jargon revealed how the characters had lost the 'moral features' characterising a Soviet person. Participating in the triumphant embrace of 'truth' and anxious to show their own support for exposing the errors of the past, these reviewers were nonetheless opposed to *One Day* as a rejection of the moral values officially promoted as an essential element in achieving communism.

Back in November 1962 *Novyi mir*'s editor, Tvardovskii, seems to have predicted the coming debate in his preface to the text. In his opening paragraph, he encouraged readers to approve the work as a necessary part of breaking with the past, citing Khrushchev on the importance of speaking the truth.⁶⁹ In the closing words of his preface, however, Tvardovskii did acknowledge that some might oppose

⁶⁶ Lidia Fomenko, 'Bol'shiie ozhidaniia', *Literaturnaia Rossiia*, 11 January 1963.

⁶⁷ She refers to a short story by Georgii Shelest', entitled 'Samorodok' and published 6 November 1962, *Izvestiia*, p. 6. In the story, four purged party members sent to the Kolyma gold mines exhibit true communist behaviour. Having unearthed a huge nugget of gold, they are tempted to hide it so that they can then sliver off small pieces each day, thus meeting their targets with less exertion. They resist, however, and hand it all in immediately in order to help the war effort.

⁶⁸ Fedor Chapchakhov, 'Nomer i liudi', *Don*, 1963.1, 155-159.

Solzhenitsyn's tale. Reflecting the uncontested status of the new rhetoric of truth and openness, he envisaged no challenge to the story's fundamental acceptability. He did fear, though, that some overly 'pernickety' people might object to some words and expressions taken from the 'milieu' in which the story takes place. Tvardovskii's fears proved correct, and it was not only on the pages of rival literary journals that such views were found. The publication of *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* became an important public event, once more provoking members of Soviet society to articulate their opinions in the form of letters-to-the-editor. In the responses of *Novyi mir*'s readers, we do indeed find that it was the issue of language that created the greatest furore, even amongst those who embraced the rhetoric of destalinisation, openness, truth, and party revival.

Such a response is best illustrated by a letter from a certain Greenberg, a *Novyi mir* reader from the city of Ukhta and a keen supporter of both Khrushchev and the journal's liberal editor, Tvardovskii.⁷⁰ Greenberg welcomed Khrushchev's promotion of purge victims as the true heirs of the revolution. A leading party cadre himself, Greenberg was repressed in 1937 and survived eight years in the camps. Paying tribute to his fellow victims, he said they lived in a world utterly different from the one created by Solzhenitsyn: 'Against all the odds, those comrades who survived and are now rehabilitated, did not lose their human dignity.' Greenberg also praised examples of these resurrected heroes in official culture. Recently the film *Clear Skies* had been broadcast on Soviet television and for Greenberg, the film offered an admirable hero: the leading character, Astakhov, is an innocent victim of repression,

⁶⁹ Tvardovskii's preface to 'One day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich', *Novyi mir*, 1962.11, 8.

⁷⁰ RGALI f. 1702, op. 9, d. 107, ll. 58-61.

but despite all his undeserved suffering ‘does not lose his faith in the party’.⁷¹ Like the critic Fomenko, he also esteemed the protagonists of Shelest’s tale who exhibited Bolshevik honour and were symbols of ‘moral cleanliness’.

For him, *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* was a distortion of Khrushchev’s new rhetoric. He wrote: ‘N. S. Khrushchev did not mean in any way for all this dirt to be raked up under the guise of truth’. Greenberg did not object to Solzhenitsyn’s work from a point of view that can easily be described as ‘conservative’. He saw himself as the promoter of the holy ‘truth’ that dominated party rhetoric at its most radical in 1961-2, a truth that stood in opposition to something he identified as ‘dirt’. So, what was the nature of the ‘dirt’ Greenberg detected? As Tvardovskii had predicted, it was indeed the language of the text that he contested. The whole tale, he wrote, was composed in the jargon of the ‘thief, the recidivist, and the bandit’. He cited various examples of this slang, which, he claimed, ‘makes you sick’. Why, he asked, do we need to make a cult out of thieves’ jargon? In addition to labelling Solzhenitsyn’s language ‘the lexicon of thieves and bandits’, he also repeatedly designated it as vulgar (*poshlyi*) or vulgarities (*poshliatina*).

Greenberg’s dread of vulgarity revealed the significance he attached to good manners. He feared the appearance of bad language as a threat to established Soviet *kul’turnost’*. *Poshlost’* – derived from the Russian word *poshlo* meaning ‘traditional’ or ‘ancient’ – represented a direct challenge to the ‘new’ Soviet values.⁷² Ivan Denisovich’s language became associated with the threat of ‘unculturedness’ that the

⁷¹ *Chistoe Nebo*. Dir. Grigorii Chukhrai. Mosfil’m. 1961.

⁷² Svetlana Boym, *Common Places: Mythologies of Everyday Life in Russia* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994), pp. 42, 64.

mass releases from the Gulag had created, as thousands of those excluded from the great civilising mission returned to Soviet society. The fact that a Gulag returnee was permitted to publish a literary text in 'criminal jargon' was of particular concern as literature had been one of the prime sites for the promotion of *kul'turnost* throughout the Soviet period. 'The culture of speech derived from good literature,' writes Vadim Volkov, and 'reading was also directly connected with the acquisition of culturedness'.⁷³ It was no surprise then that Greenberg was so aghast to discover examples of the criminal jargon promoted in a leading literary journal. He asked the editors of *Novyi mir*, 'Do you really have to be a "pernickety" person to disapprove an approach to literature which flaunts the most vulgar [*samye poshlye*] examples of the thieves' lexicon in our high-minded Soviet literature?' A few lines later he again questioned why Tvardovskii encouraged 'actual vulgarity' (*nastoiashaia poshliatina*) in literature.

According to Greenberg, the conflict between respectable Soviet society and the dirty underworld of the criminal should remain an absolute one. When expressing his concerns that 'this jargon and vulgarity [*poshlost*]' would reach 'the lexicon of callow youths', he argued that *poshlost* represented the 'harmful influence of an alien ideology' (*chuzhaia ideologiia*). Labelling the vulgar jargon as 'alien' transformed the issue of language into an encounter between two conflicting poles, one 'Soviet', the other foreign. Soviet respectability was thus at risk from an alien, criminal subculture.

Greenberg was not alone in his focus on the issue of language. In the letters located in the *Novyi mir* archive, it appears to be the single most distressing aspect of *One Day*

⁷³ Volkov, 'The Concept of *Kul'turnost*', p. 223.

in the Life of Ivan Denisovich for many of the correspondents. One pensioner described how he almost laughed at the made-up, criminal (*blatnoi*) words, but was drawn up short by his own feelings of bewilderment that this kind of ‘concoction’ had been published.⁷⁴ A Russian teacher complained that in all sixty-five pages the reader would not find a single phrase written in the literary language he had been taught.⁷⁵ Meanwhile, a captain in the Soviet army expressed his indignation that someone who had received higher education, served as an officer, and was now a teacher and novice author, should use words that it would take most readers ‘years to learn’.⁷⁶ For the captain, Solzhenitsyn’s status identified him as a respectable member of Soviet society – a fact that should have been reflected in the language he employed.

A letter addressed to the Chairman of the Supreme Court from a certain A. Mel’nikov warrants a more detailed reading for it offers further insight into why Soviet readers were so fearful of the ‘criminal’ language becoming a part of mainstream Soviet culture. Mel’nikov’s letter began on a topic seemingly unrelated to the novella:

I am writing to you because I hope you can resolve this important issue. Much is being done by the people’s patrols [*narodnye druzhiny*] in the battle against hooliganism. Much is being written in the newspapers about the moral education of the people [*vospitanie naroda*]. You don’t see the rampant hell-raisers who spew out foul language on the streets any more. Now they quickly take them off to sober up at the police station.⁷⁷

The letter articulated fears about increasing hooliganism that had been prevalent throughout Khrushchev’s rule. Although Mel’nikov was glad that the initiatives of the late 1950s seemed, in his eyes, to be remedying the situation, he portrayed the Soviet streets as a stage for violent and rowdy behaviour, populated by hooligans drinking

⁷⁴ RGALI f. 1702, op. 9, d. 108, ll. 10-12.

⁷⁵ RGALI f. 1702, op. 9, d. 107, l. 71.

⁷⁶ RGALI f. 1702, op. 9, d. 107, l. 65.

and shouting slang and swearwords. He thus opened his attack on *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* by reminding his readers that respectable members of society were engaged in an ongoing struggle to bring order to the streets. When he labelled Solzhenitsyn 'a malicious hooligan', Mel'nikov deliberately denigrated the writer not in political terms, but rather in terms of the wave of unrest he saw threatening Soviet stability.

Moving on to discuss Solzhenitsyn's work in more detail, Mel'nikov predictably opened fire on his use of 'criminal words' (*blatnye slovechki*), words that he too found shameful and disgusting. Like Greenberg, he designated the new vocabulary as 'vulgarity', writing:

This kind of vulgarity [*poshlost'*] is clearly only permissible abroad, but here in the USSR the man of the future is being raised, and not the man of the obsolete past, when the older children taught the younger ones to say disgusting swear words to their own mothers[...] Why then is the journal *Novyi mir* not pulling the reader towards the good, but instead dragging him towards the mire [*boloto*]?⁷⁸

Mel'nikov structured his text on certain oppositions, between the good and the 'mire', here and abroad, the new and the old. Abroad 'vulgarity' might flourish, but there was no place for it here in the Soviet Union. In the 'old' Russia, children were raised in the uncouth and vulgar ways of their older brothers and sisters, now they are raised as citizens of the communist future. Mel'nikov saw *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* at odds with the official commitment to raising this new man. In the wake of the anti-parasite campaign and the promulgation of the Moral Code, it was inconsistent for a text that so undermined established Soviet 'culturedness' to be allowed.

⁷⁸ RGALI f. 1702, op. 9, d. 107, l. 76.

A little over a year later, one Western observer wrote that the discussion of Solzhenitsyn's work 'has now become the main arena for the ever more bitter feud between the "conservatives" and the "liberals"'.⁷⁹ This fitted with a view popular in the western academic and political community that Soviet society was divided into two halves, those who supported reform on the one hand, and those who opposed it on the other. In fact, Solzhenitsyn's work was contested not because he wrote of the Gulag or because he claimed innocent victims were persecuted *en masse*, and only rarely because of the unflattering way he depicted prison guards and camp officials.⁸⁰ Those who opposed him did not necessarily take up positions that can readily be identified as 'conservative'. Indeed they often praised Khrushchev for his courage in repudiating the cult of personality. Within the new rhetoric of the XXII Party Congress, progress towards the communist future was dependent upon two things: overcoming the errors of the past (through exposing and condemning them); and ensuring that the social body was expunged of any harmful elements. Surprisingly perhaps, renunciation of terror and the denunciation of the socially undesirable went hand in hand. *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* was condemned not for what it said about the Gulag, but for its unwillingness to criticise weak, uncultured, and even vulgar characters and for its shocking failure to create heroic examples of the new Soviet man.

⁷⁸ RGALI f. 1702, op. 9, d. 107, l. 76.

⁷⁹ Max Hayward, 'Solzhenitsyn's Place in Contemporary Soviet Literature', *Slavic Review*, 23 (1964), 432-436 (p. 433).

⁸⁰ One such exception came from an anonymous party member who wrote to the editors of *Kommunist* early in 1964, arguing that Solzhenitsyn gave a false view of camp life. Having spent fifteen years working in the camps, he had made his own impressions of both prisoners and guards, and found they were quite different from the ones depicted in *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*. He claimed that in reality the prisoners were 'as a rule outright enemies of the Soviet people' and the guards were 'carefully selected', with only 'the best workers' sent to work in the hard labour camps. RGASPI f. 560, op. 1, d. 44, ll. 1-7.

Prisoners' Reactions to Ivan Denisovich

With greater access to newspapers and books as a result of Khrushchev's reforms, *zeks* also read Solzhenitsyn's novella with interest.⁸¹ Like ordinary Soviet citizens, some prisoners found the text confusing, and they too sought clarification from the editors at *Novyi mir*. The journal's archive preserves at least five letters from prisoners, three of which are examined here.⁸² The prisoners hoped that someone in Moscow might be able to offer them assistance in making sense of things, and one wrote: 'Help me to work things out correctly in life!'⁸³ Many were bewildered by the apparent contradictions within official Soviet culture. The media had spent the last few years promoting *vospitanie* and correction, yet the prisoners suspected that there was little genuine commitment to these conversion tales. Some seized on the publication of *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* as an opportunity to express their own views on the issues of crime and punishment, and to rail against their renewed exclusion from Soviet society.

Of the five letters the most dejected and rebellious came from A. Makarov. Well-versed in Soviet theories on re-education, he used pamphlets and booklets as textual aids, citing at length from a brochure by A. Kovalev *The Psychology and Personality of the Prisoner and the Individual Approach to the Process of Re-education*. Using the regime's own texts to condemn it, he noted its failure to live up to the grand

⁸¹ In his memoirs, one political prisoner later recalled how they sat around in the barrack as the story was read aloud. Leonid Sitko, 'Dubrovlag pri Khrushcheve', *Novyi mir*, 1997.10, 142-160.

⁸² See RGALI f. 1702, op. 9, d. 108, ll. 74-70 (letter from Mikhail Fadeev, a current *zek*) and RGALI f. 1702, op. 9, d. 107, ll. 49-51 (letter from A. P. Sergachev, a former prisoner)..

⁸³ RGALI f. 1702, op. 9, d. 107, l. 4.

claims of the 1950s. Having learned that Soviet justice was committed to returning prisoners to life within the Soviet collective, Makarov asked sardonically: 'In a few years' time, will I really be working in some collective or other, if out of the 43 years of my life, I've spent five and half of them serving in the army and seventeen in prison?' Makarov remained sceptical about the possibility of readmission into society, and was indignant that having endured seventeen years of hard labour he had not atoned for his sins in the eyes of society. He complained that his 25-year sentence was in breach of the promises of re-education made by Kovalev, Remenson *et al.*⁸⁴

Concluding that redemption was simply not possible, he dismissed the notion of correction as merely a 'pretext' (*predlog*) hiding the Gulag's true function as a site of infinite suffering. 'I can't find any answer to the question,' he wrote, 'Who needs these camps, why do they exist? Are they really a method of 're-education', or a means of spiritual and physical corruption?'⁸⁵ By the end of the letter he came to the radical conclusion that he would never be allowed back:

There's only one way out: death! To die is far simpler than meeting the daily norms. The only pity is that so many still have to meet the norms and I have to ask: What is all this for, and who needs it? If I have still not become respectable [*chestnyi*] in the eyes of the people, and atoned for my crime with seventeen years of imprisonment, then are the people respectable [*chestnyi*] in my eyes?

Makarov had already reached the bitter conclusion that a return to Soviet society was impossible and the regime's promises of re-education empty. And if readmission was not possible, he renounced life.

Another prisoner, V. A. Lovtsov, likewise believed that the regime lacked any kind of commitment to its proclaimed goal of re-education. Describing in detail the barbarity

⁸⁴ Makarov also cited from Remenson's *V obshchestve, stroiashchem Kommunizm*.

of life in the camps, he was highly critical of the Soviet penal system for failing to 'correct' prisoners. According to Lovtsov, prisoners in 1950-51 – the year in which *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* was set – would commonly say that as soon as they were free they would try to steal a little bit more money, commit a robbery, or even kill someone. 'Neither re-education nor correction had touched them', averred Lovtsov. While the Gulag allowed them to become master card-players, it denied them access to newspapers, study, or training. Penal reform was still painfully slow in the post-Stalin years, he said, and not until Khrushchev's speech at the III Writers' Congress in 1959 did the prisoner begin to hope for change. Hearing Khrushchev's promises of 'faith in man' (*vera v chelovek*), every prisoner felt that he too 'could become a human being' (*stat' chelovekom*).⁸⁶ Soon, however, this too became another broken promise. Commenting on the failure of the amnesties and the high levels of re-offending, he argued that the authorities had betrayed their own pledge to 'correct' prisoners. Applied only to petty offenders, the amnesties ignored those serving long terms, effectively suggesting that as dangerous criminals they were excluded from the promises of rehabilitation. Lovtsov emotionally claimed that the criminal should be 'forgiven', however grave his first offence had been. 'If you believe in him once, if you forgive him, he will never be a criminal again.' According to Lovtsov, Khrushchev's promises of 'faith in man' had never materialised, the practices of the Gulag remained sharply at odds with the advertised rhetoric of 1959.

Lovtsov desperately wanted to be granted readmission to society and wrote passionately:

⁸⁵ RGALI f. 1702, op. 9, d. 109, l. 141.

⁸⁶ RGALI f. 1702, op. 9, d. 108, l. 5.

Do you really think that I don't want to be respectable [*chestnym*], that I don't want to live well, like millions of Soviet citizens? But how to obtain this? How and to whom shall I prove that I want to live respectably [*chestno*], that I won't commit any more crimes? [...] Nobody wants to deal with my case.⁸⁷

Clearly despondent, Lovtsov had written to every possible body and institution, but no one was willing to allow him back into the honest and respectable Soviet world.

Despite his yearning to live within Soviet society, he continued to see himself as an outsider, recognising that 'I am a son of the Gulag, if you can put it that way'.⁸⁸

Writing on the 22 December 1962, a third prisoner, A. G. Baev, serving his fifth sentence, opened his letter with a long description of camp life. In it he hoped to prove to his reader that the hardships and injustices endured by Ivan Denisovich had not yet been eradicated.⁸⁹ Rotten meat, neglect for the sick, and official corruption were still the staple of camp life. Such experiences led Baev to believe that no prisoner could come out of camp life reformed. Typically a prisoner was so corrupted by his ordeals in the camps and by the loss of his family and home, he wrote, that upon release there was little chance that he would do anything other than re-offend.

These prisoners embraced *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* because the world Solzhenitsyn described was one they recognised, yet they were both surprised and concerned by its publication. Realising that many readers had been led to believe that the Gulag horrors Solzhenitsyn describes had disappeared, they tried to show that camp life remained brutal, unjust, and destructive. All three bitterly concurred that the promises of redemption blazoned across the newspapers in the 1950s had been

⁸⁷ RGALI f. 1702, op. 9, d. 108, l. 7.

⁸⁸ RGALI f. 1702, op. 9, d. 108, l. 2.

⁸⁹ RGALI f. 1702, op. 9, d. 107, ll. 8-14.

broken. None of them could cherish any hope that they would emerge from the camps as new men or be taken on by a collective within Soviet society for re-education. While the purge victims could share in the euphoric mood of 1961-2, the 'criminal', who had been wooed with notions of correction throughout the 1950s, remained isolated and excluded. In recognition of the fact that the 'conversion' story of the ordinary criminal had now been rejected, the prisoners sought to reclassify themselves as purge victims. Denying that he was born a criminal, Baev sketched out his life story:

During the war, I lost my parents and became a street-child at the age of twelve. While I was still a minor, I joined the army and received many awards. I was in the partisan forces. But after the war my life, a 'crack' [*treshchina*] appeared, and the stamp of Stalin's cult of personality was imprinted on my life. And so I served fifteen years in prison, experiencing all the 'joys' of a life without any happiness and without any hope for the future.⁹⁰

Orphaned during the war and left to live on the streets, his life-story had some typical elements of the *zek* autobiography. Yet he realised that the days of trying to re-educate or redeem the 'lost sheep' of the war generation were over and he did not feel it appropriate to foreground this aspect in his narrative. In Baev's eyes, his only chance to rejoin the Soviet collective was as a victim of Stalin's cult of personality.

Obstacles, Not Enemies

Although divisions between Soviet society and its 'imagined other' clearly remained and were perhaps even fortified by the early 1960s, representations of the 'enemy' had changed greatly since 1953. When a party figure erred from the correct course, the Soviet press no longer leapt to label him a warmonger, traitor, monster, loathsome

vermin, foul degenerate, or contemptible hireling; a show trial was no longer considered necessary. The approach taken to the 'deviation' of leading party figures such as Molotov, Kaganovich, and Malenkov in 1961 illustrates these changing techniques.

Identified as deviators from the party line, a minority tried to condemn them with traditionally invective rhetoric. From the tribune of the XXII Party Congress, Pospelov labelled them 'unprincipled double-dealers' and 'wretched renegades' (*zhal'kie otshchepentsy*),⁹¹ while Rodionov commented: 'The members of the Anti-Party Group have been called dogmatists. This is correct. But what they tried to do in June 1957 was not dogmatism, it was banditry, it was broad daylight robbery [*razboi sredi belogo dnia*].'⁹² Labelling them bandits and robbers, Rodionov fought against the moderate terminology that Khrushchev and others used to criticise Molotov, Kaganovich, and Malenkov. As his statement intimated, his invective proved the exception. More commonly, the party chose to label them with the milder term 'dogmatists'.

Indeed, the prevailing censure at the congress was temperate. Stalin's old colleagues were cast not as venomous enemies, but rather as obstacles and hindrances slowing the collective progress towards communism. In his concluding speech, Khrushchev prided himself on how differently he treated his political opponents compared with his predecessor. He indicted Molotov, Kaganovich, and Malenkov on two counts: first, their role in executing the purges of 1936-8; second, their recent attempts to turn the

⁹⁰ RGALI f. 1702, op. 9, d. 107, l. 12

⁹¹ 'Rech' tovarishcha P. N. Pospelova', *Pravda*, 28 October 1961, p. 4.

⁹² 'Rech' tovarishcha N. I. Rodionova', *Pravda*, 31 October 1961, p. 3.

party from the correct path. Although he labelled them 'renegades', he did not call for them to be pilloried, vilified, or court-martialled. In fact, he attempted to put into practice the principles of the Secret Speech whereby those who erred from the correct path were no longer excluded from society. The three senior party figures were to be offered work so that they could contribute to society like all other Soviet people.⁹³ Just as deviating communists in the 1920s might be returned to the factory bench, so Molotov, Kaganovich, and Malenkov were returned to factories – albeit as the managers.⁹⁴

As might be expected, the Soviet public was again distrustful of the notions of correction. Not only did local party committees write their own local stories of the terror in which Molotov, Kaganovich, and Malenkov played a key role in repressions committed in their area, they also called for them to be excluded from the party or even put on trial. At the Ivanovo *obkom* meeting, one personal pensioner shared his reminiscences of Kaganovich's role in the local purges, finishing his speech with a call for Molotov, Kaganovich, and Malenkov to be charged. As the meeting drew to a close, the delegates voted for all three to be excluded from the party, and for Kaganovich, whose role was so significant in the Ivanovo party repressions, to be sentenced.⁹⁵ Later in the proceedings when written queries were submitted from the floor as usual, the issue of Kaganovich's guilt was again central. Demanding that this

⁹³ 'Zakliuchitel'noe slovo N. S. Khrushcheva', *Pravda*, 29 October 1961, p. 3.

⁹⁴ First given managerial positions in remote areas of the Soviet Union, all three lived on into old age in relative obscurity. In the early 1980s, an American relative visited Kaganovich who was living out his retirement in Moscow, and subsequently wrote his biography; over several years, the Russian writer Feliks Chuev visited both Molotov and Kaganovich, later publishing extracts from their conversations. Both Chuev and the American, Stuart Kahan, depict elderly men living comfortably but simply, with relatively little contact either with each other or other former colleagues. Stuart Kahan, *The Wolf of the Kremlin: The First Biography of L. M. Kaganovich, the Soviet Union's Architect of Fear* (London: Robert Hale, 1987); Feliks Chuev, *Tak govoril Kaganovich: Ispoved' staliniskogo apostola* (Moscow: Otechestvo, 1992); Feliks Chuev, *Molotov: Poludnerzhavnyi vlastelin* (Moscow: Olma-Press, 1999).

‘beast in human form be sentenced’, one delegate anonymously declared that Kaganovich’s crimes were not ‘mistakes’ but ‘crimes against the people and against the Fatherland, the like of which have not been seen since the middle ages’.⁹⁶ Once more, the notions of ‘error’ and ‘correction’ lost out to vilification.

Events in Ivanovo were not entirely exceptional. At the meeting of the Moscow *obkom*, delegates also proposed that the members of the Anti-Party Group be put on trial for committing such ‘grave crimes’ (*tiazhkie prestupleniia*). When the party *aktiv* met in the town of Vyborg in Leningrad *oblast*, Kondukov, a retired railway worker and party member since 1917, talked of the ‘unlawful acts’ (*fakty bezzakonnye*) Kaganovich committed as Minister. Kondukov concluded that ‘Kaganovich, Malenkov, and Molotov’s hands are stained with the blood of many honourable [*chestnye*] and loyal Soviet people. I propose excluding Kaganovich, Malenkov, and Molotov from the party and handing them over to the people’s court.’⁹⁷ A student from Karelia said, ‘I consider that Molotov, Kaganovich and Malenkov should be tried openly, so that the whole people knows about it.’⁹⁸ These proposals not only pointed to support for some kind of show trial or ritual of public condemnation, but also to a readiness to use Stalinist rhetoric to label political opponents enemies.

A letter-to-the-editor further reveals how one anonymous member of the public craved a return to the type of performative culture crafted under Stalin. Describing herself as a ‘non-party Muscovite’, the letter-writer described her admiration for

⁹⁵ RGANI f. 5, op. 32, d. 174, l. 178.

⁹⁶ RGANI f. 5, op. 32, d. 174, l. 179.

⁹⁷ RGANI f. 5, op. 32, d. 175, l. 116.

⁹⁸ RGANI f. 5, op. 32, d. 175, l. 230.

Khrushchev to the editors of the party newspaper *Kommunist*.⁹⁹ Having lost her husband to the purges and her son to the war, she had considered herself an 'orphan' until Khrushchev's recent acts of 'bravery' revived her; implicitly, Khrushchev became the new 'father' figure. She clearly yearned for another great leader, and though she approved of the idea of a monument to the victims of the purges, she went on to suggest it might be better to commemorate Khrushchev as the one responsible for rehabilitating them. She particularly admired him for his courage in vanquishing enemies. Khrushchev, she wrote, 'bravely, heroically routed [*razgromil*] the base group of renegades [*podlaia gruppа otshepentsev*] – carriers of the cult of personality [*nositeli kul'ta lichnosti*].' He had courageously gone into battle 'against the dark forces of the carriers of the cult of personality and their overt [*vsкрыte*] accomplices,' and, she wrote, he knew that without such a battle there could be no movement forward. Understanding the world to be locked in conflict between light and dark, she idolised Khrushchev for protecting the nation against pernicious, contagious elements. She seemed to hope that Khrushchev could be venerated as a paternalistic protector and omniscient guardian like Stalin before him and that he would be fully acknowledged as the one who had vanquished 'carriers' of the cult.

In these interpretations of the Anti-Party Group, the former leaders were denigrated as carriers of infection, as a base group of renegades, and as beasts in human forms; there were calls for their exclusion and even court-martial. Ignoring such demands for ritual condemnation, the party leaders instead let Molotov, Kaganovich, and Malenkov sink into obscurity. Despite the consensus established in 1961-2 through

⁹⁹ RGASPI f. 599, op. 1, d. 183, ll. 3-6.

the party's pursuit of 'truth' and the repudiation of 'parasites', there were still important differences in the way that political deviance was understood and treated.

Poet or Parasite?

Although official culture largely eschewed Stalinist invective, new ways to condemn dissenting figures did begin to emerge. Based on popular hostility to the 'parasite', and supported by the official sanction awarded to such antipathies from 1961, new strategies were elaborated for denigrating and excluding selected heretics.

Condemned as uncultured, parasitical, and uncouth, Iosif Brodskii was a prototypical anti-hero of the early 1960s.

Unlike the persecution of controversial cultural figures in the 1930s, the campaign against Brodskii did not appear to originate within the higher ranks of the party, the Ministry of the Interior, or the secret police. According to one of Brodskii's supporters, the vendetta against him was launched by a zealous member of the local volunteer brigade (*druzhina*). In her memoirs, the Leningrad poet Natal'ia Grudina ascribed personal responsibility to Iakov Lerner, deputy director of Leningrad's Giproshtakht Institute and activist in the Dzerzhinskii district *druzhina*.¹⁰⁰ With a 'respectable appearance' (*respektabel'nyi vid*), Lerner had appeared in newsreels as an exemplary activist devoted to the task of morally educating young people. Initially

¹⁰⁰ Nikolai Iakimchuk, *Kak sudili poeta (delo I. Brodskogo)* (St Petersburg: Soiuz Kinematografistov RSFSR Sankt-Peterburgskaia Organizatsiia, 1990), pp. 6-7. Efim Etkind also describes Lerner as Brodskii's main persecutor. According to Etkind, Lerner had been a captain in the MVD troops until 1954, subsequently becoming a *druzhinik*. (Etkind credits him as a member of the patrol in the 'European Hotel' district of Leningrad, rather than the Dzerzhinskii district.) Etkind claims that Lerner regularly extorted huge sums of money from the black-marketeers (*fartsovki*) and that in 1973 he was

obsessed with catching and 're-educating' young people involved in black market transactions, Lerner then turned his attention to those young people amongst whom supposedly 'anti-Soviet moods' flourished. Prior to the Brodskii case, Lerner had already organised one campaign against three young poets at the Technological Institute and presided over the public trial (*obshchestvennyi sud*) of a young teacher who had quit his job at the Herzen Pedagogical Institute. Presaging Brodskii's fate, the man was publicly tried as a parasite and sentenced to exile from Leningrad.¹⁰¹

In his first sally against Brodskii, Lerner sought to stage a trial at the same Elektrosila factory in the Dzerzhinskii district of the city, and he showed the factory director pornographic photographs allegedly featuring Brodskii's friends. At the same time, Lerner used his contacts at the editorial offices of *Vechernii Leningrad* to publish a long condemnation of the young poet, effectively turning the twenty-three year-old over to official scrutiny.¹⁰² When arrangements for the Elektrosila trial fell through, Lerner turned to the Leningrad Writers' Union, where he sought to convince the chairman, the writer A. Profok'ev, of Brodskii's pernicious influence. In December 1963, the Writers' Union voted unanimously to try Brodskii as a parasite, and he was subsequently arrested. In March 1964, a Leningrad judge sentenced him to five years' exile from Leningrad.

arrested and sentenced to six years' imprisonment as a swindler (*moshennik krupnogo mashtaba*). Efim Etkind, *Protsess Iosifa Brodskogo* (London: Overseas Publications Interchange Ltd, 1988), p. 47.

¹⁰¹ Grudina explains that when the young teacher travelled to Moscow to plead for intervention by the Komsomol's Central Committee, they instructed the young man to return home and 'find himself a job, mocking Lerner's zealous activism. *Kak sudili poeta*, p. 7.

¹⁰² 'Okololiteraturnyi truten', *Vechernii Leningrad*, 29 November 1963, reproduced in *Protsess Iosifa Brodskogo*, pp. 16-22.

Some members of the intelligentsia used the Brodskii case to draw parallels between the repressions of the Stalinist era and the present, depicting it as an echo of 1937 or 1949.¹⁰³ Grudina and others, however, have located the case within a new political culture. Grudina emphasised the rise of the *druzhiny*:

The decree against the parasites was a sign of the times. Our society was held captive by illusions. We were promised communism within twenty years and this promise was proclaimed from the highest tribune. As it was presented, the decree was a link along the chain that would take us towards our cherished goal. The parasite decree was used to save us from all kinds of speculators, black-marketeers and spongers [*tuneiadtsy*].¹⁰⁴

Like Genis and Vail, Grudina recognised the importance of the Party Programme's fantastical pledge to construct communism. Moreover, she linked the reassertion of eschatological myths to a growing intolerance of any sort of non-conformist behaviour. Far from remembering the last years of Khrushchev's rule as a time of unprecedented freedom, Grudina asserted that this era was 'characterised in Leningrad by one thing – the prominent role given to the *druzhiny*.' Zoia Toporova, Brodskii's legal defence attorney, also identified the *druzhiniki* as principle actors, writing that at his second trial on 13 March 1964, the courtroom was absolutely full – scores of *druzhiniki* on one side and young poets and members of the intelligentsia on the other.¹⁰⁵

In the article *druzhinniki* helped pen for the Leningrad evening newspaper, their concern for behavioural conformity was evident. Although insinuations about Brodskii's political allegiances were also made, he was primarily condemned for his

¹⁰³ In an unpublished letter to *Literaturnaia Gazeta*, Lidiia Chukovskaia wrote: 'When I read the first article about him, published in the newspaper *Vechernii Leningrad* on 29 November 1963, it seemed to me that by some miracle I had been transported back from 1963 to 1937. Or, let's say, 1949.' *Kak sudili poeta*, p. 8.

¹⁰⁴ *Kak sudili poeta*, p. 7.

¹⁰⁵ *Kak sudili poeta*, p. 11.

appearance and unconventional behaviour. Entitled 'A Pseudo-literary parasite', the article began by sketching out an image of the young poet. From the outset the reader was given to understand that this youth deliberately fashioned himself as something out of the ordinary: he wore corduroy trousers, and walked the streets without a hat in winter, his red hair covered in snow. Before the authors even began to denigrate his poetry, Brodskii had been painted as a nonconformist.

The way he spent his days was also rebellious. With Soviet culture placing a high value on productivity and health, propaganda encouraged citizens to assign time appropriately to work, education, rest, and leisure.¹⁰⁶ Brodskii, however, chose to sleep late, then take a stroll down the Nevskii, where he liked to flirt with a young shop assistant in the book-store. By evening, he would invariably find himself in a café or restaurant, drinking cocktails, often in the company of someone called 'Jeff' or 'Jack' and some girl 'in glasses with a big mop of dishevelled hair'. This daily routine demonstrated the two approaches taken in the attack against Brodskii. On the one hand, he was a parasite, an idler who failed to get out of bed in the morning; on the other, he was friends with Americans, a shady type with a questionable sense of patriotic duty. In this slur on his patriotism, Lerner and his co-writers recounted how Brodskii almost betrayed his fatherland during a trip to Samarkand with his friend Shakhmatov. Having made the acquaintance of an American tourist, Brodskii handed over copies of his work for publication abroad. Brodskii and Shakhmatov then went to the aerodrome, where they planned to steal an airplane and fly it over the border, until they realised there was insufficient petrol. As Brodskii also chose to take his articles

¹⁰⁶ In 1930 a famous piece entitled 'The Task of Scientifically Organising *Byt*' laid out a daily schedule for the worker. The day began at 6am with reveille, followed by 5 minutes of calisthenics, 10 minutes

back from the American, no actual crime was committed even within the bounds of this constructed narrative, yet Lerner and his accomplices left no doubts about Brodskii's intended treachery.

However, this profile of a traitor was secondary to the portrayal of Brodskii as a lazy, anti-social youth leading a quasi-criminal life. The reader learns that his companion on the Samarkand adventure had since been sentenced for a criminal act, and that many of his other friends led marginal lives. Geikhman was a criminal (*ugolovnik*), while Shveigol'ts, a bully who refused to work, had already been named and shamed on various *druzhiny* posters. Efim Slavinskii was labelled a good-for-nothing, while Mariamma Volianskaia had abandoned her elderly and needy mother for the sake of the bohemian lifestyle, hanging out with a girlfriend who was fanatical about yoga and any sort of 'mysticism'. Brodskii was thus indicted as part of a youth subculture that rejected official Soviet values such as hard work and devotion to family, and where criminal behaviour was the norm. Claiming that Brodskii had been unresponsive to 'educational work' (*vospitatel'naia rabota*), the article drew on the prevailing rhetoric of the 'anti-parasite' campaign to call for his exile: 'Clearly we need to stop fussing over pseudo-literary parasites [*perestat' nianchit'sia c okololiteraturnym tuneiadtsem*]. There is no place for types like Brodskii in Leningrad.' The article concluded that not only Brodskii should take heed, but all his cronies who were embarked on the same 'dangerous path'. In keeping with the mood of the time, however, little hope was given that those already set on the wrong path would return.

This first assault on Brodskii presented new ways of denouncing heretics. The real danger to Soviet well-being was located not in the form of enemy spies and foreign hirelings, but in the activity of ordinary citizens who rejected Soviet mores. Where the Stalinist purges had been dedicated to the 'hermeneutics of the soul', the secret and almost surgical delving into the inner recesses of the accused man's mind, the post-Stalinist world looked for external, transparent signifiers of an enemy heart. If velvet trousers and an absence of headwear signified a heretic, he was easily visible to all. This was a significant transition from the Stalinist era, reflecting the new importance attached to morals, dress, manners, and speech. Yet it also reflected an important revision of the *byt* campaigns. If in the late 1950s the impetus had been to identify those who needed further assistance to become decent Soviet citizens, the mission now centred on removing those individuals whose behaviour was considered non-conformist and dangerously un-Soviet. While the practice of exiling 'parasites' could be used in every district of the Soviet city to regulate behaviour, the Brodskii case was used to incite the mood of social intolerance further still. In Leningrad especially, Brodskii's trial was used as a heuristic device, instructing the Soviet public that one of the greatest threats to Soviet security now came from those who failed to abide by society's moral and behavioural codes.

Conclusion

In the summer of 1962, an article entitled 'By way of an exception', offered a less than laudatory profile of the 'purge victim'.¹⁰⁷ Using the well-known figure of the Soviet impostor, a long *Pravda* feature seemed to advise caution towards those rehabilitated.¹⁰⁸ The reader was introduced to the character of Kirill Marikutsa, who had adopted a false identity and claimed to be a victim of injustice, even though in actual fact he was just a common criminal and jailbird. The days of 'unmasking', it seems, were not definitively over. Admonished for a lack of vigilance, the public was taken to task for not seeing through Marikutsa's cunning disguise. As in the pre-1953 era, the Soviet public was told to be on its guard. The nature of his hidden identity is highly significant, however. Where 'unmasking' in the Stalinist era had revealed Trotskyists, rightists, and foreign spies, here the press used the same practices to unearth a 'common criminal'. Again the message of the article was that the prime threat to Soviet well-being came not from the hirelings of the capitalist west, but from its own uncivilised masses, here represented by the criminal let to return from his Gulag exile.

The article also had implications for the status of the purge victim. *Pravda* editorialised: 'A citizen of crystal-clear purity, Marikutsa was treated badly: "he was repressed" (*«repressirovali»*). Not now, of course, but "in those times" (*«a v to*

¹⁰⁷ 'V poriadke iskliucheniia', *Pravda*, 23 August 1962, p. 3.

¹⁰⁸ In a recent article, Sheila Fitzpatrick draws our attention to the importance of the 'confidence man' in Stalinist Russia. Her focus is on the 'social', while here I examine how the figure of the trickster was employed in a newspaper article in order to convey a political message to its readers. I have little evidence that the authorities experienced real problems with criminals seeking to pass themselves off as 'victims of repression'. After the publication of *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* some prisoners convicted for criminal acts wrote to the editors of *Novyi mir* claiming that they too were victims of the cult of personality. They did not necessarily do so, however, as an act of deception, but believed that this offered an explanation for why they had become criminals. Sheila Fitzpatrick, 'The

vremia»).' Placing the words 'repressed' and 'in those times' in inverted commas, *Pravda* began to treat the modish terms of the XXII Party Congress with irony, but as yet, this cynical approach to their tales was rare. As reactions to the publication of *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* have shown, no one yet challenged the importance of speaking the 'truth' about the purges. Although the party sought to restrain the graphomantic tendencies of the rehabilitated, some memoirs of purge victims *were* published in 1962-4. Even if most of their writings remained in the sanctum of the party archive, the very fact that purge victims chose to engage in the act of writing and to submit their works to party headquarters reflects their own belief that they were important participants in the party's revival. Unlike the criminal or the 'parasite', these former enemies could join in the celebratory mood of the early 1960s.

If in the wake of the XXII Party Congress, the official repudiation of terror seems to have caused less controversy than it did in 1956, it was perhaps because the new eschatological myths not only proclaimed the 'restoration of truth' as an affirmation of party legitimacy, but also committed the regime to creating a society where anti-social and criminal behaviour had no place. Renewed intolerance towards those considered anti-Soviet elements was rarely viewed as a retreat into the Stalinist culture now so passionately condemned. Instead, fervent revolutionary zeal came together with a passion for respectability and moral cleanliness that had been nurtured over the 1950s. With the urgent call to construct communism, violent struggle against any 'enemies' who stood in the way of the glorious march of revolution was condoned. Genis and Vail' rightly highlighted the 'poetry' and universal appeal of the

Party Programme, for in one beautifully crafted text, it allowed Soviet society to denounce the 'terror', to proclaim the future, and to cast out those who threatened their cherished image of Soviet society as ordered, respectable, and pure.

Conclusion

Community activists will catch bandits and terrorists!
(*Banditov i terroristov budut lovit' obshchestvenniki!*)

- *Izvestia*, 11 July 2003 ¹

'I am not a bandit, and I am not an enemy of the people. I am a Soviet person and a Soviet writer,' wrote Nikolai Kochin to Khrushchev in 1956.² Claiming his right to full rehabilitation, this former prisoner and purge victim petitioned for his case to be reviewed and his individual status revised. His claim succinctly illustrates the nature of established Soviet beliefs. In Kochin's mind, the Soviet world was bi-partite, divided into 'bandits' and 'enemies of the people' on one side, the 'Soviet people' on the other. Firmly believing he had every right to be treated as a Soviet person – indeed one meriting the elevated rank of a writer – he contested his current position as a banished outsider. Even while disputing his own fate under Stalin, Kochin employed

¹ 'Novyi Taganskii pravoporiadok', *Izvestia*, 11 July 2003, p. 1. The article explains that in the wake of the latest terror attacks at a pop concert in Moscow on 6 July 2003, there are proposals for a new bill to create voluntary street patrols. Strangely echoing the language of the Khrushchev era, *obshchestvenniki* are once more the key to maintaining urban order. In a pilot project in the Taganka district of Moscow, members of the volunteer patrol included a police inspector, the head of the local war veterans' association, and several 'vigilant' (*bditel'nye*) citizens. The emphasis is on the interception and unmasking of bandits and terrorists, of course – not on their re-education and redemption.

² TsADKM f. 85, op. 1, d. 513, ll. 5-10.

the very categories created under Stalinism to divide the population into insiders and outsiders, to identify those belonging to the imagined 'community' and cast out those who threatened it.

At his trial in 1964, the poet Iosif Brodskii claimed he was a poet, 'not a parasite'.³ Like Kochin, Brodskii claimed to be a loyal citizen who contributed to the good of society through the profession of writing. Significantly, the Soviet mental world was still divided into insiders and outsiders, yet the terms of definition had changed. Rather than being vilified as an 'enemy of the people', a bandit, a spy, or indeed a 'beast in human form', Brodskii was condemned as a 'parasite'. The official rhetoric of the early 1960s still maintained firm boundaries between Soviet society and its outcasts, but the 'enemy' was imagined in new ways. The term 'parasite', present in Lenin's rhetoric but largely overlooked in the Stalinist lexicon, had gained new currency under Khrushchev. It became a common rhetorical tool used to castigate those whose appearance, language, and daily life marked them as 'un-Soviet', and reflected the growing importance attached to the moral behaviour of the new Soviet man.

By the end of the Khrushchev era, the campaign for a healthier *byt* had rather different meaning than when first launched following the difficult year of 1953. In the wake of the first mass releases from the Gulag, the party had sought to convince the public that even transgressors deserved the chance to rejoin the collective. Leading ideologues hoped that by creating the necessary social mechanisms they could preclude the

³ Zoia Toporova, the lawyer defending Brodskii, recorded these concluding words at his trial. Iakimchuk, *Kak sudili poeta*, p. 23.

emergence of new deviants and criminals. Throughout the mid to late 1950s, the regime attempted to create a society where every citizen worked to raise the consciousness of his colleagues and neighbours, and where each offender could be corrected by the moral will of the community. The final goal was the creation of communism, where there would be no place for jails, camps, or colonies.

The policies met with limited success. Reduced levels of sentencing in fact masked a steep rise in crime. By the early 1960s, the regime faced the spectre not only of individual and group insubordination, but also outbursts of collective rioting and mass unrest.⁴ Moreover, faced with this rise in disruptive behaviour, the Soviet public remained highly sceptical about the merits of correction and re-education. Not only did Soviet citizens take up their pens to protest against the perceived leniency of state policy, they even on occasion took to the streets. In 1960, a lynch-mob of over 2000 gathered in the Zheleznodorozhnyi district of Cheliabinsk, and forcefully prevented the police arresting a paedophile.⁵ Protesting against the lenient sentences allegedly awarded by the courts, they wanted to stage their own impromptu people's court (*samosud*).

On the whole, the Soviet public proved more willing to expel those who failed to act as a respectable (*chestnyi*) Soviet citizen, than to engage in practices of re-education.

⁴ Kozlov, *Mass Uprisings*; Baron, *Bloody Saturday*.

⁵ According to Laptev, head of the local *obkom*, he talked with workers and house-wives (*domokhoziaki*) during the protests, and they expressed their dissatisfaction with the 'liberal verdicts' (*liberal'nye resheniia*) courts gave to dangerous criminals. 'They said that the practice of reducing sentences allows prisoners to be released early and they often commit serious crimes again,' he wrote in a report to Moscow. Laptev's sympathies clearly lay with the protesters, and he concluded that the fact that many 'incorrigible' or 'irredeemable' criminals escape with such light punishment leads to 'legitimate indignation' against Soviet justice, thus unwittingly revealing his own disbelief in the possibility of universal salvation. RGANI f. 5, op. 32, d. 166, ll. 57-59. A MVD report follows (ll. 60-61).

Many officials working within the system seemed to have shared these popular fears of social degeneration, and scorn for the direction in Soviet criminal justice. By 1961, official policy underwent an important change, perhaps in response to this ongoing resistance to criminal reform. In a raft of new measures, the policies of rehabilitation within society were largely revoked, custodial sentences lengthened, and a rhetorical about-face executed. Newspapers began pillorying those who transgressed society's norms and rules, using terms from established Stalinist invective to castigate the 'parasite' as both irredeemable and contagious.

The failure of the crusade for moral education and correction and the propensity to vilify society's deviants and marginals, reflected the ontological importance of the 'enemy'. In a range of different scenarios, including the release of the Kremlin doctors and the downfall of Beria in 1953, the dethroning of Stalin in 1956, and the attack on Molotov, Malenkov, and Kaganovich in 1961, the Soviet public interpreted unwanted change as evidence of enemy action. On each occasion, they called for rituals of condemnation. Thus, when faced with the spectre of rising crime and social instability, citizens drew once more on the Manichean, eschatological, and antagonistic beliefs nourished by the Bolshevik creed and popularised by Stalinist public culture, to violently condemn those whose deviance seemed to endanger society's progress towards the communist future. In both official rhetoric and public opinion, this reneging on the promises of correction and redemption was never presented as a return to the Stalinist past, but was instead embraced as part of a buoyant and utopian mood that seized the country. If in 1959 Khrushchev's utopian vision embraced all, by 1961 the euphoric claim that communism was nigh became dependent upon banishing 'the other'.

Though initially capturing the public imagination, Khrushchev's promises of the imminent advent of communism brought their own risks, however. While the nation may have been happy to bask in the poetic glory of his vision, he dangerously raised social expectations. Khrushchev's fall from power in late 1964 was to mark the decline of the eschatological vision.⁶ In political rhetoric, 'developed (or mature) socialism' took the place of the utopian and poetic notions of 'building communism' promoted by Khrushchev.⁷ Where the Soviet press of the early 1960s was filled with images of space rockets flying into the future and excited promises of the imminent new world, Brezhnev culture looked backwards. Where in the late Khrushchev era, the suffering of the past was celebrated in order to proclaim the future, Brezhnev culture gloried the past for its own sake. Two varieties of martyr narrative illustrate this shift: in the early 1960s, heroic stories of purge victims were deployed as evidence of the party's valiant advance towards a shining future; by the 1970s, the courage of the ordinary Soviet soldier was celebrated as an end in itself, a sacrifice appreciated as proof of the war generation's bravery, not for any future it might presage. The motif of the 'path to the future' was radically reworked. On Victory Day in 1975, Brezhnev proclaimed: 'The path to victory was difficult. Many were lost on this path, and today we think most of all of those who did not return from the front,

⁶ Throughout this dissertation, my argument has been to suggest the problematic nature of reform in the post-Stalin era. While I see this as a fundamental failure in Khrushchev's rule, I do not attempt to assess the reasons why certain members of the Politburo chose to topple their leader in the autumn of 1964. Any history of elite politics under Khrushchev is still limited by the archival restriction on Politburo material, and the most detailed narrative of this plotting is still William J. Tompson's, 'The Fall of Nikita Khrushchev', *Soviet Studies*, 43 (1991), 1101-1121.

⁷ The political scientist Ron Hill claimed that the Brezhnev administration rapidly dropped much of the political rhetoric of Khrushchev, notably the reference to the 'unfolding building of communism'. Ronald J. Hill, 'State and Ideology', in *Khrushchev and Khrushchevism*, ed. by Martin McCauley, pp. 46-60 (pp. 58-59).

who perished defending the land of their fathers, the homeland of socialism.’⁸ As configured in the official rhetoric of the 1970s, the revolutionary path did not point to the shining future, but stopped with the war. Though victory had been achieved, it became associated with death and loss.

Brooks claims that Brezhnev and his government reasserted the ‘old-style performance with an almost comic banality, decrepitude, and cynicism’.⁹ If in the twilight years of the Soviet Union, this performative culture, though still ubiquitous, was moribund, by the 1990s it became the object of post-modern play, its symbols used ironically in art, literature, journalism, and the burgeoning field of commercial advertising.¹⁰ Yet although the communist state collapsed and the Marxist ideology it proclaimed was discredited, beliefs cultivated during the Soviet project have not necessarily disappeared. The division between the ‘cultured’ and the ‘uncultured’ which came to flourish in the 1950s – *against* state intentions – continued to be important both in the late and post-Soviet eras.¹¹ Public fears about crime found new articulation both under Mikhail Gorbachev and in post-Soviet Russia, as descriptions of violent acts moved from back-page crime reports to fill the newspapers and television screens with graphic images.¹² Responsive to the tropes of degeneration and

⁸ Cited in Brooks, *Thank You*, p. 243.

⁹ Brooks, *Thank You*, p. 241.

¹⁰ Theresa Sabonis-Chafee, ‘Communism as Kitsch: Soviet Symbols in Post-Soviet Society’, in *Consuming Russia*, pp. 362-382.

¹¹ On the rising levels of street crime and the accompanying public outrage under Brezhnev, see Jonathan D. Wallace, ‘Youthquake: Crime, Booze, and Gangs among Soviet Youth, 1970-1978’ (unpublished paper presented at the 34th AAASS National Convention, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, 21-24 November 2002). The camp and prison networks continued to nurture a violent, hostile subculture, and the Gulag eventually produced its most powerful and radical heretics in the form of the Russian mafia. Writing on the mafia, Martin McCauley says that ‘some of the toughest crooks formed loose associations while in prison and maintained these links after they left the gulag’. Martin McCauley, *Bandits, Gangsters, and the Mafia: Russia, The Baltic States and the CIS since 1992* (Harlow: Longman, 2001), p. 72.

¹² Nancy Ries, *Russian Talk: Culture and Conversation during Perestroika* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1997), p. 15. During the Soviet era, the letters of citizens distressed by fears of rising

moral collapse, the Russian public was a willing audience for such tales. The moral values and the importance attached to good manners, correct speech, and well-kempt appearance outlived the state that had fostered them. Although crime is without doubt a very real problem facing post-Soviet Russia, the imagined threat of the uncultured, deviant 'other' is perhaps even greater.

Under Khrushchev, many enemies were released from prison, some rehabilitated, a few transformed into heroes. In Soviet cosmogony, however, the enemy remained, though his image was refashioned. The vitriolic invective elaborated as part of the rituals of the Stalinist performance was now shifted from those once imagined as spies or saboteurs, modified and redirected towards those regarded as threats to social order and respectable conformity. These adaptations and reworkings ensured that Manichean beliefs would survive Stalin's death, the decline of 'performative culture', and perhaps even the end of the Soviet empire.

crime were usually consigned, unpublished, to the archives; in the late 1980s they began to be published regularly in the press. See Ron McKay, *Letters to Gorbachev: Life in Russia through the Postbag of Argumenty i Fakty* (London: Michael Joseph, 1991), and Marina Albee and Christopher Cerf, *Voices of Glasnost: Letters from the Soviet People to Ogonyok Magazine, 1987-1990*, trans. by Hans Fenstermacher (London: Kyle Cathie, 1990).

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