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The Communist Party in Soviet Society

Communist Rank-and-File Activism in Leningrad, 1926-1941

Yiannis Kokosalakis

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Declaration of Own Work

I, Yiannis Kokosalakis, declare that this thesis has been composed solely by myself, that the work presented is my own and that it has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

9 June 2017

Signature

Date

Abstract

This thesis examines a little studied aspect of the Soviet Union's history, namely the activities of the mass membership of the Communist Party during the interwar period, specifically 1926-1941. Based on extensive research in central and regional party archives, it revisits a number of specialised scholarly debates by offering an account of key processes and events of the period, including rapid industrialisation and mass repression, from the viewpoint of rank-and-file communists, the group of people who had chosen to profess active support for the regime without however acquiring positions of political power. The account provided is in the form of an in-depth case study of the party organisation of the Red Putilov – later Kirov – machine-building plant in the city of Leningrad, followed by a shorter study of communist activism in another major Leningrad institution, the Red-Banner Baltic Fleet. It is shown that all major political initiatives of the leadership generated intense political activity at the bottom levels of the party hierarchy, as the thousands of rank-and-file members interpreted and acted on central directives in ways that were consistently in line with their and their colleagues' interests. As these interests were hardly ever in harmony with those of the corresponding level of the administrative state apparatus, the result was a nearly permanent state of tension between the executive and political branches of the Soviet party-state at the grassroots level. The main argument offered is that ultimately, the rank-and-file organisations of the communist party were an extremely important but contradictory element of the Soviet Union's political system, being a reliable constituency of grassroots support for the regime while at the same time placing significant limits on the ability of state organs to actually implement policy. This thesis therefore challenges interpretations of Soviet state-society relations based on binary narratives of repression from above and resistance from below. It identifies instead an element of the Soviet system where the line between society and the state became blurred, and grassroots agency became possible on the basis of a minimum level of active support for the regime. It is further argued that the ability of the mass membership to influence the outcome of leadership initiatives was predicated on the Marxist-Leninist ideological underpinnings of most major policies. In this way, this thesis also contributes to the recent literature on the role of ideology in the Soviet system. The concluding chapter considers the value of the overall findings of this thesis for the comparative study of 20th century socialist states.

Дорожка скатертью!
Мы и кухарку
каждую
выучим
управлять государством!

- Vladimir Maiakovskii, *Vladimir Il'ich Lenin*, 1924

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Table of Contents

List of abbreviations and Russian terms

agitprop: agitation and propaganda

aktiv: activist group

artel': traditional Russian work-crew

CC: Central Committee of the Communist Party

edinonachalie: one-person management principle

gorkom: city committee of the Communist Party

gubkom: region (guberniia) committee of the Communist Party

komsostav: military officers

KP: *Krasnii Putilovets,* Red Putilovite works in Leningrad

kul'tprop: culture and propaganda, department and head of

obkom: region (oblast') committee of the Communist Party

partkom: party committee

partorg: party organiser

partorg TsK: party organiser assigned directly by the CC

partsec: party secretary

politruk: political instructor in the military

politsostav: political officers of the armed forces, commissars and instructors

PUBalt: Political Directorate of the Baltic Fleet

rabkor: workers' correspondent

raikom: district committee of the Communist Party

RGASPI: Russian State Archive of Social and Political History

RGAVMF: Russian State Archive of the Navy

spetseedstvo: specialist-baiting

stroi: structure, analogous to social system

TsGAIPD: Central State Archive of Historical-Political Documents, Saint-Petersburg

VKP (b): All-Union Communist Party (bolsheviks), the Communist Party

voenkom: political commissar in the military

zavkom: factory committee

zapiska: note to speaker, often question

Introduction: The Communist Party in Leninist theory, Soviet practice and historical scholarship

The Soviet Union claimed to be a state founded on a class alliance of workers and peasants engaged in the world-historical task of building a communist society.[1] Workers were explicitly recognised as the senior members of this partnership, leading the way in historical progress by means of their political hegemony over the state, exercised through the monopoly in power of the Communist Party. The party, as the "highest form of [the proletariat's] class organisation", united in its ranks the most advanced elements of the working class in the struggle for the "victory of socialism".[2] It was, in Lenin's expression, the vanguard of the proletariat.[3] The validity of these claims has been disputed in countless ways and it is not the purpose of this thesis to examine the myriad theoretical and empirical objections that can be raised against the self-representation of the USSR. Instead, it will offer an account of the implications of the institutional reflection of these claims for social life in the interwar Soviet Union. It will seek, in short, to answer the question: what did the vanguard party actually do?

One of the most influential social historians of the Soviet Union described party activism as a paradox, pointing out that the many thousands of communist rank-and-filers were representatives of political authority but their activities brought them to conflict with functionaries of the state everywhere.[4] This dual nature of the grassroots party membership as the promoter of state policy and supervisor of its implementation

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[1] The first article of the 1936 Constitution of the USSR stated: "The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics is a socialist state of workers and peasants". A similar idea was expressed by the lengthier introduction to the 1924 Constitution which declared that the formation of the USSR had divided the world into socialist and capitalist camps. Iu. S. Kukushkin and O. I. Chistiakov, *Ocherk Istorii Sovetskoi Konstitutsii* (Moscow: Politizdat, 1987), pp. 264, 285.

[2] Thus it was stated in the preamble to the 1934 Rules *(Ustav)* of the All Union Communist Party (bolsheviks). All subsequent references to the *Ustav* shall be given in the form *Ustav (date): (part).(article).* These will refer to the text as it appears in the documentary collection *Kommunisticheskaia Partiia Sovetskogo Soiuza v rezoliutsiakh i resheniakh s'ezdov, konferentsii i Plenumov TsK, 1898-1988*, vols. 1-16 (Moscow, 1983-1990). Hereafter the terms party, communist party and the acronym VKP (b) will be used interchangeably.

[3] V. I. Lenin, "Tezisi ko II-mu Kongressu Kommunisticheskogo Internatsionala", in V. I. Lenin, *Polnoe Sobranie Sochinenii*, 5th edition, vol. 41 (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Politicheskoi Literaturi, 1974): 160-212, p. 166.

[4] Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism: Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times: Soviet Russia in the 1930s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 36.

is the main theme of the chapters that follow, where it will be argued that instead of a paradox communist activism is best viewed as a central feature of interwar Soviet state-society relations. Rank-and-file activism was inseparable from the policy implementation process, with the party leadership and government unleashing successive waves of political mobilisation to generate support for their policy initiatives.[5] Reliant as it was on the input of non-professional activists, this mode of governance gave the latter significant opportunities to pursue their own interests, thus also giving them a stake in the system. Before however expanding further on the content of this thesis, a review of the relevant historiography should help to clarify its motivation; why study the communist rank-and-file?

Historiographical sketch: Soviet state-society relations before and after the archival revolution[6]

Emerging at the outset of the Cold War, the field of Sovietology became rapidly dominated by the conceptual framework of totalitarianism. Purportedly applicable to both the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany, this theoretical model postulated a political system of absolute control whereby the state ruled over a society of atomised individuals, entirely in thrall to its power. Totalitarian states were defined by the

[5] The concept of political mobilisation will be discussed below. For an early use in the Soviet context, see Peter Kenez, *The Birth of the Propaganda State: Soviet Methods of Mass Mobilization, 1917-1929* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

[6] The scholarly study of the Soviet Union has a long history that in many ways reflects that of its subject country and its relations with the world. What follows is only a brief sketch of the field's post-war and post-Soviet evolution aiming to provide a framework for the arguments developed in the chapters below. It is therefore by no means complete or exhaustive. There are a number of highly informative review essays and volumes covering recent and older developments and at least one original monograph on the field's history and one edited collection on the work of one of its prominent representatives. Stephen Kotkin, "1991 and the Russian Revolution: Sources, Conceptual Categories, Analytical Frameworks," *The Journal of Modern History* 70, no. 2 (1998): 384–425; John L. H. Keep and Alter L. Litvin, *Stalinism: Russian and Western Views at the Turn of the Millenium* (London: Routledge, 2004); Sheila Fitzpatrick, "The Soviet Union in the Twenty-First Century," *Journal of European Studies* 37, no. 1 (2007): 51–71; Catriona Kelly, "What Was Soviet Studies and What Came Next?," *The Journal of Modern History* 85, no. 1 (2013): 109–49; David C. Engerman, *Know Your Enemy: The Rise and Fall of America's Soviet Experts* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); Golfo Alexopoulos, Julie Hessler, and Kiril Tomoff, eds., *Writing the Stalin Era: Sheila Fitzpatrick and Soviet Historiography* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Lenart Samuelson, "Interpretations of Stalinism: Historiographical Patterns since the 1930s and the Role of the 'Archival Revolution' in the 1990s", in Markku Kangaspuro and Vessa Oittinen (eds.), *Discussing Stalinism: problems and approaches* (Aleksanteri Institute: Helsinki, 2015). See also the doctoral thesis of Ariane Galy, prepared at this university. Ariane Galy, "Creating the Stalinist Other: Anglo-American Historiography of Stalin and Stalinism, 1925-2013" (University of Edinburgh, 2014).

presence of a number of specific traits, including single party rule, a guiding ideology and a system of terror.[7] Although a product of 1950s political science, the totalitarian paradigm had a lasting impact on historiography as its main premises were implicitly adopted by an influential tradition of historians who have approached various events and aspects of the Soviet interwar years with reference to the intentions, ideological concerns and personalities of the Soviet political leadership, especially Stalin.[8] With the significant exception of Merle Fainsod's *Smolensk Under Soviet Rule*, scholars working within the totalitarian paradigm did not draw their empirical material from archival collections, relying instead on published sources and the accounts of Soviet emigrants to support their arguments.[9] This left their interpretations open to the challenge raised by a younger generation of more empirically inclined researchers, who suggested that developments in Soviet history were best explained with reference to existing cleavages present in Soviet society, rather than from theoretically derived formal models of interpretation such as totalitarianism.[10] Albeit by no means united

[7] The classic formulation of the concept is to be found in Carl J. Friedrich and Zbigniew K. Brzezinski, Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1956). Raymond A. Bauer, Alex Inkeles, and Clyde Kluckhohn, *How the Soviet System Works: Cultural, Psychological, and Social Themes* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1956) is a more nuanced approach, specific to the Soviet Union, which draws on material from the Harvard Interview Project with post-war Soviet emigrants. See also Aryeh Unger, *The Totalitarian Party: Party and People in Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001[1974]); Abbott Gleason, *Totalitarianism: The Inner History of the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995) examines the history of the concept throughout the 20th century (see ch. 7 for its impact on American Sovietology). For an earlier conceptual examination of totalitarianism, see Les K. Adler and Thomas G. Peterson, "Red Fascism: The Merger of Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia in the American Image of Totalitarianism", *American Historical Review* 75, no. 4 (1970): 1046-1064.

[8] Indicatively: Robert Conquest, *The Great Terror: Stalin's Purge of the Thirties* (London: The Macmillan Company, 1968). Leonard Schapiro, *The Communist Party of the Soviet Union*, (London: Routledge, 1970); Adam Ulam, *Stalin: The Man and his Era* (London: IB Tauris, 2007[1973]); Robert C. Tucker, "The Dictator and Totalitarianism", *World Politics* 17, no. 4 (1965): 555-583; idem, *Stalin in Power: The Revolution from Above*, 1928-1941. (New York: W W Norton & Co Inc, 1990) Martin Malia, *The Soviet Tragedy: A History of Socialism in Russia*, 1917-1991 (New York: Free Press, 1995). The militant anticommunism of the Cold War is most readily reflected in the works of Richard Pipes. For a selection, see Richard Pipes, *Russia Observed: Collected Essays on Russian and Soviet History* (Boulder CO: Westview Press, 1989).

[9] Merle Fainsod, *Smolensk Under Soviet Rule* (London: Unwin Hyman, Inc., 1989[1958]). Fainsod's study of the Smolensk region applied the totalitarian model to material drawn from the Smolensk Communist Party Archive. This archive was captured by German forces in the early phases of their advance into the Soviet Union and subsequently by the US army which transported it to the USA after the war. For years it was the only archival collection available to Western non-communist researchers, yet it was inexplicably not put into any use by scholars until the late 1980s, when its material was employed by J. Arch Getty, *Origins of the Great Purges: the Soviet Communist Party Reconsidered, 1933-1938* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

[10] To be sure, a number of – mostly British-based – empirically-minded historians who had been active throughout the heyday of totalitarianism had produced work that was quite at odds with its

either in their theoretical assumptions or their conclusive arguments, the scholars of what came to be known as the revisionist school did share a commitment to social-historical approaches and a willingness to expand the spectrum of relevant historical actors beyond the higher echelons of the Communist Party to include the broad mass of Soviet society.[11] Revisionist historiography focused on the broader historical processes that had formed the Soviet Union and its state institutions, asking questions about the roles played therein by the different classes or strata of people that constituted Soviet society.[12] The revisionist turn had a lasting impact on the field,

conceptual framework and value system. No pre-archival work has marshalled more sources than E. H. Carr's fourteen-volume *A History of Soviet Russia*, vols. 1-14 (London: Macmillan, 1950-1973). R. W. Davies, who co-authored the last five volumes of Carr's *History*, also during that period produced pioneering work on the Soviet economy, as did of course Alec Nove and Eugene Zaleski. R. W. Davies, *The Soviet Collective Farm, 1929-1930* (London: Macmillan, 1980); Alec Nove, *Was Stalin Really Necessary? Some Problems of Soviet Economic Policy* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011[1964]); idem, *An Economic History of the USSR* (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1972); Eugene Zaleski, *Stalinist Planning For Economic Growth* (Durham: University of North Carolina Press, 1980). Jerry Hough was an exception amongst American-based social scientists in highlighting administrative problems and institutional weaknesses in the Soviet system as evidence of state control being far from total. Jerry Hough, *The Soviet Prefects: The Local Party Organs in Industrial Decision Making* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1969). See also the works of the Marxist political writer Isaac Deutscher. Isaac Deutscher and Tamara Deutscher (ed.) *Marxism, Wars and Revolutions: essays from four decades* (London: Tamara Deutscher and Verso, 1984). The work of these scholars had in many ways foreshadowed the emergence of revisionism.

[11] Stephen Cohen, *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution: a political biography, 1888-1938* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980[1973]); idem, *Rethinking the Soviet Experience: Politics and History since 1917* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985); Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Education and Social Mobility in the Soviet Union, 1921-1932* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1979); idem, "Stalin and the Making of a New Elite, 1928-1939," *Slavic Review* 38, no. 3 (1979): 377-402; Moshe Lewin, *The Making of the Soviet System: Essays in the Social History of Interwar Russia.* (New York: Pantheon, 1985); Donald A. Filtzer, *Soviet Workers and Stalinist Industrialization: The Formation of Modern Soviet Production Relations, 1928-1941* (London: Pluto, 1986); Lewis H. Fpeplbaum, *Stakhanovism and the Politics of Productivity in the USSR, 1935-1941* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Robert W. Thurston, "Fear and Belief in the USSR's 'Great Terror': Response to Arrest, 1935-1939," *Slavic Review* 45, no. 2 (1986): 213–34; Lynne Viola, *The Best Sons of the Fatherland: Workers in the Vanguard of Soviet Collectivization* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); Gábor Tamás Rittersporn, *Stalinist Simplifications and Soviet Complications: Social Tensions and Political Conflicts in the USSR, 1933-1953* (Reading: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1991). See also J. Arch Getty, *Origins.* For a historiographical account of the revisionist movement by one of its most illustrious participants, see Sheila Fitzpatrick, "Revisionism in Soviet History", *History and Theory* 46, no. 4 (2007): 77-91.

[12] The revival of interest in the historical origins of the Soviet system was both informed and fed into a parallel development of revisionism in the historiography of the Russian Revolution. Alexander Rabinowitch, *The Bolsheviks Come to Power: The Revolution of 1917 in Petrograd* (Norton, 1976); Smith, S. A., *Red Petrograd: Revolution in the Factories, 1917-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Diane P. Koenker et al., *Party, State, and Society in the Russian Civil War: Explorations in Social History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989).

setting its agenda for several years while also drawing acrimonious attacks from some of the more militant scholars belonging to the totalitarian school.[13]

However, as the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the decline of the world communist movement appeared to make Cold War categories redundant, the heat generated by these debates gradually died down. The opening of the previously inaccessible archival collections of the former Soviet states revolutionised the field by massively expanding its primary source base. The vast volume of material that became available enabled scholars to produce a large number of detailed empirical studies, while, perhaps understandably bringing about a decline in more theoretically oriented work. In Russia, the demise of state-sponsored Marxism-Leninism after the end of Communist rule led to a flowering of almost in principle non-theoretical work, with scholars assembling and publishing large volumes of archival documents with little if any commentary.[14] By one estimate, the number of archival document source volumes published in Russia since the opening of the archives exceeds 1,200.[15] Nevertheless, the familiar issues of political violence and repression, including the personal role of Stalin in the events, received special attention in Russian scholarship of the 1990s, with totalitarianism finding a new home in some quarters of the new Russian academe.[16] This tendency was eventually matched by a renewal of interest in what had been outside of Russia the traditionally "revisionist" subjects of social and economic history.[17]

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[13] Responding to J. Arch Getty's review of his book *The Harvest of Sorrow*, Robert Conquest wrote in a letter to the London Review of Books that "Getty belongs to a gaggle of 'revisionists' who have achieved, like David Irving in another sphere, a certain notoriety." London Review of Books, Vol. 9 No. 9 (1987), online at: http://www.lrb.co.uk/v09/n09/letters#letter1, accessed on 20 May 2013.

[14] For a bibliography of documentary collections published in Russia, see Peter A. Blitstein, "Selected Bibliography of Recent Published Document Collections on Soviet History," *Cahiers Du Monde Russe* 40, no. 40/1–2 (1999): 307–326.

[15] Samuelson, Discussing Stalinism, p. 25

[16] Oleg Khlevniuk, *1937-ii: Stalin, NKVD i sovetskoe obshchestvo* (Moscow: Respublika, 1992); Aleksandr V. Bakunin, *Sovetskii totalitarizm: genesis, evoliutsia i krushenie* (Ekaterinburg: Institut istorii i arkehologii UrO RAN, 1993); Irina Pavlova, *Stalinizm: Mekhanizm stanovleniia vlasti* (Novosibirsk: Sibirskii khronograf, 1993); Ivan S. Kuznetsov, *Sovetskii Totalitarizm: Ocherk Psikhoistorii* (Novosibirsk: Izdatel'stvo NGU, 1995).

[17] The work of Elena Osokina deserves special mention here. Elena Osokina, *Ierarkhiia Potrebleniia: o zhizhni liudei v usloviiakh stalinskogo snabzheniia* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo MGOU, 1993), idem, *Za Fasadom "stalinskogo izobiliia": Raspredelenie i rinok v snabzhenii naseleniia v godi industrializatsii, 1927-1941* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2008); idem, *Zoloto dlia industrializatsii: "TORGSIN"* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2009). Indicatively, see also Elena Iarskaia-Smirnova and Pavel Romanov (eds.), *Sotsial'naia politika SSSR 1920-1930-kh godov: ideologiia i povsednevsnost'*

Amongst students of Soviet history outside of Russia, the archival revolution similarly ushered into an explosion of highly empirical work which allowed both sides of the totalitarian/revisionist debate to claim victory by relying on different aspects of the newly available source material. Thus, revisionists were able to produce firm figures on the scale of repression from the end of the Civil War to Stalin's death, revising even conservative estimates of the number of victims downwards by a significant margin.[18] Archival research was also able to refute one of the fundamental tenets of totalitarian theory, namely the notion of an atomised society at the mercy of the state.[19] Interest groups, pockets of resistance and enthusiastic supporters of socialist construction, long speculated on by revisionists, emerged as key actors in post-1991 archival scholarship.[20] Surveys of popular opinion demonstrated that state control over the media did not prevent people from holding critical views about the party leadership and its performance in running the country.[21] The newly available evidence also

(Moscow: Variant, 2007); Sergei Esikov, *Rossiiskaia Dervenia v godi NEPa: k voprosu ob al'ternativakh stalinskoi kollektivizatsii* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2010); Lyubov' Suvorova, *Nepovskaia Mnogoukladnaya Ekonomika: Mezhdu Gosudarstvom i Rinkom* (Moscow: AIRO, 2013).

[18] J. Arch Getty, Gábor T. Rittersporn, and Viktor 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, no. 4 (1993): 1017–1049, p. 1022 for previous estimates; Stephen G. Wheatcroft, "Victims of Stalinism and the Soviet Secret Police: The Comparability and Reliability of the Archival Data. Not the Last Word," *Europe-Asia Studies* 51, no. 2 (1999): 315–345. Robert Conquest once again responded with typical, albeit slightly moderated invective, shifting from his comparison of revisionist scholarship to the Nazi-apologia of David Irving to a slightly less offensive similitude with scholars of the Dead Sea Scrolls. "Communications", *The American Historical Review* 99, no. 5 (1994): 1821-1829, p. 1821.

[19] Historians of Nazi Germany were at the same time also moving away from the totalitarian model. Michael Geyer and Sheila Fitzpatrick, "Introduction: After Totalitarianism Stalinism and Nazism Compared," in idem (eds.), *Beyond Totalitarianism: Stalinism and Nazism Compared* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008): 1-40.

[20] James Hughes, *Stalinism in a Russian Province: A Study of Collectivization and Dekulakization in Siberia* (Palgrave Macmillan, 1996); Sheila Fitzpatrick, "How the Mice Buried the Cat: Scenes from the Great Purges of 1937 in the Russian Provinces," *Russian Review* 52, no. 3 (July 1993): 299–320; idem, "Signals from Below: Soviet Letters of Denunciation of the 1930s," *The Journal of Modern History* 68, no. 4 (1996): 831–66; Michael David-Fox, Peter Holquist, and Marshall Poe (eds.), *The Resistance Debate in Russian and Soviet History* (Bloomington: Slavica Publications, 2003); Matthew E. Lenoe, *Closer to the Masses: Stalinist Culture, Social Revolution, and Soviet Newspapers* (Harvard University Press, 2004); Wendy Z. Goldman, *Terror and Democracy in the Age of Stalin: The Social Dynamics of Repression* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); idem, *Inventing the Enemy: Denunciation and Terror in Stalin's Russia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Tracy McDonald, "The Process of Collectivisation Violence," *Europe-Asia Studies* 65, no. 9 (2013): 1827–1847.

[21] Sarah Davies, *Popular Opinion in Stalin's Russia: Terror, Propaganda and Dissent, 1934-1941* (Cambridge University Press, 1997); D'Ann R. Penner, "Ports of Access into the Mental and Social Worlds of Don Villagers in the 1920s and 1930s," *Cahiers Du Monde Russe. Russie - Empire Russe - Union Soviétique et États Indépendants* 40, no. 40/1-2 (1999): 171–98; Lesley A. Rimmel, "Svodki and Popular Opinion in Stalinist Leningrad," *Cahiers Du Monde Russe:* 40, no. 1 (1999): 217–34;

demonstrated that state repression unfolded alongside every-day life, without ever becoming the dominant concern of most ordinary people.[22] In general, the archival revelations were favourable to the revisionists, transforming their main insights into part of the field's conventional wisdom and inspiring a new generation of historians to pursue projects in Soviet social and cultural history.[23]

However, it became clear that at the same time that some of the assumptions that had guided the work of scholars in the totalitarian school had in fact been correct, their flawed conceptual framework notwithstanding. Thus, Stalin's personal power was shown to have been a major force shaping political outcomes in the USSR, including the initiation and reining in of repression drives.[24] The notion of repression as a process primarily affecting the Soviet elite was also shown to have been incorrect, with the majority of the victims of state violence having been swept up in mass operations by the NKVD targeting people that were far from the levers of power.[25]

Olga Velikanova, *Popular Perceptions of Soviet Politics in the 1920s: Disenchantment of the Dreamers* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); C. J. Storella and A. K. Sokolov, eds., *The Voice of the People: Letters from the Soviet Village, 1918-1932* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013).

[22] Robert Thurston, *Life and Terror in Stalin's Russia, 1934-1941* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998); Karl Schlögel, *Moscow, 1937* (Cambridge: Polity, 2012). As Lenart Samuelson points out, this was already indicated by the results of the Harvard Interview Project of Soviet "displaced persons". Most of the respondents did not identify any year as particularly marked by repression and preferred to structure their recollections around events related to their every-day lives. Samuelson, *Discussing Stalinism*, p. 22, n. 35.

[23] This has resulted in a succession of edited collections that in themselves serve as excellent markers in the post-archival evolution of the field. Sheila Fitzpatrick, ed., *Stalinism: New Directions*, (London; New York: Routledge, 1999); Stephen White, ed., *New Directions in Soviet History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Sarah Davies and James Harris, eds., *Stalin: A New History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); James Harris, ed., *The Anatomy of Terror: Political Violence under Stalin* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). Moshe Lewin was also able to round off his life's work with a highly readable synthetic account of the span of Soviet history. Moshe Lewin, *The Soviet Century* (London: Verso, 2005).

[24] Barry McLoughlin and Kevin McDermott, *Stalin's Terror: High Politics and Mass Repression in the Soviet Union* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004); Vladimir Khaustov & Lennart Samuelson, *Stalin, NKVD i repressii, 1936-1938* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2008). For a review of the debate on Stalin's power, see James Harris, "Was Stalin a Weak Dictator?," *The Journal of Modern History* 75, no. 2 (2003): 375–86.

[25] Aleksandr Vatlin, *Terror raionnogo masshtaba: Massovie operatsii NKVD v Kuntsevskom raione Moskovskoi oblasti* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2004); Paul Hagenloh, *Stalin's Police: Public Order and Mass Repression in the USSR, 1926-1941* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009); David R. Shearer, *Policing Stalin's Socialism: Repression and Social Order in the Soviet Union, 1924-1953* (Yale University Press, 2009). Hagenloh argued that the blurring of institutional boundaries between the regular police *(militsiia)* and the political branch (OGPU) after their merger into the NKVD led to regular criminal activity being increasingly perceived as anti-Soviet activity, thus justifying the use "surveillance, categorization and extrajudicial repression" in order to control it. *Stalin's Police,* p. 87. See also Stephen G. Wheatcroft, "Agency and Terror: Evdokimov and Mass Killing in Stalin's Great Terror," *Australian Journal of Politics & History* 53, no. 1 (2007): 20–43.

The opening of the archives has also allowed scholars to access the individual collections of party leaders, spurring a renewed interest in biographical research. This has yielded a significant number of illuminative sketches of the lives of Soviet leaders, offering insight into the evolution of both their interpersonal relationships and crucially, their intellectual outlook.[26] Attendant upon this historiographical trend has been a renewed interest in the ideological motivations of party policy, which has been greatly facilitated by the publication of earlier inaccessible transcripts of politburo meetings, as well as the correspondence of the party leadership.[27] The picture that has emerged from this work is one of a party leadership for whom the ideas of Marxism-Leninism matter, and where factional struggles and personal clashes were rooted in programmatic differences. Some researchers have described this lack of contrast between the public professions and private beliefs of the leadership as being amongst the most significant revelations to have come out of the archives.[28] A corollary of this has been a growing appreciation of the role of ideology and the institutions producing it in shaping the development of Soviet history.[29]

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[26] Boris Ilizarov, *Tainaia Zhizn' Stalina: Po materialam ego biblioteki i arkhiva* (Moscow: Veche, 2003); Miklos Kun, *Stalin: An Unknown Portrait* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2000); Kees Boterbloem, *Life and Times of Andrei Zhdanov, 1896-1948* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2004); Alla Kirilinna, *Neizvestnii Kirov: Mifi i real'nost'* (Saint Petersburg: Izdatel'stkii Dom Neva, 2002; J. Arch Getty and Oleg V. Naumov, *Yezhov; The Rise of Stalin's "Iron Fist"* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008); Geoffrey Roberts, *Molotov: Stalin's Cold Warrior* (Washington, D.C: Potomac Books, 2011). Stephen Kotkin, *Stalin: Volume I: Paradoxes of Power, 1878-1928* (London: Penguin Books, 2015); Sheila Fitzpatrick, *On Stalin's Team: The Years of Living Dangerously in Soviet Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015). For a discussion of the organisation of the personal *fondi* of party leaders see Lidija Kosheleva and Larisa Rogovaja, "Les fonds personnels des dirigeants soviétiques," *Cahiers du monde russe* 40, no. 40/1-2 (1999): 91–100.

[27] A.V. Kvashonkin, O. V. Khlevniuk, L. P. Kosheleva and L. A Rogovaia, *Bol'shevistkoe rukovodstvo. Perepiska, 1912-1927. Sbornik dokumentov* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 1996); idem, *Sovetskoe rukovodstvo. Perepiska, 1928-1941* (Moscow: ROSSPEn, 1999); Lars T. Lih et al., eds., *Stalin's Letters to Molotov: 1925-1936* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996); R. W. Davies et al., eds., *The Stalin-Kaganovich Correspondence, 1931–36*, trans. Steven Shabad (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003). See also G. N. Sevost'ianov, A. N. Sakharov, Ia. F. Pogonii et al., eds., *"Sovershenno Sekretno": Lubianka - Stalinu O Polozhenii v Strane (1922-1934 Gg.)*, 10 vols. (Moscow: IRI RAN, 2001); Oleg V. Khlevniuk, Liudmila P. Kosheleva, and Larisa A. Rogovaia, eds., *Stenogrammi zasedanii Politbiuro TsK RKP(b) - VKP(b), 1923-1938 gg.*, 3 vols. (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2007).

[28] *Kotkin and Zizek Discuss Stalin*, http://seansrussiablog.org/2015/04/01/kotkin-and-zizek-discuss-stalin/, accessed 20 April, 2015; James Harris, "What Stalin's Great Terror can tell us about Russia today", *The Conversation*, online at < https://theconversation.com/what-stalins-great-terror-can-tell-us-about-russia-today-56842>, accessed 23 August 2016.

[29] Erik van Ree, "Stalin as Writer and Thinker," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 3, no. 4 (2002): 699–714; idem, *The Political Thought of Joseph Stalin: A Study in Twentieth Century Revolutionary Patriotism*, (Routledge, 2002); David Priestland, "Marx and the Kremlin: Writing on Marxism-Leninism and Soviet Politics after the Fall of Communism," *Journal of Political*

This appreciation of the importance of personalities and ideology in Soviet historical development alongside the recognition that social reality remained irreducible to the conceptual schemes of party leaders and their Western watchers represents the closest thing to a scholarly consensus in the post-archival field. Modest as it is, this cross-fertilisation of perspectives has given rise to an influential departure in the literature that has sought to frame the Soviet project of socialist construction within the broader framework of modernisation. The modernity thesis, for lack of a better term, traced the origins of Marxism-Leninism in the intellectual tradition of the Enlightenment as an attempt to use reason and technological progress in order to improve human life, both materially and culturally.[30] Scholars working within that framework often included a strong comparative dimension in their investigations, drawing attention to the commonalities of modern state practices in terms of propaganda, surveillance, welfare and violence.[31] The specificity of the Soviet Union lay in the particular historical legacy of the Russian Empire, combined with the explicitly non-capitalist path of development prescribed by Marxism-Leninism. A quest to overcome the backwardness of old Russia by revolutionary means and at any cost was the essential element of what a prominent contributor to the modernisation literature termed "Stalinism as a civilization".[32]

Its impact on the field hard to overstate, the modernity thesis has generated highly innovative responses by both proponents and critics. Among the former, Igal

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Ideologies 5, no. 3 (2000): 377–90; idem, "Stalin as Bolshevik Romantic: Ideology and Mobilisation, 1917-1939," in Sarah Davies and James Harris (eds.), *Stalin: A New History* (Cambridge University Press, 2005), 181–201; David Priestland, *Stalinism and the Politics of Mobilization* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); Kyung Deok Roh, "Stalin's Think Tank: The Varga Institute and the Making of the Stalinist Idea of World Economy and Politics, 1927-1953" (University of Chicago, 2010); David Brandenberger, *Propaganda State in Crisis: Soviet Ideology, Indoctrination, and Terror under Stalin, 1927-1941* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012). See also James Ryan, *Lenin's Terror: The Ideological Origins of Early Soviet State Violence* (London ; New York: Routledge, 2012).

[30] Peter Holquist, "'Information Is the Alpha and Omega of Our Work': Bolshevik Surveillance in Its Pan-European Context," *The Journal of Modern History* 69, no. 3 (1997): 415–50; David L. Hoffmann, *Stalinist Values: The Cultural Norms of Soviet Modernity, 1917-1941* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003); idem, *Cultivating the Masses: Modern State Practices and Soviet Socialism, 1914-1939*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011); Michael David-Fox, *Crossing Borders: Modernity, Ideology, and Culture in Russia and the Soviet Union* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2015).

[31] Amir Weiner, ed., *Landscaping the Human Garden: Twentieth-Century Population Management in a Comparative Framework* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2003).

[32] Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1997).

Halfin and Jochen Hellbeck in particular have sought to go beyond methodological acceptance of the Bolsheviks' intention to create a new Soviet person, into actually investigating the extent of the psychological transformation experienced by the Soviet subject during socialist construction.[33] By contrast, other scholars took issue with the concept of modernity as a descriptor of Soviet realities, arguing that whatever the intellectual lineage of Marxism-Leninism, the party's transformative project was thwarted by the weight of Russian history. On their views, the persistence or re-emergence of informal power networks, authoritarian rule and ethnic particularism among other things, betrayed the nature of the USSR as a neo-traditional or neo-patrimonial state.[34]

After this brief sketch of the past six decades of scholarship, the question posed at the start can be reformulated thus: what can a study of the communist rank-and-file add to our understanding of the USSR as an ideologically motivated state seeking, with mixed results, to modernise a recalcitrant and hardly helpless society? The premise of this thesis is that the explosion of empirical work after the opening of the archives, welcome and fruitful as it has been, has resulted into the obfuscation of a fundamentally conceptual problem that lay at the heart of the original totalitarian-revisionist debate. This was the issue of the relationship between state and society. Totalitarianists argued that the power of the state over society was for analytical purposes boundless and consequently framed their scholarship around the intentions of state actors. By contrast, revisionists sought to demonstrate that social realities constrained the power of the state and even forced policy changes, even if ultimately

[33] 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, no. 3 (January 1, 1996): 456–63; Anna Krylova, "The Tenacious Liberal Subject in Soviet Studies," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 1, no. 1 (2000): 119–46; Jochen Hellbeck, *Revolution on My Mind: Writing a Diary Under Stalin* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009); Igal Halfin, *Stalinist Confessions: Messianism and Terror at the Leningrad Communist University* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009); Igal Halfin, *Red Autobiographies: Initiating the Bolshevik Self* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2011).

[34] Yuri Slezkine, "The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism," *Slavic Review* 53, no. 2 (1994): 414–52; Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923–1939*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001); Yoram Gorlizki, "Ordinary Stalinism: The Council of Ministers and the Soviet Neopatrimonial State, 1946–1953," *The Journal of Modern History* 74, no. 4 (2002): 699–736; J. Arch Getty, *Practicing Stalinism: Bolsheviks, Boyars, and the Persistence of Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013).

policy initiatives came from above. The debate was to a large extent one about primacy.[35]

The problem with this was pointed out by one of the leading revisionists at the high point of the debate, prior to the archival revolution. Commenting on the controversy, Getty pointed out that in the Soviet Union, as in revolutionary societies more generally, there were no obvious boundaries between state and society. "An internally divided, improvised, inexperienced, and constantly renovating officialdom shaded almost imperceptibly into a dynamic, mobile, dramatically changing society".[36] Getty warned that given this, research in Soviet history would have to proceed for years at a very slow pace dictated by the sources, seeking to shed light on the many facets of the historical context of Soviet social and political developments rather than work out a theory of the Stalinist state, desirable as that might be in the long run.[37]

Getty's prediction has been borne out by events, with post-1991 research having been more remarkable for the immense progress made in empirical knowledge about Soviet history rather than any major innovations with respect to its conceptualisation. The problem with this is that the failure to produce a specific theory of state-society relations has tended to reproduce their analytical distinction and implicitly, the search for first causes, the very problems Getty had sought to remedy by recommending careful empirical research. Greater knowledge of the views and habits of leaders cannot account for either the reception or outcome of party policies and can therefore treat ideology only as their motivator, rather than as a dimension of their concrete implementation. This complicates the task of taking ideology seriously as a component part of Soviet historical development.[38] Similarly the expanding volume of social-historical work on everyday life, as well as resistance to and collaboration with the authorities, has tended to treat the ideological dimension of policy as something external to its process of implementation. Marxism-Leninism is seen as a discourse

[35] Sheila Fitzpatrick, "New Perspectives on Stalinism," *The Russian Review* 45, no. 4 (1986): 357–373.
[36] J. Arch Getty, "State, Society, and Superstition," *The Russian Review* 46, no. 4 (1987): 391–96, p. 394.
[37] Ibid., p. 395.
[38] Taking Marxism-Leninism seriously when formulating research questions is a core argument of David Priestland's work on the ideological underpinnings of policy. Priestland, *Stalinism and the politics of mobilisation*, introduction.

emanating from above, which was then mastered by people in order to deal with the effects of policy on their lives, in a process described as "speaking Bolshevik" in Stephen Kotkin's *Magnetic Mountain*.[39] The way in which Marxism-Leninism provided the institutional structures through which people encountered government policy – that is the ways in which people *acted* Bolshevik – is left unexamined and the extent to which such involvement was a constituent part of policy conception, implementation and outcome is thus obscured.

We seem to be left with much the same picture as before the archival revolution, whereby the state tried to shape society according to its revolutionary vision and society responded in ways that yielded unexpected outcomes, modern or neo-traditional. The picture is now much more detailed, perhaps high-definition to risk stretching the analogy, but its contours remain much the same. None of this is meant as a criticism of any of the works cited here. The argument is instead that we are missing a way to put together all of the insight gained by access to the archives into a clearer account of state-society relations than was the case before.

It is not the purpose of this thesis to propose anything as ambitious as a new theory of state-society relations in Soviet history. Instead, it will show that studying a particular feature of the institutional structure of the USSR points the way to a better understanding of the nature of this relationship. That feature is the rank-and-file of the communist party, the mass membership whose party status did not translate into executive positions in the state apparatus. The dual status of party rank-and-filers as *ipso facto* supporters and functionaries of the Soviet system on the one hand and as regular factory, office or other workers on the other renders the state-society distinction null in their case. The party grassroots were both functionally and by design the locus in the Soviet structure *(stroi)* where state and society overlapped. This thesis will examine the implications of this overlap for our understanding of the history of the Soviet interwar period. Against Kotkin, it will argue that Bolshevism was not a language but a political practice engendering a specific kind of state-society relations that relied heavily on political activism. It will show that the ideological underpinnings of the Soviet system had a concrete institutional reflection in the communist party,

[39] Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain*, p. 198.

with profound effects on the way the Soviet state was governed. Ultimately, it will demonstrate that the party's mass membership was a reliable, loyal source of grassroots support for the regime, while at the same time severely complicating and occasionally derailing the policy implementation process.[40]

In terms of the historiographical sketch offered here, the argument developed in this thesis relies on the insights of both major schools discussed above but ultimately arrives at a different position. Marxist-Leninist ideology figures prominently in the chapters that follow, both as causal factor and, more importantly, as the boundary of possibility and desirability with respect to policy for all actors involved. On the view offered here, there is little reason to doubt that all major policy initiatives had their origins at the top and were motivated by ideology. What is more the main object of this study, the party organisation, was itself a product of Marxist-Leninist ideology, rather than a deep structure of Russian history.[41] Nevertheless, the producers and ultimate arbiters of Marxism-Leninism, the party leadership, will make rare and short appearances.

Instead, the rank-and-file communists who are the protagonists of this account, being in their majority workers and low-ranking administrators, are more similar to the social-historical subjects familiar from the work of revisionists. In similar manner, this thesis will also highlight the extent to which realities on the ground could diverge from what was foreseen or prescribed by central directives. It will be shown that more often than not, these immediate concerns ranked much higher in the priorities of the party grassroots than the ambitious goals of socialist construction, even though the latter rarely ceased to function as the terms in which the former were framed. This too is familiar revisionist territory.

Such similarities notwithstanding, it is not the aim of this thesis to stake out a half-way position between revisionism and totalitarianism which, as argued earlier, is in any case the nearest thing to a consensus view in the field. The contribution to the

[40] Hereafter, the term "regime" will be used to indicate both the broad institutional and ideological contours of the Soviet system signified by the Russian term *stroi* and the incumbent government-politburo. Any subsequent mention of support for the regime will thus indicate general agreement with the general way things were done in the Soviet Union, including public ownership, planning and single party rule, as well as support for the political leadership.
[41] Except of course in the trivial sense that Bolshevism was a product of Russian social conditions.

literature made by this study consists in that it demonstrates that the search for primacy in the state-society relationship that animated earlier debates can be fruitfully replaced by an analytical focus on the function of the Soviet institution designed to negotiate this relationship, that is the Communist Party. This is because the primacy question emerged as problem of policy for the Bolsheviks well before it became a problem of research for historians. The Leninist concept of the vanguard party was an attempt to provide a solution to the problem of how the state apparatus would remain under the control of a specific part of society – the proletariat – while at the same time pursuing a consistent political project, the historical transition to communism. In the chapters that follow, it will be shown that rank-and-file communists were as much Marxist-Leninist advocates and executors of government policy, that is parts of the state, as they were workers and functionaries concerned with their immediate environment, that is members of society. Neither dissidents nor state goons, but both militantly communist and fiercely protective of their workplace interests, these people took an active part in all the cataclysmic transformations of the Soviet interwar period, from industrialisation to mass repression. Their activity was a fundamental element of the Soviet political system, one that renders the contours of the imperceptible shading of the state into society described by Getty much more discernible to the historian. For the state, the party rank-and-file was a section of society that could be relied upon to promote its policies. For the large majority of people who had little influence over state power, it was a part of the Soviet system that could make sure these policies were implemented in a way consistent with their needs. This thesis will examine how communist activists mediate state-society relations in the Soviet interwar period. The remainder of this introduction will outline how.

Methodological Leninism: Studying the communist rank-and-file

Due in large part to the persistence of the state-society binary, the communist party as a distinct political institution with specific traits deriving from its vanguard mission has received very little attention in post-1991 scholarship. Because the USSR was a single party state, research on the Soviet political process has tended to treat the party as a layer of the state apparatus, with one researcher having explicitly argued that it

was not a political organisation in any meaningful sense of the term.[42] However, although administrative tasks did make up a significant share of the party's workload, there are strong reasons to reject the view of the party as an all-Union staffing agency. Not only has research on ideology demonstrated its close connection to policy formulation, but the only recent budgetary study of VKP (b) has shown that "the party's most significant expenditure item was for ideology".[43] The same study also showed that the party was financially independent of the state, relying increasingly on membership dues and publishing revenues, and concluded that it was an autonomous actor within the Soviet system.[44]

If the party can be shown to have been both institutionally distinct from the state and primarily concerned about ideology-related activities, it follows that a study of the party must take into account the tasks it set for itself on the basis of its ideological principles. For the purposes of this thesis, it is therefore necessary to set out the implications of the vanguard concept for the way the party functioned.

Some cultural histories of the Soviet interwar period have described the vanguard status of the party as being predicated on a claim of possession of esoteric knowledge in the form of Marxism-Leninism.[45] This is incorrect because although the precepts of Marxism-Leninism did acquire a dogma-like status of unquestionability, there was nothing esoteric about them. Whatever its epistemic value, Marxism-Leninism had the cultural status of a scientific discipline and was therefore in principle accessible to any interested and literate person. Members of the non-party public were encouraged to acquaint themselves with Marxism-Leninism, as with science in general, as part of their general education through books, periodicals and activities

[42] Pavlova, *Stalinizm,* introduction. This understanding of the party as an essentially administrative organ was strongly related to the view that Stalin's ultimate victory in the power struggles of the NEP-era was founded on his control of staffing appointments. For a recent refutation of this view, see James Harris, *The Great Fear: Stalin's Terror of the 1930s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 58-75. Harris argues that Stalin's tactical advantage did not lay in control of appointment, but in gaining the loyalty of regional party secretaries by providing them with security of tenure. p. 59. This argument is convincing, but it still turns on the administrative functions of the party apparatus.

[43] Eugenia Belova and Valery Lazarev, *Funding Loyalty: The Economics of the Communist Party* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), pp. 17-18.

[44] Ibid., p. 8

[45] Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism,* p. 16. Kotkin goes further, describing communist party rule as akin to a theocracy. *Magnetic Mountain,* pp. 293-295.

organised by party members. Acquiring and disseminating knowledge of Marxism-Leninism as the science of revolution was a core aspect of a communist's vanguard mission, but possessing this knowledge was not what vanguard status consisted in.

Being part of the vanguard was instead a matter of commitment. The distinctive feature of Bolshevism lay in the fact that it ascribed crucial ideological importance to certain organisational principles, central amongst which were discipline, centralism and active participation of members in all activities.[46] These were initially conceived as means to defend the party from repression by the tsarist state while also training and socialising increasing numbers of working class militants in the ways of revolutionary activity. When after revolution and civil war the Bolsheviks successfully established their authority over what would become the USSR, the party's main task became the implementation of the dictatorship of the proletariat. This consisted of the twin tasks of preventing capitalist restoration by any means necessary and involving the greatest part possible of the country's working population in the implementation of the party's programme of socialist transformation and cultural enlightenment.[47] Institutionally, this translated on the one hand into the familiar mirroring of the state by the party apparatus in a supervisory capacity. On the other, it meant that the broad ranks of the membership were expected to actively promote party policy and become involved in the day-to-day running of their workplace, in order to ensure that things were being done in the spirit of policy and ideology.

To better ground the discussion that follows in the chapters below, it is worth devoting some space to examining the Bolsheviks' ideas about the place of their party in a post-revolutionary society in more detail. The nature of the transformation of the Bolshevik party from an instrument of revolution to one of government was to a large extent determined by their understanding of the nature of state power in the transition

[46] This is a theme running through all the early works of Lenin on the party, but expressed most clearly in *What is to be Done?* V. I. Lenin, "Chto Delat'?", *PSS,* vol. 6: 1-192, especially pp. 111-154. The question of active participation was amongst the core elements of the organisational differences that led to the schism between Mensheviks and Bolsheviks at the 2nd Congress of the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party in 1903. In his speech, Lenin argued that it would be extremely dangerous to extend party membership rights to people who were not members of a party organisation. "Every member of the party is responsible for the party and the whole of the party is responsible for every member…It is our duty to protect the solidity, consistency and purity of our party". "II S'ezd RSDRP", *PSS,* vol. 7: 260–312, p. 290.
[47] Lenin, "Tezisi", pp. 185-186.

from capitalism to communism.[48] Before the October revolution, Lenin had followed Marx and Engels in regarding the state as an evil of class society that would gradually become unnecessary as more and more people became involved in public administration to run the common affairs of society. To be sure, some sort of coercion would have to exist, but its character would be more akin to the intervention of concerned citizens to prevent a crime, rather than an organised apparatus of repression.

Within months of October, with the Russian economy collapsing under the strain of Civil War, Lenin was forced to signal a retreat from the principles of the commune-state. In the years that followed, the Bolsheviks proceeded to build a monopoly on political power buttressed by extensive use of state violence against their opponents. By the time the Red Army had emerged victorious in the Civil War, some of the party's prominent members were beginning to wonder about the increasingly authoritarian direction the nascent Soviet state was taking, as well as about the effects this was having on the party itself. Although never openly challenging the party's monopoly on power, the Democratic Centralist and Workers' Opposition factional groups argued forcefully that the lack of separation between state and party was threatening to depoliticise the latter by transforming it into a mere appendage of the administrative apparatus. According to the oppositionists, communists should avoid relating to the broader masses by administrative channels, seeking instead to educate them and attract them to the Soviet state-building project by sharing their concerns and seeking to address their needs in practice. Their insistence on separating the party from the state ultimately condemned these groups to defeat and led to their disbandment. Nevertheless, their idea of the communist as a sort of people's tribune was not necessarily at odds with the emerging consensus of the party as the force that would guide society in a process of maturation which could some time make it possible to build a commune-state. In the following years, the party rank-and-file would be called on to play the role of tribune as well as leader.

Despite the ban on factions in 1921, organisational matters and their political implications remained a staple of official discussions throughout the NEP years, with

[48] The following lines draw heavily on David Priestland, "Soviet Democracy, 1917—91," *European History Quarterly* 32, no. 1 (2002): 111–30.

the nature of the party's mission continuing to act as a flashpoint in the debates taking place within the context of the factional struggle that followed the death of Lenin. Increasingly pessimistic about the prospect of building a withering away commune-state and having resolved to substitute this goal with party control over the state, the Bolshevik leadership began to take initiatives to adapt the party to its new tasks. Although later denounced by the Trotsky-led Left Opposition as an attempt to swamp the party with new members, the mass recruitment campaign initiated by the 13th Party Conference in early 1924 is best seen in the light of the party's needs for a significantly expanded membership to perform its new role.[49]

An enlarged party membership however was not itself sufficient to guarantee the creation of the proletarian vanguard expected to guide Soviet society in its journey to communism. Fresh recruits would first have to be transformed into true Bolsheviks. Given the central political importance attached to organisational principles in Leninist theory, it is hardly surprising that this process of assimilation would start with a party-wide discussion on a new CC statement on the place of primary party organisations, or cells, in the emerging Soviet political system. The draft statement was published in Pravda in October 1924 and was prefaced by a short article penned by Lazar Kaganovich, stating that establishing the mode work of party organisations on the correct basis was amongst the most fundamental tasks faced by the party.[50] The text of the draft statement is indicative of the role that central leadership envisioned for the cells. The CC statement argued that the Russian Communist Party was unique amongst all political organisations in that it had made the party cell the foundation of its organisational structure. According to the text, the cell was the fundamental element of the 'party organism' through which the party 'connected to the masses', making the 'strengthening and improvement of its work' a task of the highest importance.[51]

The CC intended the activity of primary organisations to be directed towards three main areas of work. These were: "work amongst their members", to raise their

[49] For a discussion of the campaign, subsequently known as the Lenin levy, as well as the surrounding political and historiographical arguments, see John B. Hatch, "The 'Lenin Levy' and the Social Origins of Stalinism: Workers and the Communist Party in Moscow, 1921-1928," *Slavic Review* 48, no. 4 (1989): 558–77..
[50] *Pravda*, 7 October 1924.
[51] Ibid.

level of political awareness and involve them actively in party affairs; "work amongst the masses", in order to increase the party's influence amongst them and gain a clearer understanding of their needs and demands; participation in the task of building a socialist state and running the economy.[52] In subsequent years, the party leadership would periodically revisit these themes following significant events like the completion of the 1st FYP.[53] Nevertheless, the understanding of the function of the primary party organisation in the Soviet system reflected in the 1924 draft statement would not substantially change. Thus, for the entirety of the period covered in this thesis, the vanguard's task would consist in becoming actively involved in economic administration and promoting party policy amongst non-members while also making sure the party became aware of their concerns. To do so, its members would have to make sure to maintain their standards of cultural sophistication and political astuteness at an appropriate level.

There is much in this that is similar to what has been called the politics of mobilisation.[54] What differentiates the Leninist concept of the vanguard from agents of political mobilisation more broadly is that activity of the party was intended to achieve more than a mere enhancement the state's instrumental capacity of policy implementation. The vanguard party was conceived of as the means by which the communist content of policy would be safeguarded, ensuring the successful transition of the USSR to communism at some future point. For this, the active involvement of the rank-and-file in the everyday running of industry, agriculture, the military and everything else was as important as the leadership's control of government and the formulation of policy. This was despite the fact that the existence of a purely technical dimension of administration was recognised by Lenin and the acquisition of technical

[52] Ibid.
[53] For example, in the run up to the 17th Party Congress in 1934, *Pravda* published a lengthy report presented to the politburo by Lazar Kaganovich on organisational questions in the new conditions created following the completion of the 1st FYP. *Pravda*, 31 December 1933.
[54] An extensive sociological discussion of the concept of mobilisation is Birgitta Nedelmann, "Individuals and Parties—changes in Processes of Political Mobilization," *European Sociological Review* 3, no. 3 (1987): 181–202. For examples of the use of the concept in historical research, see Stefano Bartolini, *The Political Mobilization of the European Left, 1860-1980: The Class Cleavage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Gregory M. Luebbert, *Liberalism, Fascism, or Social Democracy: Social Classes and the Political Origins of Regimes in Interwar Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991); Susan Whitney, *Mobilizing Youth: Communists and Catholics in Interwar France* (Chapel Hill: Duke University Press, 2009).

competence by the state apparatus would regularly emerge as a desideratum in policy pronouncements throughout the interwar period.[55] Getting the state to do what it was told to do was not enough for the Bolsheviks. It had to do things the right way and in the right direction. It was in this manner that the process of policy implementation acquired an ideological dimension.

This is crucial for the account offered in this thesis, because the vanguard principle transformed the party rank-and-file into an ineluctable aspect of the system of government in the USSR. For as long as the party leadership remained committed to Marxism-Leninism – and the emerging consensus is that this was the case – it was compelled by its worldview to insist that its policies were implemented by means of activism as well as administration. As will be shown in the following chapters, this was so even when it became clear that activism was getting in the way of implementation. Significantly, because ideology was more ambiguous than policy, the involvement of the party rank-and-file with the implementation process almost invariably took the form of party activists taking advantage of their supervisory status to address their myriad concerns as workers and non-elite members of Soviet society more broadly. This, it will be argued, should not be viewed as a cynical attempt to manipulate public discourse. Instead, the ability of the rank-and-filers to influence the implementation process was implied in the vanguard party concept. These people were doing what they were expected to do, even if particular outcomes left much to be desired from the perspective of the leadership. The paradox in this, if any, is that the party grassroots moved politically closer to the leadership the more they disorganised policy implementation by getting involved in it.

The points outlined above will be illustrated by means of a study of party activism in Leningrad in the period 1926-1941. This periodisation has been selected in order to cover the development of rank-and-file activism as an element of the Soviet system throughout the interwar period, while excluding the power-struggles that followed immediately after the death of Lenin in order to focus on activism as means

[55] V. I. Lenin, "Luchshe men'she, da luchshe", *PSS*, vol. 45: 389-406. David Priestland has explored the contradiction between the imperatives of technical competence and activist involvement in Marxist-Leninist theory in detail, arguing that its origins lay in the uneasy balance between romantic and scientific elements in Marxist thought. Priestland, *Stalinism and the Politics of Mobilization*, pp. 21-34.

of governance rather than factional struggle. Thus, the final defeat of Zinoviev's Leningrad-based opposition and subsequent reintegration of the northern capital into the political mainstream in early 1926 is taken as the chronological starting point of this study. The year of the German invasion of the USSR has been selected as the end point of the account offered here, on the assumption that the commencement of the Great Patriotic War transformed the relationship between party, state and society to a significant extent and that as a consequence, the study of party activism in war conditions would constitute a different research project.

Leningrad has been selected as the geographical focus for this study because of its interesting political history, its solid industrial economic base and the quality of its party records. The purpose of this thesis is not to suggest that Leningrad party life was representative of that of the rest of the country. Instead, the focus on Leningrad is intended to frame this study within the conditions best suited to an examination of the practical implications of the Leninist concept of the vanguard party. These include high party density in a highly urbanised environment and also, a series of important political convulsions such as the fall of Zinoviev, the assassination of Sergei Kirov and the front-line status of the city in the run up to the Second World War, all of which required and elicited different responses from the "most advanced elements" of Leningrad's working class.

The content of this thesis is organised in four thematic chapters, each covering a different aspect of party activity over the whole of the period examined. The first three chapters constitute a micro-historical study of the primary party organisation of Leningrad's Red Putilovite *(Krasnii Putilovets, KP)*, later Kirov, machine building plant. It is based on the stenographic records of the organisation's general assemblies – later conferences – and the protocols (minutes) of various other activities organised by the factory's communists. The first chapter examines the role played by the organisation in the factory's industrial relations from the late NEP period, through the period of rapid industrialisation and beyond. The second chapter examines the involvement of the organisation in the succession of political campaigns of the interwar period, including the early party purges and the *Yezhovshchina*. Finally, the third chapter considers the involvement of rank-and-filers in the party's mission to create a new socialist culture by means of cultural enlightenment. This material is

drawn from the KP/Kirov PPO archival collection held at the Central State Archive of Historical-Political Documents of Saint-Petersburg (TsGAIPD).

The value of this source material lies in that it affords us a unique close-up view into the workings of the party organisation. Stenographic records of conferences preserve a large volume of rich and often entertaining detail, including heckling from the floor and the occasional joke, providing rare texture to the world of factory political activism. The often handwritten protocols of lower-level gatherings similarly offer rare insight into the way that even the most mundane aspects of the production process could become entangled with ideological affairs in the highly politicised world of Soviet industry.

Equally important is the information that can be gleaned from the more formalised features of these records, like the notes on attendance, participation and of course the meetings' agendas. Thus, the fact that conference attendance rarely fell below the 1,000 mark gives us an indication of both the sheer scale of these events and the size of the audience reached by the discussions held therein. Similarly, that even small groups of communists in the shop cells could and did hold structured meetings on often seemingly obscure party affairs is testament to the influence of Bolshevik political culture down to the very bottom of the apparatus. Furthermore, protocol and stenographic records often include a large volume of question notes *(zapiski)* that reached speakers from the floor. Usually anonymous, *zapiski* contained in their majority topical questions, but could often be simple statements of opinion or (perceived) fact. Their value as sources lies in that their anonymity gave their authors the opportunity to express views that were beyond the boundaries of political acceptability.[56] Deploying them alongside the transcripts of speeches made at party gatherings makes it possible to compare what it was possible to say in the context of a party meeting to what was of actual concern to the rank-and-filers. It is amongst the most interesting and surprising incidental findings of this thesis that, barring few

[56] For a more detailed discussion of *zapiski* as sources, see Gleb J. Albert, "'Comrade Speaker!' Zapiski as Means of Political Communication and Source for Popular Moods in the 1920s," *The NEP Era: Soviet Russia 1921-1928*, no. 8 (2015): 43–54.

exceptions, the contents of the *zapiski* differed little from what contributors from the floor openly said at the meetings.

The KP/Kirov party archive is thus a rich collection of primary sources offering valuable insight into a hitherto understudied element of the Soviet political system. Nevertheless, the limitations of this source base should also be borne in mind. First, the organisation's archive tells the story of party activists as it was recorded by party members for the benefit of the party itself. It can only therefore offer limited insight into the views of KP/Kirov workers who, whether due to conviction or lack of interest, chose to keep their distance from the party. Thus, although the following chapters will refer to the stated opinions of several different people, it should be borne in mind that all of them were publicly committed supporters of the Soviet state. In no way then is this thesis a study of general public opinion, and no claims made here about the views and activities of communist party members should be taken to apply beyond its ranks. Crucially, this caveat also applies to the range of possible views held by KP/Kirov workers about their communist workmates and their proclaimed vanguard role.

Second, the wealth and completeness of the organisation's archive may give an impression of the PPO as a self-contained political entity. This would however be a misleading picture. Hierarchical centralism was amongst the core organisational principles of Bolshevism and neither KP/Kirov nor any other PPO were autonomous entities. Instead, they were attached to a clearly defined hierarchy of party organs ranging from the district committee *(raikom)* to the leading Central Committee of VKP (b). The control of these higher organs over the PPO was exercised both in the form of periodic reports required of their secretaries and by means of direct interventions that rendered the intentions of the centre clearer to the grassroots. The prominence of KP/Kirov meant that higher party officials often took an interest in its PPO and in the following chapters we will often come across visits from district, regional and central officials.

A fuller examination of the relationship of the PPO with the upper echelons of the party hierarchy would require further research into district and regional archival holdings than was possible during the course of this doctoral project. Similarly, examining the relationship between communist and non-party workers would require

use of a range of other social-historical sources to address a different set of research questions. Nevertheless, the purpose of this thesis is not to offer an account of PPO-centre, or PPO-public relations but rather, to examine the internal workings of the PPO and demonstrate the extent to which it remained an active institution even when it was not mobilised for particular political missions by higher authorities. For this task, the KP/Kirov party archive is perfectly adequate.

In order however to partially remedy the narrow view afforded by the PPO archive, I have relied on published party sources to highlight the central policy background against which the organisation's activity took place. Where necessary, references are also made to resolutions of the regional party leadership.[57] To further clarify the connexion of KP/Kirov PPO case study to broader historiographical debates, each thematic chapter is preceded by an introduction discussing the main debates in the relevant literature and framing the argument developed in this thesis within them.

The KP/Kirov case study takes its methodological cue from Lenin's insistence on the centrality of the organisational form of the party for its vanguard mission. As the primary party organisation was the "foundation of the party", a study of party activism is best conducted by means of a detailed investigation of such an organisation.[58] A micro-historical study of a specific organisation provides the opportunity to examine the activity of the party rank-and-file in a sustained manner through time, in order to appreciate both the continuities and disruptions in the reception of policy initiatives by the mass membership. Again, the selection criterion has not been typicality. The giant KP/Kirov plant was far from typical, having an illustrious revolutionary history and being at the cutting edge of Soviet industrial technology, pioneering the country's tractor and later tank production processes. The factory's engineers visited and hosted their American counterparts, while famous

[57] These are based on the copies of minutes of the party's Leningrad Regional Committee (*Gubkom,* later *Obkom*) plenary sessions and bureau meetings, held at the Central Committee Information Department collection of the Russian State Archive of Social and Political History (RGASPI).
[58] *Ustav 1936,* VIII: 48. The *Ustav* of 1926 referred to the same level of organisation as "cell" *(iacheika). Ustav 1926,* X: 57. For the sake of clarity, I have used the term "primary party organisation" and abbreviation PPO throughout this thesis. Because of its size, the KP/Kirov PPO included sublevels of organisation known as "shop-cells" *(tsekhiatseiki),* operating in the enterprise's various workshops and departments. Whenever the term "cells" appears, it refers to the factory's shops.

foreign communists like Ernst Thälmann and Clara Zetkin addressed the enterprise's workers on several occasions, as did esteemed Soviet dignitaries like Maksim Gorkii.[59] Its immense organisation was one of seventeen out of 1,814 in the city of Leningrad to be made up of over 1,000 members.[60] Party saturation at KP/Kirov was also particularly high, floating around the 14% mark throughout the whole of the period studied while the city average never exceeded a brief highpoint of 8% in 1933 and was usually just over 5%.[61]

The KP/Kirov Primary Party Organisation was thus a special party group in an exceptional enterprise. The purpose of this case study is therefore not to produce a readily generalizable picture of Soviet interwar party activism but rather, to provide a detailed account of this aspect of the Soviet political system in what were near ideal conditions for its operation. If the party were to lead the working class to the "victory of socialism", there were few places better to do that than a factory where more than one in ten workers were communists. It should go without saying that this caveat applies even more strongly with regard to the vast swathes of Soviet territory that were neither urban nor industrial. Although rapidly declining, the rural population of the Soviet countryside still outnumbered city-dwellers by a significant margin for the duration of the period studied in this thesis.[62] Amongst these junior partners of the worker-peasant class alliance, the party maintained a much weaker presence reflected in a considerably less developed network of PPOs in rural areas.[63]

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[59] For a discussion of the fame and special status of KP, see the introduction in Clayton Black, "Manufacturing communists: 'Krasnyi Putilovets' and the Politics of Soviet Industrialization, 1923-1932" (Indiana University, 1996).

[60] *Leningradskaia Organizatsia KPSS v Tsifrakh, 1917-1973* (Leningrad: Lenizdat, 1974), p. 135. Roughly two thirds, or 1,254 organisations had between three and forty nine members. There were also 258 PPOs numbering between 50 and 100 members and 285 between 101 and 1,000.

[61] KP/Kirov party saturation is given on the basis of statistical reports available at TsGAIPD, f. 1012, op. 1, d. 480; op. 2, d. 1012; d. 1478, ll. 7, 14. The city-wide figure has been derived from the total membership numbers given in *Leningradskaia Organizatsia*, pp. 69-70 and the population estimates provided in I. I. Eliseeva and E. I. Gribovaia (eds.), *Sankt-Peterburg, 1703-2003: Iubileiinii statisticheskii sbornik* (Saint-Petersburg: Sudostroenie, 2003), pp. 16-17.

[62] According to the 1939 population census, out of a total population of 170,557,093 urban dwellers accounted for only 56,534,386 or less than half. *Chislennost' Naseleneiia SSSR Na 17 Ianvaria 1939 Goda. Po Raionam, Raionnim Tsentram, Gorodam, Rabochim Poselkam i Krupnim Sel'skim Naselennim Punktam.* (Moscow: Gosplanizdat, 1941), p. 6.

[63] In 1941, there were 5,708 active PPOs in the entire Leningrad region, of which 1,967 operated in industrial, communications, transport and construction enterprises. At the same time, kolkhoz and sovkhoz PPOs amounted to 142 and 123 respectively. *Leningradskaia Organizatsiia*, p. 130.

The matter is further complicated if we consider the significant variation in social organisation that existed within the distinct parts of the Soviet population grouped together as 'rural'. One should be conscious about transposing the insights gained from the account offered in this thesis onto social contexts where the class categories of Marxism-Leninism bore little relevance to everyday life.[64] Nevertheless, maintaining awareness of the favourable environment in which the KP/Kirov PPO operated makes it possible to appreciate the ways in which its activities may have been similar or different to that of other organisations in both process and outcomes.[65]

In the fourth chapter of this thesis, a first attempt is made to provide some context to the KP/Kirov case study by leaving the factory floor to examine party activity in the considerably different environment of the Baltic Fleet. It does not focus on any single PPO, but reviews party activism throughout the Fleet's ships and land forces on the basis of party meeting minutes and activity reports available at the collection of the Fleet's Political Directorate in the Russian State Archive of the Navy (RGAVMF).

Finally, the concluding chapter offers some remarks on the implications of this study of the communist rank-and-file for the broader question of the nature of state-society relations in the Soviet Union, as well as 20th century communism in power more broadly.

[64] The Bolsheviks themselves also had to confront this problem in designing and implementing policy in rural areas. Their shifting, contradictory policy towards the Cossacks during the Civil War is amongst the most striking examples. Holquist, *Making War,* pp. 166–205. Similarly, attempts to introduce collectivisation to small hunter-gatherer societies were derailed by the irrelevance to local conditions of theoretical categories derived from Russian agriculture. Yuri Slezkine, *Arctic Mirrors: Russia and the Small Peoples of the North* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996) pp. 187–264.
[65] That the value of micro-historical research is not limited to typical or representative case-studies is a point that has been made by practitioners of micro-history in various areas. See indicatively Carlo Ginzburg, John Tedeschi, and Anne C. Tedeschi, "Microhistory: Two or Three Things That I Know about It," *Critical Inquiry* 20, no. 1 (1993): 10–35; Marion W. Gray, "Microhistory as Universal History," *Central European History* 34, no. 3 (2001): 419–431; Richard D. Brown, "Microhistory and the Post-Modern Challenge," *Journal of the Early Republic* 23, no. 1 (2003): 1–20; Sigurdur Gylfi Magnússon, "'The Singularization of History': Social History and Microhistory within the Postmodern State of Knowledge," *Journal of Social History* 36, no. 3 (2003): 701–735.

1. Bolshevik bargaining: the party rank-and-file and the formation of Soviet industrial relations

1.1 Introduction

In examining the activity of the rank-and-file membership of the Communist Party within the context of the transformation of Soviet labour relations during the interwar years, it is perhaps best to start with a discussion of the different historiographical approaches to this transformation and their corollary conceptualisations of the specific character of the relations of production it created. With respect to process, this account follows Kenneth Straus's categorisation of the literature into accounts of negative, positive and parallel integration of the working class into the nexus of production relations developed prior to WWII. This distinction is made on the basis of whether a particular account considers the Soviet working class to have pursued its interests in opposition to, in line with or with relative autonomy from the objectives of the regime.[1] Regarding outcomes, I will simply divide the literature into accounts of exploitative and social contractual labour relations. Studies focusing on how the regime managed to get what it wanted out of workers, as well as how workers failed to prevent it from doing so, are understood to belong to the first category. Conversely, the second category will comprise studies of what the regime offered workers and the reasons it did so, as well as how workers themselves managed to claim and increase what was on offer.[2]

This discussion will begin by considering accounts of negative integration into a system of exploitative labour relations. The oldest and longest surviving approach to

[1] Kenneth M. Straus, *Factory and Community in Stalin's Russia: The Making of an Industrial Working Class* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 1998), p. 7 and *passim.* The term 'social integration' is borrowed by Straus from the classical sociology of Emile Durkheim. My use of it here is restricted to the classification of the historiography stated above.

[2] This is primarily a question of emphasis, as scholars arguing that the regime formed some kind of social contract with industrial workers do not necessarily suggest that this was not exploitative or disadvantageous for the latter. Straus for example repeatedly describes worker-regime relations as an 'ersatz social contract'. Ibid, *passim.* Nevertheless, there is considerable overlap between accounts of negative social integration and exploitative labour relations on the one hand and accounts of positive or parallel social integration and social-contractual labour relations on the other. Any important exceptions and qualifications to this categorisation will be noted in the course of this discussion.

the subject, this may be called the standard or classical view on Soviet labour relations, having survived several conceptual developments and generation shifts in the field. Theories and accounts of Soviet socialism as a new exploitative mode of production were first offered by the Bolsheviks' socialist opponents, primarily former Mensheviks working in exile in the West. The most scholarly accomplished of these was Solomon Schwarz's *Labor in the Soviet Union*, which went on to become a foundational work in Soviet labour studies.[3] The main argument put forward in this work was that the abandonment of the NEP and the establishment of a command economy effectively abolished the labour market and replaced it by a system of direct labour allocation by the state. This was purportedly achieved by a succession of increasingly harsher labour laws meant to tie workers to their enterprises while also reducing their control over the labour process, culminating in the law of 20 June 1940 which formally abolished the right to quit one's job.[4] The outcome of this process was the complete subordination of the working-class to the dictates of the regime, as workers gradually lost all ability to oppose state directives and collective forms of resistance gave way to individual survival tactics.

Schwarz's account of a mighty state towering over an atomised and powerless workforce fit in very well with the then prevalent totalitarian school of Soviet studies and remained definitive until totalitarianism came under heavy fire by the revisionist school.[5] Nevertheless, the broad contours of Schwarz's argument have been defended by some labour historians of later generations who have formulated accounts of negative integration on the basis of the latest available evidence. Writing in the heyday of revisionism, Donald Filtzer attempted to provide some empirical grounding to this story of working-class defeat by means of a close comparative reading of the Soviet and émigré socialist press. Soviet industrialisation, Filtzer argued, was a gamble undertaken by the bureaucratic elite that had formed during the NEP years. Towards the 1920s, the argument goes, the contradictions of the Soviet system presented the elite with a seemingly insoluble dilemma: it would either have to restore capitalism

[3] Solomon M. Schwarz, *Labor in the Soviet Union* (New York: Praeger, 1951).
[4] Ibid, pp. 90-98.
[5] As examples of labour histories inspired by totalitarianism, see Emily Clark Brown, *Soviet Trade Unions and Labor Relations.* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966); Robert Conquest, *Industrial Workers in the USSR.* (New York: Praeger, 1967).

and therefore be subsumed by international capital, or attempt to modernise the economy by means of democratic, participatory planning thus ceding much of its influence and privileges to the country's proletariat. As neither of these options were particularly attractive, the elite decided to square the circle by embarking on a course of centralised bureaucratic planning.[6] Workers initially resisted the attacks on their living standards inherent in the industrialisation drive, but their resolve was eventually broken between increasing political repression and economic hardship. The result was a social system built on the exploitation by a managerial elite of a quiescent working class with little sense of its collective interests but also indifferent to the fate of the system itself.[7] Since the opening of the archives, this line of argument has been further developed by scholars who have produced specific case studies of resistance and repression in industry during the 1930s.[8] Still others extended the scope of investigation to the NEP years when the formation of the aforementioned bureaucratic elite took place.[9]

Despite the valuable empirical contributions made by scholars working within the negative integration framework, their general narrative of the development of Soviet labour relations in the interwar period seems rather forced and is not particularly convincing. Their copious documentation of instances of workers' resistance of regime initiatives cannot in itself support the view that labour relations in the Soviet Union were inherently exploitative or antagonistic, especially given the fact that labour unrest was, in entirely different terms, documented by both the contemporary Soviet press

[6] Filtzer, *Soviet Workers*, pp. 32-33.
[7] Ibid, p. 75. Filtzer later extended this analysis to the whole of Soviet history, arguing that because of the labour relations established in the interwar years, 'workers became a central […] cause of the long-term trend toward chronic inefficiency and economic decline which plagued the Soviet system'. Idem, "Labor Discipline, the Use of Work Time, and the Decline of the Soviet System, 1928–1991," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 50 (1996): 9–28, p. 9.
[8] Indicatively, Jeffrey J. Rossman, "The Teikovo Cotton Workers' Strike of April 1932: Class, Gender and Identity Politics in Stalin's Russia," *Russian Review* 56, no. 1 (1997): 44-69. Idem, *Worker Resistance under Stalin: Class and Revolution on the Shop Floor* (Harvard University Press, 2009).
[9] Kevin Murphy, *Revolution and Counterrevolution: Class Struggle in a Moscow Metal Factory* (Chicago IL: Haymarket Books, 2007); Donald Filtzer et al., eds., *A Dream Deferred: New Studies in Russian and Soviet Labour History*, (New York: Peter Lang AG, 2008); Simon Pirani, "The Party Elite, the Industrial Managers and the Cells: Early Stages in the Formation of the Soviet Ruling Class in Moscow, 1922–23," *Revolutionary Russia* 19, no. 2 (2006): 197–228; Andrew Pospielovsky, "Strikes during the NEP," *Revolutionary Russia* 10, no. 1 (1997): 1–34; Svetlana Ulianova, "Formirovanie 'Treugol'nika' Na Sovetskikh Predpriiatiiakh v Pervoi Polovine 1920-kh gg.," *Noveishaia Istoria Rossii*, no. 2 (2013): 169–84.

and subsequent historiography.[10] What is more, by focusing on instances of conflict, the negative integration framework failed to account for and occasionally even consider the many ways in which workers joined and supported regime initiatives.[11]

Partly in response to these weaknesses, a different view of Soviet labour relations began to be developed by some researchers who focused their inquiries on the extent of social support or tolerance for the regime. These scholars observed that Soviet workers could and did make use of officially sanctioned and informal channels to voice their grievances, attack their bosses and exert control over the labour process.[12] These included participating in production conferences, requesting the intervention of trade unions, bringing cases to court, writing to the press or major political figures and informal haggling over rates with foremen and managers, all within the context of an extreme labour shortage which made factory directors very keen to satisfy workers' demands in order to hold on to their workforce.[13] According to this view, despite the extreme demands it made on workers during the industrialisation drive the regime still provided them with a range of options for pursuing their interests, all of which were a

[10] Press reports were central primary sources for some of the pre-archival studies discussed above, especially Filtzer, *Soviet Workers*. The standard Soviet view of strikes, slow-downs etc. was that they were the product of the low class-consciousness of some 'backward' elements amongst workers, primarily former peasants but also entrenched labour aristocracies who sought to defend their privileges vis-à-vis younger workers and women during the early stages of industrialisation. Zh. P. Depretto, "Ofitsial'nie Kontseptsii Rabochego Klassa v SSSR (1920-1930-e gg.)," *Sotsial'naia Istoria. Ezhegodnik*, 2004., 72–90.

[11] Partly because of this, the framework failed to account for the decline of labour unrest towards the end of the 1920s. The assumption that it was the result of increasing repression has been recently challenged from within the negative integration camp. Kevin Murphy, 'Strikes During the Early Soviet Period, 1922 to 1932: From Working-Class Militancy to Working-Class Passivity?' in Donald Filtzer et al., eds., *A Dream Deferred: New Studies in Russian and Soviet Labour History* (Bern; New York: Peter Lang AG, Internationaler Verlag der Wissenschaften, 2008).

[12] William Chase, *Workers, Society and the Soviet State: Labor and Life in Moscow, 1918-29* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987); Lewis H. Siegelbaum, *Stakhanovism*; Hiroaki Kuromiya, *Stalin's Industrial Revolution: Politics and Workers, 1928-1931*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); idem, "The Crisis of Proletarian Identity in the Soviet Factory, 1928-1929," *Slavic Review* 44, no. 2 (1985): 280–97; Straus, *Factory*. See also Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain*, chapter 5 and White, ed., *New Directions*, Part III.

[13] Straus's is the lengthiest and perhaps the strongest account of the labour shortage as a factor strengthening the hand of workers in the Soviet economy. He explicitly argues against Schwartz that the labour market was never effectively suppressed and shows that the introduction of harsh labour legislation followed spikes in labour turnover, suggesting that laws were introduced as increasingly desperate attempts to respond to trends in the labour market. Straus, *Factory*, pp. 90-93. Curiously, although Filtzer recognised the importance of the labour shortage as a feature of the Soviet economy, he did not view at a source of strength for Soviet workers. Filtzer, *Soviet Workers*, pp. 52-53, 135.

lot more effective and far less dangerous than direct opposition.[14] Understanding the practical operation of such formal channels and informal practices became thus a far more important task for scholarly research into Soviet interwar labour relations than documenting instances of purportedly resistant activity.[15]

As indicated earlier, scholars working within this social-contractual paradigm had different ideas about what the availability of these opportunities implied about the place of workers in the Soviet system of labour relations. Those who were more interested in the place of the Soviet factory in the totality of Soviet social relations tended to view these channels of influence as a powerful force for positive integration.[16] Those who were more interested in the nature of Soviet labour relations as such tended to provide more nuanced accounts. The common theme in the latter was that the various opportunities to criticise and participate in decision making available to Soviet workers did not so much contribute to them identifying their own interests with regime objectives, as provide them with the means to defend their interests *against* the state.[17] This produced a situation whereby the state's attempts to extract ever more surplus out of labour were continuously thwarted by workers making use of all non-confrontational means at their disposal, often with the collusion of factory managers. The result was a system of labour relations which, although inefficient, provided the regime with a basic level of social support and prevented

[14] Within the context of a rapidly expanding economy, these options included multiple opportunities for promotion, as demonstrated by one of the pioneering works of revisionism. Fitzpatrick, *Education*. I am putting this issue aside here as promotion is strictly speaking a change, rather than an improvement of one's position in production. In other words, the sceptical supporter of the negative integration thesis can object that workers promoted to managerial posts were no longer members of the working class but of the bureaucratic elite or ruling class. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that Filtzer recognised that there was a 'paradox' in the existence of an exploitative ruling class recruiting its members almost entirely from those it exploited. Filtzer, *Soviet Workers*, p. 8. A full treatment of this question would require an extensive engagement with sociological theories of class and exploitation, something best avoided here.

[15] A more detailed overview of the historiography on Soviet labour is provided in Lewis H. Siegelbaum, "The Late Romance of the Soviet Worker in Western Historiography," *International Review of Social History* 51, no. 3 (2006): 463–481.

[16] For example, Kotkin, in his examination of the work process as part of 'Stalinist civilization', concluded that the new social identity created in the Soviet factory allowed the state to 'appropriate much of the basis of social solidarity and render opposition impossible.' Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain*, p. 236. Soviet historiography on the subject naturally took a similarly positive integrationist view. See for instance V.M. Kulagina, *Leningradskie Kommunisty v Bor'be Za Osvoenie Novoi Tekhniki* (Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo Leningradskogo Universiteta, 1962).

[17] Straus, *Factory*, pp. 137-38, 245. Robert Thurston, 'Reassessing the History of Soviet Workers: Opportunities to Criticize and Participate in Decision-Making 1935-1941', in White, ed., *New Directions*, pp. 179-180.

economic collapse by moderating in practice some of the more fantastical government directives.[18]

Although providing a useful corrective to accounts of negative integration, the two versions of the social contract view outlined above came with their own weaknesses. On one hand, accounts of positive integration often overstretched their arguments, smoothing over the many conflicts in the Soviet workplace and drawing an unrealistic picture of Soviet society where the state successfully managed to incorporate and neutralise all or at least most social tensions. On the other, the more convincing arguments of parallel integration could not provide an adequate account of how the complex process of negotiation they posited between workers, management and state agencies was kept in motion.[19]

The rest of this chapter will provide an account of the activities of the Primary Party Organisation of the KP/Kirov factory between 1926 and 1941 with a view to addressing some of the weaknesses of the social contract narrative, as well as conceptually unifying/integrating its two variants. It will show that the Party organisation provided the political space within which the many conflicts of the Soviet factory were played out and contained. Alongside Straus, it argues that Soviet workers did indeed operate in relative autonomy from the state. However, according to the account that follows, this autonomy was predicated on active support for the state and the taking on of specific tasks in its service, via one's membership of the communist party. This was not therefore the autonomy that is gained by carving out a niche, but that inherent in the delegation of certain powers from an authority to its subordinates.

[18] Straus, *Factory*, p. 155 and *passim*.
[19] Straus is an exception, in that he credits Red Directors as the driving force behind the development of Soviet industrial relations. Straus, *Factory*, ch. 9. Nevertheless, although Straus makes a compelling case for placing Red Directors Stepanov and Likhachev at the centre of developments at the *Serp i Molot* and *ZiS* factories in Moscow, it is not obvious that his analysis should be extended to the whole of Soviet industry. During the fifteen-year period examined in this thesis, the KP/Kirov factory saw no less than five directors. Straus acknowledges that such long tenures were atypical, but does not seem to recognise the problems this creates for his argument. Given such turnover, the emphasis Straus places on the personal skill of directors in bridging the gaps between the conflicting factions of white and blue collar, skilled and unskilled, male and female, hereditary proletarian and peasant new recruits, seems slightly misplaced. If this delicate balance were dependent on the directors' personal influence, we would expect their removal to cause serious disruption. This suggests that whatever stability was achieved in the Soviet factory was more due to the broader institutional arrangement than the personal qualities of individual directors.

The following pages will show that the PPO was the channel through which Soviet workers exercised their loyal autonomy.

1.2 From Regime of Economy to *Spetseedstvo*

By the middle of the 1920s, the NEP had succeeded in partially remedying the economic dislocation brought about by seven years of war and restored the Soviet economy to respectable levels of growth. Nevertheless, Soviet industry continued to be beset by chronic deficiencies that cast doubt on the country's long-term prospects of industrialisation, including shortages of capital and a persistently low productivity of labour.[20] In response to these problems, the April 1926 CC plenum of the Party formulated a new economic initiative known as the Regime of Economy.[21] Unlike previous attempts to save resources by putting pressure on wages, the CC resolution that introduced the Regime of Economy explicitly stated that the current level of workers' earnings was not to be affected.[22] Instead of this, measures were to be taken to improve labour productivity, including strengthening labour discipline and rationalisation of the working day. At the same time, the resolution pointed at other aspects of the production process that could benefit from greater frugality, like administrative expenditures.[23] Feeding into already tense relations between workers and management, the question of where the most economising was to be made and, consequently, who was to bear most of the burden, quickly became a matter of dispute at KP PPO meetings.

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[20] The importance attached to the issue of labour productivity by the Party leadership is reflected in the many speeches of Felix Dzerzhinskii in his capacity as head of the VSNKh. For example, in his conclusive remarks on his report on the state of the metal industry to the XIV Party Conference given on 29 April 1925, Dzerzhinskii stated that output per single worker had to be increased 'whatever it may take' ('*vo chto by to ni stalo'*). Felix Edmundovich Dzerzhinski, *Izbrannie Proizvedenia v 2-Kh Tomakh*, vol. 2, 2 vols. (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Politicheskoi Literaturi, 1967), p. 135.

[21] *KPSS v resoliutsiiakh*, vol. 4, pp. 8-17.

[22] The August 1924 CC plenum passed a resolution 'On the Policy of Wages' (*O Politike Zarabotnoi Plate)* which sought to address the growing disparity between wages and labour productivity. Ibid, vol. 3, pp. 293-296. Some of the measures proposed were effectively measures of labour intensification, leading to a spike in labour unrest the following year. See on this Svetlana Ul'ianova, "Rabochie v Massovikh Khoziaistvenno-Politicheskikh Kampaniiakh 1920-Kh Gg.," in *Predprinimateli i Rabochie Rossii v Usloviiakh Transformatsii Obshchestva I Gosudarstva v XX Stoletii. Materialy Mezhdunarodnoi Nauchnoi Knferentsii, Posviashchennoi Pamiati Professora Iu. I. Kir'ianova*, ed. A. M. Belov, 2003, 83–93.

[23] Ibid, vol. 4, p. 17.

Workplace tensions dominated the expanded meeting of the organisation's bureau which took place on 9 February 1926.[24] Although the meeting was called to discuss the revival of party discipline after the political crisis[25] of the previous month, the discussion was soon derailed into a comprehensive attack on factory administration from members of the *zavkom* (trade-union committee) and communists from various shops, as well as an exchange of accusations between the latter two groups over who was to blame the most for not containing the labour unrest caused by bad management. *Zavkom* member Kir'yanov spoke of conflicts in several shops and accused managers of withholding pay for stoppages *(prostoi)*. At the same time, he attacked party members for not bringing the problem to the attention of the *zavkom* early enough, which would have prevented things from escalating.[26] Glushkov, a communist from the iron-rolling shop responded that Kir'yanov had in fact been informed a week in advance but chose to do nothing.[27] Zadvinskii, from the steam-boiler shop blamed the factory administration for the problem of truancy also, claiming that workers had not been provided with warm clothes and reiterating the problem of unpaid stoppages.[28] Grachev, the factory director, attempted to provide some cover for his white-collar staff, saying that while there certainly were some who were damaging factory work, it was not fair to say that all the administration was worthless *(negodniaia)*.[29] The meeting ended without reaching any specific conclusions, with the party secretary Ivan Gaza issuing a generic call for greater discipline all-around.[30]

These tensions were aired before a larger audience when, on 22 April, the new Leningrad *gubkom* secretary Sergei Kirov visited the factory to inform the Party collective of the results of the CC plenum that had taken place a few days before.[31] Addressing the meeting of about 1,000 members and sympathisers, Kirov stressed the importance of the Regime of Economy for the development of Soviet industry, arguing

[24] In addition to bureau members, this meeting was attended by communist foremen, organisers of shop and sub-shop level bureaus and communist trade-unionists for a total of 306 attendees. TsGAIPD, f. 1012, op. 1, d. 268, l. 10.
[25] The recently defeated Zinoviev opposition had been particularly strong at KP. This will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter.
[26] Ibid. First names and patronymics are not usually given in minutes and stenographic records.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Ibid.
[29] Ibid. l. 11.
[30] Ibid.
[31] TsGAIPD, f. 1012, op. 1, d. 266, l. 42.

that the lack of hard currency and the inability of the Soviet government to obtain foreign loans meant that the USSR would have to rely primarily on its internal resources for development. Every kopeck had to be seen as 'one's own sweat and blood'.[32] Nevertheless, Kirov's speech was not a one-sided call for belt-tightening. The discipline of the regime of economy was not to be imposed on labour alone, but also on the administrative apparatus. 'Every plan – Kirov stated – goes through twenty revisions before being implemented. The state apparatus must be brought to order'.[33]

At the end of Kirov's speech, the floor was opened to contributions from the floor. These are remarkable for the consistency with which they attacked administrative staff as the main culprit of excessive expenses. Pavlov stated that while wage-rates bureaus were necessary, 'proletarians can't afford bureaus of 20-25 members'.[34] Artamonov complained that the main store of the factory employed five inspectors *(kontroleri)* who were paid 90 roubles per month to 'do nothing'.[35] Isakov hinted at corruption, alleging that storemen were paid 60 roubles per month, had families of four or five members, but could be seen out on drinking binges ten evenings a month.[36] Only Grachev spoke in defence of the factory's administrative staff and made an attempt to shift the focus of the conversation on questions of labour discipline. Amongst the last to take the floor, he stated that white-collar employees *(sluzhaschchie)* made up only 12% of factory staff and that any discussion on the regime of economy should start with the problem of truancy *(progulki)* as well as the disorderly state of shop-floors.[37]

A similar mood can be glimpsed from the notes *(zapiski)* passed to Kirov from the floor. Although most notes contained questions about the CC plenum and technical suggestions regarding aspects of the production process, some of them revisited the theme of administrative wastefulness with increased belligerence. In order to give a better picture of the terms in which the issue was framed, it is worth quoting some of them at full length:

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[32] Ibid.
[33] Ibid.
[34] '*Ne po nashemu proletarskomu karmanu'.* Ibid., l. 43.
[35] Ibid.
[36] Ibid.
[37] Ibid.

> How does the Regime of Economy agree with the administration receiving 200-300 roubles plus bonuses?
>
> There is too much administration in the factory. We should economise a bit.
>
> If we do not put a stop to the squandering (rastrati) and embezzlement (khishchenie) of our property (dostoiania), we will never get the masses involved in our community. My suggestion is to expose the squanderers publicly, send them back to the workers where they came from and we will try them in our own way (svoim sudom).
>
> Measures must be taken against squandering, up to and including capital punishment.[38]

In his concluding remarks, Kirov attempted to bridge the gap between workers and the administration by suggesting that the Regime of Economy was the concern of both. He argued that the decline of labour productivity was primarily the result of the wearing out of equipment and the inability of administrative staff to effectively deploy the workforce at its disposal but that truancy was also a major contributing factor.[39]

The implementation of the Regime of Economy reappeared as a major theme in the organisation's general assembly that convened on 27 May 1926.[40] Kudrianov, the chair, opened the proceedings by announcing the order of the day which consisted of the bureau report followed by a report by the review commission and bureau elections. Following a successful motion from the floor suggesting that the reporters' timeslot be cut from one hour to forty minutes, Ivan Gaza took the floor to present the main report.

Gaza noted that there had been a significant decline in the productivity of labour at the second quarter of 1926 compared to the previous year, but attributed the fall primarily to intra-party discussion that had taken up much of February.[41] He went on to say that stoppages and truancy were the other main causes of falling labour

[38] Ibid, ll. 45-47.
[39] Ibid, l. 43.
[40] Ibid, l. 57. This was a closed (members only) meeting. The minutes do not note the number of those present.
[41] Ibid. l. 58. The figures given were 501 roubles per w in 1926 compared to 633 in 1925. Gaza also noted that wages had risen steadily over the same period, from a low-point of 66.30 to 84.77 roubles per month at the time of the report. By 'intra-party discussion' Gaza meant of course the aftermath of the collapse of the Zinoviev Opposition.

productivity, stressing that the latter was the fault of workers alone, having reached an alarming rate of 13.55% in April.[42]

The need to address such problems of labour discipline was a major theme of Gaza's report, but some of the comments he made with respect to the attitude of rank-and-file communists towards these issues are of particular interest here. Speaking of a series of slow-downs *(volinki)* that had taken place in the factory in connexion with some disputes with management, the party secretary claimed that rank-and-file communists had often been found to be the main leaders, wryly commenting that 'having learned at the Party school that communists are the vanguard of the proletariat, it appears that they think that if workers want to kick up a row *(buzit')* they have to step in and do it for them'.[43] Gaza urged party members to promote the correct line amongst workers and rounded off his speech with an assessment of the organisation's work as politically correct but often weak in practice.[44]

The discussion after the report followed a pattern similar to that of the previous meeting. The perceived large numbers of highly paid administrative staff were attacked by rank-and-file members like Ukkonen who stated that the only redundancies that had taken place had been of employees on the third and fourth brackets *(razriadi)* of the skill-based pay scale. 'Start cutting from the top', he advised, 'and the party will grow to new heights'.[45] Another member, Chervinskii, complained that admin staff had in fact increased in the tractor department where he worked. Chervinskii also criticised the weak development of shop-floor organisations, bemoaning the bureau's neglect of this key task.[46] Smirnov, a former oppositionist, attacked the new leadership for making a series of mistakes in matters of party

[42] Ibid. l. 59.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Ibid. ll 59-63.
[45] Ibid. l. 65. Soviet wage policy went through a large number of reviews and overhauls throughout the interwar period, all of which created new sources of confusion and conflicts. In 1926, there was a seventeen-bracket scale in all-union use, but there were variations according to industry and enterprise with respect to norm-setting and the use of piece-rates. See on this Lewis H. Siegelbaum, "Soviet Norm Determination in Theory and Practice, 1917–1941," *Soviet Studies* 36, no. 1 (1984): 45–68, pp. 47-52; L. I. Borodkin and E. I. Safonova, "Gosudarstvo I Problemi Motivatsii Truda v Rossiiskoi Promishlennosti XX v.," in *Ekonomicheskaiia Istoriia: Obozrenie*, 5 (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Moskovskogo Universiteta, 2000); E. I. Safonova, "Moskovskie Tekstil'shchiki v Godi Nepa: Kvalifikatsiia I Differentsiatsiia v Oplate Truda," in *Ekonomicheskaiia Istoriia. Ezhegodnik* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2001), 389–419.
[46] TsGAIPD, f. 1012, op. 1, d. 266, l. 65.

development and economic administration, claiming that the factory was in fact losing more workers than admin staff.[47] *Zapiski* to Gaza from the floor reiterated these points but also inquired about the state of production conferences *(proizvoditel'nie soveshchania)*, which the secretary conceded had very low attendance.[48]

It was again left to the director, Grachev, to provide some defence for the factory's white-collar personnel. Grachev argued that management had already made significant staff reductions amongst the white-collars, having closed the commercial sub-department whose head had been enjoying a monthly salary of 300 roubles.[49] He added that administrative staff were also labourers and that the factory could not be run without them, warning that their continued marginalisation might lead to their political alienation.[50] Grachev finished his contribution by saying that the Regime of Economy would be successful only if all 2000 members of the organisation worked to put into practice.[51]

After a few more short speeches, the floor was taken by Podol'skii, an instructor from the *raikom* present at the meeting. Podol'skii warned that the inexperienced, newly expanded activist base of the organisation could fall into the trap of tailing, rather than leading the non-party mass.[52] He then encouraged party activists to tell their fellow workers the truth about the inescapable difficulties of industrial development

[47] Ibid. Smirnov claimed that only 4 admin staff had been laid off at the wagon department, compared to some 80 workers.
[48] The total number of workers participating in conferences was 1428 – out of who 530 were party members – from a total workforce of over 10000. According to Gaza however this was just on paper, attendance being even more disappointing in reality. Ibid. l 69. An institutional innovation of the NEP-era, production conferences were gatherings of workers at all levels of the production process which discussed technical and organisational solutions to problems of factory life. The party leadership devoted considerable attention to the development of conferences both as a source of legitimacy for the regime and as part of its economic policy. Low attendance was a persistent problem in the first few years of the conferences' operation, to a large extent because managers ignored their recommendations. For a full account, see Svetlana Ul'ianova, "'Leningradskii Pochin': Proizvodstvennie Soveshchaniia v Sisteme Motivatsii i Stimulirovaniia Truda v 1920-E gg.," in *Rinok Truda v Sankt-Peterburge: Problemy i Perspektivy*, ed. B.V. Korneychuk (Saint-Petersburg: Nestor, 2003); Chase, *Workers, Society and the Soviet State*, ch. 7.
[49] TsGAIPD, f. 1012, op. 1, d. 266, l. 66.
[50] Ibid. 'We mustn't treat them as a foreign body. Perhaps this is why only 100 showed up at the May Day celebrations'.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Ibid. l. 68. Podol'skii was referring to the effects of the Lenin enrolment *(Leninskii prizyv)*. In Leningrad, 23,575 new members joined the party during the 1924 and 1925 recruitment drives, raising the total percentage of working class members from 61.2% to 72.7%. *Leningradskaia Organizatsiia KPSS*, p. 25. In KP 50% of party members in 1926 had joined in 1925. TsGAIPD, f. 1012, op. 1, d. 266, l. 60.

and admonished the rank-and-file to cease the unacceptable practice of putting forward demands that are impossible to fulfil.[53]

The tensions expressed at the meeting were reflected in the resolution produced at its end. Very much a compromise document, it stipulated that labour productivity was to be raised primarily by rationalising production and renewing equipment. The text also declared the development of shop-floor organisations a priority area of work and made regular meetings and reports obligatory for their organisers while the administration was instructed to attach technical staff to production conferences, in order to assist workers in the formulation of workable suggestions. At the same time, the resolution instructed communists to be model workers and declared the promotion of labour discipline to be a priority issue for the organisation.[54]

The following year saw Party meetings play out along much the same lines with Grachev defending the record of the factory administration, rank-and-file communists protesting bureaucratic mismanagement and demanding more powers for the institutions that strengthened their position in the factory while higher party functionaries attempted to strike some balance by restraining the activists but also offering some recognition of their concerns.[55]

A slight shift of the scales can however be observed in the general assembly of June 1927.[56] By that time, the Regime of Economy had been succeeded by a new industrial campaign, the Rationalisation of Production *(Ratsionalizatsiia Proizvodstva)*. Unlike its predecessor, Rationalisation was meant to be achieved on the basis of technical and organisational measures, such as mechanisation of particular tasks, reorganisation of the workplace and training of new cadres. Socialist rationalisation, it was argued, could not proceed at the expense of the country's

[53] Ibid. l. 68.
[54] Ibid. ll.73-76.
[55] Representatives of the state apparatus tended to be less concerned about the latter as is demonstrated by the visit of Mikhailovskii, a member of the executive of the Machine Building Trust of which KP was part. Addressing the organisation on 26 May 1927, Mikhailovskii gave a detailed report of the economic priorities of the trust and their relation to the Regime of Economy, including price comparisons with major industrial economies. During the course of his report, Mikhailovskii stated that the factory had 1000 excess *(lishnie)* workers, which incensed the rank-and-filer Saltikov, provoking him to denounce managerial incompetence in his contribution. TsGAIPD, f. 1012, op. 1, d. 418, ll. 39, 47.
[56] Ibid, l. 103. The exact date is not given, but 1,409 people were noted to be in attendance.

working class as was the case in the capitalist world. It should instead contribute to the improvement of workers' living standards and the expansion of the range of opportunities available to them.[57] This political recalibration at the centre appears to have strengthened the hand of party militants on the shop-floor.

Giving his annual report on the work of the organisation's bureau, Gaza presented figures showing that overhead costs had fallen by 2.8% over the preceding year.[58] He then reported approvingly that there had been no labour disturbances during the same period, attributing this achievement to improving relations between workers and management.[59] Despite these positive developments, Gaza followed up with what seemed like an unprovoked attack on management, echoing many of the rank-and-file criticisms that had been levelled at the administration in previous meetings. The party organiser criticised management for its behaviour towards workers' correspondents *(rabkori)*, suggesting that they were, perhaps, seen as 'too inquisitive'.[60] Gaza stated that the bureau did not share this view and signalled further disapproval of administrative practice saying that 'we differ with the administration on the question of the fight against bureaucratism. They say there isn't such a problem. We disagree.'[61]

The remainder of Gaza's report revolved around the perennial problems of party building like meeting attendance and payment of dues, which Gaza noted had improved significantly along with the general level of the work of the *aktiv*.[62] Predictably however, the ensuing discussion focused more on administrative failures than party achievements.

Chervinskii stated that management was trying to suppress the *rabkor* movement, including its communist caucus. He then accused the factory administration of dragging its feet on bureaucratism, claiming that the tractor shop employed one administrator for every five workers. To applause from the floor, he

[57] *KPSS v rezoliutsiakh*, vol. 4, pp. 161-167.
[58] TsGAIPD, f. 1012, op. 1, d. 418, l. 104.
[59] Ibid. l. 106.
[60] Ibid. l. 109 Workers' – and peasants' correspondents – were grassroots volunteer journalists that reported on various aspects of everyday life for the local and national press. For a fuller discussion, see Jennifer Clibbon, *The Soviet Press and Grass-Roots Organization: The Rabkor Movement, NEP to the First Five Year Plan* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993).
[61] TsGAIPD, f. 1012, op. 1, d. 418, l. 109.
[62] Ibid. l. 114.

added indignantly that the shop-level bureau had informed the administration of the problem but they had chosen to sit on their hands, producing token resolutions without ever putting them into practice.[63] Grachev was then personally attacked by Ruzin for his 'impermissible' treatment of the *rabkori*.[64]

The most comprehensive account of the problems facing the organisation and the factory was however given by Ter-Asaturov, the draughtsman of the tractor department. He argued that the low skill level of the membership was the organisation's greatest handicap in its struggle to control the administration and called for the full communisation of the administrative apparatus.[65] Ter-Asaturov went on to argue that persistent problems in political work, like the low-attendance of production conferences by party members and the sluggish rate of party saturation increase, were directly linked to the problem of bureaucratism. He contrasted the approachable manner of managers in 'other factories' with that of KP staff who could never find the time to speak to workers.[66] Bureaucratism was finally condemned in the meeting's final resolution as a symptom of the persistent predominance of old regime specialists in the factory's white-collar staff.[67]

By 1928, rank-and-file feeling towards the factory administration had turned unequivocally sour. The publication of the Shakhty affair in the Donbass on 10 March came shortly after the new bout of labour unrest that had taken place in connexion with the campaign for a new collective agreement.[68] At the general meeting which met to discuss the results of the April CC plenum, Grachev was denounced as a demagogue by Sokolov who went on to ridicule the incompetence of the factory's technical staff:

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[63] Ibid. l. 117.
[64] Ibid. l. 118.
[65] Ibid. l. 121.
[66] Ibid. ll. 122-123. Ter-Asaturov's description of 'other factories'' *upravliaushchie* as having their 'doors open' to workers was entirely in line with the popular image of the good red director. See on this Diane P. Koenker, "Factory Tales: Narratives of Industrial Relations in the Transition to NEP," *Russian Review* 55, no. 3 (1996): 384–411.
[67] TsGAIPD, f. 1012, op. 1, d. 418, ll. 131-132.
[68] *Pravda*, 10 March 1928. Strikes and slow-downs had taken place across the Soviet Union as groups of workers protested unfavourable terms of the collective agreement. They main point of contention, especially in heavy industry, appears to have been the reform of pay-rates and production norms which undermined the position of skilled workers. *Sovershenno Sekretno*, vol. 6, January and February reports. The terms of the collective agreement were attacked in the *zapiski* written during the report on the campaign at KP in April. TsGAIPD, f. 1012, op. 1, d. 549, l. 3. For a detailed discussion of norm-setting during the NEP, see Lewis H. Siegelbaum, "Soviet Norm Determination in Theory and Practice, 1917–1941," *Soviet Studies* 36, no. 1 (January 1, 1984): 45–68, pp 47-52.

'They are refitting the cranes in our workshop and all the workers are laughing. It's obvious that they are doing it wrong, but the specialists won't listen to us.'[69] A worker from the tractor workshop, Kairov criticised the casual attitude specialists displayed towards their work but suggested Grachev was getting too much of the blame, proposing instead to have 'the technical director give a report and grill *(zharit')* him'.[70] The whole factory was declared a 'small nest of sabotage' by one of the *zapiski* given to the main speaker, because of the undue influence of the administration over the party organisation.[71] The campaign of self-criticism *(samokritika)* launched in June only emboldened the militants.[72]

To sum up, the closing period of the NEP saw the KP Party collective become dominated by moods that were increasingly hostile to the factory's managerial personnel. The ever-expanding activist base of the organisation used its status to press the demands of workers in explicit opposition to those of the perceived bureaucrats that made up the enterprise's administrative staff. To their superiors' chagrin, communist activists did not refrain from leading their colleagues in industrial action in order to secure a better deal. But as hostility towards the NEP and the vested interests it engendered grew amongst the party's top leadership, the gap between rank-and-file moods and the political mainstream narrowed.[73] In attacking bureaucratism, rank-and-file communists were not breaking party discipline but implementing party policy. Significantly, the activists were to a large extent anticipating, rather than responding to leadership initiatives. Communist workers saw the centre shift from a political line demanding tight labour discipline and favouring amicable relations between workers

[69] TsGAIPD, f. 1012, op. 1, d. 549, l. 10. The meeting was attended by 878 party, 134 Komsomol and 92 non-party workers. Sokolov was referring to Grachev's dismissal of criticism levelled at management at the previous year's Trust report.
[70] Ibid. l. 11.
[71] Ibid. l. 16.
[72] *KPSS v resoliutsiiakh*, vol. 4, pp. 338-342
[73] Apart from the familiar enemies of socialism like NEPmen, kulaks and the bourgeois specialists on whom Soviet industry still relied, the party leadership came to view the top, highly skilled layers of the proletariat with suspicion. They were seen as a labour aristocracy whose craft mentality made them hostile to industrialisation and open to all sorts of opportunist deviations. Depretto, "Ofitsial'nie Kontseptsii", p. 72.

and management, to one calling party members to battle against 'wicked bureaucratism' and 'bureaucratic degeneration'.[74]

Thus *spetseedstvo,* the anti-intellectualist practice of specialist-baiting that had been the scourge of many an engineer throughout the NEP period, became sanctioned by and institutionalised within the party collective, the very organisation charged with resolving social contradictions on the factory floor. At the same time, communist specialists like Ter-Asaturov joined the fray to propose what amounted to their promotion – the communisation of the apparatus – as the only solution to bureaucratic mismanagement. On the eve of the Great Break, the party collective of Leningrad's Red Putilovite works provided the organisational and ideological framework for the formation of an alliance of militant workers and low-ranking technicians that would go on to become the protagonists of the First Five Year Plan.

Despite their growing hostility to management however, communist activists did not transform the organisation into a mere forum for complaints. Throughout this period, the rank-and-file maintained a strong interest in the economic aspects of factory life as well as a reflective attitude on the organisation's place within it. We have already seen that the communist workers of KP were able to frame their interests and concerns in the terms of the regime's own economic policy and that they did so with considerable skill and confidence. This, however, is only part of the story. Party members spent a considerable amount of their time attempting to provide solutions to everyday problems of production, often in contexts where little political gain could be made by their efforts to do so. Communist workers were expected to and did take active part in production conferences not only to rail against the incompetence of managerial personnel – which they did at every opportunity – but also to highlight and troubleshoot technical and organisational issues in their shop.[75] Similarly, workshop-

[74] *KPSS v resoliutsiiakh*, vol 4, p. 339. It would be of little value to revisit here the tired debate of whether the radical policies that succeeded the NEP were forced on the leadership 'from below' by ultra-militant activists, or whether the former needed convenient scapegoats against whom to mobilise the latter. The point is that the rank-and-file did not need to be induced to view 'bureaucrats' as an enemy. What is important for the argument made here is that, for whatever reason, official party policy converged with rank-and-file mood at a critical historical conjuncture.

[75] A production conference held on 24 March 1926 for example heard a report on intra-factory transport from Mileev, a communist worker of the factory's railroad system. The report highlighted problems such as bad maintenance of cranes and wagons but was criticised by workers from other shops who claimed that transporters were careless in unloading material and were often less than

level party organisation meetings devoted significant amounts of time on the development and improvement of production conference work.[76]

Discussion of problems of the productive process was not however confined to production conferences and shop-level meetings. As the decade drew to a close, technical issues such as fuel deliveries or the transport of materials became increasingly more prominent in the organisation's general meetings and less distinct from the party's own organisational affairs.[77] By the time the First Five Year Plan was launched in late 1928, the alliance of workers and technicians that had taken shape within the organisation was not only hostile to managerial personnel but also confident in its ability to replace them.

1.3 The First Five Year Plan

The First Five Year Plan was a watershed in Soviet history. Its vast transformative effects on industry and society have been the subject of so much scholarly research that reviewing them here would be neither practicable nor particularly illuminating. It is, however, worth providing some detail on the specific effects of the Soviet industrialisation drive on Leningrad industry so as to better appreciate the conditions in which the KP party organisation had to operate in the years 1928-1932.

The construction of new large enterprises and the renovation and expansion of those already in operation were the primary objectives of the plan. Rapid industrial expansion brought about a sharp increase in the numbers of the industrial workforce. This was particularly pronounced in Leningrad, where 133,000 workers entered industry in 1930 alone. Heavy industry grew most of all, with some 46% of all

prompt in their deliveries. The resolution produced by the conference contained admonishments to transporters but also technical proposals, such as the refitting of specific lengths of track were bottlenecks occurred. TsGAIPD, f. 1012, op. 1, d. 312, ll. 17-19.

[76] A meeting of the wagon-carpentry workshop organisation on 14 May 1926 expressed concern about a perceived slow-down in conference activities and resolved the chair of the workshop's conference should thereafter provide regular reports. A report by the chair was given the following week. TsGAIPD, f. 1012, op. 1. d. 287, ll. 22-24.

[77] At the organisation's first conference on 18 November 1928, Makarov from the open hearth furnace shop complained that furnace charge deliveries to the shop were both insufficient and unpunctual leading to unnecessary stoppages. At the same time, he made a number of comments and suggestions on how to improve the work of shop-floor organisations and better coordinate their activities with the collective's bureau. TsGAIPD, f. 1012, op. 1, d. 550, l. 37.

Leningrad workers employed in the metal-electrical sector and machine-builders jumping from 23% to 31% of the total workforce in 1928-1932.[78] The workforce of KP more than doubled, reaching a total of about 21,000 around 1931.[79] New arrivals from the countryside accounted for much of this increase, with 55% of trade union members in 1931 being of peasant origin, compared to 9% in 1930.[80] Women also entered industry en masse, making up 43.5% of the entire workforce by 1932 compared to 37.1% in 1928; the relative increase was greater in the male-dominated metal industry, from 9.1% to 23.5%.[81]

The transformation of Soviet industry only served to complicate the chronic confusion afflicting the system of remuneration. Leningrad's 14 trade unions recognised 29 different 1st bracket wage rates, ranging from 16 to 39 kopecks per hour.[82] At the same time, the plan's prioritisation of capital investment over the production of consumer goods exerted strong pressures on living standards and shortages in foodstuffs necessitated the introduction of rationing already in 1929, well before famine struck in 1933.[83] The functioning of the rationing system was far from ideal and the shortages and quality of the food distributed led to considerable industrial unrest.[84] Although these side-effects of crash industrialisation were offset to a significant extent by the eradication of unemployment which reduced the number of dependents per household, the decline in workers' living conditions was significant in terms of real wages.[85]

Shortages in consumer goods and random variations in the system of remuneration combined to give rise to one of the main features of Soviet

[78] *Istoriia Rabochikh Leningrada. 1703-1965.*, vol. 2 (Leningrad: Nauka, 1972). p. 211
[79] TsGAIPD, f. 1012, op. 1, d. 801, l. 8.
[80] *Istoriia Rabochikh Leningrada*, p. 213.
[81] Ibid. p. 216.
[82] Ibid. p. 218.
[83] Osokina, *Za Fasadom*, pp. 57-58. Although the all-union *kartochnaia Sistema* was not introduced until 1931, Leningrad was amongst the first places to be hit by the supply crisis and a *gubkom* plenum introduced bread rationing on 23 March 1929, setting the norm at 800g per day for workers and 400g for white collar staff and dependents. RGASPI, f. 17, op. 21, d. 2694, l. 6.
[84] The textile dominated Ivanovo Industrial Region seems to have been especially prone to strike action. In 1932, a strike over declining rations developed into a public demonstration attracting at least a few thousand people, significant numbers of which engaged in rioting. Filtzer, *Soviet Workers*, pp. 83-84 and Rossman, 'The Teikovo Cotton Workers' Strike', pp. 48-52.
[85] L. I. Borodkin, "Zhizn' v Gorode v Godi Pervoi Piatiletki: 'uluchshenie Material'nogo Polozheniia' ili Padenie Real'noi Zarplati?," *Vestnik Istorii i Literaturi*, 2010, 377–90.

industrialisation, the extremely high rates of labour turnover.[86] Along with the deskilling of the now much younger and less experienced working class, high turnover induced directors to over-hire in order to secure their enterprises against the labour shortage, thus exacerbating the problem and further increasing deskilling in individual enterprises.[87]

Having spent the last NEP years as both relentless critics of management and troubleshooters of production, KP party activists now found themselves confronting rapidly changing realities. The technical process of production and the very physical space of their activity was about to change as the plan targeted the factory for full re-equipment.[88] The organisation would have to operate within and assimilate a much larger and younger workforce with little experience of factory life within the context of unprecedentedly demanding labour conditions. The initiatives undertaken by the central party leadership in response to the myriad of problems thrown up over the course of the first FYP served to further complicate an already confused situation. In industry, the most significant of these was the introduction of *edinonachalie*, or one-person management.

1.4 *Edinonachalie* and bacchanalian counter-planning

The resolution introducing one-person management in Soviet industrial enterprises was adopted by the CC on 5 September 1929.[89] Earlier scholarship regarded this as a pivotal moment in the consolidation of a centralised command economy, creating a class of industrial autocrats or 'small Stalins' under the control of the real, life-size Stalin living in the Kremlin.[90] More recent works have taken a different view,

[86] Between May and August 1930, the 20 most important construction projects in the USSR recruited 200,374 workers. Over the same period, 133,031 quit their jobs. Filtzer, *Soviet Workers*, p. 61.
[87] According to the KP administration, the factory was 'making up its full complement of labour power by recruiting and taking on unskilled labour, who gradually settle in and assume the place of skilled workers'. Ibid. p. 58. In the 4th quarter of 1931 alone, the wage fund in Leningrad was overspent by 30 million roubles. *Istoriia Rabochikh Leningrada*, p. 211.
[88] *Piatiletnii Plan Narodno-Khoziaistvennogo Stroitel'stva SSSR*, 3 vols. (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo "Planovoe Khoziaistvo," 1930), vol. 2, pp. 158-159.
[89] *KPSS v rezoliutsiiakh*, vol. 4, pp. 556-562.
[90] The term 'small Stalins' belongs to Moshe Lewin. Lewin, 'Society and the Stalinist State', p. 173. A similar conclusion, from different premises, has been drawn by Paul R. Gregory, *The Political Economy of Stalinism: Evidence from the Soviet Secret Archives* (Cambridge, United Kingdom ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 268-270.

suggesting that *edinonachalie* was intended to establish proper accountability for the performance of industrial enterprises by clarifying the specific responsibilities and prerogatives of management vis-à-vis the party and trade-union organisations.[91]

Events in KP seem to support the latter view. Party meetings at KP in 1929 did not display the same toxic attitudes towards the factory administration as those of the last NEP years. The mobilisation of party activists for the industrialisation drive, as well as the intra-party crisis over collectivisation, focused shop-floor politics on all-union affairs. General assembly meetings in May and November gathered to discuss and condemn the views of the Right Opposition, thus temporarily displacing the party-management conflict from the centre stage of factory politics.[92]

As a result of the collectivisation drive however, KP became an enterprise of paramount importance, as the only tractor producing factory in the Soviet Union. This distinction made it possible for the factory's own politics to become embedded in the political struggles taking place at much higher levels. The importance of KP's output for the union-wide collectivisation campaign was not lost on party activists. Although the 1929 general meetings were not stenographed, the *zapiski* included in the protocol records can provide some insight into the way party activists viewed the situation. At the May meeting, one Rassudov bombarded the presidium with notes asking questions about the positions of specific leaders and stating his views on everything from the danger of kulak infiltration in rural soviets to the best way to exploit recently discovered ore deposits in the Nizhnevolzhkii territory.[93] In one of his written interventions, Rassudov assured the presidium that the peasantry had realised the importance of the FYP and did not fear collectivisation, but demanded 'to be given all necessary agricultural machines, of which it has very little.'[94]

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[91] Kuromiya, 'Edinonachalie'. For a discussion focusing specifically on KP, see Clayton Black, "Answering for Bacchanalia: Management, Authority and the Putilov Tractor Program, 1928-1930," *The Carl Beck Papers in Russian and East European Studies*, 1508, (2002).
[92] The November meeting was held on the 28th and addressed personally by Kirov who reported on the CC plenum that had taken place on 10-17 of the same month and resolved to remove Bukharin from the Politburo. TsGAIPD, f. 1012, op. 1, d. 675, l. 17.
[93] Present day Saratov and Volgograd regions, more than one and a half thousand kilometres away from Leningrad.
[94] Ibid, ll. 9-10.

Although KP overfulfilled its 1928/1929 target of 3,000 tractors, the following year the factory's beleaguered administration attracted the wrath of the authorities after the enterprise failed to meet a significantly raised target of 12,000. Throughout the first quarter of 1930, the Party organisation – itself partially responsible for the upwards revision – attacked the administration for failing to meet its monthly targets. In June 1930, KP's technical director V.L. Sablin was arrested by the OGPU on charges of wrecking along with the director of the tractor department and a number of engineers. Though not charged with a crime, Grachev was relieved of his duties in September.[95]

In order to better appreciate the extent to which the power of the party organisation undermined the authority *edinonachalie* was meant to confer upon the director, it would be useful to consider the first experience of a KP party conference of Karl Martovich Ots, the factory's new red director.

Ots presented the main report to the organisation's 7th conference on 2 October 1930, only a week after Grachev's departure. Chairing the meeting, the party organiser Alekseev opened the session by informing those present that the plan had been fulfilled by only 92.1% and the organisation should use the storming quarter *(udarnii kvartal)* to overcome the persistent problems of truancy, faulty output *(brak)* and labour turnover, using the trusted weapon of *samokritika*.[96] The new director then took the floor to present the factory's production plan for the quarter. He began by stating that fulfilment up until then had in fact been 87% and declared that in order to fulfil the plan, the factory would have to produce 47% more items than in the previous quarter.[97] Ots conceded that factory output was constrained by the significant limiting factors that plagued Soviet industry as a whole, like labour shortage and skill depletion. Moreover, the factory's rapid expansion had been disproportionate, with auxiliary shop capacity lagging significantly behind that of main processing shops.[98]

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[95] Unlike the bourgeois Sablin, Grachev was an experienced and reliable party member of pre-revolutionary standing. He was transferred in the same capacity to the Stalingrad Tractor Factory. Black, 'Answering for Bacchanalia', pp. 1, 25.
[96] TsGAIPD, f. 1012, op. 1, d. 801, ll. 3-4.
[97] Ibid, ll. 6-7.
[98] Ots claimed that the factory was going to need about 2000 extra workers stating that 'there isn't a single shop that is not hysterically demanding more workers'. According to the director, the growth

Having indirectly made the point that output could not be immediately increased by further expanding the available workforce, Ots drew the obvious conclusion that the storming quarter target would have to be met on account of an increase in labour productivity. In order to dispel any doubts as to whether this would involve labour intensification and a tightening of discipline, Ots spoke of the labour shortage as 'artificially created', further explaining that he meant this 'not in the literal sense, but in the sense that people do not want to work themselves too hard'.[99] He went on to provide an example of how carelessness and a lax attitude to work were undermining plan fulfilment in the factory's paramount shop:

> It must be said that even now, at a moment when the whole country has its eyes fixed on us…when everyone's attention is on the tractor shop…not everyone's attitude to their work is as it should be. There are of course bright examples, but not everyone is like that…I was there last night at midnight, during shift change, and for 40-50 minutes the place was in a complete mess. Some people were chatting, some benches were being cleaned, and some others weren't.[100]

From his perspective, the new director was making a perfectly reasonable assessment of the situation. He had limited time to rectify the situation that had cost his predecessor his job, so that the increase in productivity necessary to meet the tractor target would have to be achieved on the basis of existing capital and labour resources. Addressing the often chaotic conditions prevalent on the factory floor was an obvious place to start. Not surprisingly, the party members who took the floor after Ots were not of quite the same opinion.

The director's report was followed by the presentation of a counter-plan by the factory's control commission (VKK). The reporter, Bolsunovskii, began his contribution on the familiar theme of managerial incompetence:

> It would seem that a counter-plan must be put forward in opposition to something (chemu-to na vstrechu), that is, the plan of the administration. But this is not the case because even today, the administration was unable to provide figures on this quarter's plan because it doesn't have them. The VKK was established on June 7 to work out a plan for 1930-31. It was put together in time but as you can see

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of the productive capacity of auxiliary shops since the beginning of the FYP had been 15-20% compared to more than 40% for the factory as whole. Ibid, l. 8.

[99] 'liudi ne khotiat potrudit'sia'. Ibid, l. 8.

[100] Ibid, l. 11.

today, neither the administration nor the zavkom can present a plan for the whole year.[101]

Bolsunovskii went on to present the counter-plan's adjusted targets. Overall output was projected to be 38.5 million roubles, over the administration's target of 36 million. Labour productivity would rise by 27%, not 20% as forecast by the administration. Bolsunovskii argued that the counter-plan's more ambitious target could be met by means of the elimination of truancy and *brak*. This, he argued, was possible if the party mobilised all of the factory's public opinion for this goal. To this end, he demanded that the shock work movement *(udarnichestvo)* should be expanded to include more workers. By placing responsibility for the plan on the rank-and-file, Bolsunovskii argued, it would be possible to meet the new targets.[102]

The call for higher targets was echoed by Marmel' who argued that even the counter-plan's revised target of 3,600 tractors in one quarter was pessimistic, as the factory could purportedly produce 1,500 per month on average. Marmel', who worked at the old forge shop, argued that it was possible to increase the production of wagons from the 75 ordered by the administration to 90, provided that the shop was relieved from orders for smaller items from other shops which could produce them internally. In order for the required increase in productivity to take place, the administration would also need to address 'some of the faults of the previous administration', specifically the lack of concern about the shop's aging equipment which was, according to the speaker, in danger of complete breakdown. Demonstrating considerable skill in Bolshevik rhetoric, Marmel' drove the point home: 'There have been considerable advances…but we have now come up against what must be called objective conditions. We must get rid of objective conditions comrades.'[103]

Other speakers expressed similar views but were more scathing. Shimkovich admitted that truancy was an important issue but wondered whether management had taken any measures to assist the trade union in remedying the problem. His contribution is worth quoting at some length:

[101] Ibid, l. 14.
[102] Ibid, ll. 15-19.
[103] Ibid, ll. 20-21.

> Ots told us the story of how he visited the tractor shop and beheld chaos; that people there weren't working, were chatting etc. This will be so tomorrow too. What concrete measures has Ots proposed? None! 75% of absences are because of stoppages…There are stoppages because of the administration's carelessness…Regarding planning, there isn't such a thing. If you want talk about bringing the plan to the worker, then bring it first to the foreman, because he doesn't have it…You start to work, then the foreman comes and says 'change equipment, work on the engine block.' In half an hour he comes again and says: 'take out the block, work on the cylinder head.'… If you are going to push the worker about like this, and he earns one and a half rouble per day, then he will say…'I better leave, I'll be a drifter (letun), but I'll earn more.' Workers get angry at the foreman, but the foreman can't do anything if he doesn't have a task…Bring the plan to the master and after that to the worker, because now…he doesn't know how many and what kind of items to make.[104]

In his concluding remarks, Ots responded to some of the points raised by the other speakers and answered questions put to him in *zapiski*. One of these asked whether the new director intended to manage the factory from his office, 'like Grachev', or on the factory floor, alongside the communist caucus of the shop. Ots answered that one is only a red director who spends at least four hours per day on the floor and promised to follow that rule. Bolsunovskii used his concluding timeslot to challenge Ots to fulfil the plan: "We have equipment and contracts, let's fulfil the plan, if you please *(izvol'te vypolniat')*".[105]

Whatever the original intent of the decree on *edinonachalie* might have been, Ots's first contact with KP's communist rank-and-file suggests that he had not been invested with the powers of an 'industrial autocrat' or 'small-Stalin', certainly not one for whom 'rudeness [was] a virtue.'[106] Instead, according to the stenographic record Ots comes across as a pragmatic administrator, who having realised that meeting production targets was only conceivable on the basis of unpopular measures of labour intensification was trying to secure the support of the institution charged with maintaining the good will of workers both within the factory and society at large. The KP party organisation however was not forthcoming with this support. The communist rank-and-file, ever suspicious of management, had not become more open to directorial initiatives since the removal of the previous administration. In fact, it would not be unreasonable to suggest that KP worker-communists experienced the removal

[104] Ibid, ll. 34-35.
[105] Ibid, ll. 39-41.
[106] Lewin, 'Society and the Stalinist State', p. 172.

of those whom they had for years denounced as incompetent or even dangerous as a victory. In this case, the confidence of the rank-and-file in its political power would have been strengthened, as would the conviction that *edinonachalie* did not in any way entail an erosion of workers' control as mediated by the party organisation.[107]

This would account for the confidence with which speakers like Bolsunovskii and Marmel' presented their own suggestions without any significant scale back of *spetseedstvo*. It does not, however, explain the specific content of these suggestions. For if in the late NEP-era communist activists were trying to defend against labour intensification by pointing to managerial incompetence as a greater cost to the economy than lax labour discipline, they were now attacking the administration by demanding what seemed conspicuously like *greater* intensification.[108]

The negative integration conceptual scheme of Soviet labour relations could presumably explain this odd behaviour of party activists as a result of the subordination of the party organisation since the introduction of *edinonachalie* to the autocratic authority of the director. On this view, the counter-plan and interventions from the floor could be interpreted as providing political cover for the director, who was after all arguing for more modest goals. Such a reading of the activists' behaviour is however difficult to sustain given the account of party-management relations in KP presented in this chapter, especially with regard to the fate of the Grachev-led administration.

Instead, it would be more plausible to suggest that the root of this change in rank-and-file attitudes lies in the shift of the boundaries of industrial politics that was effected by the launch of the first FYP. During the late NEP period, when the primary objectives of the party's economic policy were to rationalise production and economise on added costs, communist workers had been able to point to the chaotic

[107] This view could be supported on the basis of the content of the *edinonachalie* resolution itself which criticised management for ignoring the 'productive initiative' of the masses and the 'entirely correct' resolutions of party organisations. Reflecting the political ambiguities of the first FYP era, the resolution also criticised the 'direct interference' of party organisations in the operational work of factory administrations. *KPSS v rezoliutsiakh,* vol. 4, pp. 556-557.

[108] Counter-planning commissions invariably discovered 'hidden reserves' allowing higher production rates. In the *AMO-ZiS* automotive plant in Moscow, the counter planning commission presented a plan for 7,900 cars for 1930-31 in response to the administration's plan for 6,400. Straus, *Factory and Community,* p. 146.

state of the managerial apparatus as a more pressing problem than truancy or other labour discipline weaknesses. This was no longer possible by the time Ots took over from Grachev in 1930, as the imperatives of rapid industrialisation left little space for rationalising and economising practices. The industrialisation drive had also made labour intensification inevitable and opposition to it politically hopeless.

At the same time however, the FYP had opened new possibilities for worker activists. Massive levels of investment made it possible to address long-time structural and organisational problems on the shop-floor. By speaking about their potential for greater output, party members like Marmel' were effectively raising the profile of their workshops and attracting attention to real problems, like aging equipment in the case of the old forge. As well as being detrimental to plan fulfilment, such problems affected workers in more immediate ways. Old equipment was prone to stoppages, which could severely affect the income of workers on piece rates.[109] The often chaotic and cluttered state of shop-floors could be and often was a cause of serious, sometimes lethal accidents.[110]

Bolsunovskii's call for an expansion of the shock-worker movement, echoed by other members in their contributions, can be interpreted in a similar manner. Although shock-work was in the last analysis a form of labour intensification, shock-workers were entitled to a range of perks and benefits like higher rations and priority access to the city's limited housing stock.[111] Thus, Bolsunovskii was able to call for higher targets on the basis of greater efforts on the part of workers, while at the same time effectively pushing for greater access to very scarce consumer goods. In doing so, he was entirely in line with party policy on the shock-work movement which demanded that it should eventually embrace all workers.[112]

This is highly illuminative with regard to the way in which party organisations operated in industrial enterprises like KP. Although composed almost entirely of factory workers who as we have seen were very keen to defend their interests, the KP

[109] Siegelbaum, "Soviet Norm Determination.", passim.
[110] One of the *zapiski* to Ots specifically raised the question of clutter in relation to workplace safety, linking it to two lethal accidents in the iron-rolling workshop. TsGAIPD, f. 1012, op. 1, d. 801, l. 38.
[111] On the housing crisis, see Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism*, chapter 6.
[112] *KPSS v rezoliutsiiakh*, vol. 5, pp. 109-112.

party organisation was not a trade union. That is, it was not an organisation charged specifically with protecting the interests of its members in the workplace, as opposed to those of management. It was instead a component part of the All-Union Communist Party whose stated mission was to lead Soviet society in the transition to communism and its task was to oversee this process in the crucial setting of a major industrial enterprise. The organisation derived its authority within the factory from this. Its influence over management was due to the fact that it was embedded in a hierarchy parallel and at every level senior to the state. Furthermore, red directors like Ots owed their positions to their party membership and were thus beheld to the party as much as to the state economic administration. Because of this, it was essential for factory directors to maintain good relations with their party organisations in order to run their enterprises and keep their jobs, as demonstrated by the different fates of Grachev on the one hand and the directors of *ZiS* and *SiM* in Moscow on the other.

The nature of this institutional arrangement meant that communist workers who wanted to exert influence in their workplace had to do so primarily in terms of party policy implementation, rather than material demands from management. Nevertheless, the specific character of Marxism-Leninism as an ideology of working class power ensured that some aspect of party policy could invariably be used by party activists to exert pressure on management. The ambiguity of the decree on *edinonachalie*, which sought to increase both managerial authority and responsiveness to workers' initiatives is a case in point. Within the context of the massive industrial expansion of the first FYP, 'bacchanalian planning'[113] became an instrument of pressure in the hands of party activists who sought to secure better remuneration and working conditions by promising greater output.[114]

If however the peculiar political ecology of Soviet enterprises placed significant constraints upon the power of management, it also set definite limits to the scope and nature of acceptable labour activism. For the corollary of politically mediated

[113] The term 'bacchanalian planning' was coined by the economist Naum Jasny to refer to the over-optimistic targets of Soviet planning. Black "Answering for Bacchanalia", p. 2

[114] I am not arguing here that party members like Marmel' were being disingenuous in their suggestions. It is not implausible that, assuming extra investment, less *brak* and no other orders, the old forge could have produced the extra wagons Marmel' claimed it could. The problem was that much as with central planning, the optimal conditions on which the projected output of counter-plans were based could not be assumed.

influence in the workplace was that the very institution acting as the instrument of this influence was also responsible for promoting the unpopular aspects of party policy. In fact, it seems reasonable to suggest that the relative power of an industrial party organisation vis-à-vis the administration depended on the extent to which the organisation was successful in mobilising workers' support for party policy as a whole.[115] This placed the party's rank-and-file membership in a rather contradictory position, whereby their role as defenders of their fellow workers' interests was coupled with their task of promoting breakneck industrialisation. It was not always possible to successfully navigate the complexities of this situation.

The tension between the demands of the industrialisation drive and the immediate interests of workers at the point of production put significant strain on the relationship between the party and its constituents. Throughout the First Five Year plan period, the KP party organisation faced significant difficulties both in mobilising the support of the factory's workers and in maintaining discipline within its ranks. Apart from the perennial problems of labour discipline, party meetings at all levels expressed concern about the declining popularity of production conferences as well as mass campaigns like the subscription drive for the industrialisation bond. [116] Complaints about falling wages became a recurring theme in the *zapiski* of the period and there were at least a few cases where the wisdom of rapid industrialisation was questioned. [117] Curiously, the evidence suggests that collectivisation attracted considerably more negative comments from KP workers than rapid industrialisation, reflecting perhaps the growing presence of former peasants amongst the work-force and the persistence of ties to the countryside even amongst the factory's experienced workers. Reporting on the results of the CC plenum of November 1929, Sergei Kirov received a number of *zapiski* from the floor, some of which were sharply critical of the party's agricultural policy. One asked if it was true that 'they are taking every last bit

[115] The consistent promotion of KP party organisers to higher posts during this period suggests that their superiors were satisfied with the organisation's performance. Ivan Gaza was promoted to the *raikom* and later *gorkom* leadership and following his death in 1933 was buried in one of very few personal graves in Leningrad's Field of Mars. *Smena*, November 1940.
[116] TsGAIPD, f. 1012, op. 1, d. 550, l. 25 and d. 710, l. 2.
[117] TsGAIPD, f. 1012, op. 1, d. 675, l. 4.

of bread from the peasant' while another asked the regional secretary to explain what possible harm could come out of allowing peasants to develop their households.[118]

Nevertheless, despite the resentment that the hardships of industrialisation no doubt generated amongst significant sections of the rank-and-file, the organisation managed to emerge out of this period relatively unscathed. With the exception of some relatively high profile episodes like for example an open letter of resignation from the party published by two experienced workers who denounced the party's industrial policy, a significant weakening of the organisation's rank-and-file core does not seem to have taken place.[119] The purge of 1929, intended among other things to relieve the party of members who were not strongly committed to the goals of the socialist offensive, made a very small dent on the KP organisation. Of its membership of 3133 only 143 or less than 5% were expelled. Of these 143, some 47 were automatic expulsions, consisting either of those who had consistently failed to attend party meetings or let their membership lapse by not paying the required dues. A further 13 were expelled for drunkenness and 18 for concealing their class background. Even assuming then that the remaining 65 were all expelled for open and/or active opposition to party policy, they would still make up a mere 2% of the overall membership.[120]

This small rate of attrition reflects the fact that workers who wished to exert influence in their workspace were in a far better position to do so from within the party organisation than from the outside. We have already seen how worker-communists called on party ideology to draw attention to their concerns and promote their interests within factory. Party membership did not however simply provide a rhetorical space from which to issue demands. At least since the NEP-era, rank-and-file activists had played a central role in resolving the numerous technical problems that came up in the production process. As bottlenecks, stoppages and breakdowns multiplied during the first FYP, so did the initiatives undertaken by workers in response to these. This period witnessed the mushrooming of specific work teams *(brigadi)* whose task was to

[118] Ibid., l. 18.
[119] The letter described industrialisation as 'a heavy burden on the shoulders of the working masses'. Black, 'Answering for Bacchanalia', p. 18
[120] TsGAIPD, f. 1012, op. 1, d. 679, ll. 18, 141.

resolve such problems. The value of these tug-boating *(buksirnie)* and turnkey *(skvoznie)* brigades as they came to be known is demonstrated by their official incorporation into the shock-worker movement. Although party membership was not a requirement for participation in these teams, communists were expected to take a leading role in their activities. Very often, party membership came as a consequence of active engagement as shock-workers were targeted for recruitment by the party's industrial organisations, sometimes *en masse* as in the case of KP's 3rd mechanical shop.[121] Thus, rank-and-file communists at the time had not only the opportunity to express their concerns in terms that were fully within the contours of government policy, but also the ability to exert a significant level of control over the labour process, by virtue of their role as troubleshooters and problem solvers. There was thus little incentive for workers to give up this position in order to pursue a strategy of open confrontation with the state.

As the FYP drew to a close, the rationalising functions of shock-work brigades became more pronounced than the target busting feats they had originally become famous for. As the ranks of *udarniki* expanded to include ever greater numbers of workers, the title came to be little more than a formality.[122] Despite the authorities' complaints about the phenomenon of pseudo-shock work *(lzheudarnichestvo)*, whereby workers not exceeding or even missing their targets got the title of *udarnik* as well as the attendant benefits, the mass expansion of shock-work ended up having a positive long-term effect on the development of Soviet industry. As the movement grew, the shock-work brigade became synonymous with a stable unit of workers, replacing the multitude of forms of labour organisation that Soviet industry had inherited from the pre-revolutionary period such as the paternalistic *artel'*, as well as those thrown up during the 1st FYP, like production communes and collectives.[123]

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[121] TsGAIPD, f. 1012, op. 1, d. 846, l. 5.
[122] During the 1st FYP period, whole factories could receive the shock-work designation *(udarnie)*. According to a report given at a meeting of KP's shock-worker foremen, 10640 of the factory's 15000 workers were *udarniki* in 1930. TsGAIPD, f. 1012, op. 1, d. 846, l. 1.
[123] The *artel'* was a group of workers headed by an elder *(starshina)* who distributed tasks and pay to members of the group. Hoffmann, *Peasant Metropolis*, pp. 33. Production collectives were work units where pay was distributed according to three skill brackets, as opposed to the officially established eight brackets regulating pay. Straus, *Factory and Community*, pp. 147-8. Communes were most the egalitarian type of work unit, with members being paid according to the number of their dependants. Siegelbaum, 'Production Collectives and Communes', p. 65.

The rationalisation of labour organisation, exertion and remuneration that was achieved as a result of the formation of the stable work unit in Soviet enterprises was described by one incisive study of Soviet labour relations as a victory for both workers and the regime.[124] Rank-and-file party activists played a decisive role in making this victory possible. At a time of intense social upheaval, communist workers took the lead in organising shock-work brigades by recruiting actual or imagined norm-busters from their shops. Party members also seized every opportunity to argue that disappointing production results were not due to skivers or enemies amongst the workers but because of worn equipment, lack of materials and faulty planning, responsibility for which was invariably laid at the feet of management. Thus, throughout the period of the 1st FYP rank-and-file communists acted as a bridge between industrial workers and the state, preventing the opening of a major rift between the regime and its core social constituency. This they achieved by using the authority of their position to cushion the effects of the state's policies on themselves and their co-workers. This authority derived from the fact that they were themselves part of the regime, not only as trusted troubleshooters in the production process, but also as the main ideological conduit between the party leadership and the broader population. As the main contours of party policy changed with the completion of the 1st FYP, the nature of rank-and-file activism would also have to adapt.

1.5 Abortive Stabilisation: Stakhanovism and the Second Five Year Plan, 1933-1937

If the aim of the 1st FYP had been nothing less than the complete transformation of the USSR's productive base, the 2nd FYP faced the slightly less ambitious but still formidable task of bringing the products of the industrialisation drive to bear on production. The so called 'good years' of Soviet industrialisation saw a relative decline in the production of capital goods and armaments and a proportional increase in investment in the consumer goods sector. Aiming at the consolidation of the achievements of the expansionary development of the preceding period, the party's industrial policy included plans for significant changes to work-place and labour

[124] Straus, *Factory and Community*, pp. 154-155.

organisation in order to rationalise the production process. With respect to shop-floor level labour relations, the most significant aspect of the party's industrial policy was its renewed emphasis on technical competence and organisational efficiency, which in turn implied greater managerial authority and responsibility *(edinonachalie)* as well as the side-lining of some of the more conflictual forms of shop-floor activism, like counter-planning, in favour of a tightening of labour discipline. This shift in outlook amongst the party leadership had already been signalled by Stalin in an important speech to industrial executives delivered in 1931.[125] November 1932 saw the introduction of stricter labour legislation, enabling management to dismiss workers for one day's unjustified absence and transferring control of workers' ration books from consumers' cooperatives to enterprise administrations.[126] The resolution passed by the CC Plenum of January 1933 formalised the new direction of industrial policy, declaring the 2nd FYP to be one of 'mastering' *(osvoeniia)* and 'organised consolidation' *(organizatsionnogo ukrepleniia)* of the new enterprises created by the previous FYP.[127]

At the start of the 2nd FYP then, the party's industrial policy was returning to the main principle of the pre-*samokritika* era, namely the pursuit of productive efficiency through discipline and clear delineation of responsibilities in the workplace. This political shift was reflected in the 11th conference of the KP party organisation which met on 26 March 1933 to discuss the progress of the factory's production plan.

Delivering the main report, the factory director Karl Ots spoke of the achievements of KP during the 1st FYP and making use of the new catchword of the time, he praised the factory's tractor and turbine departments for the progress made in the 'mastering' of new technology. As might be expected however, there were a number of problems in production that demanded the organisation's attention, including rising unit costs and the familiar problem of stoppages, which had amounted

[125] This listed six new conditions within which Soviet industry was developing and an equal number of tasks that needed to be tackled. Amongst these were the limitation of labour turnover, the training of technical cadres from the ranks of the working class and importantly, a more conciliatory approach to old regime specialists who had demonstrated their loyalty to Soviet power. *Pravda,* 5 July 1931.
[126] The extent to which this latter provision was an integral part of labour policy or an improvised measure in response to the 1932-33 famine has been disputed Robert Beattie, "A 'Great Turn' That Never Happened: A Reconsideration of the Soviet Decree of Labor Discipline of November 1932," *Russian History* 13, no. 1 (1986): 235–57, p. 250.
[127] *KPSS v rezoliutsiiakh*, vol. 6, pp. 17-18.

to 2.9% of worktime for the reviewed period. He went on to single out the metallurgical and 1st Mechanical shops as facing particularly challenging tasks regarding the organisation of production in the coming period.[128]

In contrast to the organisation's 7th conference of 1931, party members from the shops did not attempt to deflect the director's criticisms by means of a comprehensive attack on managerial incompetence. Instead, they focused on the achievements of their shops and attributed problems to factors beyond their control. Studenikin, from the old forge claimed that the shop had made great steps in combatting the extent of faulty output. This, he suggested, was achieved by means of campaigns by the *Komsomol* group of the shop which worked hard to promote orderliness in the workplace and the rationalisation of the working day. At the same, time, workers who were producing high amounts of *brak* were brought under the supervision of more experienced employees. As a result, it was claimed than in one case, a worker who produced 65kg of faulty forged pieces the previous month had since produced no *brak.*[129]

Things in the steel-making shop were going less smoothly. Berlin, a delegate from the shop, deflected criticism about the pace of plan fulfilment by pointing out that the whole factory experienced supply problems. Stoppages at the shop were due to the fact that it was impossible to keep the furnace in constant operation without a reliable supply of magnesite. Berlin went on to criticise the bad state of account keeping in the factory which made it impossible to produce reliable inventories stating bluntly that the extent of useless paper-pushing at KP had become ridiculous *('do smeshnogo dokhodit')*. The steel shop representative ended his contribution by demanding that Ots make good on his promises to reduce white collar staff and warning that if such plans did not go through, it would not be possible to speak of victories at the next conference.[130]

The morning session of the conference was concluded with a greeting from the 4th Turkestan Division of the Red Army, delivered by Kasin, a communist KP worker

[128] Ots did mention however that this was a significant improvement over the 4.8% of time lost in 1931. TsGAIPD, f. 1012, op. 2 d. 616, ll. 4-6.
[129] Ibid, l. 38.
[130] Ibid, ll. 39-41.

who was then serving at one of the division's rifle regiments. He then praised the military hardware produced by KP and expressed his regret that it had not yet been tried in battle. Before leaving the platform, Kasin reminded conference delegates that red-soldiers around the country expected Putilovites to fulfil all CC resolutions regarding the mastery of technology and the elimination of *brak.*[131]

The conference reconvened for its evening session a few hours after Kasin's greeting. Titov from the turbine department took the floor to report on the progress made by the department and respond to some of the criticisms made in its direction by members of the administration. Titov claimed than in 1928 prices, productivity at the department had risen by 6% while unit costs per turbine had been decreased by 30%. In response to comments made by a member of the administration to the effect that the turbine department did not 'pay enough attention' to its set tasks, Titov returned the criticism:

> The leadership of our factory does not take into account the enormous importance of turbine production. If you are aware of the state of Leningrad industry … then you should know what kind of strain Leningrad' power stations are currently under. You are aware that Moscow power stations were attacked by wreckers and this speaks volumes about the importance of our production... Comrade Ots suggests that the turbine department should take care of its instruments. But the departments is making its own instruments because of the lack of special equipment.132

Meiulans, a delegate from the metallurgical department spoke along similar lines. Although he accepted that the department had been performing very badly and made up a significant part of the factory's overall *brak* and losses, he questioned whether the factory administration paid enough attention to metallurgy:

> … I must tell comrade Ots, the government and Party have issued a declaration calling for a turn to metallurgy but, so far, the administration has not done so. … The supply of materials is unsystematic. We only get help from the administration, particularly Ots, only when the factory shuts down. Then Ots himself gets this or that material necessary for metallurgy.133

[131] Ibid, l. 45.
[132] Ibid. l. 50.
[133] Ibid. l. 66

After a few more contributions and another guest speech by a military officer reminding Putilov workers of the significance of the factory for the USSR's defence, Ots took the floor to deliver his conclusive remarks. The director responded personally to Titov stating that he protested too much. The turbine department, Ots went on, had enough support as demonstrated by its 400 hundred strong administrative apparatus and should 'kindly work' *(izvol'te rabotat').* Responding to Meiulans's complaints, Ots commented that if he turned his face to the metallurgical department, he would be turning his back on turbines. He would therefore not turn in any direction but get on with work as should every factory department.[134]

The resolution passed at the conference was, in the habitual manner, a compromise document including references to all problems of factory life that had been highlighted during the discussion.[135] In this respect, there was nothing particularly new about the organisation's 11th conference. It is this absence of significant change however that is of particular interest here, as this grassroots-level continuity was being maintained within the context of a significant recalibration of industrial policy. At the same time as CC resolutions and the stricter labour legislation enacted by the government were signalling a shift towards a more productivist outlook on the part of the central leadership, the basic contours of factory-level party politics remained essentially the same as they had been since the beginning of the period examined here. The red director tried to get communist workers – nominally his comrades, but functionally his subordinates – to work harder and get their colleagues to do so too in order to meet the factory's persistently elusive targets. As they had done consistently since at least 1926, communists from KP's shops responded by pointing out that they were already working hard enough, accomplishing significant feats in production and that whatever problems there were in fulfilling the factory's production plan were either due to economic factors beyond anyone's control, like the high cost of raw materials, or due to managerial incompetence, like bad book-keeping. What had changed were the terms in which the rank-and-filers made their case, a process similar to that of five years earlier when the launch of the 1st FYP had closed off the possibility

[134] Ibid. ll. 81-84.
[135] The resolution included points about strengthening *edinonachalie*, raising workers' qualifications and improving the supply of goods through the enterprise stores. Ibid. l. 106.

of openly opposing labour intensification while at the same time enabling a frontal assault on managerial authority through the *samokritika* campaign. Now, the more technocratic orientation of the 2nd FYP period necessitated the moderation of anti-managerial attitudes and specialist-baiting but also made possible a defence of shop interests articulated along the lines of a more business-like focus on achievements and possibilities of improvement in production in accordance with the demands of the plan.

This suggests that regardless of the political winds prevalent at the top, the nature of the party organisation as a political space where the conflicting interests of labour and management confronted each other remained essentially unchanged. This is because this conflict was not predicated upon any of the centre's political initiatives but on the economic realities of a rapid industrialisation drive which even at its most moderate pace, put extreme pressure on workers while also making huge demands of managerial personnel.[136] What could, however, be affected by political initiatives was the relative intensity of this conflict on the factory floor. As the good will of the central leadership towards administrative staff was heavily dependent on economic performance, the truce between management and communist workers was as precarious as the sustenance of satisfactory output rates across Soviet industry.

The remaining years of the 2nd FYP would place this truce under new stress. Although a number of economic indicators were improving in 1934, the breakthrough in labour productivity expected by the country's leadership had yet to materialise.[137] The plan foresaw that over 40% of industrial growth for the 1932-37 period would be

[136] It may be objected here that rapid industrialisation was itself a political initiative of the party leadership. The debate on whether this was a case of reckless adventurism or the only available response to an increasingly hostile international environment in an unfavourable economic conjuncture has a long pedigree and is beyond the scope of this thesis. For opposing views see Robert C. Allen, *Farm to Factory: A Reinterpretation of the Soviet Industrial Revolution* (New Haven: Princeton University Press, 2009); R. W. Davies, "The Economic History of the Soviet Union Reconsidered," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 11, no. 1 (2010): 145–59; Gregory, *The Political Economy of Stalinism*, Kotkin, *Stalin*, "Coda"**;** Nove, *Was Stalin Really Necessary?* For a recent contribution on the international context of industrialisation, see Oscar Sanchez-Sibony, "Depression Stalinism: The Great Break Reconsidered," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 15, no. 1 (2014): 23–49. The point made here is that the industrialisation drive was at the time already an economic reality that was beyond the scope of political debate even at the top, unlike the numerous campaigns initiated by the party leadership in relation to it.

[137] In the iron industry for example, the 1st FYP revised optimal target of 10 million tons smelted in 1932-33 was finally met in 1934. Allen, *Farm to Factory*, p. 93. Similarly, a good harvest in 1934 made possible the abolition of bread rationing in 1935.

due to an increase in output per worker, in sharp contrast to the investment-led growth of the 1st FYP.[138] The persistence of the familiar problems of the Soviet production process however cast doubts on the feasibility of such ambitious improvements.[139] Combined with increased pressure from the industrial and defence commissariats for more investment, the unsatisfactory pace of labour productivity growth convinced the leadership to abandon the financial restraint of the original plan for a significantly larger investment budget for 1936.[140]

The Stakhanovite movement of super-productive workers emerged within this context, less than two months after the politburo meeting on 28 July 1935 had approved the new investment plan for the following year. Although Stakhanovism had antecedents in the shock-work of the 1st FYP, the initiative for this specific form of labour activism seems to have belonged to Konstantin Petrov, the party organiser of the Central Irmino mine in the Donbass where Aleksandr Stakhanov performed his legendary shift on 2 September.[141] The mobilising potential of Stakhanov's feat was quickly grasped by the party leadership who made sure it received maximum publicity in the national and regional press. Stakhanovism grew rapidly over the next few months and by November 1935, the movement had gained such prestige that the First All-Union Conference of Stakhanovite Workers was attended by the full politburo and addressed by Stalin.

Nevertheless, there is substantial evidence that Stakhanovism met with at least some opposition from the country's workforce. In his classic study of the movement, Lewis Siegelbaum has identified a number of sources for this opposition. Some of these, like the perception of Stakhanovites as rate-busters whose activities would end up in a general raising of norms, were similar to the causes of opposition to 1st FYP-era shock-work movement. Unlike shock-work however Stakhanovism emphasised technical competence over physical exertion, making aspiring Stakhanovites more

[138] Davies and Khlevniuk, 'Stakhanovism and the Economy', p. 876.
[139] At KP, the party organisation's 14th conference held in March expressed concern at the factory's failure to fulfil its plan for February and called all workers to 'battle against *brak*'. TsGAIPD, f. 1012, op. 2, d. 939, ll. 103-5.
[140] Davies and Khlevniuk, 'Stakhanovism and the Economy', p. 874; Mark Harrison and R. W. Davies, "The Soviet Military-Economic Effort during the Second Five-Year Plan (1933-1937)," *Europe-Asia Studies* 49, no. 3 (1997): 369–406..
[141] Siegelbaum, *Stakhanovism*, p. 69.

dependent than the *udarniki* on external factors, like the provision of favourable working conditions by their superiors and perhaps more importantly, the competent performance of auxiliary tasks by their fellow workers. The significance of this is that it expanded the pool of potential opponents as auxiliary workers resented the prestige and benefits awarded to Stakhanovites for what they saw as a collective effort, while most foremen were probably not very keen to take on even more responsibilities in order to provide their subordinates with the opportunity to earn sometimes double their own salaries.[142] This is reflected in the fact that some 50.8% of convictions for anti-Stakhanovite offenses at regional *(oblast')* courts were given to workers and a further 20% to foremen or brigade leaders while 11% of all convicts were party members.[143] Anti-Stakhanovite offenses ranged from malicious slander to physical violence and murder, while potential penalties included anything from probation to capital punishment. The extremity of such cases and the fact that offenses against Stakhanovites were often driven by motivations irrelevant to Stakhanovism itself caution against extrapolating from figures on offenders about the overall reception of the movement.[144] What is important for this inquiry is that there were good material reasons for many workers and foremen to be against Stakhanovism just as there were good reasons for many workers to aspire to Stakhanovite status. It was precisely this kind of conflict of interests that the presence of the party on the shop floor was meant to mediate.

Indeed, Stakhanovism at the Kirov works does not seem to have become immediately popular amongst the party's rank-and-file. The protocols of a number of shop-level party meetings held in the autumn of 1935 suggest that leading communist workers were frustrated by their comrades' underperformance and general lack of interest in the movement. At a meeting of the cold-stamping shop organisation, the *partsec* reported that the leading Stakhanovite brigade was that of the *kolesniki* whose foreman was not a communist, while the shop's trade-union representative complained

[142] For an overview of the sources of opposition to Stakhanovism, see ibid, pp. 190-204. For foremen in particular, pp. 165-8.
[143] Ibid, pp. 195-6.
[144] Siegelbaum concluded that there "seems no more reason to accept the prevailing Western view than there is to agree with the Soviet contention that, among workers, only 'backward' elements […] opposed Stakhanovism". Ibid, p. 193.

that some communists had even mocked Stakhanovism.[145] The party group of the 2nd mechanical shop described the pace of the movement as extremely unsatisfactory and instructed its members to popularise Stakhanovism amongst workers by publishing the higher earnings of Stakhanovites and work with the shop's administration to review the pay of auxiliary personnel and expand the progressive piece rate system.[146] Similar concerns were raised at the metallurgical construction shop, with the superintendent Kulichkin admonishing communist activists to give Stakhanovism the attention it deserved.[147] This view of the movement's predicament was not one shared by all party activists. A number of communist workers attending these meetings objected to accusations of indifference arguing instead that whatever problems there were in the development of Stakhanovism in their shops was, predictably, the fault of their superiors. At metallic constructions, Alekseev argued that foremen bore prime responsibility for the obstacles faced by Stakhanovism such as the lack of clear pay rates and the existence of 'boring forms' which put workers off the movement. Alekseev further claimed that foremen avoided popularising the movement stating that he had been awarded a bonus of 25 roubles for rationalising his work-time but this was done 'somehow secretly, without telling anyone about it'. Another participant at the meeting, Bobrov supported Alekseev citing the example of the smith Alekhanov, who was not listed as a Stakhanovite despite regularly exceeding production norms. Parfenov also expressed agreement with Alekseev arguing that foremen did not understand Stakhanovism and were holding it back for fear that if workers exceeded production norms, foremen would get fined for overspending their wage budgets.[148] Skokov, a worker of the shop's second shift, expressed the argument implicit in his comrades' contributions in a more succinct manner stating that 'the essence of the Stakhanovite movement consists in raising the productivity of labour power[…] The system of labour remuneration in our department does not stimulate the raising of labour productivity'.[149]

[145] TsGAIPD, f. 1012, op. 2, d. 1051, l. 42.
[146] Ibid, l. 163.
[147] Ibid. l. 58.
[148] Ibid. l. 59.
[149] Ibid, l. 60.

Discussion sessions in other shops were conducted along very similar lines, with the timidity of foremen and issues of remuneration providing the common theme on which the speakers developed their contributions.[150] This peculiar form of buck-passing is a familiar process that we have observed throughout the period examined so far in this chapter. It is worth noting however that this is here taking place at the very bottom of the party and factory hierarchies. This not a case of departmental representatives defending their shops' particular interests vis-à-vis the factory administration, but of rank-and-file workers negotiating their terms of employment with their immediate superiors, a negotiation made possible because of the political imperative of supporting the development of Stakhanovism. Less than two months after the publication of Stakhanov's record, party activists at Kirov were already warning about what we have already seen were amongst the main constraints on the growth of Stakhanovism, the opposition of foremen and auxiliary workers.[151] Communist workers like Skokov were letting their superintendents know that unless they were provided with reasonable working conditions and attractive pay rates, they would not be able – or willing – to exceed their production norms and they would therefore not achieve Stakhanovite status. As every party member knew from experience, such a failure in policy implementation could draw the attention of their superiors, themselves reasonably worried about catching the eye of the authorities who

[150] One of the main points made by the speakers at the cold-stamping shop meeting for example was that foremen and administrative staff must eliminate stoppages. Ibid. ll. 43. Apart from being a significant obstacle to the overfulfilment of norms, stoppages were also a threat to the income of any worker on piece-rates. Since 1932, workers were paid one-half or two-thirds (depending on sector) of their norm rate for periods of inactivity if they were not responsible for the stoppage and not at all if they were. Siegelbaum, *Stakhanovism*, p. 103.

[151] The different terms in which this problem was framed with respect to foremen and auxiliary workers is worth considering shortly. According to the evidence presented here, it seems that shop-floor party organisations viewed auxiliary workers as potential allies of Stakhanovism that could be enticed to support the movement if they were given adequate material incentives to do so. In contrast, foremen and superintendents were seen as being responsible for the development of the movement by virtue of their position, so that failure to promote Stakhanovism was presented more in terms of dereliction of duty than a problem which could be resolved by taking appropriate measures. Nobody proposed that foremen should be enticed to support Stakhanovism with material benefits. This suggests that much like the all-factory party conference, shop-level party meetings provided communist workers with an institutional space where they could articulate their interests and those of their colleagues and that they did so in terms of politically grounded demands from their superiors, in this case foremen and superintendents. The industrial party organisation functioned in much the same way at all enterprise levels.

even during the most specialist-friendly phase of the 2nd FYP never quite stopped being on the lookout for recalcitrant officials.[152]

This practice took on a darker dimension as the Stakhanovite year of 1936 was succeeded by the mass repression of the *Yezhovschchina* in 1937. The way this played out in the factory will be examined in more detail in the next chapter of this thesis, but it would be useful to consider the relationship between Stakhanovism and the 1937 wave of repression at least briefly here.

Stakhanovism was launched as an effort to raise the productivity of labour across Soviet industry by providing workers with a complex set of material and moral incentives in the form of higher wages, improved access to consumer goods, publicity and prestige. In this respect, it was substantially similar to efforts to improve productivity through labour activism in the 1st FYP. Unlike *udarnichestvo* however, Stakhanovism emerged at a time when specialist-baiting was officially discouraged and technical competence was overtaking the ability to 'storm' as the defining feature of the model worker. As we have already seen however, the mistrust of workers towards the administration was not predicated upon the political signals emanating from the centre but had been a permanent feature of industrial relations on the factory floor at least since the beginning of the period examined here. It was the scale of this mistrust, as well as the way in which it could manifest inside the party organisation that the political initiatives of the leadership determined.

This is consistent with the views of a number of scholars who have argued that Stakhanovism provided the background to repression in industry by creating multiple opportunities for conflict between workers and management, which fed into the waves of denunciation that fuelled the terror.[153] Following the Union-wide trend, 1937 at the

[152] Despite signalling a more technocratic orientation in the party's industrial policy, the January 1933 CC resolution did not fail to inform party organisations that 'merciless battle against all manifestations of opposition to party policy by the class enemy' was a necessary condition for the success of the plan. *KPSS v rezoliutsiakh*, vol. 6. p. 21.

[153] Goldman, *Terror and Democracy*, pp. 55-94, idem, *Inventing the Enemy*, pp. 81-139, Siegelbaum, *Stakhanovism*, p. 249 and *passim*, Robert Thurston, "The Stakhanovite Movement: The Background to the Great Terror in the Factories, 1935-1938," in *Stalinist Terror: New Perspectives*, ed. J. Arch Getty and Roberta Manning (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 142–60. See also Roberta Manning, "The Soviet Economic Crisis of 1936-1940 and the Great Purges," in *Stalinist Terror: New Perspectives*, ed. J. Arch Getty and Roberta Manning (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 161–141 for an account linking the repressions to economic problems.

Kirov works saw allegations of blocking Stakhanovite initiatives turn into accusations of wrecking and industrial sabotage. During a meeting of the factory's 3rd mechanical shop, a recent promotee named Vetiutnev came under fire for allowing 'wrecking' to take place in the shop. One Kotliarenko, possibly a *raikom* instructor, warned party members that there were many enemies of the people in their factory and accused Vetiutnev of underestimating the threat of wrecking while letting the Stakhanovite movement fizzle out without leadership. Spitsa, a worker who took the floor after Kotliarenko, suggested that part of the blame for the shop's failures should be attributed to the factory's new director, Ter-Asaturov, who having placed Vetiutnev at this post did nothing to check up on the shop's progress. 'Essentially', he went on, 'willingly or not, everything has been done so that the plan would not be fulfilled'. Spitsa finally claimed that nothing had been done to improve the workplace and wondered if this was because 'they' could not or did not want to do so. His rhetorical question elicited a quick response from the floor with an unnamed participant interrupting to state in no uncertain terms that it was because they did not want to.[154]

Given the account of industrial relations presented in this chapter, it is hardly surprising that party members like Spitsa seized the opportunity provided by the changing political climate to launch attacks against the administration. What is worth noting here however is that, as demonstrated by the shop meetings of October 1935 discussed above, party activists had already identified the main potential obstacles to the then nascent Stakhanovite movement in the usual suspects of bureaucratic administrators and foremen at a time when the party leadership was still committed to a technocratic orientation in its industrial policy.[155]

This suggests that in spite of the promotion of professionalism and managerial authority by the leadership for at least a few years, the outlook of rank-and-file party members had not changed substantially since the 1st FYP. Much as had been the case

[154] TsGAIPD, f. 1012, op. 2, d. 1060, l. 1. Mikhail Ter-Asaturov, the young draughtsman who we saw arguing for the communisation of the administration earlier in this chapter had by that time replaced Karl Orts as director.

[155] The major shift would not come until almost a year later when an explosion at the Kemerovo mines in Novosibirsk on 23 September 1936 killed ten workers. Three days later Nikolai Yezhov became head of the NKVD, while the Kemerovo explosion was amongst the charges brought against the defendants of the second Moscow trial in January 1937. Manning, "The Soviet Economic Crisis of 1936-1940", p. 117, Siegelbaum, *Stakhanovism*, pp. 136-7.

with the introduction of *edinonachalie* into the factory, party members manipulated a political initiative which the leadership had hoped would rationalise the work-process and raise productivity to improve their position as workers with respect to the administration. The technical expertise required to make Stakhanovism work thus ended up making it possible to hold experts and foremen responsible for its failures, just like the authority bestowed upon directors by *edinonachalie* ended up making them responsible for failures in plan fulfilment. In both cases, it was the activity of communist workers in their capacity as enforcers and troubleshooters of party policy that undermined the position of managerial staff and made them targets for the authorities. Once the party began looking for wreckers rather than solutions to industrial problems, political discourse on the factory floor changed seamlessly from allegations of incompetence to accusations of sabotage, as exemplified in Spitsa's statement that consciously or not, as if it made no difference, his shop's plan was being sabotaged.

The stabilisation of industrial relations that had been amongst the priorities of the party's economic policy for the 2nd FYP thus met a sticky end in 1937 in a violent conclusion to a process which, although initiated with benign intent, was badly suited to promote industrial peace. In the end, from the workers' point of view, Stakhanovism went much the same way as *udarnichestvo*, with the ever expanding ranks of the movement making Stakhanovite status progressively less meaningful with respect to remuneration and benefits.[156] In its short heyday however Stakhanovism gave rise to a new round of *spetseedstvo* which, for a different set of reasons, turned bloody.[157] Undoing the damage this caused would be one of the main themes of the party's industrial policy in the run up to the Second World War.

1.6 Chaos to discipline? 1938-1941

The end of the *Yezhovshchina* roughly coincided with the launch of the 3rd FYP in 1938. The rapidly deteriorating international environment led to an enormous increase of the relative weight of the arms industry in the economy, both in terms of investment

[156] Ibid. pp, 280-1.
[157] Neither Karl Ots nor Mikhail Ter-Asaturov who replaced him in 1936 survived the repression.

and labour employment.[158] At the same time, the massive expansion of the armed forces during this period led to a renewed intensification of the labour shortage that had plagued the Soviet industrialisation effort from the beginning.[159]

Given these economic realities and the extent to which the repressions of 1937 had destabilised industrial administration throughout the country induced the party leadership to embark once more on a campaign to raise the authority of specialists and administrators accompanied by a number of measures to enforce stricter labour discipline on the factory floor. As has already been shown in the introduction to this chapter, there is consensus amongst labour historians of the Soviet Union that the 3rd FYP period saw the introduction of the harshest labour laws to date, culminating in the June 1940 law making it illegal to leave one's job. Whether this was the conclusion of a decade-long process of expropriation or the last in a series of desperate and/or misguided measures is not amongst the immediate concerns of the final section of this chapter, although the evidence and analysis presented here is as previously more in line with the latter conclusion.

Instead, the focus shall remain on the effect of this new policy turn on the activity of Kirov's party organisation. Siegelbaum has argued that the party's post-1937 industrial policy represented a closing of ranks with management and a return to 'the status quo ante'.[160] This is perhaps true, but as this account has shown, the status quo ante at the Kirov works was hardly one where labour discipline reigned and the ground shook under the director's footsteps.[161] The previous pro-managerial initiatives of the party had had partial success in suppressing some of the most extreme cases of industrial strife, but had never really transformed the party organisation into a

[158] In 1938, 3 out of 8.5 million industrial workers were employed in the armaments industry. Filtzer, *Soviet Workers*, p. 128. For a discussion of the economic effects of the prioritisation of defence see Andrei Markevich, "Planning the Supply of Weapons" in Mark Harrison (ed.), *Guns and Roubles: The Defense Industry in the Stalinist State* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2008), pp. 107-110.
[159] The number of serving military personnel trebled from 1,433,000 in 1937 to 4,200,000 in 1941. Manning, "The Soviet Economic Crisis of 1936-1940" p. 132.
[160] Siegelbaum, *Stakhanovism*, p. 264.
[161] That the earth should shake when a director enters the factory is a phrase often attributed to Lazar M. Kaganovich when it was in fact said by his elder brother, Mikhail M. Kaganovich, at a major conference of industrial executives organised by the People's Commissariat for Heavy Industry in 1934. Lewin, *The Making of the Soviet System*, p. 252, Siegelbaum, *Stakhanovism*, p. 34. Regardless of its provenance, the phrase was hardly descriptive of reality on the shop floor.

disciplinary instrument. The evidence suggests that this state of affairs did not change substantially after 1937.

The organisation's 1st All-Factory conference held over seven days from 19 to 25 April 1938 is indicative of the limits of the ability of leadership initiatives to transform political dynamics on the ground. In line with the resolution of the January 1938 CC Plenum, one of the main themes of the conference was the denunciation of slanderers who had purportedly been responsible for the expulsion of honest communists as well as the rehabilitation of their victims.[162] Indeed, Nikolai Dmitrievich Es'kov, the former *partorg* of the 1st mechanical shop who was now the organisation's acting secretary, spent at least a few minutes of his opening contribution on this subject.[163] Nevertheless, Es'kov insisted that the significant delays in plan fulfilment the factory was experiencing yet again were to a large extent due to the perfidious activities of a 'trotskyite-bukharinite gang of fascist agents' that had been allowed to operate by enemies within the *partkom*, such as the purged former director Ter-Asaturov.[164]

If the intention of the leadership had been to rebuild the authority of administrative personnel and limit the extent of industrial strife, it failed to communicate this to the Kirov plant organisation. For although it could be argued that rehabilitating a relatively high-profile victim of the purge would have been politically difficult, it is harder to explain Es'kov's attacks on the plant's *new* director, Viktor Konstantinovich L'vov. The acting secretary went in almost the same breath from blaming the disgraced – and executed – Ter-Asaturov for production failures to accusing L'vov of not taking decisive measures to improve a series of problems he was perfectly aware of.[165]

Es'kov's criticisms were relatively mild however in comparison to the attack launched against L'vov and other members of the administration by a rank-and-file

[162] *KPSS v rezoliutsiiakh*, vol.
[163] TsGAIPD, f. 1012, op. 2, d. 1467, ll. 37-45.
[164] Ibid, ll. 23-24. Among other things, the disgraced party members were said to be guilty of 'putting the brakes on the Stakhanovite movement'.
[165] Ibid, l. 24. Problematic areas included a full list of the labour-organisation improvements that Stakhanovism was predicated on, like 'organising technology properly' and 'correct organisation of remuneration policy'.

member named Fedorova. Fedorova made a caustic, lengthy speech in which she accused by name several members of the administration of demonstrating inappropriate lifestyles and questionable uses of socialist property. It is worth quoting at some length:

> 'Let's take for example the use of our light transport. Things there are like, I do not want to say there exists still the Ter-Asaturov method, but our method is similar to the old method. […] Our ZiS cars are assigned to engineers etc. but they are mainly used by their wives and families. Zal'tsman's wife lives opposite the House of Soviets and we know that one hour of such a car costs 80 roubles. Well just before the New Year she used the car for four hours in order to go round every market to find herself a fir tree. I think that we should take into account here that we do not elect engineers to the Party Committee in order to give such examples to the non-partyists who are observing us. […] And yourself comrade L'vov. When we elected a new partkom we screened everyone carefully. Ter-Asaturov turned out to be an enemy of the people. He spent 160,000 roubles of the public purse to decorate his apartment. And L'vov's wife calls a car and our enterprise pays the driver's overtime. […] And then you can see cases like for example N. V. Volkov, whose heart bleeds about work, he asks for a car to get him to Smolny to sort out fuel supply problems, and they tell him that all the cars are assigned. Turns out there are no cars for such cases but there are for wives. […] You get decent salaries, hire a taxi and drive your wives around. […] This is nothing to laugh about comrades and if it isn't wrecking then, at the very best, it is bad management. […] And our party committee says that there must be pure samokritika without fear or favour. Well then, wherever you look, disgraceful things are happening.[166]

Although other speakers' contributions were not as vitriolic as Fedorova's, she was far from alone in expressing disapproval of managerial behaviour. What is more, notwithstanding the several outbreaks of laughter amongst the audience recorded by the stenographer, it is unlikely that the engineers and administrators attacked by Fedorova viewed the parallels she drew between their behaviour and that of their recently departed predecessors as attempts at humour. After all, the acting head of the *partkom* had also warned the director against neglecting his duties, a point he reiterated responding to a *zapiska* during his concluding remarks a few days later.[167]

In line with the all-Union trend, accusations of wrecking became rarer after 1938. However, although conflicts between workers and industrial cadres became non-

[166] Ibid, ll. 95-98.
[167] The note, as read out by Es'kov asked: "Will cars remain out in the open to rust and have their dynamos etc. stolen by whoever feels like it? Will a garage be built"? Es'kov responded that this was a question for L'vov, one which he in fact got many times but kept dodging. The acting secretary then admonished the director that leaving tractors to rust in the rain was not only bad management but also a negative influence on "workers' moral-political moods". Ibid. l. 312.

lethal in their intensity, they did not go away reverting instead to the familiar manner of buck-passing and mutual accusations of incompetence.[168]

This detente notwithstanding however, there are strong indications that managerial authority at Kirov remained severely constrained and had hardly recovered its pre-Stakhanovite level by 1941. By 1939 the Kirov works had once more a new director in Isaac Moiseevich Zal'tsman the former head engineer of the factory who had been a subject of Fedorova's criticism a year earlier.[169] Zal'tsman's administration came under intense scrutiny during a rare stenographed session of the *partkom* that took place on 25 September 1939 on the subject of a recent fire in one of the factory's warehouses.[170] Zal'tsman's contribution to the meeting was limited to a short introductory speech in which he affirmed that fire safety was a 'cardinal matter of factory work'.[171] Following this Vladimir Drabkin, the *zavkom* chair, invited the head of the factory's fire brigade, Iushkov, to report on the incident. Iushkov prefaced his report by stating that he along with the trade union group *(proforganizatsiia)* had tried to put pressure on administrators that 'did not implement our measures' and had even brought that matter to the attention of the NKVD.[172] He then went on to give a detailed account of the fire's development and after rejecting a number of possible scenarios left open the possibility of sabotage.[173] The members of the committee who spoke after Iushkov, including the secretary, vice secretary and a superintendent who had been assigned to investigate the issue, all agreed that sabotage was the most likely cause of

[168] This is demonstrated in the protocols of several production and Stakhanovite conferences held in late 1938 and 1939. TsGAIPD, f. 1012, op. 2, d. 1099 and d. 1707.
[169] L'vov was removed from the factory in 1938 to take up the short-lived post of People's Commissar of Machine Building, abolished in 1939. Zal'tsman was promoted from shop superintendent to head engineer sometime during or immediately after the purges of 1937. TsGAIPD, f. 1012, op. 2, d. 1467, l. 26. He therefore had less than two years' experience in that post before becoming director. Such dazzling rates of promotion were by no means atypical during this period, both due to the decimation of the ranks of industrial cadres by the repressions and the massive expansion of technical positions which had reached a ratio of 110 per 1000 workers in 1940 from 70.5 per 1000 in 1936. Bailes, *Technology and Society*, p. 289.
[170] No other stenographic transcripts of *partkom* meetings were discovered in the KP/Kirov *fond* during the course of this research project. Partkom sessions were normally minuted in the form of protocols, not transcripted. This transcript is entitled 'Transcript to Protocol No. 80'. TsGAIPD, f. 1012, op. 2, d. 1688, l. 1. The stenographer's presence suggests that the fire attracted the attention of higher powers.
[171] Ibid. ll. 1-3.
[172] Ibid, l. 3.
[173] Ibid, l. 8.

the fire.[174] Drabkin then suggested that the supervision of the implementation of safety measures be assigned to himself personally. The *partkom* accepted his self-nomination and went on to pass a resolution criticising the factory administration for 'not devoting sufficient attention' to the factory's water supply, 'despite repeated warnings from the *partkom*'.[175]

Whether the matter was pursued further is unclear, but Zal'tsman remained in his post reflecting the by then much more benign attitude of the state towards industrial cadres. What is interesting about this episode however is that it also demonstrates the extent to which the party's function as an instrument of political control persisted even during a time when the party leadership was signalling and effecting a pro-managerial line. Despite this political turn at the top, the immediate response of the *partkom* to a potentially important problem was to blame the administration. For Drabkin, this was also an opportunity to raise his profile as well as that of the *zavkom*, usually thought of as the weak part of the 'triangle' of Soviet enterprises). That the *partkom* secretary at the time was a CC organiser *(partorg TsK)* Vladimir Stepanovich Efremov may or may not have moderated the attack on Zal'tsman but Efremov himself said nothing in the director's defence, instead joining in the criticism of the other members.[176] This was hardly a resolute defence of *edinonachalie*.

A few months later, Zal'tsman's status within the factory would suffer a further blow when the organisation's 2nd all-factory conference, held in February 1940, did not elect him to the new *partkom* despite his candidacy.[177] The election took place after two days of discussion in which remarkably little was said about labour discipline despite the conference taking place a mere week after the Red Army Winter War breakthrough of 11 February. Although the factory's obligations towards the war effort figured prominently in Efremov's main report, the problems he identified in production were primarily organisational in nature and therefore easily framed as administrative failures.[178] Thus Buter, the open-hearth shop delegate who took the

[174] Ibid, ll. 8-19.
[175] Ibid, ll. 24-27.
[176] Ibid, l. 22.
[177] TsGAIPD, f. 1012, op. 2, d. 1954, l. 9.
[178] Among these were intra-factory transport, construction and the organisation of labour and wages. Ibid, l. 28.

floor immediately after the secretary could complain: "We are so close to the front, but we have stoppages because of the lack of mazut oil, despite there being some in the factory."[179] Babaev, the secretary of the party bureau of the 2nd mechanical department went a bit further, saying that "comrade Zal'tsman is a young director, he needs to be helped at work. For this reason it was necessary to demonstrate the director's shortcomings…Not a word was said about him…Comrade Efremov will have to speak about this in his closing remarks."[180] A similar note was struck by a tractor department delegate, Vinokur, who accused both Zal'tsman and Efremov of never visiting his shop.[181]

If the anti-managerial contributions of the speakers on the first day of the conference could be attributed to their possible detachment from the political mainstream as very busy people engaged in war-time production, or even to the organisation's internal political dynamics, the same could not be said for the intervention of the *raikom* secretary Iakov Fedorovich Kapustin, a native KP worker who had been promoted to party work and served as *partkom* secretary in 1938-9.[182] Kapustin criticised Zal'tsman's 'method' and admonished Efremov that a CC organiser should closely supervise *(sledit' za)* the director of such an important enterprise.[183] Using rhetoric that was indistinguishable from that of the decade-old *samokritika* campaign and too much applause from the floor, Kapustin added:

> We must sweep all of our departments with a party broom. Comrades say that… the system is too cumbersome, there are many spongers of various kinds, many inspectorates, who do nothing, but get money. Is it not time then to go through the whole apparatus with a party broom and clean out (povichistit') people who get money illegally?... For this is a disgrace – the office has turned into its own kind of department, with a superintendent, a deputy and a ZiS car. Shouldn't we go round these departments and clear out some people from there with an iron party broom?[184]

With this being the political tone of the conference, it is not difficult to see why Zal'tsman would fail to get elected to the committee. It is however harder to explain

[179] Ibid, l. 72.
[180] Ibid, l. 84.
[181] Ibid, l. 89.
[182] TsGAIPD, f. 1012, op. 2, d. 1478, l. 1.
[183] TsGAIPD, f. 1012, op. 2, d. 1954, ll. 128-129.
[184] Ibid, l. 132.

why a member of the *raikom* would actively incite anti-managerial feelings by making such a contribution at a time generally seen as the apogee of Soviet industrial authoritarianism. It may be that Kapustin's long past as a worker in the factory had made him inclined to take a hard line against the administration when problems arose. If this were so, then his was by no means an isolated case as many low ranking *apparatchiki* of the time had spent considerable time as workers at the bench.

It is however unlikely that Kapustin would act purely on the basis of his personal views if he knew them to be at odds with party policy. It seems more plausible to suggest that in fact, his actions were fully in line with what was expected of him and others in his capacity. For although the leadership did want to tighten labour discipline and restore managerial authority after 1937 it never seemed to think of party activism as being counterproductive to this goal. As late as February 1941, the 18th VKP (b) conference sough to expand party control over industry by creating new secretarial posts at the city and regional levels to oversee specific industrial sectors. At the same time, it instructed party organisations to establish "permanent control over the work of enterprises" and "increase the masses' labour activism in every possible way" while also expanding socialist competition.[185] The CC proceeded to call for a new Union-wide competition on 16 June 1941.[186]

Even then on the eve of the Great Patriotic War the party leadership remained firm in its conception of party activism as complementary to its objective of establishing order within industry. Kapustin's behaviour becomes more comprehensible in this light. If the enterprise was lagging behind in its production plan (which it was) and if Kapustin's task was to remedy this by, among other things, inducing the party organisation to be more active in its involvement in production matters, there was no better way to do this than by attacking management for taking advantage of its privileges while also doing a bad job. For the past fifteen odd years, greater party involvement had meant precisely that.

[185] *KPSS v rezoliutsiiakh*, vol. 7, p. 192.
[186] Ibid. p. 209. Although this campaign would be disrupted by the German invasion of the USSR six days later, the CC renewed it the following year, pp. 283-300.

Combined with the heightened labour shortage, the persistence of party sanctioned activism on the shop-floor after successive political – and some physical – blows to managerial authority made the enforcement of labour discipline an uphill struggle. Zal'tsman's contribution to the Kirov plant organisation's 3rd conference held in May 1941 is indicative of the extent to which this was the case at this major factory.

Zal'tsman began his report by going over some familiar problems like stoppages and the practice of fake Stakhanovism, citing the case of one shop which had purportedly recorded more than 500 Stakhanovite records in one day.[187] He then went on to touch on labour discipline problems in a curiously roundabout way, beginning by offering an apology about his past rudeness and pledging to take into account the criticism he had received on that score. This, Zal'tsman suggested, was a matter of culture and in order to get better at it, he would require help from the organisation. "Help", went on the director, "I consider to be the following: our factory needs to pay more attention to questions of discipline… order and implementation."[188]

This was the most Zal'tsman was willing to insist on the priority of raising labour discipline. In fact, the director went on to say that while truancy was a problem, it was mostly one caused by the inexperience of new recruits, who should not be treated too harshly. [189] Zal'tsman went as far as to warn against "overcautiousness" *(perestrakhovka),* citing examples of honest workers who had been referred to the authorities for minor or inadvertent breaches of the June 1940 labour law.[190]

Thus, less than two months before the German invasion of the USSR, the director of one of the country's most strategically important enterprises was still far from the fearsome figure which some of the most authoritarian industrial executives had hoped for at the start of the 2nd FYP.

[187] TsGAIPD, f. 1012, op. 2, d. 1287, ll. 102-105.
[188] Ibid, l. 108.
[189] Ibid, l. 112.
[190] Ibid, l. 113.

1.7 Conclusion

This chapter began with a review of the historiography on Soviet industrial relations during the interwar period. It is now possible to revisit this discussion in light of the account given above. As this account has shown, the party's industrial policy during this period moved in a broadly cyclical fashion between the two extremes of mass activism exemplified by *samokritika* and military-like industrial discipline culminating in the June 1940 law. Thus, the regime of economy was followed by the campaign of *samokritika* and the shock-work movement, which in turn gave way to an attempt to re-establish order in the workplace after the completion of the 1st FYP. This came to an end with the promotion of the Stakhanovite movement of record-breaking leading to a re-emergence of specialist-baiting which then merged into the blood-letting of 1937. During the period 1938-1941, the party's industrial policy again assumed a disciplinarian character, seeking partly to undo some of the damage done in 1937 but also responding to the imperatives of a rapidly deteriorating international situation.

A long tradition of scholarship has interpreted these developments as milestones of a process of class struggle between Soviet workers and the regime, one which the latter decisively won in 1940. The problems of this interpretation were discussed in the introduction to this chapter but should by now be much clearer. For as the KP/Kirov case demonstrates, far from acting as an instrument of labour discipline, the party organisation, one of the pillars of the regime, was the main institutional obstacle to the consolidation of managerial control in Soviet industrial enterprises. Throughout the period examined here, communist workers and party full timers acted as an opposition to the administration on the factory floor, whether in the form of deflecting managerial demands for labour intensification or demanding adjustments to wage policy. When tensions ran high, some were not above making thinly veiled threats of violence.

As we have seen, this peculiar form of politics took place at all levels of the organisation from the shop to the *partkom*. Significantly, the basic pattern of party activity did not change throughout this period, despite massive labour turnover,

promotions, purges and shifts in central policy.[191] At the Kirov works, party conferences remained critical, if not suspicious, of the director and parts of the administration even as ITR staff came to outnumber workers from the bench as delegates towards the end of the 3rd FYP.[192] Indeed, it seems that the KP/Kirov party organisation was at its most pro-managerial when it was headed by Ivan Gaza in the late NEP period. There are good reasons for this. By the late 1930s, a lot of the full-time party workers and low-ranking industrial cadres had until recently themselves been working at the bench and therefore probably maintained personal relations with rank-and-file workers. In fact, both the director of the factory and the secretary of its district were former Kirov workers, by the time the decade came to a close. What is more, being seen to be fighting their shop's corner at all-factory meetings would probably have made foremen and technicians more popular amongst their workers, which in turn would have made it easier for them to do their jobs. Even more so if they won concrete concessions like extra materials or funds.

Significantly, this state of affairs was in line with official policy. The party's central leadership not only abandoned its disciplinary policies periodically for campaigns of labour activism, but insisted on qualifying even its most authoritarian decrees with calls for the party to whip up mass activism. They simply never saw the two as mutually exclusive. This would seem to lend validity to Kotkin's thesis of positive integration. For if the regime had rendered opposition impossible and workers participated in its initiatives as expected, does that not mean that workers defined their interests in line with the political priorities of the regime?

Not quite so. If we take at face value the contents of the party's policy documents and the pronouncements of its leaders, it would seem that they genuinely believed that greater workplace discipline could be achieved at the same time as and as a result of greater workplace activism. But although party members did act according to party policy by taking an interest in matters of production, the result was not a well-ordered

[191] It is worth stressing this point as even scholars who have noted the disruptive effect of party activism on managerial authority have tended to think that the conflict between these two corners of the "triangle" declined after 1932. See for example Merridale, *Moscow Politics*, pp. 187-9.
[192] The 2nd Conference of 1940 is the first where workers in terms of current occupation were not the majority of delegates. Of a total number of 520, 135 were workers in production while 255 were skilled technicians (ITR). The remaining delegates were either party and trade-union staff (50) or white-collar administrative staff (58). TsGAIPD, f. 1012, op. 2, d. 1954, ll. 3-4.

workplace but the transformation of plan fulfilment and resources allocation inside the factory into matters of political contention. The reasons for this are obvious. In conditions of extreme scarcity and "taut planning" the general interest of enterprise-wide plan fulfilment diverged significantly from the interests of particular shops, as it did from the interest of workers to conserve their labour power.

There was however an important way in which party activism served the regime's interests. By making it possible for state directives to be moderated in practice and providing opportunities for promotion as well as limited control over the production process, industrial party organisations played an important role in preventing a catastrophic collapse of relations between workers and the state during the worse periods of the industrialisation drive. Overall, cases such as the Teikovo strike wave were exceptional.

This view has much in common with Straus's account of parallel integration. However, although I agree that the ability of workers to carve out a niche in the system was a fundamental feature of the interwar Soviet labour relations, I have tried to show that the primacy assigned by Straus to Red Directors in the formation of this social contract is not possible to sustain given their high turnover at the not atypical in this respect case of KP/Kirov. It was the institutional framework of the party organisation rather than the shrewdness of directors that made possible the containment of industrial strife and consequently, the completion of the industrialisation process.

This had important implications. As stressed earlier in this chapter, the party organisation was not a trade union and the workers who joined the party in order to strengthen their position in the workplace took on a number of other responsibilities in doing so. Not least among these was taking part in internal party life, from the major clashes at the top to the mundane procedural matters of their own group.

2. Conflict, Purges and Administration: Politics on the factory floor

2.1 Introduction

Grassroots participation in interwar Soviet politics has been most commonly examined within the conceptual framework of the "politics of mobilisation", that is with respect to attempts on the regime's part to whip up support for its policies by involving broad swathes of the population in mass political campaigns surrounding specific policy objectives, themselves often the focus of intense factional struggles at the top.[1] The intention, often realised, was both to crowd out grassroots opposition and to extend the regime's reach beyond that of the executive organs of the state. Because of this methodological approach, most of the literature on the activist dimension of Soviet politics has tended to focus on specific cases of mass mobilisation as aspects – albeit central – of broader political developments.[2] As a result, although there is now a significant volume of work on the impact of grassroots participation on processes ranging from the mid-1920s opposition struggles to the Moscow trials and the ensuing terror, there is considerably less work on the institutional parameters that made such input possible by inducing and sustaining popular mobilisation. Thus, while grassroots involvement in specific campaigns has been studied in great detail, the continuities and caesurae between these have seen less light. This is because mobilisation is viewed primarily as a one-way, top-down process whereby the centre switched on mass activism in order to facilitate the implementation of certain policies. Thus, the conditions within which such mobilisations took place are viewed only as facilitators

[1] Priestland, *Stalinism and the Politics of Mobilization*, pp. 15-18; idem., "Stalin as Bolshevik Romantic":

[2] See indicatively, Clayton Black, "Party Crisis and the Factory Shop Floor: Krasnyi Putilovets and the Leningrad Opposition, 1925-26," *Europe-Asia Studies* 46, no. 1 (1994): 107–126. Chase, *Workers, Society and the Soviet State*; Fitzpatrick, "How the mice buried the cat"; Goldman, *Terror and Democracy*; John B. Hatch, "The 'Lenin Levy' and the Social Origins of Stalinism: Workers and the Communist Party in Moscow, 1921-1928," *Slavic Review* 48, no. 4 (1989): 558–577; Merridale, *Moscow Politics*; Viola, *Best Sons*; William Chase, "Scapegoating One's Comrades in the USSR, 1934-1937," in James Harris, ed. *Anatomy of Terror: Political Violence under Stalin*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013): 263-281. This approach has also informed studies of post-war Stalinism: Serhy Yekelchyk, "The Civic Duty to Hate: Stalinist Citizenship as Political Practice and Civic Emotion (Kiev, 1943-53)," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 7, no. 3 (2006): 529–556; James W. Heinzen, "Informers and the State under Late Stalinism: Informant Networks and Crimes against 'Socialist Property,' 1940–53," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 8, no. 4 (2007): 789–815.

or limiting factors to the success of such campaigns. A prime example of this is the literature on the social dimensions of mass repression in Soviet factories. Scholars like Wendy Goldman, Roberta Manning and Robert Thurston have argued convincingly that the rapid spread of repression through industrial enterprises in the mid-1930s was fuelled by social tensions generated by the still recent rapid industrialisation drive.[3] The account offered here is not inconsistent with this view, but it goes a step further arguing that the primary party organisation provided the institutional framework that made possible the process described by Goldman and other proponents of this view. That is, the PPO was a necessary condition for the transformation of industrial tensions into political repression.

The purpose of this chapter is to show that although the major policy initiatives of the central leadership certainly relied on mobilising grassroots communists, the party rank-and-file was not a politically inert mass waiting to be activated from above. Every new political directive that reached the KP/Kirov PPO found it in an already rather mobilised state, most often engaged in troubleshooting issues relating to the factory's production plan. The renewed flurry of activism that ensued then left its own mark on the subsequent workings of the organisation, which in turn determined the way the next directive would be received. This dialectical interplay between the world of factory politics and the party's large-scale political campaigns will be the main subject of the discussion that follows.

The following pages will examine the function of the KP/Kirov plant party organisation as an instrument of mobilisation and channel of participation in the political campaigns of the post-1925 interwar period. The focus will be on those initiatives of party policy that were not directly related to industrial production and did not therefore concern the organisation's members as factory employees but as communist citizens of the Soviet Union. It will be shown that the political-organisational framework of the primary party organisation made successive waves of mobilisation possible by rendering the party's abstract political campaigns and remote leadership disputes relevant to the rank-and-file membership through the same

[3] Goldman, *Terror and Democracy*; Manning, "The Soviet Economic Crisis of 1936-940"; Thurston, "The Stakhanovite Movement."

medium it legitimated their concerns in the workplace, namely the ideology of Marxism-Leninism.

2.2 Return to the mainstream

The Leningrad Party Organisation was at the centre of the factional struggle that took place at the XIV Party Congress in December 1925, providing the organisational power base for the group allied to Grigori Zinoviev and Lev Kamenev who sought to challenge the CC majority line.[4] Within the LPO, the heavily industrial Moskovskii-Narvskii district where *Krasnii Putilovets* was located was one of the hotbeds of oppositionist activity, with the *raikom* secretary A. D. Sarkis being amongst the most ardent critics of CC policy.[5]

There were good reasons for this. Although the importance of the defeat of the New Opposition in the process of Stalin's ascendance to political supremacy has concentrated scholarly interest onto the implications of the affair for central politics, there are strong reasons to suggest that the origins of this factional fight lay in the tensions generated by the party's New Economic Policy and that the central role Leningrad played in the events was due to more than Zinoviev's control of the northern capital's party organisation.[6]

By the time the crisis came to a head in late 1925, the NEP had succeeded in its immediate aims of staving off economic collapse and repairing relations between the Bolshevik government and the country's vast rural population. The success of the NEP had however come at the cost of growing social stratification in both city and countryside while economic growth was primarily concentrated in light industry, casting doubts on the country's industrialisation prospects and alienating the party's proletarian support base. Several years after the revolution, the market conditions of

[4] Other prominent members of the New Opposition were Nadezhda Krupskaia and Grigori Sokol'nikov, the People's Commissar for Finance. See Robert Vincent Daniels, *The Conscience of the Revolution: Communist Opposition in Soviet Russia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960), pp. 253-272.
[5] Black, "Party Crisis", p. 114.
[6] Daniels denied that the crisis had any significance beyond that of a clash between the personalities involved, arguing that "[t]here is no evidence that any bona fide rank and file movement was involved". Daniels, *Conscience,* p. 271. Schapiro offered a similar interpretation of the events. Schapiro, *Communist Party,* p. 320.

the NEP meant that industrial enterprises that could not secure the funds necessary to remain in operation had to either go out of business or be leased to the private sector, with roughly a third of these returning to their pre-revolutionary owners.[7]

Being one of the country's most industrialised areas, Leningrad experienced the side-effects of the NEP particularly acutely. KP faced closure on two separate occasions in 1923 and 1924, as the enormous enterprise accounted for some 90% of the regional machine-building trust's debt while operating at less than 5% capacity.[8] In September 1925, the party secretary of KP Aleksandr Aleksandrov reported to the regional secretary and prominent oppositionist Piotr Zalutskii that the insufficient growth rate of the factory was a "serious danger" with respect to the political moods of its workforce.[9] There were thus strong reasons for Leningrad's rank-and-file communists to rally behind a political programme attacking the purported retreat from socialist principles represented by the NEP and in favour of an expansionist economic policy oriented towards the development of heavy industry.

Realising that the roots of the rebellion in the LPO went deeper than Zinoviev's political ambitions, the CC majority tailored its response to address the concerns of the rank-and-file even as it moved to neutralise the leaders of the opposition. Prominent members of the party leadership, including Viacheslav Molotov, Klim Voroshilov and the future regional secretary Sergei Kirov, toured the city's enterprises addressing mass meetings of worker communists in order to affirm the party's commitment to industrial expansion and win the organisations back from the opposition.[10] The extraordinary conference of the LPO that followed the defeat of the opposition was addressed by Felix Dzerzhinskii and Nikolai Bukharin, who both sought to reassure the delegates by promising an increased pace of industrialisation. A few months later, in April 1926, Stalin himself would make a rare visit to Leningrad to report on the USSR's economic state to an LPO *aktiv* meeting. The New Opposition crisis had thus brought home to the party leadership that a disgruntled rank-and-file

[7] Suvorova, *Nepovskaia Mnogoukladnaia Ekonomia*, p. 96.
[8] Black, "Party Crisis", p. 109.
[9] V. Iu. Cherniaev, *Piterskie Rabochie i "Diktatura Proletariata": Oktiabr' 1917 - 1929* (Saint-Petersburg: Russko-Baltiiskii Informatsionnii Tsentr BLITs, 2003), p. 350.
[10] A few weeks later, in a letter to Ordzhonikidze, Kirov would reflect that he had not experienced such intense meetings since 1917, some of them attracting over 2000 participants who were not above the occasional fistfight. Kirov to Ordzhonikidze, *Bol'shevistkoe rukovodstvo,* p. 318.

could act as a launching board for opposition factions. In order to prevent the re-emergence of similar problems in the future, the new regional leadership in Leningrad sought to rebuild trust between the centre and the LPO's mass membership, refraining from a punitive treatment of the oppositionists. Greater political engagement and ideological astuteness on the part of the rank-and-file were instead declared to be the only available means to prevent future factionalism, prompting the *gubkom* bureau led by Kirov to make the promotion of party activism one of the top priorities of its work in 1926.[11]

Having been heavily involved in the clash between the CC and the LPO, the party organisation at KP now became a focus of the new leadership's policy of rehabilitation through political mobilisation.[12] Ivan Gaza, an old Putilov worker and former Red Army commissar who had consistently opposed the Zinovievites throughout the crisis became the new secretary and quickly set to work reorienting the organisation towards the political mainstream.[13]

The first major party meeting held under Gaza's leadership was an expanded joint session of the bureau with its shop-level equivalents, shop-section organisers, communist foremen and trade-union activists that took place on 9 February 1926, one day before the LPO's extraordinary conference. Attended by 306 members, the first meeting of the factory's new leadership had been called to review and discuss ways to remedy the effects of the factional struggle that had shaken the organisation.[14] As shown in the previous chapter, what had been intended as the first step towards a return to normality in the factory's party life, quickly descended into a row between the administration and party activists from the shops as each side tried to blame the other for declining labour discipline. It is worth briefly revisiting this event here because it

[11] For a more detailed discussion of the way in which the new LPO leadership handled its reintegration into the political mainstream, see Yiannis Kokosalakis, "'Merciless War' Against Trifles: The Leningrad Party Organisation After the Fall of the Zinoviev Opposition," *Revolutionary Russia* 28, no. 1 (2015): 48–68.
[12] The KP party organisation was the last major *kollektiv* in the city to condemn the opposition, following a plenary session attended by the full force of the CC delegation: Kalinin, Molotov, Tomskii, Petrovskii, Kirov and Voroshilov. The plenum, held on 20 April 1926 renounced the organisation's previous support for the opposition by a vote of 800 to 400. Black, "Party Crisis" and TsGAIPD, f. 1012, op. 1, d. 266, l. 2.
[13] Stanislav Kostiuchenko, *Istoriia Kirovskogo Zavoda, 1917-1945* (Moscow: Mysl', 1965), pp. 228-30.
[14] TsGAIPD, f. 1012, op. 1, d. 268, l. 10.

is indicative of the way in which the party organisation remained a political institution imbued with Marxist-Leninist ideology even as it functioned as a space of contestation for competing interests on the factory floor.

Gaza spoke first, declaring that the main task before the organisation was the rebuilding of party discipline, which had suffered as a result of the factional conflict. This was seconded by Anushenko, a communist from the iron constructions shop, who argued that shop-level party work had taken a particularly hard hit during the crisis, as unruly young party members "had been walking all over their shop cells".[15] It was in this context that *zavkom* members argued that communists in the shops should become more active in bringing workers' grievances to the committee's attention, to which many of those present responded by arguing that such grievances were the fault of the administration. Some of them however went further than simply passing the buck to management. Nazimov, from the wagon shop, cautioned against the administration's purported slackness and then went on to argue that factory security had to be tightened, as there were people who were trying to take advantage of the situation to cause trouble. This comment was made in relation to some fires that had recently broken out on factory grounds, which the director Grachev conceded as reflective of lack of adequate security measures but not of integrity on the administration's part. While other speakers went on to criticise the administration on pay and related issues, Gubanov, a communist from the instrument making shop chose to remain on the security theme. Gubanov stated that former White Army officers and generals had been discovered at *Krasnii Treugol'nik,* another one of Leningrad's iconic factories. He went on to muse if it would not be a good idea to investigate if the same was true for KP as well, concluding that it was "necessary to shake-up" all of the factory's staff.[16]

The meeting seems to have concluded on an uncertain tone, with Gaza reiterating that rebuilding party discipline was a task of paramount importance but without any concrete measures being agreed on. At first glance, the way the meeting played out seems to fit very well with the analysis offered in the previous chapter. The first formal

[15] "[S]hagnuli po golovam tsekhiacheek". Ibid.
[16] Ibid. l. 11

meeting of the new leadership of the party organisation was overwhelmed by the internal contradictions of factory life, as communists from the shops attacked the administration and the discussion was derailed from the original issue of rebuilding party discipline to problems like adequate remuneration for stoppages.

While this is true however, it is also necessary to add an extra layer of analysis here in order to fully account for the content of the some of the speakers' contributions. For although "the politics of production" are definitely at play in Grachev's defence of the administration and the shop communists' criticisms of its performance, it is harder to draw such a conclusion from the suspicions expressed by Gubanov regarding the presence of counterrevolutionaries in the factory, especially given his conclusion that *all* of KP's staff needed a shake-up. It would instead be more plausible to read the security concerns expressed by some of the speakers as reflective of the fact that for all its preoccupation with the minutiae of production, the party organisation remained a political institution. As stressed in the previous chapter, the party was not a trade-union and although worker communists used their membership to press their workplace concerns, they did not necessarily do so in bad faith and were thus not any less communist for it. The corollary of this is that even issues that were not directly related to industrial relations within the enterprise could attract the attention of militant activists like Gubanov. In this particular case it seems that only a few years after the end of the Civil War, the confusion generated within the organisation by the political crisis of the New Opposition had made some party members feel that the factory was vulnerable to the machinations of counterrevolutionaries. Thus, more than a decade before the *Yezhovshchina*, grassroots party members were interpreting in terms of sabotage what was most likely an accident due to lax fire safety measures. Such an outlook however had not at that time become prevalent amongst the party leadership itself and on that occasion, Gaza closed the meeting by urging his comrades to rebuild the organisation by promoting party discipline, rather than vigilance.[17]

In line with the policy adopted by the new regional leadership, such discipline had less to do with persecuting the remnants of the opposition than with the more

[17] By contrast, a January 1937 *partkom* meeting at the Dynamo factory in Moscow held to discuss a fire that had consumed a significant amount of the factory's stored output rapidly determined the cause to be arson. Goldman, *Inventing the Enemy*, pp. 80-87.

mundane task of promoting a modicum of organisational culture amongst the membership, still overwhelmingly composed of recent recruits.[18] Thus, of the eleven disciplinary cases reviewed by the organisation's conflict commission on 17 March, six were about lost party cards.[19] The remainder concerned internal squabbles as well as accusations of "careerism" and corruption, as in the case of Ivan Balashov, a storekeeper accused by the main factory store bureau of not informing the organisation of his criminal convictions for bribe-taking, blackmail and theft of evidence.[20] None of the cases reviewed had any connexion to the events of the preceding winter, or to any subsequent oppositionist activity.

The promotion of party discipline with respect to organisational matters seems to have remained the primary political concern of the party at KP for most of the remainder of 1926. Low meeting attendance and high levels of arrears in party dues emerged as major issues in the organisation's general assembly held on 27 May. According to Gaza, the organisation had only collected 60% of subscription dues in March and 56.3% in April. Similarly, the shop bureau re-election campaign that had taken place after the organisation withdrew its support for the opposition had only been attended by 65% of the membership, although this was apparently an improvement on past performance.[21] Similar concerns were expressed by the *raikom* bureau during a review of the performance of some of KP's shop-level party organisers held in August. The higher party organ deemed the work of the organiser of the open hearth furnace shop party group Morozov to be "very weak", demanding "decisive measures against disciplinary offences" like unexcused absences and delays in the payment of subscription dues. Ivanov, a party activist from the tractor department was also criticised for failing to keep good attendance records, despite the rest of his work having been "satisfactory".[22]

Despite the repeated complaints about the state of party work expressed by the leadership at both the enterprise and the district level, things do not actually seem to

[18] At that time, about half of the organisation's members had joined the party in 1925. TsGAIPD, f. 1012, op. 1, d. 266, l. 60.
[19] TsGAIPD, f. 1012, op. 1, d. 268, l. 103.
[20] Ibid, l. 106.
[21] TsGAIPD, f. 1012, op. 1, d. 266, ll. 60-62.
[22] TsGAIPD, f. 1012, op. 1, d. 264, ll. 15-25.

have been so bad in every shop. The wagon shop organisation for example held regular meetings throughout the year, with an average attendance by members and candidates of around 66%, as well as regular though fluctuating presence by non-members. Although perhaps being an exception in that regard, the wagon shop party group had by May 1926 collected 90% of its members' subscription dues.[23] Its activities included presentations followed by discussion on a variety of topics ranging from the perennial problems of production to more abstract issues like the state of the worker-peasant alliance and the international political situation. Throughout the year, the group seems to have also conducted its organisational affairs in a more or less orderly manner managing to hold a smooth re-election of its bureau in January and elect other officer-bearers in subsequent months.[24] These are hardly disappointing results for an organisation composed predominantly of new recruits of overwhelmingly low education levels and that the leading cadres of the organisation found them substandard is more reflective of the importance they attached to the task of party building rather than the performance of the rank-and-filers.[25]

It should not be surprising that the KP organisation focused on party building while devoting little time to the events of the winter crisis. Both the CC and the new regional leadership had resolved that the factional activity of the opposition had become possible because of demagogic exploitation of legitimate grievances amongst the party's rank-and-file by Zinoviev and his allies. Having neutralised the opposition organisationally, it had become possible for CC loyalists to begin to remedy the problems that were the source of its political legitimacy. By making rank-and-file communists more politically astute – or "conscious" in the parlance of the time – Bolshevik leaders expected to make them less susceptible to similar demagogy in the future. A satisfactory level of political awareness could in the spirit of Marxism-Leninism only be gained by getting party members fully involved in the every-day life

[23] TsGAIPD, f. 1012, op. 1, d. 287, l. 20

[24] The new bureau consisted of 8 party and 1 Komsomol members, all with over 12 years' experience in production but, with one exception, less than two years of party membership. During the election, the candidate member Georgii Danilov was removed from the list due to incapacity to work and replaced by Georgii Smirnov who also became the organiser. Some months later, the bureau also held a three-way contested election on the post of "plenipotentiary" *(upolnomochennii)* for newspaper subscriptions. Ibid, ll. 1-4, 7, 33.

[25] Members with only primary education made up 91% of the organisation in 1926. TsGAIPD, f. 1012, op. 1, d. 266, l. 61.

of the organisation, through participating in meetings and actively promoting party policy amongst their fellow workers. This was also a necessary component of the party's response to the economic problems at the root of the crisis. The 14th Congress had resolved to step up the development of heavy industry and the Regime of Economy adopted in April 1926 was a measure in this direction which required the collaboration of the party's grassroots activists in order to become operative. Raising the rank-and-filers' level of political awareness was thus expected to make them both less susceptible to the pernicious views of the opposition and more capable of putting to practice the party's plans for economic development. As shown previously however, the smooth compliance of shop-floor activists with the measures of the Regime of Economy was hardly a foregone conclusion and there was certainly no direct relation between such cooperation and more party activism, as the latter could just as soon be channelled into passing the blame for economic failures, rightly or wrongly, onto the administration.

Thus, for most of 1926, the KP party organisation was kept busy with the task of getting its apparatus in working order and raising the political activity of its members while also attempting, usually without much success, to prevent it from getting in the way of plan fulfilment. Things would start to change toward the end of the year, as party unity was once again shaken by the emergence of a new challenge to the CC, this time from the combined forces of the Zinoviev-Kamenev bloc and their erstwhile opponent Leon Trotsky, who along with the remnants of the pre-NEP Workers' Opposition and Democratic Centralists came together to form what came to be known as the United Opposition.[26]

The alliance of these former political opponents against the CC majority was first announced at a joint session of the CC and Central Control Commission in July 1926 which, among other business, expelled Zinoviev from the Politburo on the charge that he had continued his factional activities following his defeat at the 14th Congress, exploiting his position as chair of the Comintern to build support among foreign communist parties while also building parallel organisations with the intention of

[26] Daniels, *Conscience*, pp. 273-321, Halfin, *Intimate Enemies*, pp. 228-70. *Pravda*, 30 July 1926.

establishing a second party in the Soviet Union.[27] Possibly in response to this development, Kamenev, Zinoviev and Trotsky expressed regret about their past political differences.[28] The renewed crisis lasted for more than a year, until the oppositionists suffered a final defeat at the 15th Congress which voted to expel the "active leaders of the Trotskyist opposition" from the party.[29]

Employing similar political tactics to that of the preceding winter, the revived opposition attacked the CC majority on the grounds that its general line served the interests of the NEP-bourgeoisie and the rural kulaks at the expense of the working class, therefore compromising the country's path to socialism. This critique was supplemented by charges of organisational malfeasance to the effect that CC loyalists prevented the oppositionists from airing their views.[30]

Sergei Kirov addressed both of these issues when he visited KP on 4 August to report on the decisions of the July CC plenum. The *gubkom* secretary spoke on the familiar problems of the NEP-era and defended party policy by arguing that the extensive operation of private capital in the economy did not pose a threat to the state-owned, socialist industrial sector. Then, responding to the oppositionists' protests regarding their treatment by the CC majority, Kirov went on to ridicule Zinoviev's and Kamenev's political about-turn in allying with Trotsky and adopting the political positions they had fought him over in 1923.[31] Interestingly, contributions from the floor were largely confined to the second theme of Kirov's report. Grigoriev spoke in favour of the opposition demanding more intra-party democracy and greater rights for oppositionists to present their views. Kodatskii responded by recognising that there were differences of opinion within the party but went on to warn against the "formation of grouplets".[32] Finally, Kirillov expressed zero tolerance for factionalism stating that he and other workers from the bench demanded "a monolithic party".[33]

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[27] *KPSS v rezoliutsiakh*, vol. 4, pp. 48-54.
[28] Halfin, *Intimate Enemies*, p. 228.
[29] The congress expelled 75 members as Trotskyists as well as 23 of the "clearly counterrevolutionary" Sapronov group. *KPSS v rezoliutsiakh*, vol. 4, p. 313. Trotsky and Zinoviev had already been expelled by a joint plenary session of the CC and Central Control Commission held in October. Ibid., pp. 249-250.
[30] Daniels, *Conscience*, p. 304.
[31] TsGAIPD, f. 1012, op. 1, d. 266, l. 175.
[32] Ibid, l. 176.
[33] Ibid, l. 177.

Tensions between the opposition and the CC majority remained high throughout the autumn of 1926. On the first day of October, *Pravda* led with an article which inverted the opposition's criticisms, accusing its members of undermining the country's socialist prospects by breaking ranks just at the time that economic restoration had been achieved and the party was about to embark on the construction of socialism proper.[34] A month later, the 15th all-union party conference condemned the opposition as a social-democratic deviation using revolutionary rhetoric to mask its essentially opportunist policy.[35]

Despite this escalation however, a KP party meeting held in October to discuss the growing rift in the CC was addressed by none other than Zinoviev accompanied by the former *gubkom* secretary Grigorii Evdokimov and Sarkis, the former *raikom* secretary of KP's district. Zinoviev was given a standard ten-minute time slot as a contributor from the floor, which was then extended, following a vote by hand, by another fifteen minutes. Zinoviev was not granted a further extension, and he was cut off when his extra time ran out by Ivan Gaza who was chairing the session.[36]

The organisation's attitude towards the opposition remained reasonably accommodative for several months after the party's all-union conference. On 15 January 1927, 1,260 KP communists assembled to hear a report on the latest plenary session of the Comintern executive.[37] By that time, the party's leadership of the Comintern had emerged as a major issue of contention between the CC majority and the United Opposition, with the oppositionists accusing the majoritarians that their policy undermined the prospects of world revolution.[38] The question notes passed to the presidium from the floor thus reflected the rank-and-file's interest in both international affairs and their connexion to the brewing party crisis. As shown in the following sample, the questions posed suggest that at that stage the rank-and-file still

[34] *Pravda*, 1 October 1926.
[35] *KPSS v rezoliutsiakh*, vol. 4, pp. 108-16.
[36] TsGAIPD, f. 1012, op. 1, d. 270, ll. 143-6, cited in Kostiuchenko, *Istoriia Kirovskogo Zavoda*, pp. 252-254.
[37] TsGAIPD, f. 1012, op. 1, d. 418, l. 1.
[38] Isaac Deutscher, *The Prophet Unarmed: Trotsky 1921-1929* (London ; New York: Verso, 2003), pp. 233-254.

regarded the conflict in the upper echelons of the party with curiosity rather than any firm conviction either way:

> What party work are the oppositionists doing? Trotsky, Kamenev etc.
>
> Can the opposition mess with the situation in China? How?
>
> What is Zinoviev currently doing? What is his problem with rationalisation? Is he for it or not? What is the difference between socialist and capitalist rationalisation?
>
> What is the dispute over the Chinese and Polish questions?[39]

Six months later, at the next general assembly of KP communists held to discuss international affairs, the mood on the factory floor had become markedly different. The meeting had been scheduled for 9 June to hear a report by *Leningradskaia Pravda* editor Aleksandr Ugarov on the Comintern executive plenum that had taken place in May. By that time, the Comintern's China policy of an alliance between the Communist Party of China and the nationalist *Guomindang* had suffered a catastrophic failure after the nationalists turned on their communist partners in April 1927, killing several thousands in the process. Although the Chinese strategy of the Comintern had played no part in the early rounds of the United Opposition's struggle against the CC majority, the obvious failure of the official policy became a significant source of ammunition for the struggling minority. The May Comintern plenum was the first major forum in which the opposition attacked the majority leaders on these grounds.[40]

The meeting that would hear the report on the plenum convened under the shadow of dark events that had taken place far closer to home than those of remote China. On 26 May, while the Comintern plenum was in session, the diplomatic crisis between Britain and the USSR that had been gathering pace since the police raid on the offices of the Soviet diplomatic mission in London two weeks earlier came to a head. The Baldwin government finally severed relations with the Soviet Union and cancelled the Anglo-Soviet trade agreement of 1921, thus initiating the 1927 war scare in the USSR.[41] On 7 June, a counterrevolutionary émigré assassinated the Soviet

[39] TsGAIPD, f. 1012, op. 1, d. 418, l. 2.
[40] Deutscher, *Prophet Unarmed*, pp. 266-280.
[41] Jon Jacobson, *When the Soviet Union Entered World Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), p. 222.

ambassador to Poland Petr Voikov inside the Warsaw central rail station just as he was meeting Arkadii Rozengol'ts, the former ambassador to Britain who was on his way to Moscow following the break of relations between the two countries.[42] The same evening in Leningrad, another group of counterrevolutionaries led by the former White captain Viktor Larionov carried out a bombing attack against a centrally located party club on the Moika river, injuring several party members and successfully escaping to Finland.[43]

The day after the attack, several party organisations demonstrated throughout the country in protest against the growing aggressiveness of the enemies of Soviet power. In Leningrad, KP communists produced one of the most militant resolutions, vowing to defend the USSR against foreign aggression and denouncing imperialism and "its faithful servants and minions, social-democrats and socialists of all hues".[44]

In such circumstances, it should come as no surprise that the benign curiosity towards the United Opposition demonstrated by KP communists half a year earlier had by that time given way to a much more polarised political climate within the organisation. Following Ugarov's report Tuzhikov, the first contributor from the floor, sought to defend the opposition's line on China, demanding to know why the party was not supporting a "soviet line" and going on to argue that the opposition supported cooperation with the *Guomindang* as long as it was "critical".[45] This hardly inflammatory speech provoked the rage of Ruzin who denounced Tuzhikov as an oppositionist whose arguments could convince only the politically illiterate. "The opposition" he argued "is only offering demagogy. We cannot allow any disunity in our ranks at this stage".[46]

Some of the speakers that took the floor after Ruzin tried to keep the focus of discussion on the relative merits of the Comintern's China policy, in what might have been an attempt to deescalate. The inopportune timing of the oppositionists' publication of their differences with the CC majority however made such efforts futile.

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[42] *Pravda*, 8 June 1927.
[43] *Pravda*, 9 June 1927. Larionov later published a memoir account of the attack under the title *Boevaia Vilazka v SSSR* (Paris: Bor'ba za Rossiiu, 1931).
[44] *Pravda*, 9 June 1927.
[45] TsGAIPD, f. 1012, op. 1, d. 418, l. 95.
[46] Ibid, l. 96.

Taking the floor after a speaker had criticised the opposition's radical line on the basis that China's proletariat was still young, Sharkov told the meeting that the murder of Voikov in Warsaw required every party member to be "on the alert *(nacheku)*" while the opposition wanted "to have a discussion". Ivan Gaza then took the floor to denounce the "Declaration of the 84 *(sic)*" as a "shameless *(nagleishii)* attack against the Party".[47]

Gaza's speech seems to have acted as a signal to the more militant opponents of the opposition that the time for restraint was over, for the content and tone of the contributions that followed it is markedly different, with very little to say on Comintern politics but quite vocal in their condemnation of the opposition's factionalism. Thus Smirnova, a non-KP worker present at the meeting said the following: "We don't have oppositionists in our collective. But one must feel for KP, when they have workers running about the shops distributing silly leaflets. The opposition is speculating on our difficulties. Enough!"[48] It is however the question notes attached to the meeting's protocol that provide the strongest indication of the growing impatience of the rank-and-file with the opposition. Out of 18 *zapiski* in total a full 13 contained questions or statements demanding Trotsky's and Zinoviev's expulsion from the party.[49]

On 18 August the KP party organisation met again to discuss the results of the joint plenary session of the CC and Central Control Commission that had convened earlier that month to review a motion to expel the leaders of the opposition from the CC which had been tabled by the politburo at the end of June.[50] Following a declaration by the opposition of its unconditional commitment to the defence of the Soviet Union, the party tribunal issued a formal reprimand and concluded its deliberations without taking any further disciplinary action against Trotsky and his allies.[51] By that time however, the growing schism within the party leadership had already become widely known amongst the rank-and-file and could thus no longer be contained without a fight. Thus, instead of following the standard format of a main report followed by

[47] Ibid.
[48] Ibid, l. 97.
[49] Ibid, ll. 100-1.
[50] Deutscher, *Prophet Unarmed*, pp. 285-95.
[51] *KPSS v rezoliutsiakh*, vol. 4, pp. 202-9.

discussion, the meeting's agenda also included a supplementary "co-report" *(sodoklad)* by Grigoriev, a supporter of the opposition.

The meeting protocol indicates that Grigoriev was interrupted by loud heckling from the floor and had to cut his report short after a motion by the presidium to allow him to continue his report was voted down by the assembly. Tuzhikov faced similar hostility and was also shouted down mid-speech. In this climate, it was an easy task for party loyalists to focus on the opposition's factionalism without having to confront any of the issues that its leaders were trying to wield as political weapons against the CC majority. Almost all of the speakers who took the floor to attack the opposition did so on the basis of its systematic violation of the ban on factions. Unlike past meetings, no energy was expended on arguing on about the wisdom of party policy on China or even the national economy. As one speaker put it, the assembly could not afford to "lose time arguing about the party's unity".[52]

Even those communists who were not comfortable with the way the oppositionists were being treated by the majoritarians could not but condemn violations of party discipline. Such views were expressed by Baranovskii, an old Putilov communist who had left the factory to serve on the Smolensk Control Commission. The party enforcer argued that the oppositionists had the right to present their views to the meeting and distanced himself from attempts to shout them down, stating that their contributions should and would be properly recorded. Nevertheless, he went on to condemn their attempts to bring the issue outside the confines of the party, "at train stations etc." and called on them to respect the rules of discipline.[53]

The meeting concluded with two separate resolutions being put to the vote. The one supporting the CC majority was overwhelmingly carried and consisted of the usual expressions of approval of the party's general line along with threats of expulsion for unrepentant factionalists. The opposition's resolution fell with only sixteen votes in favour, but its content is worth mentioning here because it demonstrates the extent to

[52] TsGAIPD, f. 1012, op. 1, d. 418, l. 148.
[53] Ibid, ll. 150-1. Baranovskii was referring to a possibly spontaneous demonstration held by the opposition at the Yaroslavl' train station in Moscow to protest against the banishment to the Far Eastern town of Khabarovsk of Ivar Smilga, a prominent revolutionary hero who had joined the opposition. Deutscher, *Prophet Unarmed*, 283-4.

which the rift had by that time become irreparable. The motion demanded not only space in the party press for the expression of its views, but also the recognition of these views as correct and their immediate implementation by the CC.[54] This clause, which could scarcely have done the oppositionists any favours, seems calculated to provoke and can hardly be ascribed to mere political naivety. It seems rather that despite the purported truce agreed at the top, the tensions that had been generated by the brewing crisis within the KP organisation had by that time become impossible to contain. The oppositionists were no longer seeking to win over the organisation, they were attempting to make their presence as strongly felt as possible before the inevitable showdown. Belying the relatively restrained language of the majority resolution, the question notes attached to the meeting protocol suggest that the majoritarians had also ceased to entertain any notions of reconciliation.[55]

As the conflict at the top reignited in the run up to the 15th party congress, KP party meetings also became tenser affairs. On 29 September, the party assembly met again to elect its new leading organs for the following six-month period. The supporters of the opposition put forward a separate slate of candidates for the organisation's bureau. More than its inevitable defeat, it is the composition of the slate that reflects the opposition's isolation within the organisation; only five of the proposed candidates' names were different from the majority-proposed list.[56] The discussion of amendments to the majority slate that followed its confirmation by the meeting also became caught up in the internal party struggle, as allegations about the oppositionist past of some of the candidates came to dominate the process. Even Gaza came under fire, with another candidate stating that he had been a Trotskyist in the past. This elicited a furious response from the incumbent secretary, who went on to query his accuser about his whereabouts during the Civil War.[57] The last candidate to be reviewed before the final confirmation of the slate was Smirnov, the organiser of the wagon workshop party group mentioned earlier in this chapter. Having been challenged about his oppositionist past, Smirnov took the floor to admit that he had

[54] TsGAIPD, f. 1012, op. 1, d. 418, ll. 158-9.
[55] One *zapiska* author for example wondered: "Why the hell *(kakogo-zhe cherta)* are they calling for decisions against the opposition while handing out mild punishments. Expel from CC and if necessary from VKP (b)." ibid, l. 160.
[56] TsGAIPD f. 1012, op. 1, d. 419, l. 77.
[57] Ibid, l. 79.

supported the New Opposition in the run up to the 14th Congress but had broken with it at the time of Zinoviev's attack on the CC. He then claimed that he had since been approached by supporters of the United Opposition and asked to sign their platform, which he refused. Finishing his response, Smirnov condemned the oppositionists for their attempts to organise non-party workers around their views and stated that in his view, "they would not be against an armed coup".[58]

Tensions inside the KP organisation came to a head after the October plenum of the CC finally expelled Trotsky and Zinoviev from the party. On the first day of November 1927, the communists of KP assembled once more to hear a report on the decisions of the party's leading body. The protocol record of the meeting suggests that the last confrontation between majoritarians and oppositionists was extremely acrimonious. Following the main report, Grigoriev and Leontiev took the floor to protest the exclusion of the opposition's views from the party press and argue that workers supportive of the CC majority were not fully informed of the substance of the intra-party dispute. The assembly heard their speeches but went on to deny speaking rights to Oskar Tarkhanov, the organisation's former deputy secretary in 1924-1925 who had since been working as a political advisor in China.[59]

As Tarkhanov was no longer a member of the organisation, the decision was not strictly-speaking against the rules but the reaction of the oppositionists to having one of their ablest allies barred from the meeting was, not surprisingly, to protest. The protocol record notes "disruption" of the assembly by the oppositionists in response to the decision to bar Tarkhanov, followed by threats of disciplinary action by Antipov, who chaired the meeting. Things in the hall apparently calmed down enough for the meeting to continue only after the assembly ejected Grigoriev following a motion by Ivanov.[60] The latter then took the floor to condemn oppositionist factionalism, stating that Grigoriev did not recognise the authority of the coming 15th party congress, viewing it instead as "an all-Russian *aktiv* meeting".[61] At that, he was interrupted by

[58] Ibid, l. 80.
[59] Ibid, l. 96. For a brief sketch of Tarkhanov's eventful life, see M. A. Alekseev, A. I Kolpakidi, V. Ia. Kochik, *Entsiklopediia Voennoi Razvedki, 1918-1945 gg.* (Moscow: Kuchkovo Pole, Voennaia Kniga, 2012), p. 769.
[60] TsGAIPD f. 1012, op. 1, d. 419, l. 96
[61] Ibid, l. 98

Mukhin who blandly confirmed that this was so, to applause from the oppositionists still present. Ivanov then concluded his speech by warning the oppositionists that if it were truly their intention to defy the party's sovereign body, their only remaining option would be to come out in armed rebellion against the Soviet state.[62]

The last major intervention in favour of the opposition came from Ivan Bakaev, the decorated chekist who had chaired Petrograd's security commission during the Civil War. Bakaev was attending the assembly in his capacity as a member of the party's Central Control Commission and unlike Tarkhanov, could not be barred from speaking. In any case, the assembly seems to have heard his appeal for party unity and detailed defence of Trotsky and Zinoviev with considerable interest, as Bakaev was the only speaker to have his fifteen-minute speaking slot extended by an extra ten minutes.[63]

Nevertheless, whatever the extent of Bakaev's popularity or rhetorical ability, it was not enough to sway the KP party assembly away from the CC majority. The resolution passed at the end of the meeting approved the decisions of the October plenum and condemned Trotskyism once more.[64] On 29 December, when Sergei Kirov visited the factory to personally deliver the report on the party's 15th Congress, only one person took the floor to defend the views of the defeated opposition while with few exceptions, most of the question notes concerning the opposition read more like inquiries about the fate of its leaders as opposed to the indignant denunciations of factionalism and defiant rejections of orthodoxy that been pouring onto the presidium's desk in the previous months.[65] Two years after it first emerged as a stronghold of Zinoviev's New Opposition, the KP party organisation had been transformed into a pillar of CC loyalism. Given the extent of this transformation, it may be useful here to offer some remarks regarding the implications of the preceding account for our understanding of the place of the primary party organisation in late-NEP Soviet society.

[62] Ibid, ll. 98-99.
[63] Ibid, ll.106-107.
[64] Ibid, l. 138.
[65] Ibid, l. 149.

KP communists rallied to the New Opposition because its pro-industrial political platform resonated among workers who felt, with reason, that they were not getting their fair share out of the economic growth generated by the NEP. When Kirov and the CC delegation arrived in Leningrad to retake control of the organisation, the KP party assembly abandoned the opposition, whether because its members were convinced by the arguments and assurances offered by the leadership representatives or because the very fact of their presence brought home the isolation of the Zinovievites outside of Leningrad.

In order to reintegrate the organisation into the political mainstream, the new leadership at KP had to follow a two-pronged strategy based on improving economic performance so as to deprive the opposition of its most potent argument while at the same time rebuilding the party organisation on the basis of the CC majority line, without alienating rank-and-file members who had initially sided with Zinoviev. These two tasks were almost the sole concern of all levels of the organisation for several months after January 1926. Such efforts notwithstanding, there is little doubt that the economic hardship that had fuelled the party crisis persisted, in less acute form, throughout 1926-1927 and it was around this issue that re-emboldened supporters of the opposition agitated after Kamenev and Zinoviev allied with Trotsky in mid-1926, well before Chinese affairs became an issue in the internal struggle. Why then did the resurgent opposition fail to mount a challenge similar to that of 1925-1926, even within the confines of the KP party organisation?

We have little reason to doubt the veracity of the oppositionists' protestations about their exclusion from the press and the suppression of their organisational activities. Neither of these things was sanctioned by either the Party Rules or the laws of the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, it would be hardly plausible to suggest that reading articles in *Pravda* would have done more to attract KP communists to the opposition than the visits of such of its luminaries as Zinoviev, Sarkis and Bakaev to the factory grounds. As it was thus possible for leading oppositionists as well as rank-and-file supporters to put their views to the thousand-plus strong KP party assembly, the root causes of the oppositions' defeat must be sought in conditions other than censorship and organisational pressures, even though these constraints certainly limited its ability to constitute itself into a coherent political subject at an all-Union level.

The failure of the opposition should instead be seen as evidence that the response of the new Leningrad leadership to the 1925-1926 party crisis was working. As shown in the previous chapter, the party's economic initiatives after the 14th congress were amenable to interpretations that favoured workers on the shop-floor. The party's economic policy in the last years of the NEP not only pulled the rag from under the opposition's feet by declaring industrialisation to be the order day, but crucially also gave rank-and-file communists the opportunity to pursue their immediate interests while remaining part of the political mainstream. Thus, it also made it desirable and possible for former rank-and-file oppositionists to become CC loyalists, depriving the opposition of potential cadres as well as arguments as demonstrated by the case of Smirnov who, from a supporter of Zinoviev until December 1925, had by January 1926 become a party organiser in his shop. There is little reason to suggest that this process was peculiar to KP.[66]

Having thus secured the opposition's defeat at the grassroots level, it became easy sport for the CC majority to convincingly ridicule the Trotskyists' claim to represent the genuine views of the rank-and-file and the party's true Bolshevik spirit, making their defeat at the 15th congress a foregone conclusion.[67] This outcome had significant implications for the subsequent development of Soviet grassroots politics, especially with regard to their function within the USSR's one-party system.

The opposition's refusal to openly reject the Bolshevik party's monopoly on power and organise itself into a separate political organisation has been cited by many scholars as one of the major factors that contributed to its defeat.[68] By adhering to single-party rule, the argument goes, the opposition locked itself into an irresolvable political contradiction whereby it had to constantly scale back its activities in order to deflect accusations of factionalism by the CC majority. Notwithstanding its merits, this argument still leaves open the question of why the leadership of the opposition never took the decisive step of organisational separation. Although this is usually

[66] For a different Leningrad case study, see Halfin, *Intimate Enemies*, pp. 228-270.
[67] A *Pravda* editorial published shortly after the October plenum remarked snidely that the opposition "seems to imagine its 'influence on the masses' to be growing proportionally to its own menshevisation *(omen'shevichivanie)*". *Pravda*, 29 October 1926.
[68] See indicatively Deutscher, *Prophet Unarmed*, p. 218-219 and passim, Halfin, *Intimate Enemies*, p. 260-261; John Eric Marot, "Trotsky, the Left Opposition and the Rise of Stalinism: Theory and Practice," *Historical Materialism* 14, no. 3 (2006): 175–206 .

attributed to the subjective commitment of Trotsky and his allies to the organisational principles of Bolshevism, the account offered here suggests that there was another, equally important factor at play.

As argued in the previous chapter, the influence of communist workers inside the factory was predicated on their ability to frame their interests in terms of political orthodoxy; that is as being more in line with the party's policy than the actions of the administration at any given conjuncture. This was only possible within the institutional framework of the Soviet party-state, where the party was fused with and at every level senior to the state. Appeals to party policy would have been meaningless in a situation where parties alternated in government and public officials, like factory administration staff, could claim to be apolitical. In 1926-1927, as economic policy became more closely aligned to the interests of heavy industry, there was little incentive for communist workers to jeopardise their influence at the point of production by splitting the organisation and quite a bit of incentive for them to react to any initiatives that threatened its unity with negativity, as they did. Rank-and-file oppositionists who, in Leningrad, had until recently themselves been majoritarians, could hardly have failed to see this.[69]

There were thus strong social factors pertaining to the interests of rank-and-file communists, the very constituency that the opposition was hoping to attract, mitigating against full organisational separation. Having established this, the implications of the opposition's defeat can now be more clearly stated. First, the whole process trained the rank-and-file to use party orthodoxy to its advantage, and regard challenges to it as threats to its own interests. Second, the outcome taught the central party leadership that it could rely on the rank-and-file to see off challenges to its power. In January 1926, the CC had to send some of its most prominent members to win back Leningrad from the Zinovievites factory by factory. A year or so later, it could let Zinoviev and Bakaev visit *Krasnii Putilovets* while trusting low-ranking functionaries like Ivan Gaza to maintain the rank-and-file's loyalty to the centre. The result was that the KP

[69] It seems indeed that concerns about the factional nature of their activities and the attendant dangers of expulsion were common amongst grassroots oppositionists. Halfin, *Intimate Enemies*, p. 253. The return *en masse* of the oppositionists to the party after the launch of the First FYP demonstrated that Stalin was firmly committed to industrialisation further underlines this point. Marot, "Trotsky", pp. 200-6.

party organisation never again became a space where party policy could be contested as such, but was instead established as the main site of the politics of production described earlier. From the perspective of the centre, this transformation was also what made possible the politics of mobilisation more broadly, as it was only after militant loyalty had become the norm amongst the rank-and-file that it could be mobilised, in the sense of being deployed *en masse* in order to implement or lend support to the centre's policy initiatives. As shown in the preceding chapter, the *samokritika* campaign, launched less than a year after the final defeat of the United Opposition, was the first instance in which the politics of production and mobilisation were brought together, with far-reaching effects on the factory floor. We have already seen how, within that context, the failure of the factory's tractor plan cost director Grachev his job and influenced the organisation's relations with his successor. There is no reason to revisit these themes here. Instead, the following section will examine the party building activities of the organisation during the first time in its history when the threat of internal grassroots opposition had finally been eradicated.

2.3 No Right Deviation

The breakneck pace of industrialisation required by the First FYP made it necessary for KP communists to devote an even greater part of their efforts than usual to problems of production. Nevertheless, a close reading of the organisation's records from that period reveals that KP communists never lost sight of the organisational and ideological tasks inherent in party membership, even as they were busy trying to remedy bottlenecks, stoppages and waste while also making sure management took the blame.

In the short interval between the final defeat of the United Opposition and the full scale launch of the FYP, the KP party organisation returned to the familiar business of party building that had been the order of the day in early 1926. Like then, the oppositionists and their activities disappeared from the agendas of party meetings and the content of speakers' contributions, even though the question notes surviving in the

archives do reflect considerable lingering interest on the part of the rank-and-file.[70] Instead, it was assumed once again that getting on with business would be the best way to return to normality.[71]

Thus, in May 1928, at the first electoral general assembly of the KP party organisation held after the defeat of the opposition, Gaza could declare that the party was now "stronger than ever" and that the time had come to fully "develop party democracy and *samokritika*", while joking that Trotsky had been right about one thing, "the party is always right".[72] Attended by 1,411 delegates and lasting over five hours, the meeting was a milestone in the organisational consolidation of the KP PPO, as demonstrated by the meticulous detail in which the assembly went through its agenda. Gaza delivered the main report on behalf of the bureau which, although predictably focusing mostly on the familiar problems of factory life like truancy and accidents, devoted considerable time to the theme of the organisation's political rejuvenation. Having pronounced the party group to be at the peak of its strength, Gaza went on to praise the activities of the shop-level cells which had achieved record levels of participation and contributions during a recent round of bureau re-elections. The secretary then expressed his ambition to transform the shop-cells into "genuine political centres on the factory floor", arguing that it was at that level that the rank-and-file membership of the organisation could most effectively exert its influence. This, he went on, would require a careful reorganisation of party meetings in order to ensure that their agendas included only relevant topics that could be meaningfully addressed at their level. In conclusion, Gaza admitted that the KP party was still some way short of achieving this goal and urged his comrades to spare no effort in revitalising the shop-cells.[73]

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[70] This was the case for both sides. Most of the *zapiski* concerning the opposition in 1928 were inquiries about the fate of prominent oppositionists and the prospect of their return to major party posts and can be reasonably assumed to have come from their supporters. At the same time however, quite a few of the notes reaching the presidiums were raising concerns about the pernicious influence of expelled oppositionists and warning of the possibility that they could provoke workers to riots. TsGAIPD, f. 1012, op. 1, d. 549, ll. 3-4, 19, 96, 214.

[71] This is reflected on the figures of disciplinary procedures. Between September 1927 and May 1928, there were 121 disciplinary cases which led to 60 expulsions from a total membership of well over 2000. Ibid. l. 45.

[72] Ibid. ll. 41-42.

[73] Ibid., ll. 42-45.

Gaza's bureau report was followed by an equally long-winded account delivered by a representative of the monitoring commission which had been set up by the organisation's last plenary session. The commission, composed of eleven experienced worker communists, was charged with the task of checking the bureau's work against directives issued by the *raikom*.[74] The singularly dull document it produced went over the activities of the organisation's leading organ in excruciating detail, dividing it into thirteen major areas of assessment including among others agitation, leadership of the *Komsomol* and the communist caucus in the *zavkom*, "participation in economic life" and "control of directive implementation". These were further subdivided into a total of sixty-eight sub-categories.[75]

In itself, this document represents a significant step in the organisational maturation of the KP party cell; only a few months earlier, internal conflict had made it practically and politically impossible to even discuss the organisation's work, let alone set up a functioning monitoring commission on it. The content of the report however provides further indication that party life was finally entering a period of stability for the first time since 1926.

To be sure, the commission found much that was wanting in the bureau's work, but it commended its members on managing to stick to the agreed work-schedule and successfully resolving tensions between the *zavkom* and the factory administration.[76] What is more, the problems highlighted by the commission were different to the ones that leading members of the organisation had been complaining about in the early months of 1926. The report mentioned neither attendance nor timely payment of party dues as issues in need of improvement, suggesting that at least some progress had been made in these elementary aspects of party discipline. Instead, the commission representative criticised the outgoing bureau for failing to address the fact that around a quarter of party members in the factory did not have party assignments and suggested that "there are no party members without party assignments" should be adopted as a political slogan by the new leadership. This being a problem that could only be adequately addressed at the shop level, the commission also admonished the incoming

[74] Ibid., l. 48.
[75] Ibid., l. 64.
[76] Ibid, ll. 51-52.

bureau that care should be taken to ensure that shop-cells conducted their work in an orderly manner, starting by producing minutes of their meetings.[77]

With the assembly taking place a mere month after the Shakhty affair, the contributions from the floor that followed the commission's report were predictably saturated with attacks on the factory's administrative and technical staff. The political and organisational issues raised by the main speakers were thus almost entirely absent from the ensuing discussion, with the speakers being more concerned about Gaza's purported tolerance towards engineers of seemingly dubious loyalty.[78] Nevertheless, the bureau election that concluded the assembly seems to have taken place in an orderly manner, with the exchange of personal accusations that had plagued discussions of candidacies the previous year being notably absent. An element of contestation beyond the confirmation or rejection of candidacies was also introduced to the process, with a slate of thirty-three candidates being put to the vote in order to elect twenty-five full and five candidate bureau members. The election was conducted by process of elimination, with the number of objections *(vozderzhaniia)* being listed next to candidates' names in the manner of negative votes. Candidates were then ranked according to the number of objections, with the three that received the most being disqualified and the next five assuming candidate status.[79]

These modest organisational improvements took place against the backdrop of the smouldering social unrest generated by the grain procurement crisis that struck the country in the end of 1927. The attendant bread shortages and "extraordinary measures" sanctioned by the CC to secure the amount of grain necessary to feed the cities and the military acted as the prelude to the full collectivisation campaign that marked the end of the NEP in 1929.[80] As many KP employees maintained links with the countryside and food shortages placed considerable pressures on workers just as the country was gearing up for the first FYP, none of these developments could have

[77] Ibid, ll. 71-72.
[78] Ibid, ll. 77-78.
[79] Ibid. ll. 25-26.
[80] On the "extraordinary measures", see *KPSS v rezoliutsiakh*, vol. 4, pp. 316-7. On the significance of the crisis with respect to collectivisation, see Hughes, *Stalinism in a Russian Province*, pp. 73-91; Lynne Viola et al., *The Tragedy of the Soviet Countryside*, vol. 1*: The War Against the Peasantry, 1927-1930* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005); pp. 7-21; Nove, *An Economic History*, pp. 150-153.

escaped the attention of the organisation's members. Throughout 1928, the *zapiski* collected at the organisation's assembly meetings reflect growing concern with regard to conditions in the countryside. Thus, when on 8 August CC member Aleksei Stetskii visited the factory to report on the committee's July plenum he received, among others, the following question notes:

> Will we import bread from abroad?
>
> What explains the high tax on peasant livestock?
>
> Why is there a bread crisis now, when in 1924 industry was far less developed and yet there was no crisis?
>
> There have been rumours that supposedly the Ukraine is leaving the Soviet Union that this is the cause of the bread shortages. If this is not true, and I am convinced it is not, just mention this and confirm.
>
> I observed the following situation in the village: in the autumn the kulaks bought all the bread, even from the cooperative. And in the spring they sold it no less than five roubles for every pud' of rye.
>
> What concrete measures have been taken for peasants to sow more bread and won't the raising of taxes on the peasant make things worse?
>
> People say that by extraordinary measures the crisis have been overcome but it hasn't as there are queues everywhere. The peasants are saying that we have returned to war communism.
>
> What measures are being taken against peasants who have deliberately reduced the sowing of bread and cotton?[81]

While a stenographic record of Stetskii's responses to the *zapiski* has not been preserved, this sample is by itself indicative of the multitude of views held by KP communists with respect to the rapidly deteriorating situation in the countryside. Ranging from traditional Bolshevik hostility to the kulak through to doubts regarding the economic rationality of the party's agricultural policies with various shades of bewilderment in between, the attitudes of the rank-and-file were once again divided along the same fault lines as those that split the party's central leadership. However, although opposition to collectivisation at the top found coherent political expression in the alliance between Nikolai Bukharin, Aleksei Rykov, Mikhail Tomskii, and Nikolai Uglanov that came to be known as the Right Deviation, it never gave rise to a defined factional opposition on the factory floor, in sharp contrast to the events of

[81] TsGAIPD, f. 1012, op. 1, d. 549, ll. 207-211

1925-27. Barring critical comments about the state of agriculture made in the *zapiski*, the rightists did not make their presence felt at KP by stating their views or by being subjected to attacks on account of them. The first mention of the Right as the chief threat to the party's unity was made by the chair of the organisation's first delegated conference, held on 18 November 1928.[82] More formulaic than substantial, this denunciation was not a signal for an attack on the rightists, as the conference proceeded without much reference to the brewing internal crisis. The relative calm at the meeting made it again possible for the new leadership slate vote to proceed without much controversy. Reflecting the growth of the organisation, the new body consisted of thirty-five full members and five candidates and became a *partkom* instead of a bureau. The old Putilovite Bolshevik Ivan Alekseev replaced Ivan Gaza as party secretary while, reflecting the strategic importance of the enterprise for the FYP, Sergei Kirov himself also took a seat on the committee.[83]

Instead then of dividing the organisation, the attack of Stalin and his allies on the purportedly pro-kulak Bukharin seems to have provided an opportunity for reconciliation with some of the factory's most prominent supporters of the Left Opposition. A month before the 1st Conference, at a meeting attended by Sergei Kirov, the former leading oppositionists Tuzhikov and Kovalevskii formally re-joined the party renouncing their previous factionalism.[84]

By that time, the split in the ranks of the leadership coalition that had defeated Trotsky and Zinoviev had already been made public. The Sunday issue of *Pravda* published on 30 September 1928 featured a lengthy article by Bukharin under the rather non-belligerent title *Notes of an Economist*, in which Stalin's erstwhile ally provided an eloquent warning of the destabilising economic effects of the rapid industrialisation course the leadership was about to embark on.[85] Less than three weeks later the rightists suffered their first major organisational defeat, when an extraordinary plenary session of the party's Moscow Committee and Control Commission called in

[82] TsGAIPD, f. 1012, op. 1, d. 550, ll. 2-3.
[83] Ibid, ll. 64-5; Kostiuchenko et al, *Istoriia*, p. 288. There were no additions or objections to the slate from the floor for the *partkom* and although two extra members were added to the control commission at the suggestion of one of the delegates, this modification seems to have been unrelated to the crisis at the top.
[84] TsGAIPD, f. 1012, op. 1, d. 549, ll. 218-9.
[85] *Pravda*, 30 September 1928.

mid-October by Stalin's supporters amongst the city's activists condemned the rightist leadership of the capital's organisation.[86]

It is not hard to explain the failure of the last in the series of 1920s oppositions to generate much support amongst KP communists. Throughout the internal struggle that had tested the unity of the organisation in the previous years the desirability of industrialisation and the hostile nature of the kulak had never in themselves been matters of dispute. No CC loyalist at KP ever expressed any doubts that the massive expansion of heavy industry was a sound political objective. The CC majority itself had always maintained that the Left Opposition's policies were adventurist and unrealistic on the basis of current circumstances, not of their goals. When these circumstances were declared to be no longer valid and the "socialist offensive" came to be the order of the day, the effect was not the creation of further division between those who stuck to the moderate outlook of the previous line and those for who loyalty to the CC remained paramount. Instead, what had been the only real political division within the organisation disappeared, leading to an even more solid ideological consensus.[87]

The measure of this political achievement can be gauged not only on the basis of the successful reintegration of leftists like Tuzhikov and Kovalevskii into the political mainstream – a process taking place throughout the USSR at the time[88] – but also by the organisation's performance at the various political campaigns that constituted the socialist offensive of the 1st FYP. The efforts of party activists to promote the shock-work movement have already been discussed. However, KP communists and their Leningrad comrades more broadly also excelled in campaigns that were not so obviously related to their lives as factory workers.

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[86] Molotov replaced Uglanov as Moscow secretary in November. For the struggle between Stalinists and rightists inside the Moscow organisation, see Merridale, *Moscow Politics*, pp. 47-68.
[87] Even in Moscow, where the rightists had the their greatest organisational strength, it seems that the party's activist base remained lukewarm towards the opposition, suggesting that unlike previous challengers, Bukharin and his allies failed to connect with the rank-and-file. Merridale, *Moscow Politics*, pp. 218-220.
[88] On 22 August 1928, the prominent exile Trotskyist Christian Rakovsky issued a declaration in which he urged supporters of the Left Opposition still in the Soviet Union to "give the party and the Central Committee full and unconditional assistance in carrying out the plan for socialist construction". A year later, in July 1929, hundreds of former Trotskyists including Karl Radek and Ivar Smilga renounced factionalism and returned to the party. Marot, "Trotsky", pp. 189-90.

Leningraders made up 12,000 of the roughly 70,000 workers who in 1929 volunteered to be part of the twenty-five-thousanders *(dvatsatipiatitisiachniki)*, the contingent of worker activists who left the cities to spearhead the collectivisation campaign in the countryside. KP communists were a significant part of the total number of volunteers, with the actual recruits totalling around three-hundred and including prominent party members like the chair of the factory's *zavkom* Arkhipov as well as other workers with decades of experience at the bench and also the recently redeemed Tuzhikov.[89]

The performance of the organisation in the 1929 party purge provides an even stronger indication of the KP organisation's successful political consolidation into a stalwart of CC loyalism. The purge campaign was proclaimed in April 1929 by the 16th Party Conference as a means to rid the party of "petty-bourgeois […] self-serving, careerist elements" and thus "strengthen its mobilising readiness in the cause of the socialist offensive".[90] As in the rest of the USSR, the campaign at KP happened in stages and consisted of several public meetings where party members were examined about the details of their political activities as well as aspects of their personal lives.[91] The first to go through the process at KP were prominent communists who had been selected to serve on the purging commissions of other organisations, like the former secretary Ivan Gaza, the *zavkom* chair Arkhipov and the lathe worker Aleksander Nikiforov, then serving as secretary at the 3rd mechanical shop cell. They underwent the screening process before thousands of KP workers at a mass, largely ceremonial, meeting held inside the factory's tractor workshop.[92] For the broader membership the purge came a few months later, with the first meetings starting on 1 October and most of the process having been completed by the time of the organisation's 4th Conference on 14 November.[93]

Unlike the first screening round, the main *chistka* seems to have been a much more thorough affair. According to the gross figures given in the report *(svodka)*

[89] Kostiuchenko et al, *Istoriia*, p. 324; Viola, *Best Sons*, p. 43. Tuzhikov's pre-opposition opposition Bolshevik credentials had been impeccable, having been a Civil War veteran who had distinguished himself in the operation against the Kronstadt mutineers.
[90] *KPSS v rezoliutsiakh*, vol. 4, p. 486.
[91] Getty, *Origins*, pp. 44-7, Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism*, pp. 17-20.
[92] Kostiuchenko et al, *Istoriia*, pp. 298-9.
[93] TsGAIPD, f. 1012, op. 1, d. 679, l. 18.

prepared for the district control commission, the number of speeches made during the purge amounted to 2,967 and the grand total of questions asked of those examined was 22,313 by 17,815 participants, of whom 5,499 did not belong to the party.[94] More importantly, the KP organisation performed significantly better than the national average in terms of both the thoroughness of the purge and the incidence of expulsion. By the time the 4th Conference met to discuss the results of the campaign, more than 90% of the membership had been examined with only 4.4% having been shown the door, compared to less than 87% and 11% respectively union-wide.[95]

The report delivered at the conference by the district control commission representative Amosov elaborated further on the different causes of expulsion. According to the report, the largest group of the expelled was made up of members who had let their membership lapse by not paying in dues or not attending meetings, while drunkenness was also a common cause for ejection from the ranks. "Concealment of social background" was the most serious offense mentioned in Amosov's report, which had claimed eighteen out of the total 140 expelled members.[96]Although these were hardly alarming figures, Amosov called on the organisation to not be complacent about the presence of hostile elements in the organisation, citing the case of one former member who "owned three houses and two dachas" and whose father had been "involved in the shooting of communists".[97]

Whatever the veracity of the sensational examples used by Amosov to illustrate the dangers of lax recruitment standards, they do not seem have had much of an impact on the subsequent discussion. While some of the speakers lamented the common practice of not asking many questions as long as members performed the tasks assigned to them, most of the contributions focused on the problem of lapsed memberships as an indication of the failure of the organisation to assimilate new

[94] Ibid, l. 141. As the aggregate number of party participants is just under four times that of the total membership of the organisation, it seems that on average attended on average at least three meetings. We have no way of determining the extent of multiple attendance for non-communists but it is improbable that they would have been more likely to attend multiple meetings than party members, suggesting that the *chistka* attracted significant interest from the broader KP workforce. Overall, the purge of the tractor shop cell seems to have been the most popular with 2,961 questions asked of 387 screened members.
[95] Ibid, l. 18; Getty, *Origins*, p. 46; Rigby, *Communist Party*, p. 178
[96] TsGAIPD, f. 1012, op. 1, d. 679, l. 18
[97] Ibid, ll. 20-1.

members.[98] Party-building, rather than revolutionary vigilance was once again the order of the day.

Overall, rather than shrinking and weakening the organisation the purge largely performed the opposite function, with its many sessions acting as recruitment events as much as disciplinary procedures. During the campaign, the organisation recruited 325 new members, more than double the number of those expelled.[99] A further seventy workers, some of who had spent decades in the factory, triumphantly announced their intention to join the party by marching into the conference and interrupting the main report.[100]

This was possible because, in contrast to the supporters of the New and Left Oppositions, the enemies of the socialist offensive – rightists, kulaks and their minions – never appeared in great numbers amongst KP communists. Although frequently condemned in speeches and resolutions, their activities were rarely if ever directly experienced by the broad party mass in the enterprise and thus never generated the vicious infighting that had accompanied the emergence of earlier disputes at the top.[101] The early stages of the 1st FYP were thus a period of consolidation for the KP party from which the rank-and-file came out both more united in its outlook and more competent organisationally. Overcoming the division of the mid-1920s was a necessary condition for the transformation of the organisation into the permanent source of opposition to managerial authority that was described in the previous chapter. From 1928 onwards the administration replaced the oppositionists as the main target of rank-and-file discontent. Its first victim, the director Vasilii Grachev, lost his job less than a year after the completion of the 1929 purge.

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[98] Ibid, ll. 28-9, 31-3.
[99] Kostiuchenko et al, *Istoriia*, p. 299.
[100] TsGAIPD, f. 1012, op. 1, d. 679, ll. 11-5. Evlampiev, who made the announcement, had been a worker for twenty-seven years while Kuznetsov, the oldest member of the group had spent four decades at the bench.
[101] This observation is of course irrelevant to whether the actual intension of the leadership in launching the purge was to rid the party of oppositionists as has been claimed by Rigby (*Communist Party*, pp. 176-82) among others, or to "'clean' the party of those who were not full-time, dedicated, honest party members" as in Getty's (*Origins*, p. 47) more charitable interpretation. For the purposes of the argument developed here, it is enough to note that for the reasons given, the right opposition never became a serious problem at KP.

2.4 Another purge

By the end of the 1st FYP, the political health of the KP party organisation was once again becoming a matter of concern for the leadership and *aktiv*. Success at the campaigns of 1929-1932 had come at the cost of increasing neglect of the qualitative aspects of party building, as the need to keep up with the growth of the workforce had led to mass recruitment amongst the ranks of *udarniki* and other promising young workers. Assimilating the new communists proved to be a significant challenge for the organisation, with 47% of its strength in April 1932 being made of candidate members according to a report delivered at the 9th KP party Conference by Aleksandr Ugarov, then chief of the cultural-propaganda department of the Leningrad *gorkom*.[102] Of the 650 delegates that had been elected to hear and deliberate on Ugarov's report, 380 had joined the party from 1928 onwards, ninety-five of whom had done so in 1931 and seventeen in the four months of 1932.[103] In an attempt to remedy the growing levels of political inexperience within the organisation, the *partkom* had resolved a few weeks before the conference that all new party secretaries of shop-level cells should undergo an intensive training course that would involve of a total of twenty-four hours of study and include topics ranging from technical aspects of the production process to more abstract notions like "the vanguard role of communists".[104] The extent to which that programme was implemented remains unclear as do its immediate results. Judging however by the fact that less than months later, the *partkom* had to provide guidelines to its own members regarding the adequate preparation and timely submission of materials pertaining to items on its order of business, it seems that organisational competence was a skill in short supply even above the shop level.[105]

The ability of the inexperienced, massively expanded communist rank-and-file to exert influence on the young former peasants that had come to make up a large part of the industrial workforce during the FYP had become a major worry for the party leadership all the way up to the top. In early 1933, the leadership decided that the circumstances called for a new purge campaign, announcing its decision in an article signed by the CC and published in *Pravda* in April. Noting that the party had almost

[102] TsGAIPD, f. 1012, op. 2, d. 432, ll. 20-1.
[103] Ibid. l. 101.
[104] TsGAIPD, f. 1012, op. 1, d. 940, ll. 1-2.
[105] Ibid, l. 8.

doubled in size by acquiring 1,400,000 new members over the previous two-and-a-half years, the front-page piece declared that the speed of recruitment had once more allowed the by then proverbial "alien elements" that were "careerists", "double-dealers" and "self-servers" to contaminate the membership. At the same time, it was highlighted that a number of "conscientious" but "unfamiliar with the programme, Rules and main resolutions of the party" comrades were unable to actively promote the party line. Thus, in addition to being an opportunity for the party to demonstrate its integrity before the public by cutting loose the corrupt and the "morally rotten", the purge was also meant to act as a means to gauge the political literacy of new communists as well as to provide them with an opportunity to raise their "ideological level" within the context of a structured, mass campaign.[106] It was thus a typical exercise in political consolidation following a period of disciplinary relaxation and ideological confusion, much like those that had followed the opposition crises of the 1920s.[107]

The first meetings of the campaign at KP began in the first week of June and most of the purging process had been completed by the end of October, with the exception of some busy commissions which exhausted the November deadline set by the CC. A total of 5,324 full and candidate members of the party underwent the scrutiny of their comrades and co-workers under the oversight of twelve shop-level purge commissions. As in the whole of the USSR the expulsion rate was significantly higher than in 1929, with 779 members excluded from the organisation according to the report given in its 12th Conference on 15 November 1933.[108]

In contrast to 1929, records of the public meetings of the 1933 purge at KP have been preserved in the organisation's archival collection, making possible a more direct examination of the purge campaign on the factory floor. The purging process consisted of a brief political-autobiographical statement given by the member under review followed by a number of questions asked by the commission and those present at the meeting. These were subsequently followed by contributions from the floor, after

[106] *Pravda*, 29 April 1933.
[107] Getty argues along similar lines, describing the 1933 purge as being "in the tradition of the regular 1920's-era purges". *Origins*, p. 50.
[108] TsGAIPD, f. 1012, op. 1, d. 955, ll. 1, 22; Kostiuchenko, *Istoriia*, pp. 437, 442. The national expulsion rate was 16%, only marginally higher than that of KP. Rigby, *Communist Party*, p. 202.

which the commission could pronounce its verdict. No specific limitations were stipulated with respect to the number of questions or contributions, with some of the more controversial cases taking up several hours.

The purge meeting protocols suggest that the higher rate of attrition was an effect of the indiscriminate recruitment of the previous couple of years much more than of any revival of oppositionist activity. In fact, while past oppositionist activities were brought up by suspicious or curious participants at the purge sessions, these were in themselves neither sufficient grounds for disciplinary sanctions nor did they elicit a particularly inquisitorial style of interrogation from the commissions.

One "comrade Shchagin" from the turbine shop-cell for example, for whom the only biographical information recorded is that he had a party penalty *(vziskanie),* was asked by one commission member about his participation in the 1925 opposition. Shchagin responded that he was "politically uneducated" at the time and that he no longer held such views. The commission member pressed on, asking Shchagin about his views on a "newly emerging class". Shchagin responded that he had "believed the ITR to be a new class, but [was] more or less past this" following the clarification of the Marxist concept of class by one comrade Sinev. In order to determine the extent of Shchagin's grasp of the party line, the commission went on to ask him "what is the error of the Trotskyist view"? Shchagin responded correctly that Trotskyites were mistaken on the questions of the peasantry and "socialism in one country".

Despite his past, Shchagin seems to have been a conscientious worker. "Comrade Tomason" took the floor to speak in his favour after the end of the question session, saying that "Shchagin doesn't have much education, but by his proletarian instinct always does the right thing." Kostia Karimov, the secretary of the 1st mechanical shop cell who served on the commission also took Shchagin's side on the basis that he was "a devoted worker" and therefore "must stay in the party".[109]

Such leniency regarding ideological infractions was also applied with respect to more recent events as shown by the case of Ekaterina Ivanova, a 21 year-old candidate member who worked as a polisher. Ivanova, who was of peasant stock, gave

[109] TsGAIPD, f. 1012, op. 1, d. 958a, l. 8.

satisfactory responses to a number of general political knowledge questions but was cornered by the commission about some limited commercial activity she seems to have engaged in at some point since her recruitment. In response to a commissioner's inquiry on whether she thought it "appropriate *(k litsu)* for a candidate to sell products on the market", Ivanova could only answer that she had been "in a tight spot". However, neither the circumstances nor the very fact of Ivanova's transgression were of much interest to her comrades and colleagues, who cared about her skill as a worker much more than any ideological infraction. Thus, after the end of questioning, one comrade Shatsman took the floor to deliver a fiery defence of the young polisher's record. Having reminded those present that Ivanova was an *udarnitsa*, Shatsman concluded that "if everyone worked like her, we'd have a lot less *brak*". The applause that followed Shatsman's defence sealed the positive outcome of Ivanova's review.[110]

Ivanova's and Shchagin's purge sessions were by no means atypical of the 1933 *chistka* at KP. The purge protocols contain numerous examples of communists under review receiving spirited defences by their comrades, as well as non-party participants, on the basis of their good record as workers. It is worth pointing out here that, strictly speaking, these arguments were for the most part irrelevant to the actual transgressions or failures that party members were grilled about; Ivanova's skill as a polisher was not in any way connected to her trade activities or to the question of their political permissibility. But as the purge campaign had been framed in broad ideological terms demanding ruthlessness towards self-seekers but clemency to those of pure intention, without stipulating concrete grounds for expulsion or demotion, it was possible for the rank-and-filers to interpret these political imperatives in their own way.

At a time of rapid industrial expansion and technological change accompanied by rising levels of waste, stoppages and industrial accidents, skill at one's specialty and a good work ethic were far more valued qualities by shop-floor communists than the ability to distinguish between minute conceptual details or to adhere to political principles that were not directly related to factory life. It must be stressed again that in conducting the purge in this way, the rank-and-file was neither hijacking nor being disingenuous about the campaign in any meaningful sense. The main duty of the

[110] Ibid, l. 18.

industrial party organisation was to create and maintain appropriate political conditions for the realisation of the party's ambitious industrial plans. In this sense, a skilled communist was also the "committed in practice to the cause of the working class" communist that the CC directive had explicitly shielded from the purge.[111]

Who then was not? From the available evidence, it seems that the penalty of expulsion was reserved for those who were politically entirely ignorant, as well as those who demonstrated a gratuitously careless attitude towards their work and had a very bad reputation amongst their colleagues and/or subordinates. The questions asked by the purge commissions to gauge the general level of communists' political awareness seem to have been deliberately designed to weed out only the entirely clueless, ranging from the blatantly obvious but not uncommon "Who is Stalin?" to the bizarre "When will Lenin rise from the dead?" asked of one Antipenko at the factory's electrical shop.[112] Even so, ignorance was not by itself a punishable offense as even elementary mistakes were overlooked if the reviewee was a sufficiently capable worker.[113]

The reverse was not true however and there are several cases of members whose past political credentials had been impeccable but fell afoul of the purge because of their attitude towards work and their colleagues. V. I. Pavloskii, a stoker-crew foreman with voluntary service in the Red Army and former agent of the OGPU, was deprived of membership after he was denounced as a "bad and careless *brigadir*" in the contributions of his co-workers.[114] Most expulsions were nevertheless due to a combination of political and work-related irresponsibility, with persistent absence from party meetings and truancy or drunkenness at work emerging as the most common issues.[115] The most high-profile of such expulsions was that of the assistant superintendent of the electrical shop Mironenko, whose examination lasted over six

[111] *Pravda*, 29 April 1933.
[112] TsGAIPD, f. 1012, op. 1, d. 985b, l. 30. The protocol does not report any response by Antipenko who, having already answered a number of more reasonable questions about his payment of subscription dues, must have been completely dumbstruck by the last one.
[113] Irina Lebedkina, a 38 year-old drill press operator who had failed to progress from candidate status despite having joined the party in 1927, stated that Stalin was the highest party organ before changing her answer to "the Party Congress", after some thought. Lebedkina's co-workers remarked that she produced no *brak* and therefore "must stay in the party". TsGAIPD, f. 1012, op. 1, d. 985a, l. 19.
[114] TsGAIPD, f. 1012, op. 1, d. 985b, l. 22.
[115] See e.g. ibid, ll. 21, 43-5.

hours and had to be extended over two sessions. Mironenko, who seems to have been despised as a rude bureaucrat, was also discovered to have concealed his social origin when entering the party in 1930 and was purged as a class-alien element after it was revealed that his kulak father had owned 35 horses and employed around 40 labourers.[116]

Much then like the 1929 campaign, the *chistka* of 1933 had very little to do with internal political opposition, having instead been an attempt to ensure that the party membership maintained at least a tolerable level of political awareness as well as some understanding of and identification with the goals of party policy, after the immense pressures of the 1st FYP had caused political education to be neglected at a time of mass recruitment. The inevitably vague CC directives emanating from Moscow and demanding a separation of the wheat from the chaff, were implemented in practice by the KP communist rank-and-file as a mass examination of professional competence and collegial behaviour. At the purge meetings held in the shops of the enterprise, skill and work-ethic emerged as the ultimate markers of political reliability, the ability to confront and resolve the myriad of production-related problems thrown up during the socialist offensive having overtaken unreserved support for rapid industrialisation as the sine qua non of a good communist.

It was argued earlier that the events of the late 1920s entrenched the status of the party organisation as a distinct locus of power on the factory floor, first by teaching the rank-and-file to draw links between its own work-place demands and party policy and second, by eliminating internal divisions which threatened its political legitimacy. The purge of 1933 also consolidated the strength of the organisation on the factory floor, but it did so in a slightly different way which would however have significant consequences for the future. Apart from training a new cohort of party activists in the ways of mass *samokritika*, the purge's focus on and reward of technical competence also equipped communist rank-and-filers with the arguments and rhetoric they would need in order to confront the administration in the less voluntarist political environment of the 2nd FYP.[117] By the same token that skill and competence became

[116] Ibid, l. 150; Kostiuchenko et al, *Istoriia*, p. 442.
[117] Several contributors at a meeting of purge commission members from all shops held in 1933 noted that labour discipline and output quality had increased during the campaign, while the main speaker

equivalent to political loyalty, incompetence or mere failure could now be framed in terms of duplicity, leaving administrative staff particularly exposed in the climate of individual responsibility promoted by *edinonachalie*.

2.5 Vigilance, repression, revival

While in 1933 the conflicts surrounding the identification and removal of the disloyal remained within the limits of relatively benign administrative sanctions, a year later things started to take a darker turn when in the evening of 1 December 1934 the lapsed communist Leonid Nikolaev shot Sergei Kirov dead inside the headquarters of the Leningrad Party Organisation at Smolny. A pivotal event in Soviet history, the Kirov murder and its connexion to the bloody events of the *Yezhovshchina* a few years later have been the subject of much debate since the 1930s, with the weight of scholarly opinion currently against earlier speculation suggesting a Stalinist conspiracy.[118] Neither the motives of the murderer nor the effects of his act on the outlook of Stalin and the party leadership are of import to the account offered here. It is however necessary to briefly consider the impact of the murder of the popular Leningrad party chief and regular visitor at KP on the factory's own party organisation.

News of the murder spread quickly to KP and the first meetings to discuss the fateful event took place just after the end of the factory's evening shift, only a few hours after Kirov's death.[119] These produced a resolution, published the following morning, which denounced the "vile hired murderer", praised Kirov and called members and workers to "close ranks around the party".[120] In the late afternoon of 2nd December, KP workers marched to the Taurid Palace where Kirov's body lay in state. Having paid their final respects, party members and supporters returned to the factory

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suggested that the *chistka* had made it harder for the administration to "hide behind the organisation", forcing it to assume greater responsibility for production. TsGAIPD, f. 1012, op. 1, d. 955, l. 20.

[118] Åsmund Egge, *Zagadka Kirova: ubiistvo, razviazavshee stalinskii terror* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2011); Matthew E. Lenoe, *The Kirov Murder and Soviet History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010); Kirilinna, *Neizvestnii* all favour the lone gunman view of the murder. The only post-archival scholarly study that remains open to the provocation theory is Amy W Knight, *Who Killed Kirov?: The Kremlin's Greatest Mystery* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2000).

[119] Kirov entered Smolny at 4.30 pm and was shot shortly thereafter. Matthew E. Lenoe, "Fear, Loathing, Conspiracy: The Kirov Murder as Impetus for Terror," in James Harris (ed.) *The Anatomy of Terror: Political Violence Under Stalin* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013): 195–215, p. 197.

[120] *Krasnii Putilovets*, 2 December 1934 cited in Kostiuchenko, *Istoriia*, p. 462.

to hold funerary meetings and discuss the implications of the party chief's death. Karl Ots, the factory director, led one such meeting at the 3rd mechanical shop. Ots opened the funerary gathering with the solemn declaration that "Kirov has been killed. Kirov is no more. He is dead."[121] According to the stenographic record, everyone present stood up at this point, following which Ots proceeded to give a political appraisal of the murder. The bottom line of the director's speech was that Kirov's death was a form of punishment for the party's underestimation of the class enemy a sign that "the many tales regarding the end of difficulties, that our enemies recognise us as a great power […] that the class struggle is over that we can live quietly, have not been proven right".[122]

A number of contributions from the floor followed Ots's opening remarks, mostly consisting in short expressions of indignation and the occasional declaration of intent to join the party or *Komsomol* as a militant response to the crime. However, the change in political outlook within the organisation brought about by the shocking event was best captured by a longer speech made by Matveev, an old worker and party member. Matveev wondered how it had been possible, at a time when "the final class struggle" was approaching, for a class enemy to find his way into Smolny when one needed a permit to enter even the factory's workshops. He went on to add his own political appraisal of the murder which different slightly, but substantially, from that offered by Ots:

> At the morning meeting I looked at people's faces and read on those faces that they wanted to go and fall on (brosit'sia) that enemy. Who is that [enemy]? It is all those who are in the enterprises and waste-producers (brakodeli) and work-bench breakers (stankolomi), loafers, all truants, all those who mess up our socialist construction. Look, on the Neva there is a monument to Peter I. He was a great reformer. He is preparing to charge (brosit'sia) into Europe but old Russia in snake form holds him by the leg. Thus we must fall on our enemies.[123]

The resolution produced by the organisation in the hours after the murder and the speech made by Ots later in the day of its publication approached Kirov's murder in similar terms that would have been squarely within the mainstream of the party's

[121] TsGAIPD, f. 1012, op. 2, d. 952, l. 2.
[122] Ibid, l. 5.
[123] Ibid, ll. 17-8.

political thought at the time. The victorious construction of socialism pronounced by the party's 17th Congress in January and the USSR's accession to the League of Nations in September of the same year had taken place against the disturbing backdrop of Japan's occupation of Manchuria in 1931 and the Nazi's assumption of political power in Germany in 1933. The murder of Kirov must have served as an indication that no economic or political success could guarantee security in the current international context, making a call for unity and vigilance a reasonable, if formulaic response under the circumstances.

Matveev's understanding of the situation was different. Not content with a mere call of unity in the face of the enemy, the old communist also stated his views on who the enemy actually was and in this, his views differed considerably from those of Ots. For instead of placing the murder within the framework of the menacing foreign threat, Matveev drew the attention of his comrades to enemies within not just the country but the very factory. The defeated class enemy, "old Russia", had struck against the party just as it was preparing to confront its enemies from abroad. It was not only those who were willing to resort to terrorism and murder that were enemies within. Matveev explicitly branded as enemies all those who were in anyway related to failures in production, attributing malicious intent to a broad range of problems ranging from truancy to equipment breakdowns. In line with Matveev's parallel, the party organisation had to fall on these enemies just as the Bronze Horseman tramples the snake under hoof.

Although preceding the mass violence of 1937 by more than two years, Matveev's speech foreshadowed the character of the terror as a campaign driven in large part by the misperception of failures or accidents as hostile acts. What makes it particularly striking is that it was not prompted by anything Matveev could have seen on the press. Although Stalin's suspicions appear to have settled on Zinovievites almost immediately after the murder, it was not until a couple of weeks later that supporters of the old Leningrad boss would be formally blamed for the crime.[124] The articles that appeared in *Pravda* the day after the murder described the killer as "sent"

[124] *Pravda*, 17 December 1934.

or "planted" *(podoslannii)* by the class enemy, suggesting a foreign angle.[125] Matveev's identification of the incompetent and the indifferent with the class enemy was therefore an independent conceptual act. Significantly, neither Matveev nor any other speaker had anything to say about the Zinoviev or any other opposition; it had not after all been a matter of concern within the organisation since the end of the 1920s. Although then Kirov's murder was viewed as an attack on the party, Matveev's speech provided an interpretation in distinctly new terms.

It was only after Zinovievites in league with Whites were declared to have masterminded the murder that pressure on former oppositionists started to build in party organisations in Leningrad and throughout the country.[126] Even so, vigilance with respect to the perfidious activities of oppositionists would emerge as a secondary theme at the meetings held as part of the renewed campaigns of organisational consolidation that were launched the following year. On 10 February 1935, the party organisation of what was now the Kirov plant held a general but closed meeting to take stock of the results of the discussions held around the confidential letter sent to party organisations nation-wide by the CC on 18 January. The letter had reiterated the allegations placing the "Leningrad centre" that had organised the murder under the tutelage of a "Moscow centre" that was therefore morally complicit in the crime and in no uncertain terms condemned the Zinovievites as "the most traitorous, the most contemptible of all factional groups in the history of our party".[127]

Kostia Karimov, by then a *partkom* member, delivered the main report. Karimov started his speech with some typical invocations of the need for revolutionary vigilance at a time of intensifying class struggle and, in the spirit of the CC letter, went on to warn that the party's enemies were everywhere and would use any available means in their desperate struggle to undermine socialist construction. As an example, he cited the one million rouble loss suffered by the Institute of Workers' Provisions, allegedly a result of the activities of the convicted Tolmazov who had been employed there.[128] Karimov went on to admonish his comrades to shed the habit of overlooking social

[125] *Pravda,* 2 December 1934.
[126] Chase, "Scapegoating", pp. 267-71; Lenoe, "Fear, Loathing, Conspiracy", p. 206.
[127] *Izvestiia TsK KPSS,* 1989, No. 8.
[128] TsGAIPD, f. 1012, op. 2, d. 1036, ll. 1-3.

origins and political pasts in favour of workplace achievements, mentioning the case of one comrade Reviakin "who although not a bad communist or a bad superintendent, gave a bonus *(premiroval)* to a class alien and then made a theory about it, saying that bonus payments are not related to class". According to Karimov, Reviakin failed to realise that "working well is a method of class struggle on the part of kulaks who have entered our party".[129]

It would be stretching credibility to suggest that Karimov seriously held this view, having observed him advocating for fellow communists precisely on the basis of their work record less than two years earlier. In fact, only a few minutes later he would return to the familiar theme of a strong work-ethic as a marker of political reliability, stating that the activity of party members, especially their performance in production, would have to be reviewed in a number of shops as "the vanguard role in production of our communists" was the main indicator of good party character *(partiinost')*.[130]

Similarly contradictory views were also expressed by other speakers. Ter-Asaturov, the engineer who would succeed Ots as factory director a year later, declared that it would be best to rid the factory once and for all of foreign elements, which he nevertheless equated with those who were not working correctly. According to Ter-Asaturov, two mechanics at the 2nd mechanical shop had been found to disorganise production and been subsequently discovered to be class aliens. Nevertheless, "from the point of view production […] they probably worked better than the previous mechanic". Ter-Asaturov admitted that if they had not been alien elements, their work could have been deemed satisfactory but in light of the circumstances the administration "had to remove them immediately". He promptly went on to contradict himself as follows:

> On the other hand, we have instances in the shops of people who had been White NCOs (proporshchiki), but then spent ten years in the Red Army and have proven themselves in production. And what should we do? Let them be or remove them immediately? Of course it would be good if these workers were our own (nashi), but at the present day it is undoubtedly necessary to leave them at work, but in the

[129] Ibid, l. 6.
[130] Ibid, l. 8.

> name of vigilance, some workers do not understand this issue, and begin to surround them in such an atmosphere in which a worker can't work.[131]

Even those militant speakers who did not see any reason to urge restraint could not quite decouple the question of one's political attachments from that of their performance at work. Speaking immediately after Ter-Asaturov, Sokolov from the cast iron shop warned that the careful approach suggested by previous speakers could "lead to problems". Among such problems Sokolov counted the activities of the planning department of his shop, which was staffed by people who were "difficult to trust". After some further speculation that the problems created at his foundry by the suspicious planners were derailing the plan elsewhere in the factory, Sokolov eventually came to the topic of Zinovievism with reference to one Gusev. A "double-dyed Zinovievite", Gusev was apparently a serial "wrecker" who had somehow managed to be classed as a shock-worker and get "a shock-worker's rations card and receive a good sum of money". Having nearly beaten up some worker who called him out, Gusev was eventually fired but until that time, Sokolov claimed, "everyone was pampering *(laskali)* him" and gloating that they were thus creating "nice conditions".[132]

Karimov, Ter-Asaturov and Sokolov were all responding to a political signal from the centre by interpreting it in terms that were comprehensible to themselves and their audience, while at the same time drawing attention to those issues to which they assigned the greatest priority. Karimov, an experienced communist with years of shop-floor experience as a fitter understood that if communists did not behave as model workers they could scarcely expect to induce their non-partisan colleagues to do so. An engineer with responsibility for plan fulfilment, Ter-Asaturov was probably more concerned about holding on to skilled and capable workers than about their pre-revolutionary past. As high-ranking members within the context of the organisation, both Karimov and Ter-Asaturov demonstrated their vigilance by warning that performance should not be mistaken for loyalty but they had both barely finished their sentences before declaring that performance was in fact the most important form of loyalty.

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[131] Ibid. ll. 28-9.
[132] Ibid, l. 31.

By contrast, Sokolov's concerns could be easily expressed in the language of vigilance, so that he did not have to qualify his condemnation of the Gusev with any calls for caution. According to Sokolov, Gusev was a bad worker, a "wrecker", allowed to pretend to be an *udarnik* because of the organisation's softness. He thus undermined both the interests of the factory and the authority of the party amongst non-party workers, having access to shock-worker privileges at a time of renewed concern about the availability of staples.[133] For Sokolov, Gusev's Zinovievism seems to have consisted entirely in his bad qualities as a worker.

It is worth noting at this stage that the CC letter that provided the occasion for this meeting did not mention "wrecking" or sabotage as activities that the minions of the Leningrad and Moscow centres should be expected to engage in. Rich in adjectives but low in concrete information, the letter had denounced the Zinovievites as an unprecedentedly treacherous faction but had failed to provide any indication as to what kind of activities their devious henchmen might get up to. Thus, Karimov and the other speakers were of their own accord linking the question of the presence of political enemies with that of problems in production. It is unclear if they were doing so in an attempt to respond to views that had been expressed by workers like Matveev in the weeks since Kirov's murder, or if they themselves genuinely believed that production was under threat because of the presence of hostile elements in the factory. In either case, their inability to discuss the problem of Zinovievism in its own terms demonstrates the extent to which political labels were meaningless outside the context of production within the framework of an industrial party organisation.

As Kirov's murder receded into the past, the notion of an organised political threat broadly related to Zinovievism gave way in party discourse to the older and much vaguer idea of the presence of alien elements amongst the ranks. The corollary of this was that at the grassroots level, the indeterminacy of the purported threat made it even less distinguishable from the ever present problems of industry. Thus, the national verification of documents campaign launched in May 1935 quickly got

[133] The abolition of bread rationing on 1 January 1935 had been the cause of much worry amongst workers in Leningrad and the USSR, as the attendant wage raises failed to catch up with prices. See Lesley A. Rimmel, "Another Kind of Fear: The Kirov Murder and the End of Bread Rationing in Leningrad," *Slavic Review* 56, no. 3 (1997): 481–499.; Davies, *Popular Opinion*, pp. 27-9; Osokina, *Za Fasadom*, pp. 238-239.

entangled with the numerous other challenges faced by party organisations during that period, not least of which was the launching of the Stakhanovite movement later in the year.[134] Protocol records from meetings held in the factory's shops in late 1935 indicate that the verification campaign was rarely discussed even when it appeared on the meetings' agendas, with speakers often admitting that they were failing to give it the required attention. When they did talk about it, Kirov communists more often than not linked the need to confirm the reliability of party card holders to specific failures in plan fulfilment which, in light of their comrades' presence where they occurred, were seen as inexplicable.[135]

An "explanation" would start to emerge about a year later, when the arrest of the deputy commissar of heavy industry Georgii Piatakov in September 1936 signified the shift of NKVD interest to industry as a site of subversive activities. Only a few days after the arrest, a lethal explosion at the Kemerovo mines in Siberia prompted the appointment of Nikolai Yezhov as NKVD boss. The subsequent highly publicised trial of former oppositionists and managerial staff as wreckers who had deliberately caused the explosions was followed less than three months later by the trial of the Parallel Anti-Soviet Trotskyist Centre, the second Moscow Trial which condemned Piatakov to death.[136] Thus, by the end of January 1937, the party leadership was issuing unequivocal signals that problems in production were the malicious work of enemies and saboteurs who inhabited the party-state apparatus.

The ubiquitous presence of wreckers acted as the main point of reference against which the mass campaign of repression that marked Yezhov's NKVD tenure was waged in industrial enterprises. If however the perceived need to root out saboteurs provided the rationale for the hunt for enemies, the mechanism by which repression spread through industry was what on the face of it was a much more benevolent initiative. Apart from the *Yezhovshchina*, the year 1937 also witnessed the initiation of

[134] For the verification campaign and its eventual fizzling out, see Getty, *Origins*, ch. 3. Getty notes that the campaign in Leningrad was amongst the most successful. pp. 64-5. In the whole of Leningrad region, 2,861 of 126,883 full members were expelled, less than 2.5%. RGASPI, f. 17, op. 21, d. 2702, l. 25.

[135] For example, at a meeting of the wood processing shop cell held on 8 October to discuss the potential presence of hostile elements in the party, Egorov decried the fact that communists had allowed faulty chairs to be sent to a retail outlet *(univermag)* urging vigilance. TsGAIPD, f. 1012, op. 2, d. 1051, l. 40.

[136] Goldman, *Terror and Democracy*, pp. 95-109.

Union-wide democratisation campaign, connected to the adoption of a new constitution in 1936. Intended to both reinforce and demonstrate political stability by introducing secret, multi-candidate elections to the soviets, the campaign was extended to the party and trade-union apparatuses with the aim of breaking up corrupt cliques and raising the legitimacy of their leadership bodies by forcing them to reconnect with the rank-and-file.[137] What amounted to a revival and amplification of the old *samokritika* campaign at a time when any production failure could be potentially viewed as an intentional compromising of national security provided the explosive mix of circumstances that fuelled the spread of repression throughout industry.

Regional party chiefs throughout the country attempted to protect their fiefdoms by stalling or deflecting the campaign of democratisation. Since Kirov's death however, the communist party in Leningrad had been led by Andrei Zhdanov, who had by that time emerged as the chief promoter of democratisation. Thus, a week after the end of the February-March 1937 plenum where he had first announced the campaign, Zhdanov gave an almost identical report to a plenum of the Leningrad *obkom*, where he harshly denounced the established practice of cadre appointment instead of election, declaring "long-term democratisation" to be the order of the day. The plenum then passed a resolution requiring all primary party organisations to begin holding their electoral meetings by 1 April and stipulating that reports on the work of outgoing *partkomi* be presented at every gathering.[138] There would be no stalling in Leningrad.

Promptly complying with the directive, the Kirov factory party organisation held its own meeting over three days from 15 to 17 April 1937. In line with the plenum resolution, the organisation held a non-delegated general assembly of party members, with over 2,500 communists congregating at the 5th mechanical shop to hear the main report.[139] The *partkom* secretary Aleksei Tiutin painted a worrisome picture about the

[137] Ibid, pp. 153-4; J. Arch Getty, "State and Society Under Stalin: Constitutions and Elections in the 1930s," *Slavic Review* 50, no. 1 (1991): 18–35. For cliques as a target of both elections and repression see Harris, *Great Fear*, pp. ; idem, "The Purging of Local Cliques in the Urals Region, 1936-7" in Sheila Fitzpatrick ed., *Stalinism: New Directions*, (Routledge: London, 1999), pp. 262-285; J. Arch Getty, "The Rise and Fall of a Party First Secretary: Vainov of Yaroslavl'" in James Harris, ed. *Anatomy of Terror: Political Violence under Stalin*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013): 66-85.
[138] RGASPI, f. 17, op. 21, d. 2703, ll. 3-5.
[139] Kostiuchenko, *Istoriia*, p. 535.

political state of the enterprise, stating that there were over 1,000 expelled former members still in employment, "a whole army" of whom at least 37 had been Trotskyite-Zinovievites. Drawing attention to the dangers posed by the relaxation of vigilance, Tiutin attacked comrade Sviatogorov, the head of the factory's inventors' club, who loved to "write reports and a brag about his achievements" but had apparently failed to notice that his group had become the home of several enemies of the people.[140]

Tiutin's report extended over three hours and took up the entire time of the assembly's first session. Despite the secretary's attempts to appear sufficiently self-critical about the work of the *partkom* in promoting political participation and promoting revolutionary vigilance, the following day's issue of the factory newspaper *Kirovets* carried a less than ringing endorsement of his report: "The report of comrade Tiutin insufficiently mobilises to struggle, to the liquidation of weaknesses in party work, because of its weak *samokritika* and insufficient political acuteness".[141]

If Kirov communists had needed a definitive indication than a full-scale *samokritika* campaign was on the agenda, the *Kirovets* leader provided just that. Tens of party members registered to speak before their comrades that evening, with the agitated audience often interrupting with heckles, applause or laughter. Ribakov attacked both the *partorg* of the 2nd mechanical shop who had apparently gotten in trouble with the police for some financial offense and the *partkom* which had attempted to hide this from the shop-cell. He then attacked Ter-Asaturov for having spent only 14% of the assigned housing fund since becoming director, showing that "he cares more about plan-fulfilment, than about those who fulfil the plan".[142] Speranskii criticised the *partkom* practice of appointing so called "Varangian" organisers, that is outsiders who did not have the confidence of the shop-cells, noting that its choice for the cast iron shop had after Kirov's murder been found to belong to "a Trotskyist gang".[143]

[140] TsGAIPD, f. 1012, op. 2, d. 1385a, ll. 1-2.
[141] *Kirovets*, 16 April 1937 in Kostiuchenko, *Istoriia*, p. 535.
[142] TsGAIPD, f. 1012, op. 2, d. 1326, ll. 15-16.
[143] Ibid, l. 23.

A perennial issue, housing was also one of the lines of attack employed by one comrade Spitsa who, having started his speech with an attack on the *Kirovets* editor Antselovich for being lukewarm about *samokritika*, went on to warn that workers were spending thousands on temporary accommodation while the factory administration remained indifferent. Spitsa had exceeded his timeslot, but several voices from the floor demanded that the presidium allow him to continue. Buoyed by his comrades' support, Spitsa pressed on:

> "I know of instances when a shop is not fulfilling its programme and comrade Ter-Asaturov, by secret order, illegally, gives the ITRs 40-20 thousand in bonuses. Why, I ask? 'They insisted, what can you do, I had to give it' /laughter, applause/ […] We then put this issue before Tiutin, and Ter-Asaturov's explanation satisfied [him].[144]

The accusations of favouritism, suppression of criticism and plain indifference kept piling on the party and factory apparatuses as speakers succeeded each other on the podium. The *partorg* of the 1st mechanical shop Nikolai Es'kov emerged as one of the most skilled wielders of *samokritika*, beginning his contribution with an extensive apology concerning a recent bout of heavy drinking he had been seen to engage in after an *aktiv* meeting. Es'kov then spoke extensively on a number of problems demonstrating the lamentable state of party work, including the *Kirovets* editor's disdain of *samokritika*, the almost non-existent accounting of members – an affliction which according to Es'kov extended to the *raikom* – and chiefly, the habitual neglect of duty by *partkom* members, only four of whom had bothered to turn up at its last session. Before standing down, Es'kov also attacked the *partkom* and Tiutin in particular for their careless attitude towards party members. A distinguished old worker, "auntie Niusha" Moiseeva had been suffering from a chronic illness but with the exception of Es'kov, none of the organisation's officials had as much as paid her a visit, despite Es'kov's attempts to get Tiutin to organise a visit. "Is this a way to treat people?" wondered the *partorg*, to applause from the audience.[145]

Having thoroughly thrashed the factory's party leadership in their speeches, the communists of the Kirov plant reassembled the following day to elect a new *partkom*,

[144] Ibid, ll. 41-43.
[145] Ibid, ll. 17-23.

with forty-four candidacies proposed for the committee's eleven seats. Notwithstanding the attacks of the previous day, the incumbents Tiutin, Ter-Asaturov and Antselovich were successfully returned to the committee, joined by mostly new additions like Es'kov.[146]

Within the next few months, the newly elected *partkom* would be decimated by arrests as the democratisation campaign initiated at the general assembly spilled over into the mass repression spreading through the country. Although it is not possible to examine the succession of denunciations and arrests in detail, the available evidence indicates that the dynamics of the process were similar to that in other major enterprises.[147] In spite of complaints to the contrary during the assembly, *Kirovets* seems to have acted as a major facilitator of repression, publishing denunciations and egging on its readers to provide more "exposures", with Tiutin coming once more under fire for attempting to keep a lid on the campaign.[148]

In the summer of 1937, production failures relating to Kirov's armaments building plans attracted the attention of both NKVD officers and the military representatives present in the factory. A number of arrests were made amongst managerial staff, while Ter-Asaturov himself started coming under intense pressure for his suspect staff appointments. During a shop-cell meeting, Spitsa, who as we have seen was rather suspicious of Ter-Asaturov's soft treatment of underperforming ITRs, questioned the wisdom of the director's appointment of Boris Vetiutnev as head of the factory's artillery department, as he purportedly displayed a very relaxed attitude towards *brak*.[149]

Vetiutnev was arrested on 29 June 1937 and tried by the Military Collegium of the Supreme Court of the USSR on 25 August. He was shot the same day.[150] Similar fates would befall many other employees of the factory, both party members and non-

[146] Kostiuchenko, *Istoriia*, p. 536.
[147] TsGAIPD, f. 1012, op. 1, dd. 1121, 1122, 1124, 1164 containing reports on moral-political moods, membership statistics and the special folder *(osobaia papka)* which only appears in the archival catalogue in 1937, were not available for examination by non-Russian Federation citizens in December 2014.
[148] Kostiuchenko, *Istoriia*, p. 538. Factory newspapers were playing an altogether similar role in Moscow enterprises as the time. Goldman, "Little Motors".
[149] TsGAIPD, f. 1012, op. 1, d. 1060, l. 1.
[150] *Vozvrashchennie Imena. Knigi Pamiati Rossii* (hereafter *VI*). Online at http://visz.nlr.ru/person. Accessed 20 July 2016.

partyists. By the end of 1937, three members of the *partkom* including Ter-Asaturov would be arrested by the NKVD and subsequently shot. When the mass violence campaign was finally wrapped up in the final months of 1938, almost three hundred of the factory's employees had been executed, over a quarter of whom were communists.[151]

In an incisive account, one of the most perceptive researchers of repression in industry argued that in effect, "the party organisations devoured themselves".[152] Although capturing the essentially senseless nature of the violence visited upon the Soviet people, this poignant formulation is not entirely accurate. Lethal as it was, the quantitative effect of the *Yezhovshchina* on the Kirov party organisation was in fact well below the incidence of expulsion during the 1933 purge and probably not much higher than the low rates of 1929.[153] A different study by the same author reported similar rates in major Moscow factories.[154]

Certainly, the disappearance of known colleagues and comrades cannot but have had a psychological impact that cannot be conveyed by statistical observations. Nevertheless, it is important to bear in mind that many, if not most, of those who perished did so because they were denounced by their comrades on the basis of suspicions that although baseless, were nonetheless real. As we saw earlier, the notion

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[151] My examination of the electronic version of the *Leningradskii Martirolog* available at *VI* showed that 285 Kirov employees were executed during the period 1937-1938. They ranged from the director Ter-Asaturov to unskilled workers *(chernorabochie)* and even a couple of sports coaches employed by the factory. A significant number of the arrests took place in the autumn of 1937, suggesting that they were part of the mass operations. 80 of those executed were communists at the time of arrest, but a few more had been members of the party at some other point in the past. Ibid. 20 July 2016. This is consistent with the findings of quantitative studies of repression in Leningrad noting that party members tended to be over-represented amongst the arrested and/or executed. See for example Getty et al, "Victims"; Denis Kozlov, "The Leningrad Martyrology: A Statistical Note on the 1937 Executions in Leningrad City and Region," *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 44, no. 3–4 (2002): 175–208.

[152] Goldman, *Inventing the Enemy*, p. 252.

[153] It has not been possible to determine the exact number of party members expelled without being arrested, or arrested without being executed. The continuation of recruitment during 1937-8, as well as the review and annulment by the *partkom* of around 60 cases as unfounded after January 1938, further complicate calculation. In fact, from the available evidence, the 3,454 strong membership of 1 April 1937 seems to have declined by only 50 members by August 1938. Kostiuchenko, *Istoriia,* pp. 534, 541; TsGAIPD, f. 1012, op. 2, d. 1478, l. 12. In any case, assuming that in line with the all-union trend, about as many arrestees were convicted to sentences other than death as were executed, we should expect a minimum of 160 expelled (because repressed) communists, or 4.6% of the total. Even double that would be significantly lower than the ~15% expulsion rate of 1933.

[154] At the *Dinamo* factory for example, the rate was 11%, equal to the all-Union expulsion rate of 1929. Goldman, *Terror and Democracy,* p. 245.

that production failures amounted to sabotage had hardly been foreign to members of the organisation before it became standard discourse in the national press.

At the same time, however macabre, the emergence of vacancies made possible the promotion of a new cohort of party members and distinguished workers to posts of greater significance. Es'kov was the only elected member of the 1937 *partkom* to be returned in 1938, this time as secretary.[155] Viktor L'vov, until 1937 a superintendent at the blast furnace shop, briefly replaced Tiutin as *partkom* secretary, then became director and before the end of 1938 had become head of the short-lived People's Commissariat of Machine Building.[156] Even some who were subjected to denunciation managed through luck or effort to shake off the charges and end up in a better position than prior to 1937. Such was the case of Iakov Kapustin, who was expelled, reinstated, elected to the *partkom* and then left the factory to head the *raikom*.[157] In total, around 500 technicians, engineers and Stakhanovites were promoted to higher posts in 1938.[158]

Thus, irrational violence notwithstanding, the *Yezhovshchina* had much the same function for the party organisation as the more benevolent purges of previous years, trimming the membership and opening up space for promotion within the context of a mass activist campaign. Significantly, the democratisation campaign that had precipitated the explosion of denunciations in the factories did not fizzle out entirely along with the repressions. Multicandidate elections for party posts at Kirov continued until the German invasion in 1941. These ranged from shop-level bureaus and the *partkom* to delegates to the district party conference.[159] All of these conditions contributed to the post-1937 rapid re-emergence of the organisation as a check on managerial authority that we observed in the preceding chapter. Rather than causing it to devour itself, the upheaval of repression seems to have strengthened the party organisation on the factory floor.

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[155] TsGAIPD, f. 1012, op. 2, d. 1467, l. 9.
[156] Unlike Ter-Asaturov, Tiutin had been transferred to work at *Uralmashzavod*. Kostiuchenko, *Istoriia*, p. 541.
[157] Ibid, p. 539; TsGAIPD, f. 1012, op. 2, d. 1954, l. 123.
[158] Kostiuchenko, *Istoriia*, p. 542.
[159] For shop-level elections, see indicatively TsGAIPD, f. 1012, op. 2, dd. 1396, 1804, 1805, which contain candidacies, protocols and the ballots cast. Three party conferences were held in the period 1938-1941, in which *partkom* members were elected individually, out of multiple candidates. TsGAIPD, f. 1012, op. 2, dd. 1467, 1954; TsGAIPD, f. 1012, op. 1, d. 1287.

2.6 Conclusion

It was argued earlier that although acting as the main channel of rank-and-file influence on the factory floor, the party organisation differed significantly from a trade-union, in that its power was predicated on a set of political conditions that its activities were meant to maintain, most notably the nature of the Soviet party-state as a dual structure of distinct but overlapping executive and supervisory apparatuses, wherein the party performed the latter role. This chapter has traced the development of the KP/Kirov plant party organisation as part of the party-state within the context of the major political campaigns of the interwar years.

The defeat of successive oppositionist challenges in the late NEP period laid the ground for the transformation of the party organisation from a space of contestation of alternative political projects to one of conflicts over matters pertaining to the productive process, which however continued to be framed in political terms. By 1929, the politics of production had emerged as the main activity of the organisation, displacing as it were the politics of politics. From that point onwards, the main concern of the organisation when it was not trying to run the factory was the process of party building. This amounted to a strengthening of the organisation as an actor in the politics of production by means of numerical expansion, raising members' skill levels and excluding those who threatened the minimum level of political consensus necessary for the organisation to perform its new role.

The successive purge campaigns initiated by the leadership during this period, including the repressions of 1937-8, were in effect concentrated, sped-up instances of the party-building process, during which party organisations were expected to reach a new level of political maturity before embarking on a new stage of the socialist project. Agitation, speeches, reviews and expulsions were the main components of all purges.

Viewed in this larger context, these major political initiatives of the party leadership provide the opportunity for some broader remarks on the politics of mobilisation than was possible at the start of this chapter. First, while it is true that the purge campaigns fit well into the conceptual framework of mobilisation in that they were attempts by the centre to generate grassroots support via activism, the account

offered here demonstrates that the process was more complicated than either a top-down model of the activists as foot-soldiers of the leadership or a more interactive view allowing for the pursuit of relatively autonomous interests by the rank-and-file would suggest. The party organisation had a political life that extended beyond the mobilisation campaigns of the leadership. That is, the centre was not mobilising a politically inert mass and the rank-and-file did not have to wait for signals from above to become active. Instead, the centre's initiatives mobilised an organisation that was already going about its own business which in the case of industry was the politics of production. The outcome was that the each campaign ended up being conducted within the current context of production politics while also leaving an imprint on its further development.

Second, because the party leadership and the rank-and-file operated essentially within the same ideological framework, and because industrial production was itself a top political concern for the centre, it was possible for the rank-and-file to anticipate central political developments. The framing of production failures in terms of political disloyalty by KP/Kirov communists, well in advance of the press, is the most striking example of this. Having politicised the production process, securitising it was hardly a massive conceptual leap for communist workers. When this view came to dominate the national leadership, the stage was set for yet another mobilisation campaign that would differ from the others in that it would involve lethal state violence. It is perhaps not immaterial then that Nikolai Yezhov acquired his first experience of labour activism as a young striker in the Putilov works.[160]

[160] Getty and Naumov, *Yezhov*, pp. 14-20.

3. Marxism and clean canteens: party activism and a new socialist culture

3.1 Introduction

It has been argued in the preceding two chapters that the ability of party members to fulfil their vanguard role in production was predicated upon them having an adequate grasp of Marxist-Leninist ideology and elementary respect for the norms of Bolshevik organised life. To promote the interests of their shops and colleagues, communist activists had to be sufficiently in tune with the prevailing political moods in order to be able to frame their demands and arguments within the terms of official policy. It was the central role played by the party organisation in the politics of production that drew the rank-and-file into the sphere of politics proper from collectivisation to the unmasking of enemies.

While participation in party life did not require a profound grasp of the minute details of Marxist political economy, in order to be an effective activist one still needed a level of knowledge of Marxism-Leninism that was not imparted by the mere fact of acquiring a party card. It was thus expected of party members to devote a considerable amount of time to their self-education, or "working on one's self" in the parlance of the time.[1] The raising of the rank-and-file's level of political-ideological astuteness, as well as its cultural level more broadly, was thus a major aspect of the party building process described earlier and the organisation devoted a considerable amount of time and resources to activities that contributed to members' cultural development.[2]

Like most of the party's initiatives, educational activities were more campaigns than events, seeking to involve broad numbers of non-party participants and taking place over extended periods of time. This chapter will examine the cultural-educational aspect of party activism at KP/Kirov and relate this to the functions of the organisation

[1] On self-education as an ideological imperative, see Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism*, pp. 16-17.
[2] Enlightenment, or a general broadening and deepening of mental horizons, was an ambition that the Soviet state had for its entire population. Hoffmann, *Cultivating the Masses*, pp. 211-237; Halfin and Hellbeck, "Rethinking"; Hellbeck, *Revolution in my Mind*. The point here is that much like in other areas, party members were expected to lead the way in cultural affairs both as a matter of principle and as a precondition for discharging their other duties.

examined earlier, thus rounding off the account of the industrial communist rank-and-file offered in this thesis. It will be shown that the broad range of activities that fell within scope of the party's mission of cultural enlightenment gave the latter significant material implications. Because of this, the intensity with which KP/Kirov communists engaged in cultural activism was to a significant extent independent of the attitudes prevalent amongst the central leadership, whether with respect to the relative weight attached to the party's cultural mission or the actual content of the latter. This observation has significant implications that extend beyond the immediate scope of this thesis onto the broader historiographical debate of Soviet cultural policy in the interwar period. This will be examined in the following pages in greater detail, but it is worth briefly setting out the shape of this debate here in order to better frame the argument of this chapter.

In broad terms, scholarly interest on Soviet cultural affairs has focused primarily on the question of the relationship between early attempts to transform the cultural landscape by means of ambitious educational and artistic initiatives, and a later turn towards more traditional practices and values. At its core, this debate has been about the extent to which these two periods, roughly delineated by the end of the 1st FYP, are better viewed as being defined by distinct and mutually exclusive political projects, or rather as a more incremental succession of cultural policy that did not signify a sharp political reorientation.

Although few scholars would deny that significant changes did take place, there remains considerable difference of opinion on whether these may be subsumed under a broader continuity.[3] This chapter will show that from the perspective of the party rank-and-file, the latter was the case. It will be argued that because the party relied on the same overworked activists to promote its cultural policy as it did for all of its initiatives, its ambitious plans always came up against the fact that the rank-and-filers could only do so much. In practice, communist workers engaged in the kind of cultural activism they could fit into activities they were engaged in anyway and which in any

[3] See the following sections for further discussion of the relevant scholarship. It is worth noting in passing that that the continuity/retreat dispute overlaps significantly with the modernity/neo-traditionalism debate. Thus, one of the arguments for cultural continuity is Kotkin's account of Stalinism as a socialist civilisation predicated on a rejection of capitalism and tracing its roots to earlier Bolshevism. Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain*, pp. 1-2.

case were higher up on their list of concerns, that is the familiar matters of factory life. The corollary of this is that when the overall direction of cultural policy did change, its shop-floor manifestation did less so. Cultural activities continued to rank below factory problems in the hierarchy of activists' concerns and the content of those that did clear the bar was not particularly affected by whatever change of policy took place at the top.

3.2 An attempt at Cultural Revolution, 1926-1931

The period of Cultural Revolution in the USSR is usually conceived as part of the broader "socialist offensive" or "revolution from above" of the First Five Year Plan period and roughly dated from the Shakhty affair in 1928 to Stalin's Six Conditions speech in June 1931. It therefore coincides chronologically with the party's *samokritika* campaign, it being one of the means to the end of transforming the Soviet intelligentsia from a remnant of the former ruling class to a new revolutionary leadership with proletarian consciousness.[4] While this is certainly an accurate description for the country as a whole, there is some evidence suggesting that the party in Leningrad was attempting to pursue more ambitious cultural and political education projects than was the case nationally already upon Sergei Kirov's assumption of the regional leadership.

The resolution adopted at the extraordinary conference of the LPO held in February 1926 after the defeat of the Zinoviev Opposition made specific reference to the cultural underpinnings of the recent party crisis. The document urged members to pay closer attention to the rapidly expanding *Komsomol*, as well as the broader "non-party mass" in the trade-unions, soviets and co-ops.[5] In the ideologically blurry environment of the NEP, these broader groups of people who had not "been through the school of class struggle and proletarian organisation" were more vulnerable to falling victim to pessimistic petty-bourgeois mentalities.[6] Motivated by concerns about

[4] Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Cultural Front: Power and Culture in Revolutionary Russia* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1992), pp. 115-118.
[5] RGASPI, f. 17, op. 21, d. 2669, ll. 57-60.
[6] Ibid., l. 57. The notion of *meshchanstvo,* the narrow-minded and self-centred mentality of the petty-bourgeoisie or lower middle class, has a long pedigree in Russian intellectual history. It was counterposed to ideas of selflessness or commitment to a higher purpose already by the pre-revolutionary intelligentsia and naturally entered the discourse of Bolshevik polemics in the mid-1920s on topics ranging from economic growth to sex. On the latter, see Fitzpatrick, *Cultural Front*, pp. 65-70; on *meshchanstvo* more broadly, Timo Vihavainen, "Meshchanstvo, or the Spirit of

the politically unhealthy effects of such attitudes on members and their ability to promote party policy amongst the population at large, the new *gubkom* bureau adopted an extensive plan of cultural and educational activities, ranging from organising recreational walks and excursions during the summer period to doing work with national minorities and establishing cultural clubs.[7] Some months later, the bureau reaffirmed its commitment to this aspect of party work, requesting the CC to almost double the budget of its *agitprop* department.[8]

These were not isolated actions. Throughout 1926, the new Leningrad leadership had kept a close watch on the progress of the party's cultural-educational initiatives, with matters falling within the purview of the *agitprop* department appearing with almost the same frequency as economic issues on the bureau's agenda.[9] Only a few days after the LPO's extraordinary conference had confirmed the leadership change, the bureau produced a resolution expressing alarm over the state of the region's *rabselkor*, or workers' and peasants' correspondents' movement and ordering its complete overhaul.[10] Territorial and city-wide correspondents' associations were to be abolished, and district committees were instructed to reorganise the movement on the basis of activist circles *(kruzhki)* formed around the wall newspapers *(stengazeti)* of specific workplaces, to make sure that published content was more relevant to their readers.[11]

Kirov's bureau also laid out ambitious plans with respect to the LPO's work amongst women, their emancipation *(raskreposhchenie)* being a major pillar of the party's struggle against cultural backwardness throughout the interwar period.[12] On 23

Consumerism in the Russian Mind", in *idem* and Elena Bogdanova (eds.), *Communism and Consumerism: The Soviet Alternative to the Affluent Society* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), pp. 139-160.

[7] RGASPI, f. 17, op. 21, d. 2674, l. 57. The plan was broken down into several categories made up of thirty or forty points.

[8] Ibid., l. 230. The only other request for more funds by the bureau in the same year related to the construction of a hydroelectric power station on the river Svir'. Ibid., l. 204

[9] Kokosalakis, "'Merciless War'", p. 66, n. 70.

[10] On the *rabselkor* movement in the NEP-era, see Michael Gorham, "Tongue-Tied Writers: The Rabsel'kor Movement and the Voice of the "New Intelligentsia" in Early Soviet Russia", *The Russian Review* 55, no. 3 (1996), pp. 412-429; Jeremy Hicks, "From Conduits to Commanders: Shifting Views of Worker Correspondents, 1924–26", *Revolutionary Russia* 19, no. 2 (2006), pp. 131–149; *idem*, "Worker Correspondents: Between Journalism and Literature", *The Russian Review* 66, no. 4 (2007), pp. 568–585; Koenker, "Factory Tales"; Clibbon, *The Soviet Press.*

[11] RGASPI, f. 17, op. 23, d. 2674, l. 22

[12] See on this Wendy Z. Goldman, *Women, the State and Revolution: Soviet Family Policy and Social Life, 1917-1936* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); idem, *Women at the Gates: Gender*

March, the bureau produced a "work plan for women workers and peasants" aimed at strengthening the party apparatus amongst women by recruiting to the party those most actively engaged in public and professional organisations. The document also proposed a thorough review of the state of shop-floor party work amongst women to take place over the following thirty days, with representatives of the *gubkom* to visit district and primary party organisations' meetings and conduct personal interviews with women activists. According to the resolution, the LPO was to intensify its efforts to attract women to literacy circles and increase their presence in technical skills courses to a level correspondent to that of their presence in the workforce. Mass cultural work amongst women was to be expanded, with a series of activities on topics like "Marriage and Family" and "Religion and Worker *(Rabotnitsa)*" planned for the Easter period. With respect to this, the resolution instructed activists to pay particular attention to domestic workers and housewives due to their relative isolation from public affairs, and devise appropriate forms of organisation to ensure the establishment of permanent contacts amongst them.[13]

Similar issues were a major theme in regional party directives the following year as well. A review of the work of the party organisation of the *Skorokhod* factory identified members' low level of political education as one of the least bright spots of the group's record and instructed its bureau to strengthen its network of party schools, with special attention to women and youth.[14] Cultural and political work amongst women was also the main item on the agenda of a *gubkom* bureau meeting on 16 February 1927 which reviewed the implementation of the relevant work-plan of the preceding year and, noting some modest achievements, set higher targets for the "promotion of women to leading posts".[15]

The commitment of the regional leadership to revolutionising the city's cultural life is also reflected in another resolution taken at the same meeting which set out plans for party work amongst "science workers". According to the document, the main task

and Industry in Stalin's Russia (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Melanie Ilic, *Women Workers in the Soviet Interwar Economy: From "Protection" to "Equality"* (Palgrave Macmillan, 1998); Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism*, pp. 139-163.

[13] RGASPI, f. 17, op. 23, d. 2674, ll. 30-34.

[14] RGASPI, f. 17, op. 23, d. 2675, ll. 8-11.

[15] Ibid., ll. 45-51.

of the LPO was to "attract a broad circle of materialist-minded, loyal to soviet power" scientists and intellectuals to cooperate with the party in "a common front against reactionary idealist worldviews". In order to achieve this goal, the party would have to strengthen its organisations in educational institutes and ensure that communist scholars were relieved of party assignments to concentrate on their research. At the same time, the resolution stipulated that research should be "oriented towards the concrete tasks of socialist construction" and that its results should be "disseminated amongst the masses" in open workshops and public debates.[16]

The preceding examples provide a good picture of the close attention paid to cultural and education affairs by the LPO *gubkom* bureau under Kirov's leadership.[17] A number of reasons can be adduced to account for this. First, cultural experimentation was a major trait of the NEP-period and as the traditional centre of Russian intellectual activity and home of the Revolution, Leningrad could not remain unaffected.[18] Second, as discussed earlier, the new leadership saw the intellectual and cultural development of the party rank-and-file as a key task in preventing the re-emergence of an oppositionist challenge to the CC majority line. Higher education institutions in particular had a complicated role to play in this process, with the Leningrad student body having in the past demonstrated particular vulnerability to the allures of the Left Opposition and the faculty of the city's University having been compromised by its association with the Zinovievites.[19]

A combination of factors relating to contemporary political imperatives and historical precedent thus led the various aspects of cultural development to the top places of the political agenda of Leningrad's regional leadership. Given the importance attached to this area of party work by the *gubkom* bureau, we should expect the

[16] Ibid,. ll. 51-57.
[17] A note on the copy of the science work resolution sent to the party CC and reading "to comrade Stalin" *(tovarishchu Stalinu),* suggests that interest in educational affairs was not limited to the Leningrad leadership. Ibid., l. 51. For an account of Bolshevik attitudes and policy towards higher education in the 1920s, see Michael David-Fox, *Revolution of the Mind: Higher Learning among the Bolsheviks, 1918-1929* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1997).
[18] A detailed account of the northern capital's vibrant cultural life is provided in Katerina Clark, *Petersburg: Crucible of Cultural Revolution* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 2010)., especially chapters 5, 6 and 8.
[19] While Zinoviev seems to have made some efforts to generate support amongst the city's students, he did not meet with much success even though some leading academic staff did take his side. Halfin, *Intimate Enemies,* pp.193-194; Konecny, *Builders and Deserters,* pp. 103-109.

activities of the city's primary party organisations to reflect similar priorities at least to some extent. This, however, seems not to have been exactly the case. We have already seen in previous chapters that the new leadership of the party organisation at KP was immediately overwhelmed by the problems of production in the enterprise. Despite the commitment of Ivan Gaza's bureau to party building, the strictly political and organisational aspects of party work had to take second place to resolving issues like stoppages, *brak* and wage disputes, all of which had contributed considerably to the success of Zinoviev's supporters in attracting the factory's workers to their cause. Education being the qualitative aspect of party building, it too was put on the backburner.

This is not to say that KP communists did not make any efforts to implement the *gubkom*'*s* directives. A month after the party assembly that withdrew the organisation's support from the opposition in January 1926, members serving on the *agitprop* committee of the organisation held a meeting to discuss plans and distribute responsibilities for educational work for the following three months. The resolution produced stipulated that efforts should be made to attract more workers to be *rabkori* while making sure that the existing network of political education *(partprosv)* should be strengthened by recruiting more workers from the shop-cells to do educational work. During the meeting, Kovsh argued that more attention should be paid to political agitation amongst women. This point was also included in the resolution, which assigned Kovsh the responsibility of coming up with a plan for the relevant work.[20] No other concrete measures were agreed on.

The underwhelming output of this meeting lies in stark contrast to the ambitious plans produced by the regional bureau a few months later and cited above. A similar assessment of educational work at the factory was made by the *agitprop* collegium of the Moskovsko-Narvskii party *raikom* in a review of the organisation's progress on 19 April. The main report was delivered by Kasparov, who outlined the achievements of the organisation in terms of organising courses and study circles on Marxism-Leninism and "self-education" and promoting press subscription amongst the party rank-and-file and KP's workers more broadly. Kasparov stressed that cultural activities had been

[20] TsGAIPD, f. 1012, op. 1, d. 272, ll. 1-3.

more popular amongst non-party members than expected, with around 45% of the entire workforce of 12,000 having taken participated in one way or another. [21] The libraries organised and maintained by the organisation were amongst its most popular achievements, having served 4,122 readers in February of whom 847 belonged to the party.[22]

Despite these results however, Kasparov complained that the party's cultural activism was being undermined by the fact that foremen did not take it into account when assigning shifts, leading to some workers being irregularly, if at all able to participate. This had the effect of keeping the level of discussion at study circles at a very elementary level, a problem compounded by the fact that 17 out of 20 shop-cell *agitprop* activists had only joined the party in the last mass recruitment drive of 1924-1925.[23] Kondratiev, the communist responsible for *agitprop* at the factory's old forge gave his report after Kasparov, noting in similar manner that shift work and the lack of appropriate premises were posing significant problems to the expansion of shop-floor cultural activism, despite the recent achievement of organising a "red corner" for the first time. The overall assessment of cultural work at KP given by Levina on behalf of a monitoring committee *(obsledovatel'nii komitet)* set up to review the shops' *agitprop* painted an even bleaker picture. In her supplementary report, Levina stated that KP organisation had failed to take advantage of "the positive peculiarities" of the factory in terms of history and party saturation to establish a strong grassroots *agitprop* network. No work-plan had been produced, the shop-cells remained without leadership from the bureau and the study circles organised were doing poorly both in terms of their curricula and their composition.[24]

Levina's criticisms and the complaints of Kasparov and Kondratiev are very illustrative of the constraints placed by shop-floor realities on the party's ambitious plans of cultural transformation. Inexperienced activists had to teach their colleagues things they probably barely understood themselves, more often than not after a long shift at the bench with all the attendant frustrations caused by stoppages and break-

[21] TsGAIPD, f. 1012, op. 1, d. 264, l. 1.
[22] Ibid., l. 2.
[23] Ibid., l. 3.
[24] Ibid., ll. 4-6.

downs. Whether members of the party or not, foremen were more concerned about meeting their production targets than not upsetting the schedule of party study circles with their shift rotas. It is perhaps indicative of both the misunderstanding of the problem and the helplessness of the organisation before it that the only suggestion made by Levina was moving "towards a system of shop-level *agitprop* assemblies", which was to add one more layer of activity to resolve an issue brought about in large part by excessive workloads.[25]

The *raikom* review had a certain urgency about it because less than two weeks later, the factory would be hosting a major celebration of its 125-year anniversary. The event took place one day before the May Day celebrations on the 30th of April and seems to have been an enormous success.[26] Thousands of KP workers and other locals assembled at the factory's giant tractor shop which had been converted to a beflagged exhibition of the factory's achievements. An artillery gun and a KP-produced tractor were placed on each side of the meeting's presidium to represent the factory's transition from military to peaceful production under Soviet rule. The main event consisted of a series of speeches by old Putilovites who recounted their experience of clandestine organisation during the 1905 revolution and WWI, urging the new generation of workers to new feats of labour and industry. The celebrations were attended by a number of dignitaries, including Sergei Kirov, trade-union, Red Army and Comintern representatives along with delegations from the Communist Party of Germany and the Mongolian Popular-Revolutionary Party.

Representatives from Leningrad City Soviet and other factories also addressed the meeting. A worker from *Krasnii Viborzhets* drew much applause from the audience after he presented the presidium with a figurine of a tongs-wielding worker representing the readiness of Soviet metalworkers to "nip the tail of the global bourgeoisie".[27] The jovial atmosphere was enhanced by the flourishes and tunes played by KP's own choir and orchestra, which also performed a march it had composed especially for the occasion after Ivan Gaza's closing speech.

[25] Ibid., l. 6.
[26] This account of the event is based on the description and photographs in Kostiushchenko, *Istoriia*, pp. 239-245.
[27] Ibid., p. 243.

All of the traits of the new socialist culture envisaged by the Bolsheviks were in evidence at the celebration, including awareness of past sacrifice, optimism for the future and an internationalist outlook tempered with a resolute determination to defend revolutionary gains from the machinations of global imperialism.[28] It seems however unlikely that the KP party organisation, whose *agitprop* activists were struggling to draw up plans for study circles, could have put together such a well organised event.[29] It is instead more probable that given the high profile of the event and the presence of foreign visitors, the regional leadership had provided at least some material and organisational assistance.[30]

Whatever the case, as successful as the anniversary celebration was in its own terms, it does not seem to have provided a boost to KP cultural activism for much longer than its one-day duration. A similarly festive mood was apparent the following evening at the opening of KP's cultural club on the site of an old church across the factory gates, but less than a month later complaints about the persistent weakness of cultural activism re-emerged at party meetings.[31] At the annual electoral assembly of the organisation which met on 27 May, the uninspiring record of the organisation in the *agitprop* priorities set by the *gubkom* was remarked on by a number of speakers. In the main report, Gaza lamented the state of political education, the drop-out rate of which had reached 40%. Little progress had also been made in setting up a *rabkor* collective, as members of the would-be editorial group were at odds with each other on how to proceed. Chervinskii commented that at the tractor department they did not even know who the candidate editors were.[32] Dmitriev complained that *agitprop* was

[28] These are some of the features of Kotkin's Stalinist civilization. *Magnetic Mountain*, pp. 355-359. It seems that at KP, where the party had a long and established presence, these cultural traits had already started to take shape some years before the 1st FYP.
[29] The celebrations had made it to the agenda of the party assembly on 22 April, just a week before the actual event took place. Even then, there was little in the way of concrete task assignment, with a vague mention of the need to get all workers and the family to attend, so as to spend their May Day holiday in an intellectually stimulating manner *(razumno).* Most of the assembly's time was devoted to a speech by Sergei Kirov on the April CC Plenum and the mostly economy-related questions that followed it. Even days away from a major event, cultural activism could not compete with the economy for the attention of rank-and-filers. TsGAIPD, f. 1012, op. 1, d. 266, ll. 42-47.
[30] On foreign visits to the USSR and the importance attached to them by the party leadership, see Michael David-Fox, *Showcasing the Great Experiment: Cultural Diplomacy and Western Visitors to the Soviet Union, 1921-1941* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), especially chapter 3.
[31] Kostiushchenko, *Istoriia*, p. 245.
[32] TsGAIPD, f. 1012, op. 1, d. 266, l. 63.

non-existent and cultural activism had been left to its own devices without any leadership from the party.[33]

It should be noted here that all such mentions of the problems faced by the party in its mission of enlightenment appeared as afterthoughts within much longer speeches on production problems and disputes. One of the *zapiski* passed to Gaza from the floor complained that the he had not said a word about work amongst women in his report. The secretary responded that there were about three hundred women in the factory and that a special organiser had been assigned by the *raikom* to lead work with women workers.[34] In a factory of more than 10,000 workers, the otherwise attentive Gaza could only think about the issues concerning specifically the small minority of female employees as being somebody else's problem, despite indications by the *gubkom* that they ought to be taken seriously.[35] The resolution produced at the end of the meeting showed a similar attitude to cultural work more generally, stating that the organisation had to "increase the political and cultural level of the *aktiv*", but offering little in the way of practical measures to achieve this goal.[36]

The revival of internal political turmoil the following year pushed cultural activism even further down the list of priorities of the organisation. For the duration of 1927, educational activities and the state of *agitprop* were rarely mentioned at party meetings, as the combined strain placed on the organisation by the Regime of Economy and the emergence of the United Opposition left little time for the consideration of other matters. To the extent that the state of activity circles and similar initiatives was discussed, it was usually in the form of complaints by the communists leading them about the lack of support they had received from the bureau.[37] Even when the state of the organisation's cultural activities was among the main items on

[33] Ibid., l. 70.
[34] Ibid., l. 69.
[35] Despite CC support, women activists faced considerable difficulty in making their overwhelmingly male rank-and-file comrades take their concerns seriously. This was especially true for workplaces like KP where women made up a very small percentage of the workforce. Goldman, *Women at the Gates*, pp. 33-48; Elizabeth A. Wood, *The Baba and the Comrade: Gender and Politics in Revolutionary Russia*, New Ed edition (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), pp. 157-162; Diane P. Koenker, "Men against Women on the Shop Floor in Early Soviet Russia: Gender and Class in the Socialist Workplace," *The American Historical Review* 100, no. 5 (1995): 1438-1464.
[36] TsGAIPD, f. 1012, op. 1, d. 266, l. 75.
[37] TsGAIPD, f. 1012, op. 1, d. 418, ll. 13, 55, 117-118, 131.

meetings' agendas, it was often the case that discussion strayed into the more pressing matters of the factional struggle. Thus, while the annual bureau report delivered by Gaza at the party assembly of September 1927 contained extensive information on the number and attendance of the various *kruzhki* organised by party members, it was impossible to keep the meeting focused on this topic. The intensification of the leadership struggle during the preceding summer overwhelmed the discussion, leading to calls from the floor to interrupt speakers not addressing the actual business of the meeting or wrap up the assembly altogether.[38]

The information presented by Gaza provides furthers indication of the organisation's difficulties in implementing the party's ambitious plans for cultural activism. On the basis of the figures cited by the *partorg*, it appears that KP communists had made considerable progress in setting up things but were not doing as well in sustaining participation. Thus, some form of *agitprop* had reached every single factory employee at least once, with a gross number of over 90,000 having participated in 845 lunch-break discussion sessions *(besedi)*.[39] These figures do not however provide an indication with regard to the extent of participants' commitment or actual interest in the issues discussed, beyond recording the fact that some sort of discussion took place. Similarly, the numbers given on the membership of mass public organisations appear impressive on the one hand, with the civil defence group *OSOAVIAKHIM* and the International Association of Aid to Revolutionaries *(MOPR)* counting 2,082 and 4,799 members amongst the KP workforce respectively. However, the *aktiv* of these groups was considered to be made up of only 96 and 124 of these members.[40] KP communists had thus succeeded in getting several thousands of their comrades and colleagues to demonstrate civic consciousness by signing up to assist in civil defence and support persecuted communists around the world, but had failed to ensure that they actually stayed regularly involved in the relevant activities.[41]

[38] TsGAIPD, f. 1012, op. 1, d. 419, l. 74.
[39] Ibid., ll. 50-51.
[40] Ibid., l. 56
[41] Russian scholars have in recent years produced a number of studies on interwar public activism with a local focus, where difficulties in sustaining high participation rates in the late 1920s emerge as a common theme. See indicatively: Olga Nikonova, *Vospitanie Patriotov. Osoaviakhim i voennaia podgotovka naseleniia v ural'skoi provintsii (1927-1941 gg.)* (Moscow: Novii Khronograf, 2010); Elizaveta Palkhaeva and Natal'ia Zhukova, "Deiatel'nost' obshchestvennikh organizatsii Buriatii (vtoraia polovina 1920-kh gg.)," *Vestnik Buriatskogo Gosudarstvennogo Universiteta*, no. 7 (2005):

Participation rates left much to be desired even amongst those activists specifically charged with the task of overseeing cultural activism in KP, with meeting attendance reaching an average of only 50% for the factory's 29-member cultural commission.

This puts into perspective some of the other achievements claimed by Gaza. According to the report, there were 380 *rabkori* at KP writing for no less than 8 factory-wide and 15 shop-level papers. While we have no reason to doubt that these numbers are real, we may question the extent to which these papers were produced with any regularity. Even if there was enough going on at KP to justify the existence of eight separate publications covering the entire enterprise, one third of the *rabkori* editorial groups had never met.[42] This suggests that the ambitious cultural plans of the new Leningrad leadership notwithstanding, the KP party achieved mixed results in putting them into practice. *Rabkor* groups and *kruzhki* for various activities had been set up and large numbers of KP workers had been attracted to them regardless of party affiliation. On the other hand, a large part of the membership of these groups likely existed only on paper, leaving overworked and poorly qualified activists to run them with little assistance from the organisation's leadership.

This trend would persist even as the Cultural Revolution began to gather momentum the following year. On 13 March 1928, the *obkom* held a joint meeting with the secretaries of primary party organisations of the city's Vasileostrovskii and Moskovsko-Narvskii districts, thus including KP's Gaza. The regional *agitprop* department had prepared an extensive report on the progress of the party's enlightenment mission which warned that cultural development lagged significantly behind economic growth throughout Leningrad. Despite significant achievements in setting up adult education institutes and similar activity groups, the report indicated that library work and the literacy campaign had slowed down considerably in the preceding year, in the latter case leading to significant relapse rates.[43] This is of course

pp. 96-100; A. V. Khlopova, "Innovatsii v obshchestvennoi zhizni gorozhan viatskogo regiona v 1920-1930-kh godakh", *Sovremennie problem nauki i obrazovania*, no. 3 (2012): pp. 1-7.; Ol'ga Nikonova, "OSOAVIAKhIM kak instrument stalinskoi sotsial'noi mobilizatsii (1927-1941 gg.)," *Rossiiskaia Istoriia*, no. 1 (2012), pp. 90a–104.

[42] TsGAIPD, f. 1012, op. 1, d. 419, l. 52.

[43] Over the preceding three years, 63,000 people had received literacy training in the city of Leningrad, but around 14% had shown signs of relapse *(retsidivizm).* RGASPI, f. 17, op. 21, d. 2693, ll. 8, 15.

consistent with the account of KP cultural activism given above; whether students or instructors, the party's overworked activists could just not keep up with everything expected of them.

This would not change significantly in the years of the 1st FYP. Despite the party's determination to create a new, thoroughly proletarianised intelligentsia through cultural class struggle, the flurry of new initiatives promoted during the Cultural Revolution ended up considerably tempered by the constraints of time and resources. As the collectivisation and industrialisation campaigns got underway, the *obkom* began to devote increasingly more time to coming up with stop-gap measures to resolve supply bottlenecks and acute shortages than proletarian enlightenment.[44] The party's educational mission did continue, but it was now subordinated to the more pressing tasks of providing the population with the skills needed to run an industrial economy.[45]

As might be expected, primary party organisations felt the strain of the socialist offensive more directly than the *obkom*, leading to a proportional shift of rank-and-file attention even further away from cultural activism than had been the case during the Regime of Economy period. As we have seen in the preceding chapters, during the 1st FYP KP communists among other things got involved in the 25,000ers campaign, the 1929 purge and the shock-work movement, all against the backdrop of bitter conflicts with the factory administration over the impossible tractor target assigned by the government. It should be hardly surprising then that cultural and educational activities appear in KP party records from this period primarily with reference to their failure or absence, if at all.[46] In fact, what was perhaps the greatest success of the organisation in terms of *agitprop* in this period had taken place several months before the launch of the FYP in February 1928, when the factory's *rabkor* publications were consolidated to form the *Krasnii Putilovets* paper.[47] The paper went on to become an established part of factory life and played an important role in the ouster of the factory's director Grachev a couple of years later.[48] *Putilovets* also became the main medium for KP's

[44] For example, the first item of business of the first *obkom* plenum in 1929 was supplying Leningrad's population with "necessary foodstuffs". RGASPI, f. 17, op. 21, d. 2694, ll. 3-6.
[45] An *obkom* plenum resolution issued in February 1931 demanded that "clubs and cultural centres be transformed into places of technical education". RGASPI, f. 17, op. 21, d. 2697, l. 19.
[46] TsGAIPD, f. 1012, op. 1, d. 675, ll. 6-8, 18-20; d. 679, ll. 29, 32-35; d. 710, ll. 2-4.
[47] TsGAIPD, f. 1012, op. 1, d. 549, l. 39.
[48] For the role of the paper in the conflict, see Black, "Answering for Bacchanalia".

litkruzhkovtsi, the group of primarily *Komsomol* amateur poets and writers among the factory's workers.[49] Nevertheless, the *rabkor* movement was only one of many initiatives through which the party was attempting to transform daily life, few of which would thrive during the FYP.[50]

KP communists were not entirely indifferent to their organisation's failures on the cultural front. The more conscientious amongst them demonstrated strong concern about this crucial aspect of party building even at the height of the industrialisation drive. The last person to take the floor during the discussion of the purge campaign results in November 1929, Trutnev warned that the campaign had revealed that "many of our communists are captives of cultural-political darkness". He went on to wonder:

> Is it possible for a communist without elementary knowledge to exert influence over alien and even hostile forces amongst us? Is it possible for a superintendent who is a cultural-political invalid [sic] to lead work on the balance of class power etc.? Before everything else, we must study, study and study.[51]

Like the *obkom*, Trutnev believed that the low educational level of the rank-and-file posed a threat to the party's ability to perform its leadership role, both in terms of running production and forestalling political opposition. Whatever the views of Trutnev's comrades however, they did not view the matter with the same urgency. Neither the question notes nor the main speaker's closing remarks expressed similar concerns. This trend continued for the remainder of the 1st FYP period and besides the occasional lecture on ideology, cultural activism retreated into the background.[52]

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[49] Kostiushcenko, *Istoriia,* pp. 311-312. The promotion of literary pursuits amongst the country's working-class youths was a key aspect of the party's cultural policy during the cultural revolution. See on this Lynn Mally, "Shock Workers on the Cultural Front: *Agitprop* Brigades in the First Five-Year Plan", *Russian History* 23, nos. 1-4 (1996), pp. 263-275.

[50] The strength of rural traditions amongst the millions of peasant internal migrants was a major obstacle to the promotion of the party's cultural initiatives. David L. Hoffmann, *Peasant Metropolis*, chapter 6; Straus, *Factory and Community*, pp. 69-83. I have deliberately set this issue aside here to focus on the specifically institutional constraints of cultural revolution, namely its reliance on a group of extremely busy activists.

[51] TsGAIPD, f. 1012, op. 1, d. 679, ll. 32-33

[52] The industrialisation drive interfered even with these simple activities, as the transformation of the factory into a giant construction site meant that there was little unoccupied space left in the factory. Kostiushchenko, *Istoriia*, pp. 303-308. Even when space was found, the chaotic state of the enterprise could cause other disruptions. Thus, a group activity titled "Bolshevism was tempered and grew stronger in the struggle against which enemies?" held in early January 1931 was interrupted by a power failure. TsGAIPD, f. 1012, op. 1, d. 922, l. 5.

Transforming a giant machine-building plant into a beacon of culture was always going to be a tall order. This was doubly so within the context of the 1st FYP, with shop-floor conflict and chaotic work schedules placing severe limits on the scope of activities not directly related to production. Against this backdrop, the successful setting up of *Krasnii Putilovets* and a writers' collective were no mean feats. At the same time however, the organisation failed to establish a reliable, functioning network of educational and cultural activities to free the rank-and-file from the bonds of cultural darkness as per the words of Trutnev. Like most aspects of the socialist offensive, the attempt of KP communists at cultural revolution yielded mixed results.

3.3 Not so great a retreat, 1932-1941

Following the completion of the 1st FYP, the party leadership embarked on a campaign of all-round consolidation that was marked by a more moderate approach to most aspects of policy. In industry, technical competence came to be valued more than shock-work and *edinonachalie* started to be promoted over *samokritika*, if not always consistently so. A similar attitude of going slower and taking stock led the party to freeze recruitment and shift through its vastly expanded membership in the 1933 purge.

Disillusionment with the results of earlier rounds of radical experimentation also motivated a series of reversals on the cultural sphere. The Soviet 1930s witnessed among other things the rehabilitation of Russian history, the reintroduction of traditional methods of schooling and the promotion of traditional family values.[53] Avant-garde tendencies in literature and music were condemned in favour of purportedly more accessible themes inspired by tradition and every-day life.[54] Famously, Stalin started to become the subject of increasingly magniloquent public

[53] Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism*, pp. 152-163; Hoffmann, *Stalinist Values*, pp. 96-110; Goldman, *Women, the State and Revolution*, pp. 296-344; David Brandenberger, *National Bolshevism: Stalinist Mass Culture and the Formation of Modern Russian National Identity, 1931-1956,* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2002).
[54] Fitzpatrick, *The Cultural Front,* pp. 183-189; Vera S. Dunham, *In Stalin's Time: Middle Class Values in Soviet Fiction*(Durham: Duke University Press, 1990); Boris Groys, "The Birth of Socialist Realism from the Spirit of the Russian Avant-Garde", in Hans Günther (ed.), *The Culture of the Stalin Period* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1990), pp. 122-148.

adoration which cast his leadership in patriarchal terms, not entirely unlike those used to praise the Tsars.[55]

The Russian exile sociologist Nikolai Timasheff interpreted these developments in terms of a "Great Retreat" from the Soviet revolutionary project, inspired by a realisation on the Bolsheviks' part that their experiment had failed.[56] It is not the purpose of this account to examine Timasheff's argument in depth, but it should be noted that the view from the ground suggests less of an about-turn than is implied in the notion of a great retreat.[57] This seems to be due to a misrepresentation of the actual state of affairs under the status quo ante.[58] As indicated above, there are strong reasons to doubt the extent to which the party had succeeded in implementing its cultural programme by the time this was purportedly abandoned at the end of the FYP.

The same combination of ambitious plans for cultural projects and recalcitrant objective realities on the ground is reflected in the activities of KP communists throughout the 1930s. The first couple of years after the completion of the 1st FYP the LPO's first order of business was to address the crises generated by the upheaval, with the food and housing shortages caused by famine and in-migration being the most pressing issues.[59] Thus, resolutions addressing problems in housing construction and the distribution of rations dominated the agenda of *obkom* plenary sessions in 1932-1934.[60] Even then however, the regional leadership remained sufficiently concerned with the cultural state of the LPO to keep the pressure on the lower party organs regarding the educational dimension of their work. In October 1934, at one of the last

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[55] Jeffrey Brooks, *Thank You, Comrade Stalin! Soviet Public Culture from Revolution to Cold War* (Princeton, NJ, 2000); Sarah Davies, "Stalin and the Making of the Leader Cult in the 1930s," in B. Apor, J. Behrends et al. (eds.) *The Leader Cult in Communist Dictatorships* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), pp. 29-46.

[56] Nicholas Timasheff, *The Great Retreat: The Growth and Decline of Communism in Russia* (E. P. Dutton & Company, Inc., 1946), pp. 349-71. Also from exile, Leon Trotsky concluded that the revolution had been betrayed based on similar observations. Leon Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed* (Mineola, NY: Dover, 2004).

[57] For a more detailed discussion of Timasheff's work in light of recent research, see Michael David-Fox, Peter Holquist and Alexander Martin (eds.), 'Ex Tempore Stalinism and "The Great Retreat"' [special section], *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 5, no. 4 (2004), pp. 651-733.

[58] The same issue was raised in the preceding chapters with respect to accounts positing "retreats" in terms of industrial relations and party politics.

[59] The deterioration of rations had been the main cause of the unrest at Ivanovo region in April 1932, of which Kirov as a politburo member must have been aware of. Rossman, "Teikovo Cotton Workers". For the housing crisis, see Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism*, pp. 46-50.

[60] RGASPI, f. 17, op. 21, d. 2698, ll. 14, 25 and passim.; d. 2699, ll. 3-6, 71 and passim; d. 2700, ll. 1-12, 29-36, 39-43 and passim.

plenums before Kirov's death, the *obkom* voted on a lengthy resolution regarding the "ideological arming" of Leningrad communists. The document noted a number of weaknesses in the party's ideological work, including predictably that organisations were not affording it the appropriate amount of attention. The resolution went on to state that cultural awareness was a necessary precondition for the performance of the party's vanguard role, listing "science, art and literature" among the main subjects that the good communist ought to be conversant in. Such broad general knowledge would enhance the ability of rank-and-filers to participate actively in the party's discussion and decision-making processes, while at the same time enabling them to relate party policy to real every-day issues.[61]

During the same period, KP communists attempted to get their own cultural activism up to the standards of the *obkom*. The 9th Conference of the organisation held in April 1932 heard a report from Aleksandr Ugarov, head of the cultural department *(kul'tprop)* of Leningrad's city party committee *(gorkom)*. The hour-long speech concerned the "tasks of Marxist-Leninist education in the factory" and its content is indicative of both the importance attached to this task by the party leadership and the difficulties faced by the rank-and-filers trying to implement it.[62]

Ugarov began his talk by reiterating the importance of educational activities as an "enormous part of party work" without which it would be impossible to "resolve the fundamental questions of socialist construction" and "craft a successful foreign policy".[63] In order to stress his point, the *gorkom* functionary referred to the case of a kolkhoz in Valdai district, where the local party organisation's relaxed attitude towards ideological instruction had allowed former kulaks to assume leading posts. According to Ugarov, after predictably distributing most of the collectivised animals to their own households, the kulaks went on to cancel the party's educational initiatives.[64] The morale of the story was that only the class enemy stood to benefit from an abandonment of the party's educational mission, a lesson especially apposite in the

[61] Ibid., ll. 70-75.
[62] TsGAIPD, f. 1012, op. 2, d. 439, l. 7
[63] Ibid., l. 9.
[64] Ibid., ll. 14-15.

case of KP's own organisation, where youth of peasant origin made up a large part of its massively expanded membership, around half of which had only candidate status.[65]

During his talk, Ugarov received a note from the floor suggesting that educational sessions should be treated in the same way as labour discipline, with "truancy" controlled by means of appropriate disciplinary sanctions. This prompted the *kul'tprop* to warn against "administrative attitudes" towards the party's cultural activism, arguing that the process of assimilating recent recruits and improving the abilities of old ones was necessarily a protracted one that required patience.[66]

Ugarov's report provides a succinct overview of leadership views on party education, but it is the ensuing discussion that offers a glimpse into the way these were received by the rank-and-file. Of course, nobody disagreed in principle with Ugarov's take on educational activities; the problem was one of implementation. Fratkin, one of the members of the editorial group of *Krasnii Putilovets* complained that factory affairs took up all of the organisation's time, with shop cell meetings often having to hear extensive reports on the progress of their production plans. This left little time for discussing even such prominent political affairs as party conferences, let alone questions of cultural activism. According to Fratkin, wall-newspapers were little more than complaints forums, reporting that "this or that guy is a self-seeker, truant, etc." but not much of substance.[67] Similarly, Sobolevskii stated that at the factory's turbine department, around two thirds of the party's members and candidates were not involved in any kind of educational activity.[68]

Deviatkin brought up the perennial issue of the organisation's failure to devote sufficient time to work among women, noting that this had not even been mentioned in the report, to supportive cries of "that's right!" from the floor.[69] Krasnopolina, a delegate from the KP's *Komsomol*, warned that the state of education amongst the factory's youth was such that some members lacked basic political knowledge and even thought that "the *Komsomol* is the vanguard of the party". She went on to argue

[65] Ibid., ll. 20-21, 58.
[66] Ibid., ll. 27-28.
[67] Ibid., ll. 39-41.
[68] The exact numbers were 173 out of 268 and 56 out of 83 for members and candidates respectively. Ibid., l. 54.
[69] Ibid., l. 64.

that party members had failed to provide adequate leadership to the youth, with not a single one of the tractor department's shop cells having devoted any time to reviewing *Komsomol* work. Seizing on Ugarov's point regarding the vulnerability of young people to bourgeois ideology, Krasnopolina stated that the factory *Komsomol* had attempted to put together a series of events dedicated to the life of youth before the revolution, but very few party members had agreed to help out. The youth representative closed her contribution by urging the organisation to pay as much attention to education as it did to production, drawing applause from the floor.[70]

Like their comrade Tutnev some years earlier, activists like Deviatin and Krasnopolina were genuinely worried by their organisation's substandard performance in cultural activism and education. In this, their views were entirely in line with those of the party leadership as expressed by Ugarov and the *obkom* resolutions cited above. Like the leadership, concerned activists could do little more than reiterate the significance of the party's cultural mission and the resolution produced at the end of the conference itself merely recorded the many weak-spots of educational work, without stating any concrete plan of action to remedy these.[71]

It is hard to gauge the extent to which these complaints reflected real indifference to cultural activism on the part of large numbers of the party rank-and-file or the unrealistic expectations of those who voiced them. To be sure, even with the best of intentions, it is not hard to imagine why experienced workers would be keener to get on with the business of making tractors and turbines than offering history lessons to the young. Solving problems of production was simply a higher priority, affecting both remuneration and personal safety for everyone involved. On the other hand, warnings against ideological laxity notwithstanding, there was quite a lot of party-educational work going at KP at the time. Shortly before the organisation's conference, the *partkom* had organised a competition between the numerous party study groups operating in the factory. One of the best was run by Krasnoshevskii, a 1930 recruit who had spent twenty years working at the factory. Krasnoshevskii's group had an attendance rate of 72% and had organised a small campaign of looking into the state

[70] Ibid., ll. 72-75.
[71] Ibid., l. 84.

of consumer services available to workers of the tractor department's erecting shop, as an assignment in connection with the decisions of the October 1931 CC Plenum.[72] Significantly, the group had managed to recruit five new members to the party during its activities. Similar achievements were reported by the *partkom* for the other winning groups, all of which were awarded literary book-coupons.[73] The *partkom* awarded similar prizes to some instructors dispatched to the enterprise from the Leningrad Region Communist Academy *(LOKA),* the prestigious party-affiliated educational institute that had been supervising the organisation's cultural mission for the preceding couple of years.[74]

In light of these achievements and the fact that KP communists were receiving specialised assistance from the party's own higher learning institute, it may be tempting to view the alarm expressed regarding the state of cultural activism by some of the speakers at the conference as misplaced or exaggerated. It is more likely however that what was at play had once again more to do with a divergence of priorities than an absolute lack of interest about cultural matters in some quarters. In a still primarily male factory, the even more male party membership struggled to take women's issues sufficiently seriously, even though it was a male communist who raised the issue.[75] Even young communist workers were probably more concerned with everyday matters than the type of ideological education appropriate for youth. The advantage of the consumer services related activities organised by groups like Krasnoshevskii's was that they touched on issues that were of primary concern to every worker in the factory, perhaps more so for the minority of women.[76]

Other initiatives of cultural activism that met with success during the same period lend further support this view. Perhaps the most extensive and elaborately

[72] The plenum had issued a resolution "On the expansion of Soviet trade and improvement of workers' provisioning". *KPSS v rezoliutsiakh*, vol. 5, pp. 366-369.
[73] TsGAIPD, f. 1012, op. 2, d. 432, ll. 85-94.
[74] These seem to have been awarded on the basis of the achievements of their students. Ibid., ll. 92-96.
[75] Exact numbers for women in the workforce and membership are not easy to determine for 1932 due to the chaotic state of record keeping in the aftermath of the 1st FYP. However, in January 1934, immediately after the purge, there were about 6,000 women amongst KP's 30,000 workers, or 20% of the workforce. Just under 400 of them were in the party then numbering 3,233 members, or just over 12%. TsGAIPD, f. 1012, op. 2, d. 1012, l. 1.
[76] Acquiring the goods available through the state trade network and restricted market outlets remained a task primarily performed by the female members of Soviet households. Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism,* pp. 54-58; Osokina, *Za Fasadom*, pp. 189-214.

planned of these was a competition for the best canteen *(stolovaia)* held over two months in September 1933. The competition involved the setting up of a seven person commission to investigate the performance of the factory's canteens in terms of cleanliness, speed of service, the food's caloric value and responsiveness to complaints. Apart from visiting twelve canteens and interviewing users and staff, the commission also conducted two "night raids" to ensure appropriate standards were maintained during the night shifts too.[77] The results were announced at a meeting attended by one hundred representatives from the party, trade-union, *Komsomol*, administration and canteen committees *(stolovie kommissii)*. Speakers at the event demonstrated all the traits of Bolshevik militancy, including *samokritika*, denunciations of incompetence and mutual admonishments to strive for better results.

Delivering the report, the commission member Potikov classified the *stolovie* in groups of "bad", "good", and "best", enumerating the achievements and failures of each to the audience. Thus amongst the "bad" ones, canteen No. 29 of the rolling-mill shop had failed to make planned renovations, did not provide tea and had been the subject of rat and cockroaches infestations for which nothing was being done. No. 5 of the tractor department's forge shop was also a poor performer with Potikov stating that there was "no discipline in the canteen", as reflected by the numerous broken forks, flies in the kitchen and two kilograms worth of wasted cabbage. On one occasion, the poor planning at No. 5 had led to lunch service being delayed for two hours.[78]

"Good" canteens were not necessarily free of such problems, but their committees demonstrated an attitude conducive to improvement. Thus, canteen No. 32 serving the factory's construction workers had been on schedule with its repairs and was regularly meeting the target of 1,033 calories per meal and smooth service ensured that there were no queues. However, No. 32 had had wastage *(brak)* amounting to the 18^{kg} of potatoes and been the subject of complaints about cockroaches. What saved No. 32 a "bad" assessment was that its committee was "leading a struggle" *(vedet bor'bu)* against these failures.[79] In the same way, it was the efforts of its committee

[77] TsGAIPD, f. 1012, op. 2, d. 623, l. 1-2.
[78] Ibid., ll. 3-5.
[79] Ibid., l. 6.

that won canteen No. 34 the best assessment in the competition. This *stolovaia* had not only exceeded its caloric target on two separate samplings and never been infested by any critters, but its committee had been on such good terms with staff that they had even managed to organise the production of a wall-newspaper.[80]

Closing his report, Potikov encouraged those canteens that were "lagging behind" to strive to "transform themselves into leading, exemplary canteens" by the October celebrations.[81] In the discussion that followed, speakers addressed issues overlooked by the report in similarly militant terms. Belokurova, a trade-union representative, criticised the poor oversight exercised by some committees, noting that at canteen No. 28 – which had not been part of the competition – the committee had failed to realise that the canteen's auditor, one Solov'ev, was working with expired credentials. As a result, Solov'ev "almost seized the revenue" of the canteen, before union activists "unmasked" *(razoblachili)* him.[82] Martianov, the committee chairman of canteen No. 17 took the floor to criticise the non-rounded prices that canteens had to charge leading to complaints when workers were short-changed because of the low availability of single kopek coins.[83] Other speakers complained about the familiar problems of bad planning, interference by outsiders and substandard performance by some activists. In his closing remarks, the chair of the meeting Zhukov suggested that the issues that had not been resolved through the competition could be taken up during the upcoming round of the 1933 purge.[84]

There is something slightly comical in associating one of the party's most exalted procedures of political introspection with the performance of canteens, as there is in the notion of a struggle against cockroaches. Strange as the use of language charged with revolutionary pathos might seem in connection with such quotidian things as caloric measurements, it actually reflects the importance attached to the issues discussed by the participants.[85] With famine spreading through the country and

[80] Ibid., ll. 7-8.
[81] Ibid., l. 8
[82] Ibid., l. 11
[83] Ibid, l. 15.
[84] Ibid., l. 19.
[85] In earlier years, bread and the overcoming of hunger had been important parts of Russian revolutionary politics and discourse. See Lars T. Lih, *Bread and Authority in Russia, 1914-1921*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990); Mary McAuley, *Bread and Justice: State and*

the availability of food at state trade and market outlets severely restricted, the network of canteens operating at factories and other public institutions had become a primary means of subsistence for the Soviet people.[86] Making sure that their canteens were clean, efficient and wasting no food was thus a matter of more than cultural importance for KP workers. This is not to say however that any cultural dimension was absent from the campaign. Promoting habits of personal and communal hygiene had been a strong theme of the Bolsheviks' ongoing campaign to "cultivate the masses" since the early years of Soviet power and remained part of the Leningrad *obkom* cultural agenda throughout the interwar period.[87] One of the most proudly proclaimed aspects of KP's extensive renovation during the 1st FYP had been the building of shower-rooms on the factory premises.[88] Moreover, promoting a "cultured" attitude towards consumption, including food, emerged as a major aspect of state policy regarding the provision of goods in the 1930s.[89]

At the same time, involvement in the campaign should not be mistaken for a disingenuous hijacking of a party initiative by workers attempting to draw attention to their concerns. Party policy foresaw and presupposed public involvement in the retail sector both as a means to generate information on quality and uncover malfeasance.[90] Indeed, less than a year after the KP competition, an *obkom* plenum criticised the state of the public catering with respect to the sanitary standards of canteens as well as the nutritional value and even presentation of meals offered. The regional leadership also admonished party and trade-union organisations to ensure the greatest possible "participation of the masses" in overseeing the public catering network.[91]

This raises an interesting point regarding Soviet cultural activism and the role of party activists within it. In the absence of widely available marketed goods,

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Society in Petrograd 1917-1922 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991) and of course Peter Kropotkin, *The Conquest of Bread* (London: Penguin Classics, 2015).

[86] Osokina, *Za fasadom*, pp. 150-155.

[87] Hoffmann, *Cultivating the Masses*, chapter 2; RGASPI, f. 17, op. 21, d. 2700, ll. 41, 111; d. 2707, l. 26.

[88] Kostiushchenko, *Istoriia*, p. 307

[89] Julie Hessler, *A Social History of Soviet Trade: Trade Policy, Retail Practices, and Consumption, 1917-1953* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004). pp. 198-215; A. Randall, *The Soviet Dream World of Retail Trade and Consumption in the 1930s* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp. 134-157.

[90] Ibid., pp. 112-133.

[91] RGASPI, f. 17, op. 21, d. 2700, ll. 39-43.

participation in party-led campaigns of involvement in and oversight of the state retail network became an important means of exercising control over consumption. In the same way that communist activists took an active and often aggressive interest in production as a precondition for gaining a degree of control over the conditions of their labour, cultural activism offered them a degree of control over what they got in return for it. In the years of famine, nutritious food was the most important form of remuneration, but even then the "cultural" services offered through factory based structures included theatre tickets, day care services and tourism, including highly desirable but rare trips abroad.[92]

At the same time, the *ipso facto* politically charged character of party activism made consumption into a means of ideological hegemony. Thus, in a late 1933 interview with the KP *partkom*, a 46 year old non-party shock-worker called Boroda reported that his life was especially hard in terms of accommodation and access to food, but that he could bear the hardship in the knowledge that "if not us, then our children will live well" and that "in capitalist countries they live worse".[93] During the 1st FYP, Boroda had been one of the country's exceptionally productive *udarniki* who had been rewarded with a cruise around Europe on the ship *Abkhazia*. The travellers had had time to observe the plight of workers in depression-era Europe and Boroda returned to KP to tell his fellow workers that Kiel's idle shipyards resembled the state of Russian industry in the Civil War year of 1918.[94]

For the remainder of the decade, cultural activism in the factory proceeded along similar lines. The first conference of the organisation to be held after the party's 17th Congress met in March 1934 with an agenda dedicated to party educational work.[95] Despite significant improvements in terms of the numbers of members and candidates participating in educational activities, the familiar themes of competing priorities and work overload dominated the discussion. Thus, although the *partorg* Tiutin noted in

[92] Filtzer, *Soviet Workers*, pp. 174-175; Diane P. Koenker, *Club Red* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013), pp. 89-115. The multitude of services offered by and at factories has prompted Kenneth Straus to describe the Soviet factory as a community organiser. Straus, *Factory and Community*, p. 212. In keeping with this metaphor, the argument offered in this chapter is that the party was the community organiser of the factory as a community centre.
[93] TsGAIPD, f. 1012, op. 2, d. 628, l. 2.
[94] Ibid., l. 1.
[95] TsGAIPD, f. 1012, op. 2, d. 939, l. 5.

his report that over three quarters of communists were engaged in some form of study, the progress of more than half of participants was assessed as "satisfactory" and "unsatisfactory" and only a third or less were "good" or "excellent".[96] Even worse, basic literacy and numeracy skills amongst the membership left much to be desired, with Tiutin jokingly commenting that although everyone was Russian, "when it comes to an exam in the Russian language, you couldn't tell if we were French or some other people".[97]

The scarcity of basic mathematical skills was a particularly sensitive issue, given their importance for comprehending and monitoring the progress of production plans. One of the last to speak at the conference, the factory director Ots described party education as a necessary condition for economic progress.[98] Pichugina, a KP communist attached to the regional higher party school *(komvuz)* made the same point more blatantly, stating that workers who studied at the *komvuz* learned "the language of political economy and *diamat*" without mistake but had trouble using fractions and percentages. Pichugina went on to attack both Ots and Tiutin for failing to take adequate interest in the kind of training provided to future production cadres at the *komvuz*.[99]

Other speakers highlighted the persistence of religious attitudes amongst older workers as well as the familiar problem of lack of interest in women's issues as areas in need of improvement.[100] The variety of loosely related matters discussed at the conference may seem to indicate that the speakers were talking past each other, but is better viewed as a reflection of the vast scope of activities that fit under the label of party education. The blurry contours of the subject-matter continued to make it hard to discuss any concrete issues regarding the broad range of activities that constituted party education, beyond the common across the board problem that there simply was not enough time to get everything done. In the end, the most concrete measure taken by the conference in that respect was to instruct the organisation to extend its

[96] For example, of the 619 people studying "political literacy", 304 were "satisfactory", 149 "unsatisfactory", 132 "good" and 33 excellent. Ibid., l. 14.
[97] Ibid., l. 91.
[98] Ibid., ll. 73-75.
[99] Ibid., ll. 51-57.
[100] Ibid., ll. 59, 92.

educational reach by taking activities beyond the factory and into workers' own apartments, an innovation in cultural activism apparently pioneered by the 2nd Mechanical shop-cell.[101] In its habitual manner, the party organisation resolved to remedy its overwhelming workload by expanding its activities.

Home visits seem to have become a regular component of the organisation's cultural activism after the conference, with collected minutes of interviews at workers' apartments appearing as separate entries in the archival catalogue.[102] Although these were not available for examination, references to home interviews conducted by communists of the 2nd Mechanical made at the March conference suggest that their content was fairly balanced between the concerns of every-day life ("why are light industry products of low quality?") and the broader political awareness expected of engaged Soviet citizens ("why, precisely speaking, are such contradictions developing in the Far East?").[103] In addition to being a means of strengthening the rank-and-filers' links with their non-party colleagues, home visits also became a way by which the organisation monitored the private behaviour of its own members in order to ensure it met the cultural standards expected of communists. Activists visited the homes of their comrades to hold what seem to have been similar to counselling sessions, offering help to those struggling with alcohol and advising on marriage problems ranging from how to relate to a religious or non-communist spouse to more serious cases of domestic abuse.[104]

Though not necessarily attributable to such innovations, cultural activism as a whole seems to have risen in prominence in the period after the party's 17th Congress. In the years leading up to 1937 the organisation began to hold regular educational activities on specialised topics in addition to the long-running study circles. These included lessons on party history, shop-floor discussions on developments regarding the Spanish Civil-War and what seems to have been an exceptionally well-planned conference on Marxist theory held over two days in March 1936.[105] The transcript of the conference – which was one of the very few party educational activities to have

[101] Ibid., ll. 96-98.
[102] TsGAIPD, f. 1012, op. 2, d. 1012.
[103] TsGAIPD, f. 1012, op. 2, d. 969, ll. 16-18.
[104] Ibid., l. 59; TsGAIPD, f. 1012, op. 2, d. 1051, ll. 45-46
[105] TsGAIPD, f. 1012, op. 2, dd. 1171, 1172, 1242.

been fully stenographed – indicates that by the mid-1930s factory communists had acquired substantial knowledge of Marxism that went considerably beyond concurrent party slogans. The event's agenda included extensive presentations on "Utopian Socialism", "The Dictatorship of the Proletariat as an instrument for the construction of a classless society" and "The Socialist State" by members of the factory's shop-cells.[106] The well-informed talks were followed by equally erudite discussions during which speakers disputed some of the most minute points of the original presenters. Thus, Miliutin of the 3rd Mechanical Shop took issue with the account of pre-Marxist socialism offered by Markin of the energy shop on the grounds that it underestimated its "influence on the development of the revolutionary worldview of the proletariat". This was apparently because Markin had focused on Étienne Cabet's Icarian movement instead of Robert Owen's attempts to create working-class led industrial communities.[107]

A year later, the organisation began its descent into the delirium of denunciation and "unmasking" described in the preceding chapter. As we have seen, the combination of the campaign for party democracy and the hunt for enemies led to renewed rank-and-file attacks on those holding positions of authority in the factory, with social tensions feeding into the wave of repression. The result of this process on cultural activism was a forceful resurgence of interest in the service provision aspects of the new socialist culture being built by the factory's workers. Thus the 1st Conference of the Kirov factory party organisation held in April 1938 saw the interim *partkom* that had emerged within the chaos of the previous year come under sustained attack with regard to the factory's housing-building plan. The most biting criticism came from Sitarzh, a communist who worked as a trade-union representative at the factory's dormitories *(obshchezhitiia).*

Sitarzh began her intervention by saying that the new *partkom* had done a good job in putting production in order but had forgotten about the other side of party work, namely "concern about people, the creation of conditions for people, the nurturing of people who live and study and do great things".[108] She went on to attack by name

[106] TsGAIPD, f. 1012, op. 2, d. 1171, l. 1.
[107] Ibid. ll. 35-38.
[108] TsGAIPD, f. 1012, op. 2, d. 1467, l. 162.

everyone involved in some capacity in the factory's housing development programme for having failed to demonstrate said concern, to applause and encouraging cries from the floor. Sitarzh demanded of the new director Viktor L'vov to "find the money" to build a new club at one of the dormitories and went on to attack the *kul'tprop* Maliutin for his lack of concern about the provision of cultural services like film screenings to the dormitories.[109] Maliutin attempted to respond to Sitarzh's criticisms by stating that other party members had been successful in performing their cultural enlightenment duties without complaints, but he was interrupted by cries of "she is right!" from the floor and a member of the presidium dryly commenting that hear Maliutin, "one could think that a club is not even necessary".[110]

As a result of Sitarzh's efforts, L'vov promised to reserve part of the factory's budget for renovations at the dormitories.[111] During the discussion of the resolution draft at the end of the conference, Sitarzh also demanded that a point be added instructing the *partkom* to build a school for the children of factory workers. Many pointed out that this was a matter for the city authorities and not the party but at that point, the chair of Leningrad Soviet who was attending the conference announced that he would see to that the issue was forwarded to the relevant agencies, to applause from the floor.[112]

3.4 Conclusion

Regardless of when it was that the promised school materialised, Sitarzh's efforts to get it built demonstrate the very material implications of some aspects of the party's mission of cultural enlightenment. In the remaining three years between the 1st Conference and the German invasion of the USSR, Kirov communists would continue their cultural activism along much the same lines as described above, with the only major difference being the much stronger emphasis placed on the promotion of civil-defence and paramilitary training as appropriate "leisure" activities.[113] On that note, it

[109] Ibid, ll. 166, 169.
[110] Ibid., l. 177.
[111] Ibid., l. 276.
[112] Ibid., l. 322.
[113] Ibid., l. 81; TsGAIPD, f. 1012, op. 2, d. 2192, ll. 1-9; Kostiushchenko, *Istoriia,* pp.

is possible to offer some concluding comments on the KP/Kirov organisation's efforts to transform the factory into a socialist cultural site.

The account offered in this chapter has divided the party's cultural activism into two main periods corresponding roughly to what cultural historical scholarship has identified as the Cultural Revolution accompanying the 1st FYP and the subsequent establishment of Stalinist culture. The picture that emerges from observing the activities of the factory's communist activists on the cultural front is one that suggests more continuity than is implied in the twin concepts of revolution and retreat. This is because on the one hand, the poorly educated and extremely busy rank-and-file lacked the ability to affect revolutionary changes in the cultural sphere and on the other, the rehabilitation of traditional values in Soviet public culture did not in any way diminish the extent of cultural activism that was taking place on the factory floor. Paradoxically, the intensity with which the party KP/Kirov party organisation pursued its mission to cultivate the masses seems to have only increased after the national leadership retreated from its revolutionary ambitions.

The reason for this development is that the recalibration at the top confirmed what had been always the case at the bottom. As we have seen, the new Leningrad regional leadership under Kirov took a great interest in the development of cultural activism as a means of promoting the rank-and-file's political astuteness and preventing the re-emergence of pro-opposition views. In between implementing the Regime of Economy and fending off oppositionists however, the party grassroots at KP did not rush to respond to the *gubkom's* repeated calls for expanded intellectual horizons, except in so far as these translated into the provision of much desired services. As crash industrialisation followed by famine further squeezed the already pressed living standards of industrial workers, these services increased in importance providing further incentive for activists to become actively involved in supervising their quality and provision. Although of course not attributable solely to this, the Union-wide shift in cultural policy towards less ambitious goals reflected the adoption of a more instrumentalist logic which required that cultural activism was directed towards the achievement of concrete policy objectives. When the securing of adequate standards of service quality became such an objective, communist workers responded

actively and creatively. In famine conditions, "battling cockroaches" and preventing potato *brak* were more pressing matters than studying party history.

None of the above goes to say that KP/Kirov communists did *not* engage with the more party-ideological aspects of their cultural mission. Marxist study circles were organised and joined by thousands of rank-and-filers and the progress of their studies was a frequently raised issue at the organisation's meetings by *partkom* members and concerned activists alike. Organising shop-floor newspapers, amateur writing clubs and political theory conferences was not a mean task in a giant machine-building plant increasingly staffed by barely literate former peasants. The frequent complaints about the state of cultural activism and party education in the factory thus seem to be more indicative of unrealistic expectations than anything else.

Finally, it is worth reiterating that there was nothing in the actions of the rank-and-file that went against the tasks set by party directives. The range of activities that fell within the scope of the Bolsheviks' cultural mission was so broad that every member of the factory's workforce could find something to relate to. Naturally, most party members gravitated towards the issues that affected their lives most directly, so that cultural activism on the KP/Kirov factory floor came to be primarily focused on matters of consumption and the provision of services. Conversely, those aspects of cultural activism that were of interest to fewer activists were marginalised in party discussions. This was the permanent problem of those seeking to promote activities regarding women's issues. One suspects that it was also the reason why some activists felt so disappointed by their comrades' performance in Marxist education. In terms then of the historiographical debate regarding the fate of the Soviet Cultural Revolution, what this chapter has shown is that the presence of the PPO provided party policy with a certain ideological and practical continuity even when the leadership engaged in what appear to be political aboutfaces. This is because whatever the specific content of the party's cultural policy, rank-and-file communists would be called upon to implement it in practice. Although party members obliged, they inevitably gravitated towards those aspects of cultural policy that were more readily relatable to their everyday concerns. Because of the worker-oriented nature of Marxist-Leninist ideology, there was always some campaign or part thereof that was of interest

to KP/Kirov workers, making it possible for grassroots communists to engage actively with the party's cultural enlightenment project even if partially and intermittently.

The point here is that in cultural affairs as much as in industrial policy, Marxist-Leninist ideology was sufficiently ambiguous that the varied signals and decrees emanating from the centre could always be selectively interpreted and partially implemented. In this area of party work also, the rank-and-file could thus pursue its own agenda while still remaining within the boundaries of the political mainstream.

4. Communists in Uniform: The Party on the Baltic Fleet

4.1 Introduction

The preceding chapters examined three overlapping but distinct aspects of communist rank-and-file activity in one of the USSR's largest and most iconic industrial enterprises. As indicated in the introduction, the last chapter of this thesis will attempt to contextualise the account provided so far by telling much the same story from a perspective that differs significantly to that of a giant factory. In what follows, the focus of this investigation will shift to grassroots party activity in another iconic Leningrad institution, the Red-Banner Baltic Fleet *(Krasno-Znamenii Baltiiskii Flot)*.[1] As this is a considerable change of scene, it is necessary once more to offer some extensive introductory remarks before delving into the activities of communist sailors and their officers.

There are two main obstacles to crafting an account of party activity on the Fleet similar to the one provided in the previous chapters about KP/Kirov. The first, and perhaps most significant is historiographical. Due to the Soviet Union's political claims as well as the intellectual interests of many of its historiographers, factory life in the interwar period has been a major subject of social historical research for almost as long as the field has existed. This made it possible to ground the argument developed in the preceding chapters in existing literature, relating to conceptual schemes already established. It is unfortunately much harder to do the same for the purposes of this chapter.

Social histories of the Soviet military have understandably focused primarily on the life of Red Army soldiers in the battlefields of the Second World War, seeking to shed light on their motivations and experiences.[2] Conversely, research focusing on the

[1] Like the KP/Kirov works, the Baltic Fleet underwent a number of name changes during the period examined here, reflecting changes in organisation and composition as well as awards received. From 1918 to 1935, the Fleet was known as Baltic Sea Force *(Morskie Sili Baltiiskogo Moria)*. This formation was awarded the Order of the Red Banner in 1928 and became known as the Red-Banner Baltic Fleet after 1935. For the sake of simplicity, the term "Fleet" will be used to refer to the whole of the formation throughout the period covered in this chapter.

[2] Anna Krylova, *Soviet Women in Combat: A History of Violence on the Eastern Front* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Roger Markwick & Euridice Charon-Cardona, *Soviet Women on the Frontline in the Second World War* (Basingstone: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011); M. I. Mel'tiukhov,

period between the Civil and Great Patriotic Wars has tended to focus on the institutional development of the Soviet military and its relation with and influence over other state agencies of the USSR.[3] Explaining the origins of the military purge initiated in June 1937 and its connection to the broader process of mass repression has been a major theme in this strand of research.[4] Scholarship in both directions has tended to ignore the specific questions arising from the ubiquitous presence of the communist rank-and-file in the military, whether because it was looking at civil-military relations on a higher level, or because it was more interested in military personnel as peasants, men, women and youngsters at war rather than communist activists. The problem is even more pronounced with respect to the Navy which, especially in English language historiography, has been the subject of only highly specialist military historical scholarship that has tended to eschew social and political issues altogether.[5]

Perhaps the only major exception to this trend is the work of Roger Reese, whose numerous studies of the Soviet military have included considerations of the function

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"Materiali Osobikh Otdelov NKVD O Nastroeniiakh Voennosluzhashchikh RKKA v 1931-1941 gg.," in *Voenno-Istoricheskaia Antropologiia. Ezhegodnik* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2002); Catherine Merridale, "Culture, Ideology and Combat in the Red Army, 1939-45," *Journal of Contemporary History,* vol. 41, no. 2, 2006, pp. 305–324; *idem. Ivan's War: Life and Death in the Red Army, 1939-1945* (New York: Picador, 2007); Roger Reese, *Why Stalin's Soldiers Fought: The Red Army's Military Effectiveness in World War II* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2011); *idem.* "Motivations to Serve: The Soviet Soldier in the Second World War", *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies,* vol. 20, no. 2, 2007, pp. 263-282 David R. Stone, "Stalingrad and the Evolution of Soviet Urban Warfare," *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies,* vol. 22, no. 2, 2009, pp. 195–207. Robert W. Thurston and Bernd Bonwetsch, *The People's War: Responses to World War II in the Soviet Union* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000).

[3] Mark von Hagen, *Soldiers in the Proletarian Dictatorship: The Red Army and the Soviet Socialist State, 1917-1930* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1990); Mark Harrison (ed.), *Guns and Rubles: The Defense Industry in the Stalinist State* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008); David R Stone, *Hammer and Rifle: The Militarization of the Soviet Union,* 1926-1933 (Lawrence, University of Kansas Press: 2000); *idem.* "Mobilization and the Red Army's Move into Civil Administration, 1925-1931", *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* vol. 4, no. 2, 2003, pp. 343-367; Oleg Suvenirov, "The People's Commissariat of Defense and the NKVD During the Prewar Years", *Russian Studies in History,* vol. 31, no. 2, 1992, pp. 61-84; Vasilis Vourkoutiotis, *Reform in Revolutionary Times: The Civil-Military Relationship in Early Soviet Russia* (New York: Peter Lang, 2009).

[4] Oleg Suvenirov, *Tragediia RKKA, 1937-1938* (Moscow: Terra, 1998); Peter Whitehead, *The Red Army and the Great Terror: Stalin's Purge of the Soviet Military* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2015).

[5] Robbert C. Whitten, "Soviet sea power in retrospect: Admiral of the fleet of the Soviet Union Sergei G. Gorshkov and the rise and fall of the Soviet Navy", *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* vol. 11, no. 2, 1998, pp. 48-79; Gunnar Åselius, *The Rise and Fall of the Soviet Navy in the Baltic, 1921-1941,* (London and New York: Frank Cass, 2005); Vasilis Vourkoutiotis, "Foreign Contacts of the Red Navy, 1920-1923", *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* vol. 19, no. 1, 2006, pp. 83-91.

of its political structures.[6] Even in Reese's work however, the issue of party activity is subordinated to the broader issue of Soviet military professionalism, or rather the absence thereof, which forms the core argument of most of his work. Reese argues that the dual presence of the party in the military in the form of party organisations and a parallel hierarchy of specialised political officers *(politsostav)* exacerbated a number of problems endemic to the Red Army in the interwar period, such as its chronic lack of personnel and persistently low quality of military training. Along with a number of contingent factors, extreme politicisation inhibited the development of professionalism in the Soviet military, leading thus to persistently substandard performance and ultimately contributing to the series of catastrophic defeats that ensued in the first stages of the German invasion. Neither space nor expertise permit a thorough engagement with the nuances of Reese's military-historical argument here, but it must be noted that even sections of his work that are specifically dedicated to military-political structures provide very little information on their actual activities, focusing instead on gauging their prevalence as a proxy measure for the lack of professionalism.[7]

By contrast, Russian-language scholarship has examined the activity of Soviet military-political structures quite extensively. However, it also suffers from an analogous problem in that it consists primarily of examinations of the minute details of *politsostav* work, without embedding these in a broader conceptual framework.[8] Given then these historiographical constraints, the discussion that follows will have to be limited to the question of the extent to which party activity on the Fleet is in line

[6] Roger Reese, *Stalin's Reluctant Soldiers: A Social History of the Red Army, 1925-1941* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1996); *idem. The Soviet Military Experience* (London, Routledge: 2000); idem, "Red Army Professionalism and the Communist Party, 1918-1941", *The Journal of Military History*, vol. 66, no. 1, 2002, pp. 71-102; idem, *Red Commanders: A Social History of the Soviet Army Officer Corps, 1918-1991* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2006).

[7] See for example the chapter specifically dedicated to the Political Directorate of the Red Army in *The Soviet Experience*, pp. 71-93 as well as the discussion in *Red Commanders,* p. 38 and "Red Army Professionalism", p. 88-102 and passim.

[8] A. V. Makedonskii, "Bibliotechnaia rabota v Krasnoi Armii v 20-30 godi XX veka", *Uchenie Zapiski*, no. 4, (2007): 164-168; I. Iu. Sidorov, "Razvitie periodizatsii problemi podgotovki partiino-politicheskiikh kadrov VVS (1918 – Iiun' 1941 g.), *V Mire Nauchnikh Otkritii,* vol. 47, no. 11.3 (2013): 143-149; V. V. Zharkov, "Politicheskie Organi RKKA v 20-30e godi XX-go veka", *Iaroslavskii Pedagoicheskii Vestnik,* vol. 56, no. 3, (2008): 154-161, idem, "Agitatsionno-propagandistdkaia rabota v boevoi obstanovke v mezhvoennii period", *Iaroslavskii pedagogicheskii vestnik*, vol. 61, no. 4, (2009): 241-246.

with the observations previously made about the party in industry, without addressing any specifically military-historical issues.

The second obstacle that needs to be addressed is methodological and stems from the dual structure of party presence in the military. Much like in industrial enterprises, the institutional architecture of military formations was triangular, the difference being that in the latter context two out of three sides were formal party structures. In addition to the mass of enlisted personnel the Soviet military included, unremarkably, a hierarchy of officers *(komsostav)* to command them. Its rather more peculiar feature was the parallel *politsostav* hierarchy of commissars *(voenkomi)* and political instructors *(politruki)* mirroring the chain of command and answering ultimately to the Political Directorate of the Worker-Peasant Red Army *(PURKKA* or *PUR)*, the military department of the party CC.[9]

The *politisostav* was an institutional innovation that had its origins in the Civil War when, in the Red Army, the committees of soldiers' representatives in military units created after the February revolution were replaced by individual political officers charged with maintaining discipline and morale, while also overseeing the work of commanders and professional officers.[10] Originally holding extensive powers including the right to veto politically suspect orders, the status of *politsostav* officers was curtailed significantly as part of the military reforms conceived by Mikhail Frunze and confirmed by the 14th Party Congress in late 1925 shortly after his death. The Congress resolutions deprived political personnel of their veto powers and limited their authority to strictly political matters, which however included responsibility for the maintenance of discipline and morale.[11] The new Party Rules confirmed at the Congress also sanctioned the operation of primary party organisations within the

[9] *Ustav VKP (b), 1926.*, XII: 78.
[10] *KPSS v resoliutsiiakh*, vol. 1. p.; Anna Korobets, "'Golod , razrukha, vosstanie imushchikh klassov s odnoi storoni i innozemnie razboiniki - s drugoi…',Partiinie Mobilizatsii v Krasnuiu Armiiu v 1918-1920 gg. Po arkhivnim materialam Viatskoi gubernii' *Voenno-Istoricheskii Zhurnal*, no. 2, (2013) pp. 63-65. Although the Russian Civil War was an overwhelmingly continental conflict, this structure of political control was extended to the navy almost simultaneously. Iulia Kalinina, "Politotdeli v Sisteme Politicheskogo Kontrolia Na Baltiiskom Flote, 1919-1921" (Sankt-Peterburgskii Institut Istorii, 2007). Introduction.
[11] Reese, *Soviet Military Experience*, p. 82. For the Frunze reforms, see von Hagen, *Soldiers*, pp. 206-230.

military and established electable party commissions to regulate recruitment and handle party-disciplinary affairs.[12]

The ever-present institutional overlap of the Soviet party-state therefore meant that a Soviet serviceman could expect to be commanded by an officer who may or may not have been a party member and was in turn overseen by an *ipso facto* communist political officer whose responsibilities included supervising the work of a party organisation composed of members of any military rank and led like its civilian counterparts by a bureau and secretary. The extent of confusion this abundance of authorities must have caused is not hard to imagine and is no less a problem for the purposes of this account than it was for the people in service.

In the preceding chapters, it was possible to examine the implications of rank-and-file communist activism for state-society relations on the basis of a conceptual distinction between those members of the KP/Kirov organisation who held management posts and the majority who did not. This made sense because the interests of management in fulfilling plans and those of workers in conserving their labour power and maximising remuneration are opposed, all the more so in the conditions of Soviet industrialisation. The hierarchical continuum of the military makes it unhelpful to structure the investigation around an existing social cleavage. Conceptually counterposing the party organisation to command will also not work here because of the presence of the *politsostav*, who were closer to commanding officers in terms of rank but more analogous to the party organisation in light of their primarily ideological responsibilities.

Being thus deprived of conceptual anchors on which to ground this account, what follows will have to take the form of a more or less impressionistic review of party activity on the Fleet – both *politsostav* and organisation – as reflected in the documents of *PUBalt*, the Baltic Fleet's *PUR* section. It will emerge that in the absence of a productive process party activity focused almost exclusively on educational and cultural work, being however no less disruptive for it.

[12] *Ustav VKP (b) 1926* XII: 79-81.

4.2 Class struggle on the Fleet?

The duality of the Soviet party-state was a consequence of the dependence of the Bolsheviks on a state apparatus staffed by people they did not trust, their need, as it were, to maintain one group of people to do things and another to make sure that the former only did those things that were right. This peculiar mode of governance was particularly suited to the navy, where the highly specialised skills required of high-ranking officers meant that top ranks in individual ships and units continued to be dominated by old-regime specialists. As late as 1928, a statistical report on the social composition of the Baltic Fleet showed that all four commanders in the Fleet's Battleship squadron belonged to the former nobility, although one had since joined the party. Similarly, out of five head mechanics, one was a noble by descent, two were peasants, one a worker and one was marked as 'other'; none of them were party members, although one was a candidate. Party saturation was higher in the less senior ranks, with all artillery officers in the squadron being communists.[13] This suggests that although by that time the new naval academies had already started to produce a new generation of officers without ties to the old regime, these had not by that time acquired the necessary experience to assume command.

For as long as this situation persisted, it was necessary for political departments and party cells to keep a close watch on the activities of old-regime officers and make sure that, if they did not convert to the Bolshevik cause, they were at least not working against it. An example of the uneasy relationship between the representatives of Party authority and those they were watching over can be seen in a 1926 collection of reports on surviving Tsarist traditions to the political department of the Kronstadt naval base. The issues highlighted by the commissars who authored these reports often seem pedantic or trivial in their remarks but are in fact highly illustrative of the gap between the expectations and ideological outlook of communists and the established norms of the institution they were charged with controlling.

For example, a report penned by the *politsostav* officer of the cruiser *Aurora* of revolutionary fame, complained that there was a widespread feeling among officers of superiority with respect to the army, whose officers were seen as less cultured and of

[13] RGAVMF, f. r-34, op. 2, d. 1334, l. 72.

inferior skill.[14] Another commissar wrote in exasperation that whenever large ships are visited by the high command, carpets are rolled out and all regular business of the ship is disrupted by a rush to make everything "sparkling clean". He concluded that the worst thing about this state of affairs was that "many people find nothing wrong in this and think that it is normal".[15] Other reports highlighted as ideologically suspect the persistence of pre-revolutionary rank appellations like "captain" or "admiral" instead of the more politically appropriate "commander of" and superstitious behaviour like not taking women at sea and throwing coins into the water when sailing past Gogland Island in the Gulf of Finland. Even the lettering in which ships' names were written proved very troubling for one political officer, who complained about the persistence of old Slavonic instead of modern Russian script, arguing that this was a remnant from the Tsarist period, when a ship was viewed as "a Church on Water".[16] In his own report to *PUBalt*, the commissar who had collected these reports opined that the only way to remedy this situation was to "fight as a single front to replace these [Tsarist traditions] with new, revolutionary traditions".[17]

In order to bridge the gap between the actual and the desired ideological state of the Fleet, ship commanders were expected to participate in the educational and propaganda events organised by political departments for all personnel, in fact sharing responsibility for their work regardless of whether or not they were party members.[18] Such events included regular lectures, film screenings and Q&A sessions about international events and central political affairs like Party Congresses as well as special sessions on the political importance of particular naval exercises before and during their execution.

Thus, in the run up to the naval manoeuvres of autumn 1926, *PUBalt* produced a set of guidelines on the appropriate topics around which political education should be based, in preparation for the exercise. These included themes as varied as the role of the Fleet in protecting the merchant navy, the rise of the USA in the world economy, the English miners' strike and the future direction of the worker-peasant alliance in the

[14] RGAVMF, f. r-34, op. 2, d. 1304, ll. 79, 87.
[15] Ibid., l. 79-80.
[16] Ibid, l. 81.
[17] Ibid. l. 87.
[18] RGAVMF, f. r-34, op. 2, d. 1303, l. 4.

USSR.[19] In a model political education session outlined in the guidelines, *politsostav* officers were encouraged to draw upon these and other issues to demonstrate that "growing contradictions amongst capitalists" made an attack on the Soviet Union "both possible and inevitable".[20]

Expectations notwithstanding however, the participation of commanders in such events seems to have remained limited. Their absence is a recurring issue in the minutes of commissars' and party secretaries' joint meetings from this period. Discussing the matter at a meeting of the *komsostav* and *politsostav* officers of the Leningrad Naval Base *(Lenmorbaza)* in early 1926, the temporary commissar of the M-type submarine *Serp i Molot* Kudriavtsev gave a glowing report on the leadership of commander Tsiplenov, who was absent from the meeting. According to Kudriavtsev, Tsiplenov was a brilliant commander who enjoyed very good relations with his crew and took a strong interest in their political development, as well as his own. Despite not being a party member, the conscientious commander apparently attended all political meetings that were open to non-partyists.

This picture of harmonic collaboration between commanders and political officers painted by Kudriavtsev was however undermined by a supplementary report delivered by Gor'kov, a member of the organising sector of the political department of *Lenmorbaza.* Gor'kov's report painted a decidedly less rosy picture, according to which Tsiplenov's "influence on political work [was] negligible" and the "alienation of the *komsostav* from political work" was demonstrated by the absence of links with the party group. To further illustrate the extent of the problem, Gor'kov added that Tsiplenov had failed to give a report to the party bureau – composed of his subordinates – and that it was often the case that *Serp i Molot's komsostav* had no political assignments.

In the ensuing discussion, commissars from other vessels weighed in with their own experience to further undermine any notion that the two branches of the Fleet's dual hierarchy were working in smooth cooperation. According for example to Shcheglov, the commissar of the depot ship *Smolny, komsostav* officers did not seem

[19] RGAVMF, f. r-34, op. 2, d. 1310, l. 16-17.
[20] Ibid, l. 16.

to care about political work at all. Seemingly unaware of the fact that the recent party congress had abolished the commissars' right to veto orders, Shcheglov added indignantly that commanders were often drawing up orders without consulting their *politsostav* and that the higher military organs signed off on these.[21] In his concluding speech, the head commissar of *Lenmorbaza* Davidov remarked that *komsostav* officers seemed to be "scared of the party collective". To remedy the problem, the meeting resolved to organise a monthly base-wide conference of *politsostav* and *komsostav* officers to discuss issues such as the delineation of responsibilities and share experience on the ways to resolve disputes arising therefrom.[22]

It is not possible to determine on the basis of the available evidence whether Kudriavtsev was indeed covering for Tsiplenov, or if the latter's overtly keen critics were just being plainly unreasonable in terms of their political expectations of an officer who was not even in the party. In any case, it does not require a leap of the imagination to see why professional officers who were busy commanding warships would not want to spend much time discussing issues like a strike in England, let alone assume responsibility for such work, especially given the lack of mutual understanding between them and the *politsostav* indicated by the report on traditions cited above. There were also other reasons which suggest that commissar Davidov's description of the *komsostav* attitude towards the party as fearful was not metaphorical. According to some of the participants at another meeting at the Leningrad naval base, a lot of officers were simply too scared to get involved with party organisations, because of a recent wave of arrests conducted by the secret police against officers of all backgrounds. According to one speaker, an engineer from Battleship *Oktiabr'skaia Revoliutsiia* had been arrested without the ship's commissar having even been informed.[23] Whether then because of excessive workload, fear or simple indifference, higher ranking officers remained distant from the party throughout the mid-1920s.

Things were different however for junior officers and sailors who made up the bulk of the rank-and-file membership of the party.[24] This was despite the fact that party

[21] RGAVMF, f. r-34, op. 2, d. 1303, l. 4
[22] Ibid., l. 5
[23] Ibid., l. 183.
[24] In 1928, total party saturation in the Baltic Fleet was 20.3%, or 4506 communists out of a total of 21654 servicemen. These were organised in a total of 27 unit-level organisations and 158 ship-

building activities examined earlier faced considerable difficulties on the Fleet, to the extent that the overall impression derived from party minutes from 1926-1929 is one of a membership trying with increasing desperation to combat drunkenness and rowdiness amongst their comrades and fellow-sailors, while at the same time explaining to bewildered peasant seamen the difference between the Tsarist and Red Fleets.[25] These unattractive aspects of membership notwithstanding, participation in party-sponsored activities provided a significant distraction from the tediousness of everyday military life for lower ranking personnel, while also acting as a channel of influence over their immediate environment.

This is because, apart from endless meetings about current political affairs, party cells organised a number of activity circles and cultural clubs, not unlike those established by their industrial counterparts. These included chess, sports and music clubs, as well as literacy circles and an extensive system of libraries on ships and units. The three libraries of the Battleship Squadron on the *Marat*, *Oktiabr'skaia Revoliutsiia* and *Parizhskaia Kommuna* alone contained 19,596 books and served 1,698 readers in the second half of 1928.[26] Film screenings were also a favourite activity organised by the party-led clubs, with *PUBalt* inspectors regularly noting 100% attendance as a major achievement of cultural activism.[27] Party activists also led an extensive network of military correspondents *(voenkori),* amateur journalists who like their civilian counterparts, the workers' and peasant's correspondents, produced single-sheet wall-newspapers carrying reports on a range of issues of concern to rank-and-file sailors. From 1926 to 1928 the number of *voenkor* circles operating on the Fleet jumped from 8 to 60, while their total membership increased almost tenfold from 128 to 1137, only

department level cells. RGVAMF, f. r-34, op. 2, d. 1334, 1. 55. During the same period, at the naval base of Kronstadt, out of 591 party members, 479 were sailors and junior officers. RGVAMF, f. r-34, op. 2, d. 1346, l. 6.

[25] RGAVMF, f. r-34, op. 2, d. 1307, l. 30-34; RGAVMF, f. r-34, op. 2, d. 1303, ll. 35-36, 170-171; RGAVMF, f. r-34, op. 2, d. 1365, ll. 1-7.

[26] RGVAMF, f. r-34, op. 2, d. 1348, l. 4. The expansion of the military's library network had been a political priority of PUR since the early 1920s, leading by the end of the decade to what one scholar has described as a "readers' boom" *(chitatel'skii bum)* with the average military library serving 262 readers per year compared to a national average of 312. Makedonskii, "Bibliotechnaia rabota", p. 165. The libraries of the Fleet's battleships therefore performed significantly better than both the military and national average in terms of readers served. Smaller vessels provided similarly high levels of literary service, with the library of *Aurora* lending 6,926 books to 371 readers during the same period. RGAVMG, f. r-34, op. 2, d. 1346, l. 7.

[27] At the same time, insufficient tickets to civilian cinemas at subsidised prices were amongst the common subjects of formally lodged complaints. RGAVMF, f. r-34, op. 2, d. 1307, ll. 3-5.

38% of who were party members.[28] Although of course not a forum for criticism of Union-wide policy, *voenkor* publications seem to have enjoyed considerable freedom in discussing problems of everyday life in the navy, as demonstrated by recurring complaints by commissars and senior officers that the *voenkori* and party activists more generally were undermining discipline.[29]

It seems then that in the second half of the 1920s, attitudes towards the party on the Fleet were divided along similar lines to those in industry. Much like engineers and specialised technicians in factories, the Fleet's commanding officers saw political work as a more or less pointless distraction from their duties and viewed the ubiquitous presence of the ever-meddling party activists with a mixture of feelings ranging from resentment to fear. Party activists on their part, especially *politsostav* officers, viewed the military specialists with distrust and expected them to demonstrate their loyalty to Soviet power by taking on political assignments which served no military purpose and probably only served to further alienate the *komsostav*. This military version of *spetseedstvo* was among the main problems that the delineation of authority promoted by the Frunze reforms had sought to remedy.[30] Indeed, the reforms can be seen as a military precedent of the decree on *edinonachalie* that sought to redress the same problem in industry.[31] In much the same way as in industry, the party's own presence on the Fleet would nullify in practice the effects of the centre's attempt to distinguish between the technical and the political aspects of military activity.

4.3 From activism to repression

As we have seen in previous chapters, when the party leadership decided to move away from the NEP in the late 1920s, it also effectively abandoned any attempt to combat *spetseedsto.* The Shakhty affair signalled this political reorientation and the subsequent

[28] In 1928, there were 179 different papers with a total circulation of 1001 copies. RGVAMF, f. r-34, op. 2, d. 1334, l. 66.
[29] See for example the reports in RGVAMF, f. r-34, op. 2, d. 1421, especially ll. 175, 184-186 and RGVAMF, f. r-2068, op. 1, d. 25, l. 2.
[30] The problem of specialist-baiting in the military seems to have been so widespread as to have elicited the creation of a more specific term, *kraskomchvanstvo*, or red-officer conceit, to describe the disdain of party promotes for formally trained military officers. Reese, "Red Army Professionalism", p. 83.
[31] Commanders are commonly referred to as *edinonachalniki* in the *PUBalt* documents cited here.

samokritika and party purge campaigns became the first political shots fired in the "socialist offensive". Political departments and party cells inevitably brought these campaigns onto the Fleet. The relatively subdued meetings of the NEP years thus gave way to far more engaged and often heated gatherings, as more abstract topics like the class structure of Soviet society and international affairs were replaced by discussions about collectivisation and criticisms of personal conduct. The minutes of party meetings from this period reveal a strong concern with the personal lives and attitudes of all personnel.

For example, a joint meeting of the commissars, commanders, secretaries and party commission members of the submarine squadron held on 3 March 1929 to discuss the upcoming party purge resolved that the purge should be postponed until such time as the civilian party organisations could share their experience.[32] Having thus decided, the assembled communists went on to spend a considerable amount of time discussing the problem of antisemitism. Gol'dshtein, who led the discussion decried this and other instances of great-Russian chauvinism as a counterrevolutionary phenomenon, but other speakers went beyond sociological abstractions to criticise the specific forms of racial prejudice they had encountered aboard their ships. Tolkachev complained that there was no effective struggle against antisemitism and that Great Russian chauvinism was left unchecked, with people "saying jokes against Jews and national minorities like Tatars and Finns". Although dangerous jokes did not seem to impress Gusev, who suggested that they were reflective of the low cultural level of personnel, one Veshchilov went on to demonstrate his revolutionary vigilance by stating that Jewish servicemen often spread such jokes themselves and that consequently, the party had to "fight against anti-Semitic Jews".[33] The meeting resolved that internationalist agitation should be intensified, and that both the public and private attitudes of members to the national question should be amongst the key criteria of their evaluation for the purge.[34]

[32] RGAVMF, f. r-34, op. 2, d. 1365, l. 3. Civilian organisations did eventually send help. One of the civilian communists that came to assist the Fleet party with the purge was the lathe operator Aleksander Nikiforov, secretary of KP's 3rd Mechanical shop. Kostiuchenko, *Istoriia,* p. 299.
[33] RGAVMF, f. r-34, op. 2, d. 1365, l. 2
[34] Ibid,. 1. 3.

In light of the account of party politics at the height of the socialist offensive given in earlier chapters, it seems rather odd to observe communist submarine officers fret over inappropriate jokes. This, however, is in line with the observation made earlier that in the absence of a production process to troubleshoot, party activists directed their efforts to the cultural-ideological aspects of political work. Some of the latter nevertheless had a more direct bearing on military matters than bad jokes and "anti-Semitic Jews", chief among them being drunkenness and rowdiness. We have already seen how KP/Kirov communists took a low view of alcohol abuse, relating such behaviour to poor labour discipline and corruption. None of these problems were unknown to the Fleet, with sailors and officers on shore leave often getting lost or in fights with civilians, leading to considerable embarrassment for military authorities.[35] Thus, subsequent party meetings that took place during the purge campaign dwelled considerably on the problem of the off-duty behaviour of the Fleet's personnel, with speakers at a gathering of the Coastal Defence party group urging that the organisation should look more closely into the activities of members on leave, including their everyday habits *(byt)*. In line with the general directives on the *chistka*, some speakers called for the involvement of non-party personnel in the purge review process.[36]

Interestingly, none of the *PUBalt* material surveyed indicates that oppositionist activity or deviationism featured as a major concern of the Fleet's communists in 1929, with party growth emerging as a more pressing concern than safeguarding against nefarious subversion. The resolution taken at the Coastal Defence meeting for example admonished members to "never forget about the growth of the party" and not permit any personal score-settling during the purge.[37] In a more direct manner, a senior *PUBalt* officer ordered restraint at a December 1929 party meeting of the naval hospital. The session had been called to review the tense relations between the head doctor Kalnin and the leadership of the organisation, which had been accusing him of ignoring *samokritika* and taking no responsibility for it. Solovev, the ranking commissar present, instructed members of the bureau to drop the accusations and work closer with Kalnin, adding that there was little to be proud of in *samokritika* when

[35] See indicatively RGAVMF, f. r-34, op. 2, d. 1303, l. 184; RGAVMF, f. r-34, op. 2, d. 1307, ll. 33-34.
[36] RGAVMF, f. r-34, op. 2, d. 1366, ll. 1-2
[37] Ibid. l. 3.

there was "only 5% of truth in it".[38] In the end, the meeting resolved that "*samokritika* should be directed towards the unity and strengthening of the organisation".[39]

Not unlike their labouring comrades at KP then, the Fleet's communists were far more interested in the problems of their immediate environment than the political realignments taking place in the Kremlin. They were thus not too keen to persecute colleagues for Bukharinism or opportunism and were more likely to notice the latter when it was linked to poor behaviour more generally. As a political campaign of rank-and-file mobilisation however, *samokritika* was impossible to script. During this period, the party's open invitation to criticise was taken quite literally by sailors of peasant origin who were opposed to collectivisation. Thus, during a discussion aboard the battleship *Oktiabr'skaia Revoliutsiia* on the policy of liquidation of the kulak as a class, one participant of peasant origin flatly declared that the party's policy was wrong on this matter as rich peasants simply didn't exist, receiving vocal support from other members of the group.[40] Commissars' reports are replete with descriptions of such events, usually followed by some sort of assessment on the response given to such 'peasant moods' by the political instructor leading the discussion and the rest of the attendees.[41]

The effects of a state of permanent discussion on discipline were, as may be expected, far from constructive. Commissar reports from the Battleship Squadron in early 1931 reflect a very bleak picture with respect to the state of crew behaviour, officer-sailor relations and even basic standards of hygiene. Groups of sailors from the

[38] Ibid. l. 10.
[39] Ibid. l. 11.
[40] RGAVMF, f. r-34, op. 2, d. 1423, l. 6.
[41] The very strong difficulties faced by the party in getting servicemen to support collectivisation was one of the main differences between the civilian and military party experiences. In the opening rounds of the collectivisation drive, the party had attempted to mobilise soldiers, especially party and *Komsomol* members, to assist in the campaign. In contrast to the success of the *25,000er* initiative, the overwhelmingly rural composition of the military rank-and-file meant that the attempt to mobilise the armed forces to support collectivisation was not only met with considerable resistance, but also served to undermine the already unenviable state of military discipline. Thus, in February 1930, Klim Voroshilov issued a decree forbidding the further involvement of military personnel in the campaign. See on this Roger R. Reese, "Red Army Opposition to Forced Collectivization, 1929-1930: The Army Wavers," *Slavic Review*, vol. 55, no. 1, 1996, pp. 24–45; Reese, *Soviet Military Experience*, pp. 72-77. It should be noted that despite the fact that the skills required for naval service were more readily available amongst workers, sailors from the countryside still outnumbered those of proletarian origin even though farmworkers *(batraki)* were included in the latter category. In 1928, 48.2% of the Fleet's 21,654 serving personnel were peasants compared to 41.1% workers and 10.5% from "other" social backgrounds. RGAVMF, f. r-34, op. 2, d. 1334, l. 1.

Oktiabr'skaia Revoliutsiia and the *Marat* engaged in collective drinking bouts, lost parts of their uniform and started brawls, on one occasion seriously injuring a worker from *Baltiiskii* factory.[42] *Oktiabr'skaia Revoliutsiia* was also the subject of a number of other troubling reports, including one about a lice infestation "of unknown origin" and two relating separate occasions when intestines with traces of faeces were discovered in the crew's soup.[43]

Possibly prompted by similar issues, a three-day disciplinary review of battleship *Marat* in February 1931 stated that military discipline aboard the ship was in complete breakdown *(proriv).* According to the report, the number of disciplinary infractions during the same month had amounted to 17% of the ship's personnel, with a 19.6% of these committed by Party members.[44] The review also noted that the attitude of officers to disciplinary infractions was extremely lenient, quoting the ship's commander Bulantsev as saying that 'sailors are responsible for their own offences, not officers. Red sailors are citizens and should take responsibility for their actions'.[45] The ship's junior commander Garifov expressed a similar attitude towards undisciplined sailors, stating that 'they know what they are doing. They are not children'.[46] In a manner indicative of the conflicted priorities of the time, the report concluded with a positive overall assessment, stating that the political and moral moods of the crew were generally healthy.[47]

It should be noted here that this state of affairs was not confined to the thousands-strong crews of battleships, but also plagued less unpleasant environments. Party meetings from the Kronstadt-based House of the Red Army and Fleet, the Soviet equivalent of an officers' club, reflect increasing desperation with the state of both party and military work. Sore points included the regular problems of low attendance and lack of assignments as well as some less familiar issues. On 14 March 1931, the theatre director of the House gave a report to the organisation on the progress of preparations for the May Day staging of a play titled *Before the Storm (Pered*

[42] RGAVMF, f. r-34, op. 2, d. 1423, ll. 1-3.
[43] Ibid., ll. 4, 60-61.
[44] Ibid., l. 12
[45] Ibid., l. 13
[46] Ibid.
[47] Ibid., l. 16. Despite this assessment, the commissar of the *Marat* received a reprimand for failing to take measures to improve discipline at a second review in the autumn of 1931. Ibid., l. 107.

Shtormom), during which he demanded a "breakthrough in discipline" *(dobitsia perelom v distsipline!)* to remedy the weak grasp of the "technique of theatre" amongst personnel.[48] In many of the House's party meetings, speakers noted that the *voenkori* and other channels by which *samokritika* was supposed to strengthen the organisation were acting in a way that further undermined discipline, without however being able to offer any more substantial suggestions than further calls for yet more activism.[49]

The fundamentally contradictory demands of basic military discipline and the mass discussion required by the party's activist campaigns were extremely difficult to reconcile and many officers failed to navigate through the political complexities of the time unscathed. In September 1931, Evdokimov, the commissar of the guard ship *Taifun*, received a reprimand from the political department of the battleship squadron for misinterpreting the intent of one of its orders which had demanded improvements on battle readiness and the general condition of the ship. According to this report, the commissar's transgression was that instead of mobilising the ship's party organisation 'towards the rapid liquidation of these shortcomings', he and the *Taifun's* party secretary asked the ship's commander to give a report to the organisation's presidium.[50] The ensuing resolution criticised the actions of both the commander and the political department. What earned the commissar a reprimand, was that he allowed a discussion on the 'correctness' or orders.[51]

About a month later however, Adol'f Yanukovich Keek, a political instructor serving on the *Marat* fell afoul of the ship's party organisation for bending the stick too far in the other direction. Keek, who by that time had served on the Fleet and been a member of the party for six years, was expelled from the organisation for 'allowing opportunism in practice'.[52] This apparently consisted in refusing to visit crew quarters and failing to collaborate with the party secretary to deal with the chronic disciplinary problems of the *Marat*. Keek was summoned to a general meeting *(obshee sobranie)*

[48] RGAVMF, f. r-2068, op. 1, d. 27, l. 3.
[49] RGAVMF, f. r-2068, op. 1, d. 25, ll. 2-7; RGAVMF, f. r-2068, op. 1, d. 26, ll. 3-5, 8-9.
[50] Just like in the civilian party, presidiums or bureaus were elected at regular intervals or at the initiative of higher party organs, usually in connexion with the launching of some new political campaign. What is of interest here is that party members in the military sat in such bodies irrespective of rank. Although this report does not mention the composition of the presidium, it is very likely that at least some sailors took part in the session which criticised the commander's actions.
[51] RGAVMF, f. r-34, op. 2, d. 1423, l. 165.
[52] Ibid., l. 175.

of the *Marat's* organisation to explain his behaviour. Far from sharing commander Bulantsev's casual disregard for the chaotic state of discipline on the giant battleship, the *politruk* turned out to be a firm believer in rank and to have little patience for non-military work. During the meeting, it emerged that he was of the view that *samokritika* had no place in the military and that the only way to deal with disciplinary infractions was to 'tighten the screws' and enforce rules 'like on German cruisers'.[53] Keek further went on to express his resentment over the poor living conditions of Soviet officers compared to the "*komsostav* in industry" and the privileges enjoyed by officers "in capitalist bourgeois armies".[54] Concluding his defence, Keek expressed his desire to remain a member but insisted that the party's military policy was wrong, warning that he would be proven right in the coming war.[55] None of these arguments seemed particularly convincing to Keek's comrades, who promptly voted to expel the *politruk,* himself hardly a shining example of military discipline, having two serious reprimands and a week of house arrest for drunkenness on his record.[56]

Evdokimov's and Keek's similar fates demonstrate the impossible situation faced by officers who were expected to issue firm orders while also remaining open to criticism from their subordinates. This almost in-built institutional crisis of authority was a feature of much of social life in the Soviet Union during the interwar years because despite repeated attempts by the party leadership to apply the brakes on the activist campaigns it initiated, the same leadership kept coming up with more. Even after the wrapping up of the *samokritika* campaign, other forms of public activism aimed at spurring complacent bureaucrats onwards continued to enjoy the support of the party leadership. Socialist competition and its more famous successor, Stakhanovism, are perhaps the most iconic of these.

Party presence in the navy ensured that such activities took place on the Baltic Fleet as much as on any factory or *kolkhoz* in the Soviet Union. In 1932, there were 5,860 serving personnel taking part in some form of socialist competition in the

[53] Ibid., ll. 175-178.
[54] Ibid., l. 179. The inferior living standards of the Soviet officer corps to those of the industrial cadres was a major contributor to the Red Army's chronic lack of qualified personnel. See e.g. Reese, *Red Commanders,* pp. 94-95.
[55] RGAVMF, f. r-34, op. 2, d. 1423, l. 181.
[56] Ibid, ll. 182, 4.

Coastal Defence Squadron alone. Most of the participants were sailors, but there were also 1,000 junior and 350 senior and high ranking officers. The 1,430 Coastal Defence *voenkori* produced 9 regiment and 117 company-level papers as well as 9 radio shows.[57] The Battleship Squadron, which as we have seen was faring exceptionally poorly in terms of military performance, produced equally impressive results in terms of activism, with about a third of the 2,203 *sotssorevnovanie* participants being officers.[58]

These illustrious achievements in cultural activities of dubious military value are best attributed to the communisation of the officer corps. Through a combination of co-optation and persecution, the party had by the early 1930s remedied its weak presence amongst the *komsostav* throughout the military achieving over 50% saturation.[59] In 1931, the replacement rate of commanding officers ranged from 60% to 85% on different levels of the Fleet's hierarchy.[60] Unlike the *komsostav* of the 1920s, the new officer hierarchy was thus both better versed in and less hostile to the numerous non-military activities organised by the party.

The upshot of this demographic and ideological transformation in the officer corps was that it removed much of the ground for the specialist-baiting of the late 1920s. The archival records of *PUBalt* become considerably thinner in the mid-1930s, but the party meeting records that do survive suggest that accusations of ignoring political work and being distant from the organisation were far less commonly levelled against the *komsostav*.[61] The behaviour of commanders is scarcely mentioned in the

[57] RGAVMF, f. r-34, op. 2, d. 1443, l. 12
[58] Ibid, l. 19.
[59] Fewer than half of all officers were party members in 1926. In 1930 4,473 military cadres were demobilised, of whom around 3,000 were arrested. By the same year, more than half of the *voenspetsi* who remained in the military were in the party. This trend was strengthened by similar developments in the military academies where by 1933, 75% of trainees were party-affiliated compared to 30% in 1930. Even those officers who were not communists were thus socialised in environments where the majority of their colleagues belonged to the party. Reese, *Soviet Military Experience*, pp. 79-83; *idem*, "Red Army Professionalism", pp. 93; Pavel Petrov, "Krasnoznamennii Baltiiskii Flot Nakanune Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voini, 1935 – Vesna 1940 gg." (Sankt-Peterburgskii Gosudarstvennii Universitet, 2014), p. 328.
[60] For example, 5 out of 8 formation and 6 out 8 squadron commanders were relieved. Amongst individual ships, destroyers experienced one of the highest replacements rates, with 10 out of 12 receiving new commanders. Ibid., p. 329.
[61] The reason for this dearth of material from that period is unclear, but it might be related to some re-structuring undergone by *PUBalt* at the time. See on this RGAVMF, f. r-34, op. 2, "Predislovie k opisi" l. 2.

commissar reports regarding the progress of party elections collected from the whole of the Fleet in December 1934. Instead, the reports note a satisfactory pace of work in terms of meeting attendance, *voenkor* newspapers and radio productions. Some ships and units were the subject of especially positive comments, like the destroyer *Lenin* for the distinguished work performed by one of its sailors in a kolkhoz while on leave.[62] In terms of weak spots in party work, the reports contain several mentions of the perennial problem of idle members *(nezagruzennost'),* but blamed the bureaus instead of the commanders.[63]

None of this is to say that the state of military training and discipline improved in the mid-1930s, except in so far as the removal of a major cleavage led to less friction between serving personnel on the Fleet. In any case, whatever new *modus vivendi* might have been worked out between the overlapping party and military authorities was violently shaken when in the summer of 1937, the campaign of repression that had been gathering pace since the beginning of the year finally hit the military.[64] Just as in the civilian party, the *Yezhovshchina* took place in tandem with the party democracy campaign driven by Andrei Zhdanov. As per the instruction of the Leningrad party chief, electoral meetings on the Fleet started to be held in mid-April.[65] All procedural formalities were observed, with the Fleet's organisations electing new bureaus in multicandidate elections and the new leadership bodies themselves electing a secretary out of at least two candidates.[66] Like in the factories, these meetings turned into rounds of denunciation after news spread of the NKVD discovery of a conspiracy amongst the high command.

In a report to Kliment Voroshilov and Andrei Zhdanov composed shortly after the execution of Mikhail Tukhachevskii and the other top-ranking officers accused of

[62] RGAVMF, f. r-34, op. 2, d. 1519, ll. 2-4.
[63] Ibid, ll. 9-10.
[64] For the most recent and well-documented account of the military purge, see Whitewood, *Red Army and the Great Terror*, especially chapters 6 and 7. See also Suvenirov, *Tragediia*.
[65] RGASPI, f. 17, op. 21, d. 2703, l. 5.
[66] For example, the electoral meeting of the organisation of the *Marat* debated for a while the exact size of the bureau to be elected, arriving at a number of seven seats after a vote. Twenty candidates were proposed of which only six made it to the bureau on the first round. This is because votes were tallied both in favour and against candidates and anyone receiving more negative than positive votes was automatically disqualified. A second round was then held for the remaining bureau seat for which eight candidates competed. RGAVMF, f. r-852, op. 6, d. 24, ll. 117, 123.

being part of the military plot, the head of *PUBalt* Iakov Volkov wrote that "in their contributions to meetings, the resolutions taken and their expressions, red-sailors and commanders expressed their […] burning hatred and contempt for these […] enemies of the people and demanded their execution".[67] Not much survives of these meetings in *PUBalt's* archives, but given the experience of the Kirov works described earlier, there is little reason to doubt Volkov's approving description of the mood of the Fleet's personnel, to which he would himself fall victim two years later.[68] Voices of reason – and cynicism – did exist, but they stood little chance of being heard in the furore of denunciations.[69]

The limited information that can be extracted from the protocols of party meetings on the Fleet suggests that reasons for expulsion during the military purge could be equally flimsy to those in the civilian party, often including the familiar transgression of being close to the wrong people. Thus, the party commission of the Battleship Squadron expelled one Barchubaev for having "close links" to the "enemy of the people Degaziev", overturning the *Komsomol* cell's verdict of a strong reprimand.[70] The same session of the commission expelled the vice-commander of the guard ship *Vikhr'* A. B. Sey on the grounds that he had links with the "Japanese spy Kozlov" through his wife, who also had "relatives in Poland". A boatswain at the Marat, M. K. Zakhavrov was also deprived of party membership on account of his wife, who had "links abroad" and conducted "counterrevolutionary conversations about Stalin".[71]

The tradition of activism on the Fleet thus contributed to the hunt for enemies, helping the repression spread through the ranks in a way not unlike the earlier, more benign party campaigns. In fact, by the time the *Yezhovshchina* was in full swing in

[67] Petrov, "Krasnoznamennii", p. 340.
[68] Volkov was arrested and sentenced to ten years of corrective labour in 1939, having left the Baltic for the Pacific Fleet in August 1937. Nikolai Chernushev and Iurii Chernushev, *Rasstreliannaia Elita RKKA (Komandarmi 1-go i 2-go rankov, komkori, komdivi i im ravnie): 1937-1941. Biograficheskii Slovar'* (Kuchkogo Pole: Moscow, 2012), pp. 138-139.
[69] Petrov, "Krasnoznamenii", pp. 340-346 provides a substantial overview of the opinions expressed by sailors and officers with respect to the military purge, on the basis of *svodki* to the Leningrad *obkom* information department. Among the unsatisfactory attitudes reported was that of one sailor who apparently wondered if Stalin was also going to be shot. p. 344.
[70] RGAVMF, f. r-852, op. 8, d. 19, ll. 11-12.
[71] Ibid, l. 33.

late 1937, "unmasking" and exposure of enemies had become integrated into the broader curriculum of activities expected of and promoted by conscientious party members. Reports on the content of political agitation conducted during the manoeuvers of October 1937, which were observed by no less prominent a personality than Klim Voroshilov himself, are particularly illuminating in that respect.

Lists of political materials made available to the sailors of the battleship *Marat* included several copies of a pamphlet titled *The Cause of Spain is not the Cause of Spain Alone*, by José Díaz, then general secretary of the Communist Party of Spain. Such materials on the international antifascist struggle sat on the *Marat's* library selves alongside Stalin's report to the infamous February-March 1937 Central Committee plenum and literature on the recruitment tactics of foreign intelligence services.[72] On the *Oktiabr'skaia Revoliutsiia*, the manoeuvres were preceded by a "thorough examination of all personnel" and purging of "the politically and morally unreliable" from the ranks.[73] Having fulfilled their duty of ensuring maximum revolutionary vigilance amongst the crew, communists and commissars went on to organise even more ambitious competitions than before. *Oktiabr'skii Luch*, the daily newspaper of the *Oktiabr'skaia Revoliutsiia,* announced a competition with the *Marat* over, among other things, which of the two battleships could operate while producing the least visible smoke.[74] On the *Marat*, the boiler and engine department crews challenged each other to a competition which, in addition to technical aspects like reducing steam-power losses, included terms like being 'cultured' and 'well-mannered' in one's behaviour towards fellow sailors.[75]

One may well wonder about the possibility of determining a victor in a collective competition of well-manneredness, all the more so when this concerns a battleship crew in exercise. Such almost comical examples of socialist competition however demonstrate the extent to which the activist culture that was such an integral part of

[72] RGAVMF, f. r-34, op. 2, d. 1569, l. 54. Soviet citizens followed the events of the Spanish Civil War with great interest for the duration of the conflict. On the way this interest was managed by the leadership, see Gleb J. Albert, "'To Help the Republicans Not Just by Donations and Rallies, but with the Rifle': Militant Solidarity with the Spanish Republic in the Soviet Union, 1936–1937," *European Review of History: Revue Européenne D'histoire* 21, no. 4 (2014): 501–518.
[73] RGAVMF, f. r-34, op. 2, d. 1569, l. 24.
[74] Ibid., l. 46.
[75] Ibid., l. 56.

the way the interwar USSR was governed had penetrated into the military. The existence of specialised political structures within military organisations made even the slightest degree of insulation from civilian affairs impossible. While some of these may have been funny, others were lethal.

4.4 On course to war

By the time the military purge was over, some 22,705 of a total of 206,000 officers *(komsostav* and *politsostav)* throughout the USSR had been discharged from all branches of the military, of whom 9,506 were arrested.[76] The Fleet experienced similar personnel losses, with 444 of its 5,320 officers being arrested by April 1938. The quantitatively limited impact of the purge was further reduced by the subsequent expansion of the officer corps throughout the USSR, which brought the Fleet's total to over 8,000 officers.[77]

Nevertheless, the greater incidence of expulsion and demobilisation amongst the higher ranks resulted in significant deskilling of the officer corps.[78] Combined with the overdrive of political mobilisation and the reinstitution of dual *komsostav-politsostav* command, officer skill degradation had a strongly disorganising impact on performance and most aspects of military discipline. This was both because the authority of officers amongst their subordinates declined rapidly as a result of the pervasive atmosphere of suspicion and due to officers themselves being reluctant to issue and enforce orders. Thus, in the last two years of the 1930s, the traditionally complicated relationship of Fleet personnel with alcohol led to new levels of embarrassment for the military leadership, forcing the People's Commissar of the Fleet Mikhail Frinovskii to address the issue in a special decree in which he described drunkenness as the "scourge of the Fleet". Baltic Fleet personnel were amongst the

[76] Reese, *Soviet Military Experience*, p. 86.
[77] Petrov, Krasnoznamennii, pp. 336-337.
[78] Some figures bring the replacement rates of the Fleet's formation commanders to 62% and, 32% for surface vessels and 55% for submarines. Ibid., p. 339. See also Reese, *Red Commanders*, pp. 122-131 and *idem, Soviet Military Experience*, pp. 86-89 for a further discussion of the officer corps' quality post-purge.

leading offenders with more than 3,000 recorded drunkenness related incidents, including 201 involving officers.[79]

In the first two months of 1939 alone there were recorded 5,573 disciplinary infractions, corresponding to roughly 10% of the Fleet's personnel. These were not confined to alcohol abuse and included sleeping at watch, abandonment of post and direct refusal to obey orders. Perhaps more worryingly for *PUBalt*, over half of the transgressors were party or *Komsomol* affiliated.[80] None of these pieces of information induced the party leadership or its military branch to reconsider the value of political agitation in military life. On the contrary, as shown earlier, the party democracy campaign outlived the *Yezhovschina* so that even though the most disruptive – because lethal – aspect of political mobilisation came to an end after 1938, the Fleet's officers and sailors still spent considerable time engaged in activities that had little to do with military tasks.

Party organisations on the Fleet continued to hold electoral meetings to elect bureaus and party commissions from multiple candidates, during which they were expected and encouraged to criticise their superiors even after the hunt for enemies had fallen off the agenda. Meetings of communists serving in the Battleship Squadron from mid-1938 provide a good example of this. Commissars reporting on the meetings praised the Squadron's organisations for their observation of procedural forms, the lack of unexcused absences and the good preparation of all attendees. However, the same reports highlighted the absence of "sufficient criticism" of commanders and *politruki* as being amongst the major weaknesses *(nedostatki)* of the meetings.[81] This was despite the fact that several speakers *did* criticise the substandard performance of some of their comrades. Astakhov from the *Marat's* propulsion department attacked the ship's *partorg* Gorokhov for ignoring the crew to such an extent that he was virtually unknown among them. Gorokhov was also criticised by Glazkov, also from propulsion, who accused the *partorg* of being responsible for the dying out of socialist emulation on the *Marat*.[82] On *Oktiabr'skaia Revoliutsiia,* the *politruk* Zinov'ev stated

[79] Petrov, Krasnoznamennii, p. 347.
[80] Ibid., p. 348.
[81] RGAVMF, f. r-852, op. 5, d. 15, ll. 1-2.
[82] Ibid., l. 3.

that bureau members had been neglecting their duties, with some of them even playing chess during educational activities. Zinov'ev himself came under attack, when Zubor'ev accused all *politruki* of being entirely clueless regarding in military affairs and Zinov'ev in particular of not knowing anything about the ship.[83]

As *samokritika* and mutual scrutiny were thus alive and well, it seems that it was the lack of application of these to matters of military work that troubled the reporting commissars. The protocols themselves do not offer any clues as to why Battleship communists were not volunteering their views on the performance of the *komsostav*, but it seems plausible that generalised confusion was amongst the main causes of the problem. By the time the *Yezhovshchina* was over, the party leadership had spent more than a decade sending mixed signals over the proper place of each part of a uniquely complicated military structure. *Komsostav* officers had gone from being suspect elements to authoritative *edinonachalniki*, while at the same time the *politsostav* had seen its status reduced from that of supreme party representative to that of a subordinate structure responsible for political education. Communist party members, who could belong to either or neither of these hierarchies had been expected to promote these alternating military policies, which were in the end topped off with a campaign of mass persecution. It is then no wonder that the different constituent parts of the party-military complex were out of step with each other as to their relative responsibilities.

No serious efforts were made to remedy this condition as the decade drew to an end and the prospect of war loomed closer. Instead, the intensity of political agitation received a new boost as the Fleet's organisations started to prepare for the party's 18th Congress in March 1939, the first to be held after socialism had been declared built in its foundations in 1934. With the adoption of a new party *Ustav* being amongst the major items of the Congress agenda, officers and sailors found themselves discussing minute details of the draft document in the meetings that preceded the supreme party event.[84] At the same time, the need to convene district, city and regional conferences

[83] Ibid., l. 42.
[84] RGVAMF, f. r-34, op. 2, d. 1591, ll. 1-15.

before the all-Union Congress led to a new round of party elections and the attendant scrutiny of individual candidates' political and personal past.[85]

Not even the actual outbreak of war was strong enough a reason to displace political activity from the every-day life of the Fleet. Less than a year after the pre-Congress electoral campaigns, party activists would have to perform their political duties in conditions of prolonged military conflict for the first time since the Civil War, as the Fleet's land forces took an active part in the operations of the Winter War against Finland (1939-1940).[86] On 5 December 1939, only a few days after the beginning of hostilities, a *PUBalt* representative gave a lecture on the broader international context of the war to a meeting of communists and sympathisers serving in the Fleet's Special Naval Infantry Brigade. The commissar report on the meeting provides no clue as to the lecture's content, but contains a list of the questions posed to the speaker by the marines present.

These included several factual inquiries on matters like the status of the Aaland Islands and the composition of the government of the Finnish Democratic Republic but also reflected considerable interest into the nature of the new regime that would be established on the successful conclusion of the war. One marine asked about the views of the Communist Party of Finland on the future state, while another wondered if it would be possible for the new authority to "develop into Soviet power" or if a new revolution would have to take place.[87] Similar interests were reported by the same unit's political instructor in a report composed on 31 December, with marines apparently being curious as to whether Finland would embark on the construction of socialism or become more like the far away People's Republic of Mongolia.[88]

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[85] By 1939 fears of pervasive conspiracy had subsided and party organisations seem to have been less quick to judge their members by association. A meeting at the Fleet's fast-track *Komsostav* School elected amongst its delegates to the district party conference one Terekhin, who had a dekulakised uncle and whose father had been put to trial in 1933, but not convicted. One of the speakers successfully argued that as Terekhin had never concealed this facts of his past from the organisation, they should not affect his candidacy as a delegate. Ibid., l. 628.

[86] The winter ice placed significant constraints on the capabilities of the Fleet's ships. Nikolai M. Grechaniuk, Vladimir I. Dmitriev, Anatolii I. Kornienko et al., *Dvazhdi Krasnoznamennii Baltiiskii Flot*, (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1990), pp. 163-6; Petrov, *Krasnoznamennii*, pp. 565-566.

[87] RGAVMF, f. r-1893, op. 1, d. 39, ll. 25-26. The Finnish Democratic Republic was the name of the short-lived government of the occupied territories headed by the Finnish communist Otto Kuusinen. It was wound up after the Finnish government conceded defeat and accepted Soviet terms.

[88] Ibid., l. 10.

Besides political education sessions, the party continued to exercise its ideological influence over the marines through their training which, even in wartime, continued to be conducted in terms of socialist emulation. Thus, the platoon of "second lieutenant comrade Zabrazhnii" of the third battalion was praised for its performance in skiing, night-time training and orienteering *sotssorevnovaniia*, while the one led by second lieutenant Ivanov was commended for its high participation rates in the events.[89] In another company, the marines Zvukov, Kuznetsov and Korotkov were praised by their *politruk* for "completing their study of the rifle in less time than stated by the terms of the *sotssorevnovanie*" and moving on to train in the use of machine guns.[90]

There are limits to the value of these reports as sources on the actual views of Baltic Fleet sailors on the Winter War. As these documents are not stenographic records or even meeting protocols, it is likely that they are more reflective of the intentions of their compilers than the views of the crews. But even on a highly sceptical reading, assuming for example that commissars were inventing examples of rank-and-file interest to make themselves look better in the eyes of their superiors, these reports are still consistent with the general argument made throughout this chapter. Political agitation and party activism was such an integral part of the way the Soviet leadership conceived of the military that they expected it to continue uninterrupted even in wartime. The upshot of this was that with military performance finally assuming very immediate life and death importance for serving personnel, it also came to acquire the status of a marker of political reliability, much like labour performance had been the sine qua non of the good party member in industry since the mid-1920s.

Party commission sessions from the period following the end of the Winter War in March 1940 illustrate this point very well. During admission and disciplinary reviews, commission members showed little patience for those who were obviously ignorant about political affairs or demonstrated careless attitudes, yet they also seem to have been willing to be especially lenient with proven soldiers. At a session held on 3 June, one Pavel Grigor'ev was refused membership by the Naval Infantry Brigade

[89] Ibid., l. 44.
[90] Ibid., l. 124.

commission on the grounds that he had never heard of the Mensheviks. Two more applications were rejected on the grounds of past disciplinary infractions while another thirteen cases were not considered because their documents had been formulated incorrectly; only one of the applicants was admitted, with the commission noting that he had shown exceptional "bravery against the White Finns".[91]

Even more indicative of the changing priorities of the time however was the case of Gibat Gabzallilov, a member of the party since 1927 who was serving in the brigade with the rank of captain. Gabzallilov's brother had been expelled from the party because during the Civil War he had served in a partisan group that had been under "kulak leadership" and had refused to demobilise after the Bolsheviks' victory, turning instead to "banditry". Gabzallilov's brother had mentioned this fact in his biographical statement, but the captain himself, who had provided one of the recommendations for his sibling's membership application, had concealed it. This had earned Gabzallilov a party censure which he was trying to get lifted on the grounds that he had been unaware of his brother's actions. In the end, the commission agreed to strike the censure off Gabzallilov's record, citing the fact that the captain had been awarded the Order of the Red Star for his bravery in the war against Finland.[92]

Gabzallilov was not only brother to someone who had been involved with kulaks and bandits, but had also concealed this information in an attempt to get the party to accept his brother as a member. Each of these facts would on its own have been enough to raise serious suspicions about his political reliability under different circumstances. For the commission's members however, Gabzallilov's outstanding performance in what had been a poor show for the Red Army took precedence over his party-disciplinary transgressions.[93] Cases like Gabzallilov's abound in the commission's records after the Winter War, collectively indicating that the Fleet's engagement in real combat finally drove home the importance of actual military skills to party organs,

[91] RGAVMF, f. r-1893, op. 1, d. 38, ll. 11-15.
[92] Ibid., ll. 41-42.
[93] For a discussion of the Red Army's performance during the Winter War see Roger R. Reese, "Lessons of the Winter War: A Study in the Military Effectiveness of the Red Army, 1939–1940," *The Journal of Military History* 72, no. 3 (2008), pp. 825–52. For the Baltic Fleet's role, Petrov, "Krasnoznamennii", pp. 560-570.

which began to take these into account for their political evaluations.[94] In doing so, the Fleet's communists were moving towards a practice that had been the norm amongst their civilian comrades in industry since at least the mid-1920s.

4.5 Conclusion

Naval infantry barracks, battleships and submarines are all social settings that are very different from a giant machine building plant. Yet as this chapter has shown, the activities of the Fleet's communists – and the broader outcomes thereof – did not diverge significantly from those of their civilian comrades. In the mid-1920s, the political officers who were expected to lend authority to commanders came up instead with their own version of *spetseedvsto,* demonstrating the inherent problems of formalised political control over state administration some years before industrial party organisations had turned the notion of *edinonachalie* into a weapon against their factory directors. Much like in industry, these tensions subsided as the party saturation of the *komsostav* increased as a result of the rapid promotions of the early 1930s, only to return with a vengeance once the mass hunt for enemies of the *Yezhovshchina* spread to the military after the Tukhachevskii affair. Never abandoning their activist duties even at the height of mass repression, party members dutifully continued their work after the blood-letting was over, continuing their mass meetings and political agitation sessions even as they were fighting in the frozen battlefields of the Winter War.

Party activism on the Fleet was thus of a very similar kind to that which took place at KP/Kirov, even though communist officers and sailors were not competing for influence over anything as material as production plans. This illustrates a point mad earlier in this thesis, namely that the activity of the rank-and-file in industry should not be understood as a by-product of the management-labour conflict but rather as a channel through which this was expressed. Even though the Fleet's personnel had no equivalent of the Regime of Economy to worry about, the party activists amongst them were still suspicious of *komsostav* officers in the mid-1920s. For the commissars, this had been their job since the early days of the Civil War and their attitudes for a while

[94] Commissions reviewed around ten cases per (usually) weekly session. Their records from May to August 1940 can be found at RGAVMF, f. r-1893, op. 1, d. 38, ll. 1-42.

lagged behind those of the party leadership as expressed in the Frunze reforms. For lower-ranking communist officers and sailors, the ambiguous political status of military specialists may or may not have been much cause for concern, but it was certainly a good enough excuse to assume a flexible view of military discipline.

As the communisation of the *komsostav* proceeded, tensions between commissars and commanders seem to have eased. Discipline however did not improve, as a more reliable officer corps was never seen by the party leadership as sufficient reason to call for less activism. At the same time, with the distinction between politically and military performance remaining unclear, it also became possible for officers like Bulantsev of the *Marat* to deflect criticisms of the state of discipline of their ships and units by pointing out that their subordinates were after all politically conscious Soviet citizens. As statistical reports reflected ever greater participation in clubs, competitions and political circles, all of which were important achievements in terms of implementing party policy, such arguments appeared to be backed by solid evidence.[95] There were also of course those who, like the political instructor Keek, found this state of affairs uniquely unsuitable for a military organisation. As with purely technocratic views with respect to industry however, the notion of a non-ideological domain of military activity was entirely at odds with the framework of politics that had been established since the Bolsheviks' victory in the Civil War.

At the same time, the permanent state of mobilisation engendered by the party's incessant activity brought to the fore deeper tensions which the politically inexperienced and greatly outnumbered discussion leaders were ill-equipped to contain. Ethnic prejudice, anti-Soviet attitudes and hostility to collectivisation were far from uncommon amongst serving personnel and the examples cited above can hardly be the only occasions when such views were aired in public. Although then statistical reports reflect a steady rise in participation in political activities during the 1930s, it cannot be assumed that participants were always positively predisposed towards Soviet power. These tensions, along with persistent ideologically-motivated

[95] That responsibility for discipline fell primarily on the *politsostav* hierarchy also made it more likely that inspectors would be more concerned with its political rather than its military aspects. Reese, "Red Army Professionalism", p. 88.

suspiciousness and the fear induced by the threatening international environment, helped fuel the campaign of mass repression after the fall of the generals in June 1937.

In all these ways, the activity of the party rank-and-file developed along much the same lines and yielded similar results on the Fleet as it did in industry. Before however closing this chapter, it is worth briefly considering the manner in which communist activism in uniform differed from that of the factory floor. As argued earlier, the party rank-and-file played an important role in the process of Soviet industrialisation in that their activity prevented a catastrophic collapse of industrial relations. Primary party organisations allowed a large part of active workers to carve out a niche within the system and also made possible the taking of stopgap measures to address plan failures, even at the same time as contributing to the generalised chaos of the factory floor. It is much harder to make a similar assessment of the effects of party work on Soviet military development during the same period.

For although the energies of industrial party activists were primarily applied to the task of devising solutions to problems of production, the aspects of military work that could benefit from grassroots input were few and far between. Instead, party activism on the Fleet consisted primarily in party building and ideological instruction, which were both activities that were very weakly related to military tasks. To the extent then that party activism meant that the Fleet's sailors – and Soviet soldiers more broadly – spent time learning about party history and the international situation instead of drilling and exercising, it is also likely to have had a detrimental effect on military performance. Even for those aspects of activism that were about military skills, like for example the organisation of marksmanship competitions, it is unclear that they carried any benefits over normal training. In this sense, the account offered in this chapter supports Roger Reese's argument that the regime-sanctioned politicisation of the Soviet military contributed to preventing the development of professionalism amongst its ranks.

Professionalism, however, was never a high priority in the party's military policy. For the Bolsheviks, the combat effectiveness of the military had always taken second place to its political reliability.[96] The party's ubiquitous presence inside the

[96] See on this Lenin, "Voennaia Programma Proletarskoi Revoliutsii", in *PSS*, vol. 30: 131-143.

USSR's armed forces was meant to prevent them from developing political ambitions that would pose a threat to civilian authority, an insecurity rooted in the Imperial origins of the first generation of Soviet officers. What military sociology terms "civilianisation", the breaking down of the boundaries between civilian and military life, was an intended objective rather than a failure of party policy.[97] This state of affairs lead to such bizarre situations as battleship crews competing in politeness while seeking to expose enemies of the people and foreign spies. It is no coincidence that, with the exception of the similarly insecure republican Spain, no other state in the interwar period developed a similar system of civilian control over the military.[98]

Nevertheless, there was one way in which the work of commissars and communists was intended to positively influence the combat effectiveness of Soviet troops. Lectures and activities on imperialism, the world revolution and the achievements of the Soviet system were all meant to strengthen the ideological commitment of servicemen to the USSR and in that way raise and maintain troop morale *(boevoi dukh)*. It is extremely difficult to determine the extent to which party activists were successful in this aspect of their mission for among other things morale is a very difficult thing to measure. In any case, by most recent accounts of Soviet troop performance during the Winter War and WWII, bravery and perseverance were not amongst the attributes they lacked, even if basic discipline left much to be desired.[99]

Although then it is reasonable to assume that on the whole, party activism had a negative effect on the skill level of Soviet sailors and soldiers, the same cannot be said in terms of their morale. The significance of this is that from the perspective of the leadership, the dual system of political instruction developed by the party had been

[97] On "civilianisation" see Morris Janowitz, *The Professional Soldier: A Social and Political Portrait* (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1960) pp. 30-38. Reese observes that many communist soldiers and officers viewed themselves as serving the party, rather than their country. "Red Army Professionalism", p. 93.
[98] James Matthews, "The Vanguard of Sacrifice? Political Commissars in the Republican Army during the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939" *War in History*, vol. 21, no. 1, 2014, pp. 82-101. Nazi Germany, which placed significant emphasis on the appropriate ideological upbringing of its soldiers, explicitly rejected the Soviet system of commissars and party organisations as unsuited to a National-Socialist military. Jürgen Förster, "Ludendorff and Hitler in Perspective: The Battle for the German Soldier's Mind, 1917-1944," *War in History* 10, no. 3, 2003, pp. 321–334.
[99] Merridale, *Ivan's War,* pp. 12-17; Reese, "Motivations to Serve"; Stone, "Stalingrad and the evolution"; Robert Thurston, "Cauldrons of Loyalty and Betrayal: Soviet Soldiers' Behavior, 1941 and 1945" in Robert Thurston and Bernd Bonwetch (eds.), *The People's War: Responses to World War II in the Soviet Union* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), pp. 235-258.

successful in its own terms. Thus, when the military setbacks of the war against Finland and the early stages of the German invasion demonstrated the weaknesses of the Soviet military, the only measure taken by the party leadership with respect to the system of political instruction was to make *politsostav* officers once again subordinate to their commanders, in a manner similar to staff-officers.[100] Much like previous efforts at reform in both the military and industry, this was an attempt to eliminate competition over authority and strengthen *edinonachalie*. Like all of its predecessors, this initiative did not address political activism in the form of *samokritika* and ideological education sessions as an issue because, from the perspective of the leadership and of the Soviet political project more broadly, it was an objective rather than a problem.

To return to Reese's argument on the lack of professionalism of the Soviet armed forces examined in the beginning of this chapter, what the preceding pages have shown is that this was a result of the military's institutional make-up, itself a product of Bolshevik political priorities. For as long as the party was more concerned about the military's political reliability than its combat readiness, professionalism in the armed forces would always have to suffer due to the myriad non-military tasks required to secure and demonstrate political loyalty. As shown in the previous chapters however, this hierarchy of priorities was not the product of contingent factors, but was hard-wired into the political project that was the Soviet state. The Bolsheviks did not want a professional military because they had never wanted a professional state in the first place. Much as the party's ubiquitous presence in industry was intended to guarantee the economy's progress towards communism, the dual party control over the military apparatus was a means to prevent it from becoming anything other than an armed defender of the revolutionary project. What this chapter has shown is that the party rank-and-file played a crucial role in putting the leadership's political vision into practice on the Fleet as much as in industry. The ensuing chaos was of course an unintended consequence.

[100] Reese, *Soviet Military Experience*, p. 98.

Conclusion: the vanguard concept as a promising category for historical research

This thesis began with a discussion of the problem of state-society relations for historical scholarship on the Soviet Union in the Stalin period. The argument made was that the issue highlighted by J. Arch Getty in the late 1980s regarding the fuzzy boundaries between state and society in the USSR had been obscured by the exponential growth of empirical research after the opening of the archives. Remaining unaddressed, the binary conception of state and society as distinct and competing entities continued to structure the field, broadly dividing research into state-political and social-cultural even as the growing popularity of the indeterminate intellectual approach known as the "linguistic turn" purported to deconstruct concepts of social structure.[1]

This did not so much negatively affect the quality of the research outputs produced in either category as complicate the task of relating them to each other. If pre-1991 totatalitarianism and revisionism had a clear-cut mode of communication in often heated disagreement, after the opening of the archives had given both sides cause for celebration it became less clear where their successors stood relative to each other. How did confirmation of Stalin's commitment to building a true classless society influence the much more detailed picture of everyday life that emerged from the archives? What did this new appreciation of the multiplicity of forms of everyday day people's interactions with the state, "the little tactics of the habitat", have to contribute to research about the nature of the ideologically derived "grand strategies of the state"?[2]

Attempts to classify the Soviet system as a distinctive modernisation project or neo-traditional society generated very interesting empirical insights but ultimately failed to develop into fully-fledged theoretical frameworks. This was to a large extent

[1] Mark Edele, "Soviet Society, Social Structure, and Everyday Life: Major Frameworks Reconsidered," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 8, no. 2 (2007): 349–73, p. 351.
[2] Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain,* titles of parts I and II respectively.

due to their mutual compatibility; it was perfectly possible to view the pioneering welfare projects of the USSR as modernising policy initiatives, while at the same time recognising that the persistence of informal patron-client networks reflected the failure of the Bolshevik endeavour to overcome the Russian past. There was thus no obvious reason why the concepts of modernity or neo-traditionalism had any particular heuristic value beyond serving as descriptors of different features of the Soviet system.

This prompted some more theoretically inclined researchers to suggest that the time of competing and mutually exclusive research frameworks had come to an end. The fall of the USSR and the archival revolution had made it possible to treat the findings of all scholarly traditions that had been part of the field's history as having mutually contributed to the incremental development of its collective wisdom. Scholars like Gábor Rittersporn, Mark Edele and Jean-Paul Depretto argued that this made it possible to start the business of theorising from scratch, by deploying the resources of different traditions of classical sociology in order to make sense of the field's massively expanded source base and eventually come up with a new theoretical understanding of the USSR's social structure.[3]

There is much to agree with in this view; the mutual appreciation of the relative merits of formerly competing research agendas has been one of the most positive effects of the archival revolution on the field's development since 1991. Nevertheless, several years after this conceptual reboot was first announced, we are still not any closer to developing a theory of Soviet social structure or a conceptual framework of for the history of the Stalin period. It would seem that the "quicksand society" described by Moshe Lewin resists theorisation, if only for the fact that the structures it produced were too transient for their conceptualisation to be of any use.

This thesis has shown that it is possible to side-step this problem in the study of Soviet state-society relations by focusing on an institutional feature of the Soviet political system, a structure that is that does not need to be theoretically derived. The communist party and its primary organisations were stable features of the Soviet

[3] Gábor T. Rittersporn, "New Horizons: Conceptualizing the Soviet 1930s," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 2, no. 2 (2001): 307–318; Edele, "Soviet Society, Social Structure, and Everyday Life"; Jean-Paul Depretto, "Stratification without Class," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 8, no. 2 (2007): 375–388

system for the duration of its existence and rank-and-file communists are easily distinguishable from the rest of society by virtue of their party membership. What makes the study of the party especially illuminating with regard to the relationship between state and society is that mediating this relationship had been its core task from its conception as an institution. If the ultimate goal of the Bolshevik project was to create a state in which "every kitchen-hand" could govern, it was the task of the vanguard party to make this a reality by getting as many people involved in the business of running the state as possible.[4]

The way this was to be achieved was leading by example. Communists were expected to be the first to take part in both the government's far-reaching policy initiatives and the everyday business of keeping the country running. As mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, the role envisaged already in the mid-1920s by the party leadership for the organisations of their rank-and-file comrades was that of administrative troubleshooter, educator and liaison with the broader public. Party activists were thus involved in the minute details of daily administration as much in the factories, where they were permanently in search of solutions to problems like bottlenecks and faulty output, as in the less obviously proletarian environment of the military. They put together literacy circles, organised drama groups and socialist emulation campaigns on deck as on the factory floor. In this sense, vanguardism consisted in recruiting a section of society to become a non-professional arm of the state. On this definition, and based on the evidence presented here, grassroots communists certainly lived up to their title in the interwar period.

This state of affairs differed significantly from that described by the concept of political mobilisation, primarily because it was permanent. Certainly, the various campaigns initiated by the party leadership can be seen as attempts to mobilise the rank-and-file in order to achieve specific objectives. However, the indeterminacy of

[4] "Every kitchen-hand must know how to govern" *(kazhdaia kukharka dolzhna umet' upravliat' gosudarstvom)* is a phrase often attributed to Lenin. In "Uderzhat li bol'sheviki gosudarstvennuiu vlast'?" Lenin actually wrote that "We are not utopianists. […] We know that […] not every kitchen-hand can engage in governing the state now. […] We demand that training in the affairs of government is led by the most conscious workers […] that it begins without delay […] to involve all workers, all poor peasants". *PSS*, vol. 34: 229-339, p. 315. The implication remains that a state run by *kukharki* was a desirable goal for the Bolshevik leader.Vladimir Maiakovskii later included the first version of the quote in his poem *Lenin* from which the epigraph of this thesis is taken.

the tasks set and the ubiquity of everyday crises in the Soviet interwar period meant that the rank-and-file was constantly active in some way or other. Unlike specific campaigns which the leadership could call off or reverse, the party rank-and-file was a permanent structure of the Soviet system. The vanguard could not, or would not be switched off as long as the party leadership remained committed to Marxism-Leninism and the role it assigned to the party.

The value of studying the communist rank-and file thus lies in the fact that party organisations were the institutional link between the state and society at large, a locus in the Soviet system where the two overlapped. They were the site of interaction between grand strategies and little tactics. The party organisation as vanguard was an ideologically imbued institutional structure, operative for as long as the party leadership was committed to the ideological principles that ascribed to it a leadership role over its social setting. At the same time, because party organisations were composed of ordinary people, their social setting determined the nature and effects of their ideologically motivated activities.

Thus, KP/Kirov communists were industrial workers whose efforts were primarily directed towards addressing the issues confronting themselves and their colleagues in their giant machinebuilding plant within the context of Soviet industrialisation. Their understanding of concepts like class struggle, *samokritika* and ultimately their own vanguard role, were always inflected through the prism of labour-management conflicts and the permanent pressure exerted on their living standards. This is perhaps most clearly reflected in the fate of the party's ambitious cultural enlightenment programmes which the scarcities of time and things largely limited to the supervision of the quality of services.

This notwithstanding, it is neither helpful nor accurate to view the activities of the rank-and-file in an instrumentalist manner. The activities of communist workers examined in the preceding chapters were not such that could be considered disingenuous by either themselves or the party leadership. Their involvement in factory affairs was both expected and desirable as far as the leadership was concerned, even if the outcome thereof was more often than not at odds with what was sought. As the rank-and-filers could thus get what they wanted whilst acting largely within the

letter and spirit of party policy, there is little reason to suggest that they did not do so in good faith. The upshot was that, as their party membership inevitably drew them into political affairs extending beyond the factory gates, their participation was no less keen than it was with respect to the issues of immediate concern to them as workers. This also made it possible for the rank-and-filers to view their own concerns through the prism of broader political issues, including the ever more threatening security environment. Fires, accidents and plain selfishness were thus understood in terms of sabotage or "Zinovievism" by some communists, years before the leadership came to adopt a similar outlook.

Meanwhile, party activism on the Baltic Fleet was developing along similar lines, though its effects differed in significant respects. Marxist-Leninist inspired activism was well suited to the factory floor, where ideas of working class hegemony could find ready applicability in institutions like production conferences, making it possible to contain the tensions inherent in the uneasy balance of Soviet industrial relations. Conversely, the benefits of party presence in a military organisation like the Baltic Fleet were less obvious. To be sure, the cultural activities organised by the Fleet's communists probably went a long way towards making the rough conditions of military service more tolerable for both sailors and officers. It is unlikely however, that they contributed anything to their combat abilities. When war drove home the real value of military skill, the Fleet's party organs started to regard it as a marker of political loyalty, in a manner similar to worker communists' attribution of political value to labour performance.

Although then the centralist principle on which the party operated meant that similar kinds of activities would be attempted wherever there were communists present, the outcomes of these would differ depending on the conditions in which they took place. It is the ubiquity of the party's presence combined with the variation of Soviet social conditions that makes the appreciation of the PPO as a specific element of state-society relations a useful substitute for a theoretical framework of the same. If one the purposes of theory is to make the findings of empirical research comparable and applicable across research projects, then further study of the party rank-and-file can provide a similar service.

Useful insight can be gained by comparing the picture of rank-and-file activism emerging from the account offered in this thesis with that of the party grassroots in workplaces that were smaller, or less party-saturated, or where women made up a greater part of the workforce, or any combination of these conditions. We may further expect rank-and-file activism to have had different a different impact in rural areas, where the insistence of the party on recruiting chiefly amongst proletarian village elements like farmhands and shepperds deprived it of members during the NEP era and can hardly have placed it in a strong position to launch its aggressive campaign of collectivisation in the late 1920s.[5]

The party rank-and-file may also serve as the object of diachronic comparisons. This study has traced the contours of party activism in 1926-1941 and argued that these remained remarkably stable for the duration of this period. It is unlikely however that things continued thus for much longer, as the war killed and displaced significant numbers of communists, destroying some party organisations while forcing others to operate underground for the first time after two decades of monopolising political power. While the activities of party activists during WWII would in themselves be a fascinating subject for research, the effects of the war on the place of the rank-and-file in the Soviet system after the USSR's victory are perhaps more relevant to the issues that have been examined in this thesis. The available evidence suggests that the party's budgetary expenditures on "ideology", its privileged activity domain, collapsed during the war and, despite a brief revival, declined consistently in the postwar period.[6] Combined with an observed strengthening of the state apparatus vis-à-vis the party in the same period, this could have had a significant impact on the activities of primary party organisations and their effects on state-society relations.[7] This is a question worth exploring, as are similar issues emerging with respect to other major milestones in the Soviet Union's history, like the response of the grassroots to destalinisation and perestroika.

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[5] Isabel Tirado, "The Komsomol's Village Vanguard: Youth and Politics in the NEP Countryside," *The Russian Review* 72, no. 3 (2013): 427–446, p. 442.
[6] Belova and Lazarev, *Funding Loyalty*, pp. 17-18.
[7] Edward D. Cohn, "Policing the Party: Conflicts between Local Prosecutors and Party Leaders under Late Stalinism," *Europe-Asia Studies* 65, no. 10 (2013): 1912–1930; Daniel Stotland, "The War Within: Factional Strife and Politics of Control in the Soviet Party State (1944–1948)," *Russian History* 42, no. 3 (2015): 343–369.

Perhaps more interestingly, the communist rank-and-file can serve as a comparative tool for state-society relations between different 20th century socialist states. Some version of the vanguard party principle was applied by all states that declared themselves on the socialist path. Despite their organisational similarities, these parties came to power in very different circumstances and had to "lead" the way to socialism in different conditions. Thus, both the Chinese and Cuban communists came to power by means of guerrilla warfare in conditions of economic backwardness and both developed Marxism-Leninism in ways inspired by their national intellectual traditions. Nevertheless, in contrast to the Chinese communists who had spent years establishing base areas in the countryside before their victory, a decade after coming to power the Cuban communists numbered only 55,000 members, less than half the membership of the Leningrad Party Organisation in the period studied in this thesis.[8] In most of Eastern Europe, formerly strong communist parties that had been destroyed by Nazism and war were brought to power by the might of Soviet armour and began building their links with society in entirely different conditions to those of the Bolsheviks. Nevertheless, scholars working on the social history of the East and Central European socialist states have highlighted similar patters of grassroots activism to the ones examined here.[9] The reproduction of the institutional form of the Leninist concept of the vanguard party in different historical conditions thus provides a promising lead for comparative research in state-society relations, as a component part of the emerging historiography of international communism.

Finally, some concluding remarks. This thesis has been a study of a particular source of social support for the Soviet system under Stalin. Its completion comes at a time when the figure of Stalin has been undergoing a grassroots rehabilitation of sorts in Russia, with busts of the general secretary appearing in provincial cities and polls

[8] Stephen A. Smith, "Introduction: Towards a Global History of Communism," in *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Communism*, ed. Stephen A. Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 18; Peter Zarrow, *China in War and Revolution, 1895-1949* (London ; New York: Routledge, 2005), chapter 16.

[9] Dorothee Wierling, "Work, Workers, and Politics in the German Democratic Republic," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 50 (1996): 44–63; J. B. Straughn, "'Taking the State at Its Word': The Arts of Consentful Contention in the German Democratic Republic," *American Journal of Sociology* 110, no. 6 (2005): 1598–1650; Eszter Bartha, "Welfare Dictatorship, the Working Class and the Change of Regimes in East Germany and Hungary," *Europe-Asia Studies* 63, no. 9 (2011): 1591–1610.

showing increasingly positive or sympathetic appraisals of his legacy. This development has not failed to attract the attention of the academic community of historians of the Soviet Union. In Russia, the different academic responses to this trend are exemplified in two recent books by the most influential post-Soviet historians. Oleg Khlevniuk's new biography of Stalin was written explicitly as an admonishment against what he regards as naïve glorification of the *vozhd'*.[10] By contrast, the last book of Viktor Zemskov, published shortly before his death, is essentially a summary of the author's quantitative research over the last three decades aimed primarily as a final rebuttal of some of the more imaginative exaggerations of the number of victims of repression.[11]

If changing Russian views on the legacy of Stalin have had productive effects on Russian scholarship, the same cannot be said with respect to English-language historiography. For although research on Stalin and his era is as strong as ever, there are worrying signs that we may be witnessing a re-emergence of the kind of acrimonious invective that was first directed against the revisionists in the 1980s. Three separate volumes on Stalin, his allies and the terror have very recently come under heavy criticism for being too close to Stalinist apologia.[12] That they are obviously nothing of the sort, and that their critics are by no means fringe figures in the field, suggests that rising tensions over what is an understandably sensitive historical subject may come to pose a challenge to cool-minded scholarly debate in the future. This thesis was written on the assumption that scholarship is best suited to the business of explanation and understanding, rather than condemnation or admonition. Understanding the motivations of the historical supporters of the Soviet state under Stalin may go some way towards explaining the roots of the revival of his popularity, moreso one suspects than condemnation.

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[10] Oleg V. Khlevniuk, *Stalin: New Biography of a Dictator* (Yale University Press, 2016). See the introduction for Khlevniuk's motivations.
[11] Viktor N. Zemskov, *Stalin i Narod. Pochemu Ne Bilo Vosstania* (Moscow: Algoritm, 2014). Zemskov's semi-polemical intent is reflected in the somewhat sarcastic subtitles of his chapters, e.g. "Is it true, that 40 million people were convicted?" (chapter 2).
[12] Oleg Khlevniuk, "Top Down vs. Bottom-up: Regarding the Potential of Contemporary 'Revisionism,'" trans. Aaron Hale-Dorrell and Angelina Lucento, *Cahiers du monde russe* 56, no. 56/4 (2015): 837–857; Hiroaki Kuromiya, "Stalin's World: Dictating the Soviet Order," *Revolutionary Russia* 28, no. 2 (2015): 199–201; E. A. Rees, "On Stalin's Team: The Years of Living Dangerously in Soviet Politics," *Revolutionary Russia* 29, no. 1 (2016): 110–112.

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