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POWER, IDENTITIES AND LANGUAGE IN COLLECTIVIZATION OF THE SOVIET COUNTRYSIDE – LOCAL OFFICIALS IN THE 1920S-1930S.

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ABSTRACT

POWER, IDENTITIES AND LANGUAGE IN COLLECTIVIZATION OF THE SOVIET COUNTRYSIDE - LOCAL OFFICIALS IN THE 1920S-1930S

By

Natalia A. Starostina

Local officials and peasants in the Soviet countryside in the late 1920-1930s adapted the dominant discourse of collectivization, which the Soviet authority attempted to realize. However, even though they used the same language, the communication in the Soviet countryside broke down because peasants and local officials used the language against each other, thus undermining the possibilities of negotiation of collectivization processes. The underlying paradigms which created the frameworks for using the language were rooted not in the context which this language appeared from (collectivization), but rather on the traditional paradigms of running the peasant life. The state gradually acknowledged an impossibility to use the language inspired by the state-sponsored rhetoric of collectivization and class-struggle in the countryside as a criterion for assessing its own success in transformation of the countryside. This resulted in the prohibition of the language of negotiation for local officials in their everyday transactions with the higher authorities.

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Introduction

Although both in the West and in contemporary Russia a vast amount of literature on collectivization has appeared during the last two decades, a critical problem remains: the studies of the Soviet countryside has touched very little upon the important group which was in great part responsible for its transformation. The problems of local officials who bore the primary impact of collectivization from both peasant society and the state remained outside of a range of problems that historians were pursuing. Even though Sheila Fitzpatrick dealt with the problem of local leaders in the countryside, the all-encompassing character of her works did not allow for underlining the importance of lower rural officials for the balance of power in the countryside. The books of Fitzpatrick, which saw chairmen as just another variety of the soviet bureaucratic machinery, simplified the problems of authority which the Soviet village faced, and actually imposed the post-war and later Soviet phenomena on the Stalin's collectivization. Yet the study of lower rural officials - chairmen of collective farms, - is crucial for understanding the inner mechanisms of the Soviet village during and immediately after collectivization. A very limited number of historians have given partial attention to this problem, but in general there exists no consistent work that would try to make a broad generalization about a role of local officials in the countryside.

The historians of the so-called "totalitarian school" in the historiography of the Soviet Union treated the history of collectivization as an undesirable and violent

intervention of the Bolsheviks into the life of the Russian countryside.[1] Partisans of such an approach seemed oblivious to the problem of modernization of the countryside in Soviet Russia that was of extreme need and importance in the 1930's. Implicitly, they lamented the end of an old way of life in Russian village, based on a system of the village commune with its accompanying practice of discrimination of women, the dominance of elderly people and a very tiny possibility for social mobility.[2] Such authors as Richard Pipes, Martin Malia, Andrea Graziosi and Robert Conquest used the dichotomy between fanatical and cruel Bolsheviks, on the one hand, and suffering and passive people, on the other hand, as a ubiquitous explanation for the whole period of Soviet society. For historians of the totalitarian school the Soviet Union represented a dictatorship and there was no place for common people to participate in the projects launched by the Bolsheviks. They saw collectivization as a forceful imposition of Bolshevik will on the peasantry. Such historians failed to see that the state would not be able to launch and eventually to implement large-scale reforms of the society without the participation of hundreds of thousands of people in this process. This paradigm proved to be extremely insufficient for the explanation of the complex social fabric of Soviet society and was severely criticized by the next generation of historians, the partisans of the so-called "revisionist school."

The scholars of the so-called "revisionist" school became pioneers in revealing to Western historiography the vast amount of documents produced by common people in the

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[1] Richard Pipes, Russia under the Bolshevik regime (New York, 1984); Martin Malia, The Soviet Tragedy: A History of Socialism in Russia, 1917-1991 (New York, 1994); Robert Conquest, The Harvest of Sorrow: Soviet Collectivization and the Terror (London, 1986), Andrea Graziosi, "The Great Soviet Peasant War. Bolsheviks and Peasants, 1917-1933, Harvard Papers in Ukrainian Studies (Cambridge, 1996) and other.

[2] For peasant commune in imperial Russia: Christine Worobec, Peasant Russia: Family and Community in the Post-Emancipation Period, (Princeton, 1991).

Soviet period.[3] It allowed them to highlight the complexity of social processes that took place in the 1930's and the variety of social responses to collectivization from whole-hearted support and active participation to total denial and resistance. Such scholars as Moshe Lewin, Sheila Fitzpatrick, Lynn Viola and others sought to understand how the life of the Russian village changed during and after collectivization. Inasmuch as their studies touched the problem of the role of local officials in the collectivization drive, they were turning their attention to local officials, even though this problem never occupied a central place in their work.

Moshe Lewin argued that collectivization came as a response from above to the intensification of a class tension in the countryside that occurred in the end of 1920's and that collectivization would be impossible without an active participation of local officials in dekulakization.[4] Lewin argued that local officials were ignorant and leaned on violence and disorder when the state launched the dekulakization. They played a central place only in a destruction of the old way of life in Russian village. It was not local officials, however, but urban dwellers, according to Lewin, that came to build collective farms in the countryside. Lewin blamed the brutality with which dekulakization was implemented

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[3] Merle Fainsod, Smolensk under Soviet Rule (Boston, 1989); Moshe Lewin, The Making of the Soviet System. Essays in the Social History of Interwar Russia, (New York, 1994); idem, Russian Peasants and Soviet Power. A Study of Collectivization (New York, 1968); Roberta Manning, "Government in the Soviet Countryside in the Stalinist Thirties. The Case of Belyi *Raion* in 1937," The Carl Beck Papers in Russian and East European Studies (University of Pittsburgh Center for Russian and East European Studies, October 1984); William Rosenberg and Lewis Siegelbaum, eds. Social Dimensions of Soviet Industrialization (Bloomington, 1993); Siegalbaum, Stakhanovism and the Politics of Productivity in the USSR, 1935-1941 (Cambridge, 1988); James Hughes, Stalinism in a Russian Province. A study of Collectivization and Dekulakization in Siberia (New York, 1996); Elena Osokina, Za fasadom "stalinskogo izobiliia": raspredelenie i rynok v snabzhenii naseleniia v gody industrializatsii (Moscow, 1998) and other.

[4] Dekulakization was a process that took place along with collectivization and implied clearing peasant society of the excessively rich peasants (*kulaks*) and the appropriation of their property. Moshe Lewin, Russian Peasants and Soviet Power. A Study of Collectivization (New York, 1968), 489-90.

not local officials, but Moscow politicians. The term "kulak" that Moscow politicians actively used during the dekulakization to manipulate local officials was more than confusing. Therefore, Lewin argued that local officials played rather a negative role in collectivization because they succeeded only to alienate peasants from an idea of collective farm.

Lynn Viola's works on collectivization demonstrated an even more skeptical approach towards the ability of local officials to rule the countryside.[5] She argues that the role of local officials in the collectivization drive was insignificant and that it was newcomers into the villages, urban dwellers, who actually transformed villages into the collective farms. One of Viola's studies was focused on the 25,000ers, workers from Leningrad and other cities, who came in the countryside as new appointed chairmen of collective farms. According to Viola, it was they who first brought a bold vision of social transformation into the countryside. The 25,000ers, however, failed to transform this vision into reality because they were challenged by a lack of understanding from rank-and-file peasants and by the hostility of local officials.

Sheila Fitzpatrick developed another definition for local officials as "middlemen" between the state and the countryside. Fitzpatrick argued that a collective farm's chairman could negotiate with the state in his everyday transactions as far as, for example, the delivery of planned quotas on agricultural production was concerned.[6] Fitzpatrick

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[5] Lynne Viola, The Best Sons of the Fatherland: Workers in the Vanguard of Soviet Collectivization (New York, 1987), *idem*, Peasant Rebels under Stalin: Collectivization and the Culture of Peasant Resistance (New York, 1996).

[6] Fitzpatrick argued that "the kolkhoz chairman was the chief broker in the kolkhoz-village's relationship with the state. He mediated between the village and the district authorities; it was his job to tell the district that the procurements target on such-and-such a crop was too high and try to get it lowered; to convey to the peasants that the *raion* (district administration) was serious about clamping down on pilfering or

compared the role of a collective farm's chairman with that of a middleman between serfs and their landlord, for she argued that collectivization of the countryside resulted in the revival of old ways of life.[7] The creation of collective farms, according to her, became a second edition of the commune (*mir*). Fitzpatrick argued that by and large Soviet peasants as well as local officials remained passive, if not hostile to collectivization. [8] She distinguished three types of peasant mentality in the countryside: first, "traditionalist," a rejection of any changes and a desire to be left alone by the state; second, "entrepreneurial," a desire to be engaged in trade and entering into the market; and, third, there were peasants who appreciated collectivization as providing for welfare practices in the countryside. By arguing this, Fitzpatrick put Russian peasants into the category of a passive social stratum that might respond differently to the challenges from above, but had nothing to propose itself. Fitzpatrick's views on the political aspirations of peasants expressed the understanding of political and social dynamics in the Soviet society of the 1930's that characterized contemporary Soviet historiography.

This understanding of peasants as a passive agent in the collectivization of the

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individual use of kolkhoz horses without payment; to try to provide excuses for any failures to meet procurements targets, and so on." Sheila Fitzpatrick, Stalin's Peasants: Resistance and Survival in the Russian Village after Collectivization (New York, 1994), 11.

[7] According to Fitzpatrick's views, "one of the kolkhoz chairman's main functions was to act as broker between the village and the *raion* authorities. To play this role successfully, he needed acceptance on both sides: If the village "elected" him, he needed *raion* approval; if the *raion* "appointed" him, he need the approval of the village. This was not fundamentally different from the situation on Prince Gagarin's Manilovo estate a century earlier, where the serf manager (*burmistr*) was "elected by and from the local peasants and approved by Gagarin." Fitzpatrick, Stalin's Peasants, 194.

[8] Fitzpatrick concluded her books by a suggestion that "three separate strains of peasant aspiration can be identified in the 1930s. "Traditionalist" peasants wanted to be left alone with their horse and cow to be subsistence cultivators, within a communal framework that tended to inhibit economic differentiation. "Entrepreneurs" wanted not just to subsist but also to sell for a profit on the marker, have the opportunity to buy and lease land, and become prosperous, on the Stolypin model. "Welfare-state kolkhozniks" wanted the state to act like a good master, providing pensions and other kinds of social welfare that would eliminate the risk of being wiped out in a bad year." Fitzpatrick, Stalin's Peasants, 313.

1930's is challenged by recently published collections of primary sources -- for example, letters that Soviet citizens sent to newspapers, security reports on rumors and opinions in cities and in the countryside produced by the NKVD -- that shed light on the inner mechanisms of Soviet society as well the role of local officials in collectivization.[9] In many cases, short commentaries or no commentaries at all accompany documents in these editions. The editors of such collections of documents, therefore, have left much room for further interpretations of these documents.

A new trend in Soviet historiography, the so-called "subjectivist school" promises new possibilities for historians to understand how complex social, political and cultural processes of the 1930's were re-shaping identities of people.[10] An innovative study of a diary of a Moscow worker Stepan Podlubnyi by Jochen Hellbeck suggests a new approach to the history of Stalinism as a story of internalization or denial of identities that the state implicitly and explicitly suggested. Hellbeck argued that the identity of Stepan Podlubnyi was deeply transformed as a result of the internalization of identities that the state suggested. The diary for Stepan Podlubnyi became a means to fashion his soul according to ideals promoted by the state.

The tendency to limit collectivization to a re-allocation of property from individual households into a collective farm with a concomitant exile of better-off peasants and the

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[9] Andrei Sokolov, Golos naroda. Pis'ma i otkliki riadovih sovetskih grazhdan o sobitiiah 1918-1932 (Moscow, 1998); idem, ed., Obshchestvo i vlast' v 1930-e gody: povestvovanie v dokumentakh (Moscow, 1998); Lynn Viola, T.McDonald, S.V.Zhuravlev, A.N.Mel'nik, Riazanskaia derevnia v 1929-1930 gg. khronika golovokruzheniia. Dokumenti i materiali, (Moscow, 1998); Sergei Maksudov, Neuslyshannye golosa: Dokumenty Smolenskogo arkhiva. Kn.1 (Ann Arbor, 1987); Vasilii Popov, Krest'ianstvo i gosudarstvo: 1945-1953 (Paris, 1992) and other.

[10] Stephen Kotkin, Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization (Berkeley, 1995); Johen Hellbeck, "Fashioning the Stalinist Soul: The Diary of Stepan Podlubnyi (1931-1939)," Jahrbucher fuer Geschichte Osteuropas 44 (1996) 344-373; Veronique Garros, Natalia Korenevskaya, and Thomas Lahusen, eds. Intimacy and Terror: Soviet Diaries of the 1930's (New York, 1995) and other.

mechanization of the countryside limits historians in their understanding of collectivization. Collectivization of the countryside was designed to resolve urgent problems that the Soviet state was facing in the middle and end of the 1920's. There was a fourteen million population increase during the 1920's, but agricultural production did not reach its pre-war level. For example, grain production per capita was 584 kg in 1913, but in 1928-9 it was only 484.4 kg. This gap was continuing to increase in the end of the 1920s.[11] In other words, there was not enough grain to feed the growing population of the Soviet republic. A possibility of drought or other climatic failure could result in a famine that the state would not be able to stop or to lessen its consequences for the state did not have even grain reserves.[12] There was a limited number of available measures to overcome this shortage of grain without applying pressure on peasant society. If before 1913 peasant households produced only 50% of the total grain output, and consumed 60% of their production, now peasants produced 80% of total grain output and consumed 85% of its volume.[13] The fact that only 15% of the grain went to the market put state authorities in an extremely difficult situation because of the importance of grain in the balance of the economy. First, grain production occupied a central place in the still mostly agricultural economics of the early Soviet state. Moreover, agricultural production had become central to the industrial renovation which the Soviet state, for ideological and pragmatic reasons, considered a cornerstone of its right to exist. Grain exports were the major source for the regime to fund the restoration and expansion of industry that suffered great losses during the Civil War. Hence, the low productivity of agriculture was perceived as a major cause

[11] Lewin, Russian Peasants, 174.
[12] Ibid, 178.
[13] Ibid, 175-6.

of the obstacles to build the Soviet state.[14] Therefore, collectivization was predicated on re-organizing the countryside along the lines of increasing productivity.

In this context even collectivization itself needs further explanation in the context of complex social processes that took place in the Soviet countryside in the end of 1920s – 1930s. The term implied the creation of collective farms as an ultimate goal of the state's policy in the countryside. However, the use of this term necessarily questions people's initiative in transforming the countryside and implicitly advocates a trickle-down theory of socialism in the countryside. Evidence suggests, however, that collectivization was a process of social transformation that deeply changed the nature of power and authority in the countryside. Language played a central role in this process because the subjectivity of power during the time of social transformation resulted in a specific phenomenon: interpretations of social realities became as important as realities themselves. Because of this, language is one of the dominant elements of the social transformation, and example of which the collectivization presented. The language which local officials used and which peasants and the political elite applied towards local officials allows us to see the sets of representations on which this language was based. It allows us to distinguish realities from representations in the analysis of the role of local officials in the countryside.

This understanding of collectivization allows us to consider actions of local officials from a new perspective. First, I will try to demonstrate how local leaders constructed their identity through creating an elaborate construction of a social utopia, in which they were the leaders of the people. I will examine this discourse which local

[14] Ibid.

leaders invented through the lense of Michel Foucault's theory of the dissemination of power through social institutions and language.[15] In my second chapter I will try to argue that rank-and-file members of Soviet farms re-defined the meaning of the narrative created by local officials and created a specific discourse of local officials as gentry landowners. In contrasting the two different discourses present in the countryside I will attempt to show that both of them came from the same roots of social utopianism. In many ways both of the conflicting discourses resembled, and probably directly borrowed from, the Bolshevik language of social transformation, which had reached the countryside from the cities. The thesis will attempt to show that even though peasants and those of them who managed to become collective farm chairmen employed the same language, they used it against each other. They competed against each other using the same kind of Bolshevik discourse in everyday life. Therefore, the Soviet countryside was a sponge that absorbed the dominant discourse of social transformation, but reinterpreted it and used it for the purposes of traditional peasant routines. The tensions within the collective farms, which the chairmen were the first to bear, went not along ideological lines, but rather emanated from the pressure on peasant society which collectivization exemplified. This does not mean, however, that these tensions, to which the conflicting discourses of the countryside gave a voice, were any less poignant. The thesis will show that the rural officials, and chairmen of the collective farms in the first place, were not able to connect even on the level of language, and that any negotiation was impossible. The last chapter will try to demonstrate that the political elite did not invest local officials with the function of negotiating

[15] See Michel Foucault, Power/Knowledge: Selected Interview and Other Writings, 1972-1977 (New York, 1980).

collectivization in the countryside. The appropriation and re-interpretation of Bolshevik discourse by rural society made the central elites come up with a new language of collectivization, which was based on extending urban models to the countryside and emphasized the role of machinery in the transformation of the countryside.

Chapter 1.

"Charismatic leaders:" rural officials in collectivization's narratives

A language and a set of images that local officials used describing themselves shed light on the complex identities of local officials and their understanding of their role in the social fabric of Soviet society. For local officials, the representation of themselves went far beyond an image of state servicemen with precisely defined administrative duties. Not an administrative position of a chairman in a collective farm, but rather a broadly understood position of power responsible for transforming the countryside according to socialist ideals inspired local officials in their search for self-identities. A specific discourse, according to which local officials were leaders of the people, and which they themselves developed, reflected their search for self-identification.

The exploration of the discourse of "people's leaders" cannot be done without the exploration of the dominant official discourse - the language of socialism. For historians, a vision of socialism appears to be the privilege of the "Kremlin dreamers," and the process of the building of socialism a dissemination of a dominant discourse, as Michel Foucault put it, of the socialism produced by the educated urban elite. Social historians still refuse to see how deep the social utopianism was embedded in the everyday reality of the Soviet countryside. The understanding of socialism articulated by the peasants is considered to be only a curiosity, a ridiculous fantasy that stands halfway between interpretative rigidity, illiteracy of peasants, and their futile efforts to understand the complexity of socialism.[16] According to an assumption that many scholars share, the revolutionary discourse in the

[16] See, for example, Sokolov, Golos naroda 11.

countryside existed only as an alien language in contrast with the traditional culture and mentality of the peasants. The trickle down discourse of the urban utopianism and reorganization of society joined and was in many ways accompanied by the undercurrent of rural utopianism, and their interaction was the reason for the dynamics and tension of rural life.

The self-representation of local officials suggests, however, that a correlation between an urban-dominated socialist discourse on soviet power and the peasants' interpretation of betterment of their lives was a much more complex process. The self-representations of local officials as "people's leaders" will provide evidence of a complex process of internalization of the language of socialism among Soviet peasants and, particularly, local officials. Narratives which emerged together with the dissemination of a dominant discourse in the society were incorporated by local officials for the creation of a specific self-representation of "people's leaders." Local leaders, however, re-defined the meaning of these narratives and while using its language, put a very different meaning into them. Chairmen's visions of a new countryside embedded the social utopianism that re-defined the discourse about socialism in the countryside and brought into it a new meaning. I will try to demonstrate that the social utopianism became deeply embedded in the everyday actions of rural authorities and that collectivization invoked and powerfully reinforced this utopian vision.

The reinterpretation which peasants gave to the social blueprint for a better society, suggested by the Bolsheviks in 1917, started immediately after the news from

Petrograd reached countryside.[17] The period of the Civil War became a time when the village faced a generation of militant dreamers - demilitarized soldiers that brought their own representations of social utopia and change into the countryside. While the village faced increasing banditry, demobilized soldiers or just volunteers came to serve in new institutions and to defend the village from the Whites, Greens and so forth. They, however, quickly came to disagree with the central authorities and came to make the Revolution in the countryside on their own. For example, the story of Avraam Makarov, a demobilized soldier, illustrates to what extent his vision of social change was much more radical than that of the higher authorities and how quickly he appropriated the making of the revolution in the countryside. He wrote a twenty-page letter to Krest'ianskaia Gazeta in 1929 in which he described his life. The story of his revolutionary experience began when he returned to his village and was elected chairman of the provincial executive committee (*volispolkom*).[18] His views on the building of socialism countered those of higher authorities and from 1919 Makarov began his struggle with executives in the provincial executive committee. Makarov labeled those who were his chiefs as past officers of the old army: they, according to him, did not allow him to implement collectivization and the cultural enlightenment of people in his village. In order to succeed in this clash Makarov organized a clandestine party cell during the second meeting of Soviets in his province. Makarov's story of ardent struggle with his enemies - officers of the czarist army that according to his account occupied positions in the revolutionary committees - suggests the longing for social transformation that the generation of militant

[17] Orlando Figes, Boris Kolonitskii, Interpreting the Russian Revolution : the language and symbols of 1917 (New Haven, 1999)
[18] Ibid, 67-8.

dreamers brought with them in the countryside. In verses that Makarov composed in 1927, he defined his adherence to the ideals of revolution and the tribulations he had suffered because of it. The people who brought the influence of the city to the countryside - demobilized soldiers and other groups, - as well as local peasant society borrowed revolutionary rhetoric, in the process redefining the meaning of Bolshevik ideology.

From the very beginning of the Soviet state local authorities were at odds with the official view of their responsibilities and the extent of their power. Perhaps, Andrei Platonov's novel Chevengur (1927) gives the best view of a gap between the understanding of socialism expressed by a generation of "rural dreamers" and the dominant discourse of socialism.[19] "Rural dreamers" produced a very peculiar understanding of socialism, which sometimes might be an eccentric re-interpretation of Marx's ideas on the countryside. A main character of "Chevengur," Kopenkin, was deeply influenced by Marx's ideas about the necessity to eliminate exploitation in society in order to build socialism. Kopenkin, however, re-defined the logic in Marx's argument and announced labor itself (rather than social relations based on one's relation to property) a source of exploitation and inequality in the society. Kopenkin argued that only by eliminating labor and, thus, according to his logic, exploitation, it was possible to reach socialism. Kopenkin created a commune of people in the countryside who refused to work and by that, i.e. doing literally nothing, they believed they were building a new, socialist society.

A confrontation between the official view of rural officials and rural officials'

[19] Andrei Platonov, "Chevengur," Yuvenil'noe more (Moscow, 1988).

vision of their role produced striking effects when collectivization was launched. The way in which these leaders envisioned themselves is represented in great detail by the memoirs of a collective farm's chairman, which demonstrated that rural officials adopted a language which portrayed them as "people's leaders." The memoirs of Vasilii Sitnikov,[20] a fascinating account of the life of collective farm's chairman, gave a number of very important insights into his representation of this office. Published in a newspaper with an introduction by his grandson, writer Vasilii Sitnikov, these memoirs portrayed the formation of a rural official. Even though Sitnikov might have written or dictated these memoirs later in his life, most likely between the 1950s and the 1980s, the Soviet state still existed and socialism remained the powerful, if not dominant, ideology in the society. The language which Sitnikov used in his story is not a result of his later interpretation because the development of the Soviet state at this time represented a continuity of political institutions the political and social function of which were defined during the social transformation of the 1930s. The continuity of the official rhetoric emphasized the Soviet state's devotion to Marxist ideology and building socialism. Therefore, there were no other ideologies that might challenge Sitnikov's understanding of his role as a collective farm's chairman. Moreover, as Stephen Kotkin suggested, even after the fall of the Soviet system the language that was based on socialist ideas was present in conversations that Kotkin had with his friends and a landlord in Magnitogorsk in the late 1980's.[21] Sitnikov's memoirs presented him as a utopian dreamer who did not give up his vision of transformation of the life in his village according to his utopian beliefs. His memoirs

[20] Vladimir Sitnikov, "Khronika vremeni moego deda", Sovetskaia Rossiia, August 26, 1988.
[21] Stephen Kotkin, Steeltown, USSR: Soviet Society in the Gorbachev Era (Berkeley, 1991), passim.

reflected his thoughts about forces that hindered his success as a chairman of a collective farm but even after many years Sitnikov believed that the idea of transforming the countryside was certainly to the benefit of the peasant population.

The memoirs showed from the start that Sitnikov was a dreamer. According to them, Vasilii Sitnikov developed an interest in books from his childhood and as a result he became more educated than his fellow villagers and was sent abroad to learn agriculture. Then, Sitnikov served in the army during the First World War, was captured and spent time as a prisoner. After 1917 he returned to the village, was drafted into the Red Army, became a member of a small administrative district's executive committee (*volispolkom*) where he was responsible during the years of War Communism "for culture and medicine" and during N.E.P. - for cooperation. In 1929 Sitnikov was purged from the party for his origins (his father was a petty merchant). Sitnikov went to the commune in a different area, acquired there some popularity and even was nominated as a possible chairman. Sitnikov, however, decided not to run because he was still deprived of political rights (*lishenets*). Soon Sitnikov returned to his village, became an activist and participated in the creation of a commune in Gul'kevichi in 1929-30.

Sitnikov was deeply disappointed when Stalin put a blame and responsibility on local officials for excesses and rush with which collectivization was implemented in his article "Dizzy with Success" that appeared in the newspapers in March 1930.[22] Stalin argued that the course of action, taken by the local officials, was the main reason for the failure of collectivization. He lashed out against what many chairmen believed their

[22] Joseph Stalin, "Golovokruzhenie ot uspekhov" (*Dizzy from Success*), Pravda, March 2, 1930.

collective farm had to be – a commune. He argued that this form of peasant organization that undertook a requisition of almost all property of peasants including their personal belongings was an extreme. Stalin claimed that local officials should take responsibilities for their eagerness to make every peasant a member of a commune or a collective farm even when peasants did not want to become its members. Stalin deliberately failed to mention in his article that the Moscow political elite required Party and state officials elsewhere in the Soviet Union to achieve planned quotas of collectivization and to create a certain number of collective farms. The failure to implement state quotas of collectivization was most likely to result in purges against those officials who failed to achieve these quotas. Stalin's article, therefore, was an effort to distance the state, and particularly, the Party elite, from failures that the introduction of communes against peasants' wishes brought in many cases. The mass breakdown of collective farms after this article was an important consequence. However, collectivization headed in the same direction even after the appearance of Stalin's article. The political elite began to use a variety of means in driving peasants into collective farms. The increase of the state tax on individual households of those who were hesitant to join to a collective farm beyond any possibility to pay it was, for example, one of the means at state's disposal to ensure growth in the a number of collective farms.

Stalin's article "Dizzy with Success" ruined the commune that Sitnikov organized in Gul'kevichi too. His commune fell apart in a moment after the publication of Stalin's article. He wrote: "We, activists, got stranded (*ostalis' na meli*). How could it happen? Stalin proved his innocence, but he blackened us and attacked us. All passionate words

and incredible efforts went down the drain (*vse zharkie slova i neimovernye usiliia poshli nasmarku*). This struck me. It was like a betrayal." Sitnikov abandoned the village because he was ashamed to live there, and chose another one. In another commune, "Working Peasantry," Sitnikov launched a propaganda campaign and as a result he was elected as a chairman of the collective farm again. However, Sitnikov realized that the grain delivery quotas that the state set for the peasantry were impossible to achieve and impossible to negotiate. Moreover, Sitnikov claimed that he could be easily labeled as an enemy of people for a delay with various assignments such as carting out the grain that his collective farm had to implement. Sitnikov quit his position and was sent to a lumber mill and then went to his son in the city in 1937. He remained there and visited his village only after the Second World War.

There are several narratives which this collective farm chairman's account illustrates. First, in the beginning of his activity Sitnikov constantly wanted to distance himself from the pressure exercised by the state on peasants. He minimized his role in the building of a commune in his village. Only his comments about the ruinous impact of Stalin's article on its creation revealed that this commune was created through his vigorous, if not forceful, partaking - his "passionate words and unbelievable efforts". He did not mention forceful means for the creation of this commune, although he most likely used them, for this commune seemed to exist only through coercion.

It is very revealing how Sitnikov described his position between a hammer and an anvil. He wrote:

"I, a chairmen of a collective farm, ended up being between the rock and the hard

place (*mezhdu dvuh ognei*). They pressed me from above: I have got to fulfill urgent tasks come hell or high water (*krov' iz nosu*). Despite a bad harvest of flax, the regional authority issued an enormous quota for flax delivery. Implementing this order, I myself unwillingly became a stubborn and obtuse agent for procurement of delivery quotas (*upriamii i tupoi vykolachivatel' plana*)." [23]

According to Sitnikov, he was pushed to force his subordinates. His account in fact gives almost a physical perception of force that won over his will to be a compassionate leader. At the same time, he was aware of the transformation that happened in him when he was a chairman - his will came to serve the merciless force that turned the lives of the Soviet peasantry upside down. Sitnikov's account gives a different perspective of the process of the making of the New Soviet Man that characterized the 1930's.[24] Instead of describing himself as an outside observer of the social transformation, Sitnikov saw himself captured by this process and transformed almost against his will. There was no exit for Sitnikov but to quit his job and even abandon his identity as a peasant. He confessed that after the experience of this pressure, peasant work lost its attractiveness for him and he decided to quit. The impossibility to transform the life in his collective farm according to his dreams was perceived by Sitnikov, therefore, as a failure to preserve his integrity as a peasants' leader and as a peasant.

Sitnikov described his experience in the 1930's as an interchanging set of failures caused by the state and successes caused by peasantry. The state purged him from party in

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[23] Ibid.

[24] Hellbeck, "Subjectivities and Policies of Subjectivization in the Stalin Period" (manuscript, presented at the conference "The Stalin Period: New Ideas, New Conversations", the University of California, Riverside, 12-15 March 1998), 16.

1929, Stalin's article ruined a commune that Sitnikov created and, finally, the pressure from the state made him abandon his post of a chairman of the collective farm. The state appears to be a force that stood behind the party purges, Stalin's articles and the ill-done process of ruling the countryside. Sitnikov did not make a distinction between the state and the party and did not identify actors in his account as Communists or non-Communists. It even remained unclear whether Sitnikov was reinstated in the party after 1929. It suggests that for Sitnikov membership in the Communist party meant very little if it was not reinforced by a position in the authorities which could be either linked with the state or the party but had to be necessarily inscribed into the state mechanism. The division between the state and the party hierarchies that one scholar described as being important for social identities,[25] appeared to be significant only for those who were occupying a position of power in these structures. In Sitnikov's account, there is no difference between the actions exercised by the state or the party - both of them mingled together to overcome Sitnikov's will as well as the will of his people.

Actions of Sitnikov's foes acquired success only because the state supported them, for without this support people would find a right leader and a right path. It was his fellows' support that brought him recognition in his village and election to the district executive committee (*volispolkom)* in 1917. Sitnikov was nominated three times by his fellows as the best candidate for chairmanship in two communes and his native village, and the Timiriazev collective farm in 1929, 1930, and 1933. Sitnikov presented his election as something that had nothing to do with his efforts - in his account it appears that he was

[25] Kotkin, Magnetic Mountain, 590-96.

nominated as a possible candidate even during his actual absence in Gul'kevichi. Sitnikov constructed himself as a leader nominated by the people and serving them. Although Sitnikov might have been just removed from the position of chairman for his inability to fulfill the quota requirements, he represented his quitting as a gesture of desperate protest against the virtual impossibility of being a people's leader.

Sitnikov's representations about the role of leader in the countryside invoke a whole set of associations. Sitnikov created a peculiar triad that could be seen in the production of revolutionary rhetoric in the 1920's: the state as a counterfeit power (= Imperial government and Czar), Sitnikov as a genuine people's leader (= Bolsheviks) and the people as a group that knows who is its real, not forged leader. Sitnikov presented himself as a servant of the people, not the state. The state in his narrative is as a constantly intervening and hindering force in the process of his serving the people of his village. The state is ultimately responsible for his failures, but the people - the peasants of Gul'kevichi - are willing to support him and to nominate him as a genuine peasant leader. Despite constant pressure from the state, purges and ordeals, Sitnikov did not give up. He referred to the higher authorities as ultimately counterfeit leaders in the view of the peasantry - they maintained power only through the use of force, while Sitnikov acquired his authority through the genuine people's support and his "passionate words." Sitnikov is not afraid of his fellows although the widespread practice of assault on collective farm chairmen might suggest that he had many reasons to be afraid. For instance, he explained his reluctance to return to his village as a fear of shame, not a fear of being killed or injured. Sitnikov feels that he has to account for his actions in the face of his village, not that of the state.

Sitnikov, however, is not writing about himself as an ordinary peasant like the rank-and-file members of his commune. He did not squeeze himself into a dichotomy of "us" ("peasants") against "them" (the state authorities) in which he would be a part of "us," the peasant community. He invokes his identity of peasant only to show how meaningful peasant work was for him and how symbolic was his decision to quit his work and peasant labor. In fact, a peasant identity is too solemn for him to refer to it in his everyday life decisions. It is significant that in a period when he was not chairman he relied on his skills to repair accordions or to procure lumber. Peasant and chairman's identities became closely interwoven for him and he was unwilling to remain a peasant without being a chairman.

Rationalizing his achievements and failures in a position of authority, Sitnikov actually created a discourse of power which was distinctly different from what his immediate surroundings or ideology of service to the socialist state could predicate. Sitnikov did not see himself as a servant of the state. He understood his mission in much broader terms of service to the people and transforming of their lives according to his belief. His identity of chairman of a collective farm has nothing to do with his professional responsibilities *per se*, but is understood as an essential mission of implementing his dream - commune- in his village. The position of chairman was a time of Sitnikov's personal and professional triumph - only then could he carry out his essential task of people's leader.

The question of belief plays an important role in Sitnikov's narrative. Sitnikov almost did not mention the development of events in the commune until Stalin's article made it disappear. The process of building a commune for him is a process of the

implementation of a dream. A narrative about actual events is subdued by a narrative about a correspondence between life and dream and an oscillation between a belief and a frustration. He wrote: "We lived in an unusual way, we believed and did not believe, but we wished that everything we dreamed about come true (*zhili neprivychno, verili i ne verili, no khotelos, chtoby udalos' vse tak, kak mechtalos*)." When the commune fell apart, Sitnikov became deeply disappointed in the role of leader. He promised himself that he would not be involved again in any projects ("*dal ia zarok bol'she ne vstrevat' ne vo chto*").

The chairmanship was meaningful for Sitnikov only when he had the possibility to implement his dream in his native village. His narrative hinges on the moments when he became a chairman in his native Gul'kevichi. Moreover, other events in his life did not interest him that much – the story becomes almost incoherent when he talked about repairing accordions or was just a rank-and file member of a collective farm in the south where he went with his friend, a like-minded peasant. Although there was a group of sincere believers in the commune, Sitnikov was not satisfied there - he wanted to transform his native village. The south was an alien terrain for him which might lure for a brief moment by the mildness of the climate and fertility of the land, but did not fulfil his dreams.

In Sitnikov's narrative, his failure to exercise his essential role of a "people's leader" was closely interwoven with a failure to implement his dreams in Gul'kevichi. Without Sitnikov's leadership, life in his village could not but go awry - after WWII there was a famine in his area and people in his village became torn by tension, which he

interpreted as class hatred. Sitnikov was greatly distressed by the fact that people in his village did not create an atmosphere of trust and belief in each other that would be the most important evidence of transformation of life in his village according to his dreams.

Therefore, Sitnikov's account of his chairmanship is constructed according to the conventions of narrative available through revolutionary and utopian rhetoric. Sitnikov borrowed the discourse of the Russian revolution to create the self-image. His vision of the future of Gul'kevichi was inspired by an utopian discourse, and the implementation of his dream was the ultimate goal as a people's leader in Gul'kevichi. He created a triad in which he played the role of a genuine people's leader. He did not refer to himself, however, as to a state officer whose function was to serve the interests of the state. While borrowing the language of a dominant socialist and revolutionary discourse, Sitnikov greatly re-defined its meaning. In his narrative the state played a negative role of a force that hampered the transforming of life in Gul'kevichi. Sitnikov acknowledged that the state was ultimately responsible for his life's failure - to implement his virtual responsibilities of people's leader in Gul'kevichi and to transform life there according to his beliefs.

Sitnikov's example illustrates the process of transformation and re-definition of the official discourse that local officials were engaged in.[26] Sitnikov's understanding of his role in a *kolkhoz* was typical as letters of local officials demonstrated. A peasant of Voronezh province, Andrei Poluektov, described a number of positions in the *kolkhoz* that he took, from most recently, a member of auditing commission to a bookkeeper and a member of

[26] The rhetorics that Sitnikov used is very similar to that of many local officials in the countryside. See letters of local officials in Sokolov, Golos naroda, passim.

all possible voluntary societies such as that for promotion of radio and elimination of illiteracy. [27] He argued that his collective farm was falling apart because there was no accurate bookkeeping verification. He believed that his efforts as a newly appointed member of the auditing commission to check funds of his collective farm would save this collective farm from a complete breakdown. Again, for Poluektov his own vision of the problems which beset collective farms was the only guiding principle which had to be applied in solving them.

For some local officials the establishment of collective farms provided an opportunity to create new social bonds in the countryside and to essentially redesign gender relations in the countryside according to this utopian vision. Reports about people's political attitudes in the countryside collected by OGPU, the Department of state security, portrayed how local officials tried to implement their utopian ideas about the collective farm in reality. For example, a party member, M. P. Shesterov, advocated membership in a commune for three widows in a village in Riazan province in 1930. He told them: "Become members of a commune, you widows! You will have intimate relations three times a night."[28]

A desire to create immense entrepreneurial projects in the countryside demonstrates another dimension of the utopianism that embedded actions of local officials. An unpublished article in Krestianskaia Gazeta told a story of two consecutive chairmen of a collective farm who tried to create fantastic enterprises.[29] Markov, a chairman of a

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[27] Sokolov, Obshchestvo i vlast', 282-3.
[28] Viola, Riazanskaia derevnia v 1929-1930 gg, 241. This information was taken from special report #6/6 composed by Riazan''s provincial department OGPU and dated by February 20th, 1930.
[29] Sokolov, Obshchestvo i vlast', 254.

collective farm named in honor of Voroshilov in Moscow province, tried to implement a number of different economic projects - the production of maps for high school students, rugs for home and building a gigantic repository for produce and stockyard. The extent of Markov's commercial initiative is hard to underestimate: in order to produce maps, he wanted to raise funds for the enterprise which to date existed only in his imagination. In order to do so, he sent out representatives all throughout the Soviet Union, including the remote republics, and raised a significant sum of one million four hundred and eighty thousand rubles for the purpose of producing these maps. The map business, unfortunately, went wrong and was a complete failure. Markov did not get discouraged by this failure and launched a production of rugs. This undertaking again brought only losses to the collective farm. Members of this collected farm re-elected Markov, but his successor, chairman Gavrilenko, kept to the beaten path: he started producing color chalks and even printing templates for identification cards for members of professional unions and stuck to the production of maps. All these enterprises resulted in the waste of the collective farm's funds because of the considerable quality problems or theft of funds by those who were supposed to raise them. Finally, Markov and Gavrilenko were charged with abuses of power and put on trial.

When the state tried to impose its own vision of socialism by launching collectivization and when rural officials strongly disagreed with it, this clash of different visions could produce a disastrous denouement. In November 1929 the lives of two brothers Anikeev tragically ended - both of them committed a suicide in protest against forceful collectivization. Both were vested with power as rural Soviet's chairman and a

collective farm's chairman in the village Gorki Kiovskie, Moscow province. They refused to make their subordinates members of the collective farm in the short period of one month and were charged with the deliberate failure of the collectivization project.[30] Charged with wrecking, the brothers Anikeev were sentenced to a long-term imprisonment, but they decided to commit suicide in a vain hope to attract the attention of the higher authorities. The understanding of collectivization which Anikeev had was in tragic dissonance with that issued from the center. To create a collective farm in one month was for them to betray the idea of socialism and their own people. Although Solov'ev, as a Party plenipotentiary, was sent from Moscow to Gorki Kiovskie to examine this incident, he just filled out the formal report which seemed not to result in any persecution.

The development of the language of "people's leaders" represents efforts of local officials to find means of channeling their power during collectivization. The local officials were supposed to implement a broad range of social reforms in the countryside while at the same time there was an appalling scarcity of sources of power at the disposal of local officials. The language of people's leaders and originating from there an imaginative and utopian discourse about the extent of their power was the only means for local officials to channel their power in the countryside. This image of "people's leader" provided an opportunity for local officials to exercise their power in the countryside and to justify the means by which the power was exercised.

Collectivization enhanced this utopian understanding of the role of rural officials as

[30]A.G.Solov'ev, "Tetradi krasnogo professora," 159-161, Neizvestnaia Rossia. XX vek, vol. 4 (Moscow, 1994), 140-231.

people's leaders that re-defined the nature of collective farms according to their understanding of socialism. In doing this, they reinforced a discourse of rural officials as people's leaders who were independent from the state and served not the state, but people's interests broadly understood. The making of a utopia was for them an ultimate task that surpassed narrow definitions of professional responsibilities of a collective farm or Soviet's chairman. The trickle-down theory of social utopianism, implicitly present in many works which emphasize the dichotomy between the ideal plan of collectivization and its barbarous implementation in the countryside, is therefore apparently flawed, because the countryside matched the utopian project of the Soviet state with its own utopia.

Chapter 2.

Chairmen as viewed by Soviet peasants

The language of being leaders of the rural population that chairmen of collective farm invented had its repercussion among rank-and-file members of collective farms. The peasant who now bore the title of members of collective farms (*kolkhozniks*) closely watched the everyday life of local officials, which received immediate reflection in the security reports about opinions in the countryside. The peasants interpreted what was going on collective farms in the terms of their own utopianism, which, paradoxically, went against the utopian visions of local chairmen or their efforts to transform the countryside. The discourse about local officials as landowners or even a new *oprichnina*[31] that rank-and-file members of collective farms created demonstrates that the peasants had their own utopia which they attempted to put forward in their critique of the chairmen's actions.

The deviant behavior of local officials, according to these reports, occupied a dominant if not central place in peasant discourse. Peasants relentlessly criticized local officials for their failure to conform to basic administrative discipline, idleness, drunkenness and so on. By doing this, peasants, therefore, revealed their deep concern with a gap between sometimes gloomy realities of life in the *kolkhoz* and social and economic goals that the creation of collective farms was supposed to fulfill. Close examination of the way peasants criticized local officials suggests that peasants often built

[31] Ivan the Terrible, a czar of Moscovite Russia (1530-84, crowned in 1547), established a special unit of militant people (*oprichnina*) that stood above other structures of the state and even aristocratic networks and was subordinated only to the czar. Ivan the Terrible used this political force to fight against his real or, most of the time, imagined, enemies. Members of *oprichnina* were carrying out purges of Russian nobles and implemented the barbarous massacre of the inhabitants of Novgorod, a prosperous city in the North-West of Russia. The term *oprichnina* became associated with cruelty and violence later. See, for example, Ruslan Skrynnikov, Ivan Groznyi (Moscow, 1975).

their accusations on the shaky ground of imagination. It was sometimes the idleness of a chairman of a collective farm or his material well-being that were described in politically combustive terms. Therefore, the language that rank-and-file members of collective farms used to criticize local officials suggests that often peasants imposed an imaginary picture of what a collective farm should be on their chairmen.

Even before collectivization there were many references to the local officials in the countryside as brutal, unjust and selfish. Peasant letters to Krest'ianskaia Gazeta, for example, demonstrate a high degree of anxiety and dissatisfaction with the authoritarian style of leadership in the countryside that became common in these years. According to the author of a letter to Krest'ianskaia Gazeta, I. G. Shokhin, the rural authorities came to resemble the *oprichnina* and counterrevolution. Shokhin blamed rural officials "for destroying what Soviet power was building" ("*eto te zhe konttrevolutsionery - razrushiteli togo, chto iz sil vybivaias', stroit tsentral'naia vlast'*")[32] Another peasant, A.Grigor'ev, passionately condemned "a lack of Soviet power in the countryside." He wrote: "Actually, there is no Soviet power in the countryside, especially among peasants; everything goes the wrong way, not like the rulers write. [They write:] "we are building socialism, but in reality it is complete bureaucratism."[33] The peasant therefore did not acknowledge rural officials as representatives of central power. Moreover, he blamed them for failing to bring the social transformation to the countryside. An anonymous author of a letter to Krest'iansakaia Gazeta described a shortage of food that was in his (her) collective farm and put the blame for this on local officials: "the newspaper, ... do not take away our belief

[32] Sokolov, Golos naroda, 209.
[33] A letter is written by A.Grigor'ev on July 4th, 1928. Publ. in Sokolov, Golos naroda, 213.

that collective farms lead us to a better life, not to death and if we do not have enough bread, it is a responsibility of local authorities, but not Soviet power."[34] According to these letters, there was a considerable gap between what Soviet power brought into the countryside and what rural officials brought into the everyday reality of the Soviet village. Moreover, these letters show that the peasants had their own ideas about building the new life, and that they honestly believed in the social reorganization of the countryside. Interestingly enough, both authors used the language of social reorganization against local officials, who were allegedly to implement these ideas.

The extreme degree of alienation of local authorities from the peasantry reached its peak during the grain delivery crisis of 1929. In a letter written by a peasant to Krest'ianskaia Gazeta the methods which local authorities used to extract the extra grain from their neighbors are described. This peasant refused to fulfill the quotas issued by the local Soviet when they were increased by five times. Calling this peasant into the rural Soviet, local officials cursed and humiliated him after which this peasant began to ponder "who these people are: state criminals, or activists of grain delivery, or some gang of bandits."[35] Again, the peasants applied their understanding of what life should be to the actual people in charge and their actions, and the comparison was not in favor of the rural officials.

When in 1928 the local authorities were given freedom to impose an unlimited agricultural tax on the better-off households, volost and district tax commissions' actions

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[34] Sokolov, Obshchestvo i vlast', 39.

[35] The author, Il'sov, a peasant from Cheliabinsk's district, sent this letter to Pravda, before April 11th, 1929. Published in T. M. Vakhitova and V. A. Prokof'eva, eds., "Prokliatiia krest'ian padut na vashu golovu... Sekretnie obzori krest'ianskih pisem v gazetu "Pravda" v 1928-30 godakh," 176, Novyi Mir, 1993, 4:166-83.

spurred more pessimism among peasants. Antonov, the author of letter to Pravda, pessimistically viewed the greed of local authorities. "These abuses always will be unavoidable only because most of these agricultural taxes go to the local budget and, therefore, local officials at the local level are interested in extraction of funds." [36] The actions of local officials, therefore, were judged more harshly than those of central authorities.

Collectivization gave a powerful impetus to the formation of a language of social utopianism focused on local officials. Property that local officials possessed or gained access to was described in politically combustive terms. It was the material inequality between members of the collective farm and their chairman that undermined the idea of new relations in the Soviet countryside. One peasant bitterly claimed, for example, that in his collective farm " there is no order, everybody seeks only his own profit and the others cannot do anything whether they like it or not - if one can get away [with stealing], one can steal (*esli lovko, to i tashchi sebe*)."[37] In these words the bitter criticism of the practice of the rural officials appears as fundamentally different from the utopian ideal of mutual sharing. The fact that the lower rural authorities lived better than simple rural inhabitants provided the possibility for peasants closely to examine the relations of local

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[36] New laws on the imposition of taxes in the countryside were introduced in 1928. They did not specify an amount of tax that local authority could impose on households of peasants. Therefore, local officials (*volost* and district tax commissions) were granted an authority to define an exact amount of tax in each case that, according to the author of the letter, would result in numerous abuses of power. Vakhitova, ed. "Prokliatiia krest'ian padut na vashu golovu..." 176.

[37] All cited sources are from the Records of the Smolensk Oblast of the All-Union Communist Party of the Soviet Union, 1917-1941, Microfilm (Washington, DC, s. a.) Wkp 166, 16. The structure of the archive is described in the Guide to the records of the Smolensk oblast of the All-Union Communist Party of the Soviet Union, 1917-41 (Washington, 1980). For the history of the archive and the documents it contains see Patricia Grimsted, The Odyssey of the Smolensk Archive: Plundered Communist Records for the Service of Anti-communism (Pittsburgh, 1995), E. V. Kodin, "Smolenskii arkhiv" i amerikanskaia sovetologiia (Smolensk, 1998).

officials with the property of the collective farm and, in general, the suitability of their leaders for the building of socialism in the countryside. For a chairman of a collective farm was the only person in a village who enjoyed a relatively good standard of living. He had almost unlimited access to the collective farm's property and the better knowledge of the allocation of supplies, even though the information was only about the goods in the village shop. Probably, the specific nature of agricultural industry gave even more grounds to suspect that local officials were involved in the embezzlement of a collective farm's property. For example, as a security report on rumors and opinions in the countryside claimed, one collective farm's chairman embezzled twenty poods of wheat by sowing the field with trash instead of seeds.[38] The chairman of a collective farm in the Smolensk region was claimed to have sold the grain from the collective farm's reserve in a marketplace in the town of Krasnii.[39]

Rank-and-file members of collective farms gave a different meaning to the idleness of local officials and the inability of some of them to perform their basic administrative duties. The fact that chairmen of collective farms were doing nothing suddenly acquired a politically dangerous meaning in the context of security reports on rumors and opinions, for such information came together with information about anti-Soviet expressions among peasants. A peasant claimed that during the critical time of procurement the chairman of a collective farm and his counterpart from the village Soviet were fishing at a local lake after enjoying a deep sleep until noon.[40] Another report claimed that the chairman of the collective farm Path of Il'ich Gurov enjoyed playing the *balalaika* and hanging out with

[38] Ibid, 36
[39] Ibid, 452.
[40] Ibid, 276.

his wife in a house. [41] On the same day one of the poor peasants of this ill-fated collective farm, Pavel Erofeev, had given up his ploughing on the collective farm's field because "he could no longer do it since he had not eaten because of the lack of food."[42] After being fired, ex-chairman Gurov drank himself into oblivion with his fellows – chairman of the rural soviet and the head of collective farm - and stirred up the village's inhabitants by riding a stallion at midnight.[43] These reports indicate that peasants expected adherence to basic norms of organization from the local officials.

The bad organization of labor in the *kolkhoz* was a focus of constant criticism for peasants who very often blamed chairmen of collective farms for their inability to run agricultural routines efficiently. For example, a peasant blamed the chairman of his collective farm Il'ia Zaretskii for failures to manage the functioning of the farm that threatened the welfare of all members.[44] According to this report, Zaretskii was a rude person, who was communicating with their subordinates only with obscenities. He was not able to explain anything and answer their questions. The author of a report compared Zaretskii with a former chairman of the board in this *kolkoz*, Martusov, who could give clear instructions to members of this collective farm ("*ob'iasnit vse kak chelovek*") and because of this, a peasant argued, before Zaretskii the *kolkhoz* ran well. The inability of chairmen to give clear instructions to *kolkhozniks* challenged the success of collective farms in general in peasants' view. In some collective farms, the peasants did not know the plan for sowing until the middle of May because of the chairman, which was already very

[41] Ibid, 484
[42] Ibid.
[43] Ibid, 692.
[44] Ibid, 31-2.

late considering the climate of the Smolensk region.[45] Peasants had to begin an individual sowing campaign despite the fact that it went against the bylaws. In a village Zavidovki and another village of Samsonsk's rural soviet peasants did not know the amount of delivery quotas on wheat as late as the end of August because local officials did not tell them.[46] Considering the fact that all of these accusations only appeared because the peasants were voicing their concern, their discontent shows the very important phenomenon. The peasants were apparently aware of the ideal organization which they would like to see in the countryside, and attempted to inform the world of the irregularities.

Peasants were concerned with the past of their leaders and believed it could have a significant impact on the future of a *kolkhoz*. When Grigorii Osipenkov, a former criminal, was sent by regional authorities to head a collective farm "Joint Labor," peasants were appalled by the outlaw character of their new leader. According to the report, peasants believed Osipenkov was a bandit who pillaged the Smolensk province in the early 1920s.[47] "Why did they send a bandit (*"opredelennogo bandita"*) to our *kolkhoz* who was going completely to ruin it?" Therefore, peasants of "Joint Labor" believed that the leadership had to adhere to the basic norms of social behavior to be critical for the *kolkhoz* success.

A lack of concern for the property of collective farms that some chairmen had also greatly bothered peasants. Political reports are full of information about local leaders who appeared to be involved in the destruction of the *kolkhoz's* property, even though this was often just due to the lack of knowledge of agriculture and peasant routines. For example,

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[45] Ibid, 330, 216
[46] Ibid, 565.
[47] Ibid, 596.

a chairman of a collective farm named after the Second Bolshevik Spring was reported to have no interest and no skills for running this collective farm. As a result, there was a lack of management in this *kolkhoz* ("*v kolkoze tsarit polnaia beskhoziaistvennost'*"). To substantiate this charge, the peasants showed an example of a rush decision that this chairman made: he ordered the dismantling of a recently bought woodshed for firewood.[48] Peasants of Tolstikovo rural Soviet believed that the actions of their leaders caused damage to the property of the *kolkhoz*. The chairman of Tolstikovo rural Soviet relocated the beehives from one village to another (both of them were in the same collective farm) and because of this relocation, peasants believed, bees died.[49] Mismanagement of the collective farm's property that some local officials rendered often wrecked peasants' best intentions to support the most distinguished projects, such as, for example, the creation of the advanced aircraft industry in the Soviet Union. For example, peasants of a village in Smolensk province sew a strip of land in order to sell the harvest from this strip in autumn and to raise funds for *Osoviakhim*, the Association for Support of the Soviet Aircraft Industry. However, the chairman of a collective farm sold off the harvest from the strip of land to a peasant and, thus, peasants missed an opportunity to raise funds for their project.[50] The peasants, therefore, believed that management skills were critical for the reorganization of the countryside, and they bitterly contested those in charge who were unable to perform as they saw necessary.

Chairmen of collective farms, as peasants told in the reports, failed to organize peasant work better and efficiently and, thus, undermined the meaning of a collective farm

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[48] Ibid, 33.
[49] Ibid, 545.
[50] Ibid, 690.

as a path to a better future. There was a considerable gap between an emphasis on the scientific organization of labor that collectivization was supposed to bring about and the actual situation in the countryside. A bookkeeper of Voloedovsk rural soviet, Kavliuchenko, appeared to be very disappointed with a lack of agricultural knowledge in his village.[51] "They do not carry out crop rotation, they do not consult the rules of agronomy. Where has the time gone when the magazine "Self-guide to agronomy" (Sam sebe agronom) actually taught people how to run agriculture?" Kavlyuchenko, therefore, while supporting innovations that science was bringing to the countryside, was deeply concerned that in his collective farm the peasant did not acquire, but, on the contrary, lost the ability to incorporate the achievements of agronomy in everyday practice. Another peasant was bothered by the fact that in his *kolkhoz* sowing was performed without plough blades (*nozhi*), which diminished a chance for a reasonable harvest.[52] A similar criticism of the inability to incorporate peasants' experience in managing the land appeared in words of Miron Sergeenkov, a peasant of the "Red Banner" collective farm.[53] He argued that the extensive sowing campaign, which the authorities of his district undertook, could only bring disastrous results. "If our leaders would not issue us such plans, but were sensitive to the peasant experience, the life would be better. For we sow so much, but there was not and would not be any grain." Therefore, the appalling realities of bad planning and inability to bring the best of agronomy or management into collective farms contrasted with the rhetoric of reorganizing the countryside, which the peasants eagerly accepted.

Therefore, the peasants used a specific language describing the actions of local

[51] Ibid, 459.
[52] Ibid, 457.
[53] Ibid, 659.

leaders. Peasants believed that the bad management of their chairmen and their ignorance of agronomy and basic skills of dealing with the land significantly undermined the ideas that brought collective farms into existence. They did not see the realization of promises that collectivization brought to the countryside and they apparently believed that sometimes it was local officials who negatively affected life in the *kolkhoz* by their inability to be up to demands that life in the collective farm posed. Collective farm members thus judged the activity of local leaders according to explicit and implicit standards and expectations to which local leaders were not always able to live up. The existence of a hidden context in which the actions of local officials were described suggests, therefore, an existence of a system of representations about how life in a collective farm should run and how social relations after collectivization should be re-fashioned. The examination of the language that peasants used to describe local officials reveals this context. The fact that peasants were often constructing identities of rural officials as landowners or even class enemies suggests that, according to peasants, local leaders played an ambiguous role in the transformation of the countryside.

Although peasants branded local officials "landowners" or "class enemies" with a great deal of persistence, these terms were deliberately misrepresenting the actions of local officials. In reality, rural officials had only a very slim chance to have connections with class enemies or act as real gentry landlords. For example, Minchenkov, a peasant in Smolensk region, claimed that while the farm's chairman Gurov favored his class allies (*kulaks*), he deliberately ignored the needs of poor and middle peasants. [54] Minchenkov,

[54] Ibid, 120-22.

however, mentioned that Gurov used his power to support his relatives – the chairman distributed the meat of slaughtered animals only among his relatives. Two conflicting interpretations contradicted each other in Minchenkov's report: first, Minchenkov claimed Gurov supported his relatives and then, he argued Gurov favored his class allies.[55] Therefore, Minchenkov gave political connotations to Gurov's nepotism, and used class terms to describe this episode, which had nothing to do with class struggle in the countryside. The story continued when Gurov, who evidently knew who was the author of the report, threatened to expel Minchenkov from the collective farm. During one of brawls Minchenkov attempted to blackmail Gurov with politically charged language when he said, according to an informer: "Should I take back my cow and horse [from collective farm's common shed] and return to being independent?" Gurov arrogantly missed the political connotations of this perspective: "Take back your cow and horse and go to hell, because for us your horse and cow are nothing."[56] Apparently, Minchenkov was better at mastering the dominant discourse of the Soviet state, because he skillfully shaped their argument in terms of building or destroying the collective farm.

In order to denounce their local officials, peasants used the terminology of serfdom and compared a chairman with a landowner (*pomeshchik)*. For example, women from collective farm "Force" said about their authorities: "We were united with Tolstikovo collective farm and they now feed off us, before we had only one landowner, and now there are three. Chairman of the rural Soviet, chairman of the collective farm and steward all boss around, sell our bread on the market, while we have to make do without bread."[57]

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[55] Ibid, 438.
[56] Ibid.
[57] Ibid, 545.

Peasants of the "Red Banner" farm were talking among each other that they would better leave a collective farm in the near future because, they said, "a collective farm is a second edition of the serfdom: we are working day and night, but we are starving because of such leaders."[58] Although peasants of the "Red Banner," whose opinion the report gave, might refer to the highest political elite, they most likely referred to their local officials in the first place. The beginning of this report described a chairman who refused to make feeding troughs for pigs in this *kolkhoz*, which threatened the stock and hence the welfare of the peasants. A chairman of a collective farm "*Kommunar*" Ivanov was so rude with the members of the collective farm that the latter decided to give him a lesson.[59] Peasants drew a picture in which they represented him as a general of czar's army in the *kolkhoz's* wall newspaper. Such an image invoked associations with the insolence, the arbitrariness and dull wit that was attributed to highest officials of the recently gone regime. Therefore, peasants clearly saw political connotations of the reorganization of the countryside, which was taking place in Soviet Russia, and masterfully exploited the language of revolution and social transformation towards the ends of running usual peasant business.

The term "landlord" (*pomeshchik*), which had pejorative connotations associated with the czarist regime, and which peasants applied to local officials as an expression of the heaviest criticism, suggests that rural inhabitants developed a system of explicit and implicit representations about collectivization and a fair way to organize life in a *kolkhoz*. The emergence of a discourse of "landlords," "*oprichnina*," or "czarist generals" suggests that the past represented an absolutely unacceptable social order in the countryside that

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[58] Ibid, 657.

[59] Sokolov, Obshchestvo i vlast', 33. This information was taken from the security report on political attitudes written on September 26, 1930.

actions of some local officials seemed to revive in collective farms. The appalling discrepancy between peasants' vision of collectivization and abuses of power in which many local officials were involved, resulted in the creation of the language of social discontent focused on local officials. The peasants' discourse that branded local officials as gentry landlords, therefore, often indicated the dissatisfaction with the results of collectivization of the countryside.

Such a language, prevalent in the countryside at the time of collectivization, emphasized the disconnect between two important discourses, created by the peasants and some of their kind that managed to get into positions of local authority. Promotion to the duty of a chairman seemed to have undermined even the deepest connection between the former peasant and now a local official and his fellow villagers. Moreover, even though both of these two strata seems to have been speaking the same language, the greater part of which was based on the vocabulary of collectivization and reorganization of social structures, and counterposing the new soviet village to its czarist past, the chairmen and the peasants were effectively using it against each other.

Chapter 3.

Negotiating the countryside? Local officials in the discourse of the central elites

The different discourses about the power of local officials which they elaborated and which peasants reinterpreted were a response to the re-organization and re-distribution of power through the transformation of institutions and values that collectivization of the Soviet countryside in the 1930s represented. Both discourses focused on the problem of transforming the countryside, betterment of peasant life and increasing of peasant life, but approached this task from different angles. The conflict, however, was not the only one in the countryside, for the Soviet political elites were ready to forge a new language describing the social change. The two discourses of the countryside, which reinterpreted Russia's recent revolutionary experience, were at considerable odds with the new rhetoric, developed by the party elite, bureaucrats, and Soviet writers. This new rhetoric developed a negatively charged representation of local leaders as people virtually incapable to bring changes in the countryside.

The role of local officials in the relations between the state and the society was discussed in a recent work on collectivization by Sheila Fitzpatrick. One of the important concepts in this study was of rural officials as negotiators and middlemen between the state and the society in the countryside. According to Fitzpatrick's views,

> "one of the *kolkhoz* chairman's main functions was to act as broker between the village and the *raion* authorities. To play this role successfully, he needed acceptance on both sides: If the village "elected" him, he needed *raion* approval; if the *raion* "appointed" him, he need the approval of the village. This was not fundamentally different from the situation on Prince Gagarin's Manilovo estate a century earlier, where the serf manager (*burmistr*) was "elected by and from the local peasants and approved by Gagarin." [60]

[60] Fitzpatrick, Stalin's Peasants, 194.

This view became popular among scholars and in fact oversimplified, if not vulgarized, the complexity of social identities of rural officials and the nature of relations between state and its representatives in the countryside. Representing rural officials in a position of middlemen opened a number of enticing yet doubtful opportunities for scholars to present the process of running the Soviet village after collectivization as a process lubricated by the presence of a negotiating agent - the lower rural authorities. According to this interpretation, the Soviet peasantry acquired an ally in a form of the rural authorities. At the same time, this interpretation suggested that the state was willing to give much of its agency to local officials.

A closer look at the documents reveals that the nature of interactions between the central party elites and local officials was much more complex than the concept of negotiation suggests. As chapters one and two have just shown, even though rural officials and peasants accepted the language of social transformation, which collectivization brought, they effectively used it against each other, thus undermining the possibility of negotiating, let alone agreement.

Moreover, if the local officials and the peasants were to find a common language, the immediate problem waited for the chairmen and other local officials on the other side of the hierarchical ladder. For the local party elites and other agents of the state, such as police, security service, and local representatives of the government departments, did not allow the local authorities, who actually interacted with the peasants, to accept the terminology of negotiation. Efforts to stand up for peasants and to correct norms were considered as a politically dangerous action, which could be immediately dubbed "an

opportunistic disregard of government food procurements," "an anti-Party and non-Bolshevik action,"[61] or a "counterrevolutionary activity." Fulfilling procurement norms was considered not an economic activity, but a political action, namely, the realization of the directive of the Party. For example, Lazar Kaganovich, a highly placed Party secretary, clearly articulated the state's approach towards the implementation of planned quotas by collective farmers.

> "The most important questions around which the re-education of the collective farmers must be centered, are, firstly, the struggle for a careful attitude towards public socialist property; secondly, punctual and unquestioning fulfillment by the collective farms, collective farmers and Soviet farms of all their obligations to the Soviet state; and, thirdly, the correct organization of labour, labour discipline..."[62]

Obviously, even the highly placed Soviet officials had no authority to adjust the directive of CC VKP(b). For example, the chairman of the nominal Soviet government of the RSFSR,[63] S. I. Syrtsov (1893-1937), argued against the exaggerated quotas and arbitrary planning and questioned the necessity to speed up collectivization and dekulakization.[64] He delivered a speech on this issue during the plenary meeting of Moscow Party cell in September 7, 1930. Stalin and other members of the political elite labeled his speech as an anti-Party action. Several months later, on November 4th, Syrtsov was fired from the Politburo and the People Commissars' Soviet. His died in the Great Purges in 1937.

Local officials were in a much worse situation. What any efforts to adjust or

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[61] Wkp. 220, 137.
[62] L.Kaganovich, "Political Departments in M.T.S.and Soviet Farms. Report delivered at the Joint Plenum of the Central Committee and Central Control Commission of the C.P.S.U., January 10, 1933," 261, From the First to the Second Five-Year Plan (s.l., s.d.) 209-77.
[63] Sovet Narodnykh Komissarov RSFSR.
[64] See a detailed description of this incident in Solov'ev, "Tetradi krasnogo professora," 164-7.

negotiate state procurement quotas on a local level brought might be illustrated by the fate of Tolchanova, a candidate for membership in the Tumanovo regional Party committee. In the committee meeting Tolchanova said: "Collective farms are overburdened by the sowing of flax, members of collective farms are unable to gather the harvest..."[65] Her report was considered an anti-Party action and in three months she was fired from her position in the Tumanovo regional party cell. Later, she was transferred to the lower job of being responsible for cultural activities in a remote turf production settlement. Such a demotion meant that Tolchanova lost any possibility to play a significant role in party affairs in this area.[66] The attempt at open negotiation led Tolchanova to dismissal.

Sometimes the plans which the central party elites attempted to impose on the countryside were adjusted. However, it is interesting to look at the language which the rural officials were ready to use in such situations. The chairman of the farm "Unification," Grigorii Borisenkov, refused to fulfill the sowing plan issued by the rural Soviet. He argued that he did not have enough seeds to sow the land.[67] A chairman of the Voloedovskii rural Soviet Fedor Evseev claimed that the planned quotas for a collective farm named after Kalinin were chosen out of thin air because there was no efficient amount of land to sow a planned amount of spring wheat.[68] Loginov, a chairman of a collective farm "Budennyi," argued that there were not enough human resources on his farm to implement planned quotas of gathering the harvest. Probably in fear of possible punishment for the failure to gather the harvest, Loginov argued that because only four

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[65] Wkp. 86, 147.
[66] Ibid, 226.
[67] Ibid 166, 156.
[68] Ibid, 66.

men and twelve women were members of the collective farm, it would impossible to harvest fifty-three hectares of winter wheat, forty hectares of rye and to mow thirty hectares of land that was the planned quota for this collective farm.[69] He demanded the unification of the collective farm with another farm several times, but the local union of collective farms did not satisfy his request. Therefore, when the adjustment of plans which the central party elites attempted to impose on the countryside took place, it was put in the language of immediate unavailability of resources. In other words, the peasant idea of running agriculture, the disregard for which was equal to destruction in peasant eyes, took hold as the major reason for such occasions.

Rural authorities were aware that failure to deliver planned amounts most likely led to removal from both the office and the party as well as further purges.[70] For example, a collective farm chairman, Moriakov, ordered to sow an area of twenty-eight hectares, even though the plan required forty hectares. At the same time he knew that his refusal to fulfill the spring sowing plan could result in his arrest. "It is better if they bring us to the court now because it makes no difference when we will be brought to the court [in the autumn or spring]."[71] Therefore, his action was more an act of desperation than a deliberate attempt at negotiation.

A much more common attitude towards the delivery quotas on the local level appeared in one letter from the chairman of Toropetsk's regional executive committee, Smorodin. He reported that the fulfillment of norms was achieved only for three reasons:

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[69] Ibid, 476.

[70] See on the link between purges from the Party and political repressions Vladimir Izmozik, Glaza i ushi rezhima. Gosudarstvennii politicheskii kontrol' za naseleniem Sovetskoi Rossii v 1918-1928 godakh (Saint-Petersburg, 1995) 115.

[71] Wkp. 166, 245.

the sowing of out-of-plan spring rye, plowing of virgin soil and influx of individual farmers. Moreover, the norms issued by the Regional Administration of Tractors included overall plowing area of collective farms and even areas where the houses of peasants were located instead of the plowing area for a particular crop. However, he did not mention any possibility to change norms (even obviously mistaken ones) and instead proposed to resort to the further expansion of the activity of the MTS (Machine-Tractor Stations) and further collectivization.

Therefore, rural officials did not have the possibility to change delivery quotas by means of negotiating with the state and did not use the terminology of negotiation. When they did, as in the case of Tolchanova, punishment came immediately. It was impossible to negotiate quotas for they started to serve as a measure of success in the transformation of the countryside. Even though these quotas were impossible to fulfil in many cases, the inability of local officials to implement them resulted in their denunciation and accusations that they were unable to build socialism in the countryside.

The refusal to negotiate with local officials was an immediate result of the changing language that the party elites were ready to introduce into their relationship with the countryside. They no longer relied on local officials as a force in the countryside that would be able to respond to the challenges of social reorganization. The party elites, although still emphasizing social tensions in the countryside, which in party rhetoric was one of the major inspirations for launching collectivization, gradually imposed the strict language of administrative hierarchy even on its willing allies in the countryside. The resolutions of the plenary meeting of the party bureaucracy in January 1933 suggested a

change in the nature of relations between the countryside and the Soviet power. The rhetoric of class war in the countryside, which changed its meaning and was eventually appropriated by different social groups of rural society, began to coexist with the discourse about the countryside as an appendix of the central administrative apparatus. The conflict was now between the city and the countryside rather than between various political and social forces within the countryside. While the city was imagined as a "modern" place, the village became homogenized in the imagination of political elite as backward. For example, Lazar Kaganovich, a highly-placed Party official, argued:

> "..it would be ridiculous to expect all these numerous new large-scale entreprises [newly established collective farms] in the field of agriculture, created in a culturally and technically backward countryside, to become at once, in one year, exemplary and highly profitable undertakings. This obviously requires time. It requires the untiring, patient, tedious work of consolidating the collective and Soviet farms *organizationally*, of expelling the pernicious elements from these farms, of carefully selecting and rearing new, tested Bolshevik cadres before the collective and Soviet farms can really become exemplary. And undoubtedly they will become exemplary, just as many of our factories and mills that in 1920-21 were uncoordinated and poorly organized have since become prototypes."[72]

The rhetoric of joining of villages to cities (*smychka*) in terms of mechanization of labor processes, material well-being and intellectual development, thus implied a changing nature of social transformation in the rhetoric of the political elite.

One of the major indications of a changing vision of social transformation was the beginning of several campaigns to bring urban dwellers into the countryside which the state launched in 1932. These campaigns revealed a set of prejudices that the state had towards local officials, for these crusades challenged local officials. The first one was a

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[72] L.Kaganovich, "Aims and Tasks of the Political Departments of the Machine and Tractor Stations and of the Soviet farms," 460-1, From the First to the Second Five-Year Plan (s.l., s.d.) 450-472.

campaign to bring urban dwellers, also dubbed the 25,000-ers because of their number, to the countryside. While describing local officials as backward or selfish, the state contrasted them with an image of educated and energetic urban workers who were devoted to the idea of social transformation of the Soviet countryside. However, urban newcomers also proved to have a different set of ideas about the best way to run collective farms and came to question the possibility to implement planned quotas. Some Leningrad residents were shocked by the coercion that became a common means to squeeze more agricultural products from peasants and instead came to defend the peasantry.[73] Yet again, the 25,000-ers' failure to achieve the planned norms was considered their failure to transform the countryside and as a result, the state ceased working-class mobilization during the drive of 25,000-ers after less than one year of its existence.

The establishment of Machine-Tractor Stations (MTS), a state enterprise to ensure the mechanization of the countryside, became the second campaign that also considerably changed the nature of leadership in the countryside. These stations had to provide sufficient equipment - tractors, mostly - for collective farms in exchange for agricultural products that the staff from the MTS obtained from a collective farm. The director of political department of MTS was granted power that greatly exceeded that of local officials - for example, he did not have to submit to local authorities on the level of *raion*, but only to the head to the Party cell in a province. However, chiefs of MTS's political departments came to argue against state procurement norms because they were impossible to implement.[74]

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[73] Viola, Best Sons, 109-12.
[74] Alec Nove, An Economic History of the USSR (Harmondsworth, 1982) 182.

This campaign indicated another development in the understanding of the social transformation of the countryside that the state developed. Bringing machinery to the countryside became one of the most significant criteria for measuring the success of building highly-profitable collective farms. These MTS were described as the vanguard of the countryside. For example, Yakovlev, the Commissar of Agriculture, argued that MTS became a lever for the reorganization of agriculture along socialist lines.[75] This understanding of MTS as a leading force of social transformation created a tension between the staff of the stations and local administration. For example, according to the chairman of the collective farm "Il'ich" Khalistov, a member of Gorsk's MTS emphasized that they, the staff of the machinery and tractor station, were the real captains of modernization. Khalistov wrote: "When members of collective farms blamed the staff of Gorsk's MTS for the lack of tractors, the latter responded that tractors were being repaired. In the meantime, [MTS's authority said] members of collective farm should plow with horses and sow by hand and pull out an old wooden plow from a museum and start to rely on it."[76] Apparently, the representatives and staff of the MTS did not consider the peasant concerns important, and considered themselves to represent the momentum of social transformation in the countryside.

Therefore, the experiments with the fashioning of rural officials in the countryside that the party elites launched reflected a changing representation about the nature of collective farms. The political elite wrote off local officials as people who could not implement the critical changes in the countryside – the changes for which the party

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[75] Y.Yakovlev, "Consolidating Collective Farms." 343, From the First to the Second Five-Year Plan, 277-346.
[76] Sokolov, Obshchestvo i vlast', 250-51.

appealed to the 25,000-ers and resorted to a campaign of purges against local officials. Also, the party promoted the mechanization of the countryside as a universal means to transform the village, and intensified the campaign of establishing MTS in villages. These two narratives – one of backward local officials who were an obstacle to build efficient collective farms and embodied the peasants' inability to accept change, and another of the mechanization of villages as a corollary to its urbanization, - were closely interwoven. They complemented each other and revealed the dilemmas that the political elite faced in ruling the countryside.

A novel by Nikolai Brykin Iron Mamai, written in 1934, demonstrates the close links between these two narratives.[77] Its author was a part of the political establishment who successfully matched the career of a party member and that of a writer - an "engineer of human souls" in contemporary parlance. From 1917 Brykin served the new political order: he set up partisan detachments in Pskov and Tver' provinces in February 1918, and also was the military commissar of the Velikie Luki region. Finally, in 1929 he became a chief of the Union of Peasant Writers in Leningrad. In his works, Brykin created a glorious picture of bringing tractors and building MTS in the countryside that literally turned life in villages upside down. It was the staff of MTS that finally transformed life in his village and made it socialist. At the same time, Nikolai Brykin showed rural officials who served in the collective farms as lazy people that were only pretending to work. As portrayed in the novel, the chairman of a rural Soviet was spending his time in drinking parties and used to come to the workplace only when he wanted to do so. When urban dwellers organized

[77] Nikolai Brykin, Zemlia v plenu. Stal'noi Mamai (Leningrad, 1969)

MTS in this village, they even did not bother to meet with this chairman and acted on their own.

Many novels of 1930s while exploring the impact of modernization in the villages portrayed local officials as people not suitable for modernization. In the novel Virgin Soil Upturned by Mikhail Sholokhov, who was extremely influential on the formation of ideals and practices of the Soviet literature of the 1930's, the author created an image of Makar Nagul'nyi. He was a peasant-activist who was a whole-hearted supporter of collectivization, but whose extremism and lack of understanding of the complexity of the social fabric only alienated peasants from the idea of becoming *kolkhozniks*.[78] Sholokhov contrasted the image of Nagul'nyi with that of Davydov. Davydov, a 25,000-er and former Petrograd worker, had to correct numerous errors committed by Nagul'nyi.

Not every writer, however, while denouncing local officials as narrow-minded and extremist people, still shared sympathy for them, as Sholokhov did. Some works created a grotesque image of local authorities in the countryside. Zaretskii, a writer, created an image of extremist builders of a collective farm in his novel Viaz'mo in 1932.[79] The creators of a collective farm masked their egoistic aims behind their eagerness to subscribe everybody to a collective farm. Two works, Orders of Taltanbai and Ulbosyn by a Kazakh writer, Beimbet Mailin, portrayed chairmen of collective farms as pseudo-activists who, while driving people into a collective farm, were seeking egoistic and selfish goals and damaged the reorganization of the countryside. According to Mailin's novel Ulbosyn, chairmen initiated the imposition of immense taxation on peasants and spread the rumors

[78] Mikhail Sholokhov, Virgin Soil Upturned (Moscow, 1984).
[79] Georgii Lomidze, Leonid Timofeev, eds. Istoriia sovetskoi mnogonatsional'noi literatury, vol. 2 (Moscow 1970-1974).

that all women will become the collective property of collective farm in the future. In the play "The Wedding" by a Georgian writer Sabit Rakhman, the chairman of a collective farm Kerimov could not stand criticism. The writer portrayed chairman Kerimov as a leader with total lack of concern for the affairs of his collective farm. Kerimov surrounded himself with people who, while currying favor with him, were involved in the embezzlement of funds from this collective farm. Kerimov was covering up his sycophants until rank-and-file members of this collective farm exposed embezzlers and Kerimov.

The Russian writer, Andrei Platonov, harshly criticized this party-sponsored vision of mechanization as the only force that was able to transform the agriculture into an advanced modern industry. He demonstrated what could happen in the countryside if the utopian projects brought from the city were implemented there. In his novel Iuvenil'noe more, Platonov demonstrated the chaos that the fascination with technical aspects of collectivization and total disregard for its human dimension might create in the countryside. Platonov's character, a recently graduated engineer and a former driver, locksmith and watchmaker Nikolai Vermo, came from Leningrad to a fictitious farm "Parents' Courtyards" that was located in steppe regions of the Soviet Union. He wanted to resolve the problem of feeding livestock, which suffered from a lack of water in this farm together with Nadezhda Bostalaeva, the Soviet farm's chairwoman.[80] Vermo wanted to resolve this problem once and for all and began to work on an immense utopian project of extracting water from the core of the earth. The engineer put forward a project of reaching underground seas that might rest deep inside the earth. While Nadezhda went to

[80] Platonov, Yuvenil'noe more. See this work translated in French Mer De Jouvence (Paris, 1990).

the city to get supplies for this project, Vermo came up with a new idea to build a tremendous tower that would serve as a gigantic slaughterhouse for livestock and would save hundreds of tons of meat because it would eliminate stocks' weight loss during transportation to the city. In order to obtain building materials and to construct this tower, Vermo completely dismantled this farm. When Nadezhda Bostalaeva came back from the city, there was no farm as such - but only a surrealistic tower stripped of peasants' property.

Therefore, the discourse about local officials that the state elaborated was a reflection of changes in the understanding of objectives in the transformation of the countryside. The portraying of local officials as backward people who hindered the transformation of the countryside became a necessary part of the narrative of transformation of the Soviet countryside into socialist and technically advanced. This narrative was accompanied by glorification of the mechanization of the countryside. The emphasis on bringing machines to transform the countryside was a hidden challenge to local officials, whom the party elites now presented as not being able to live up to the demands articulated by the state towards the countryside. The image of local officials which this narrative emphasized, therefore, demonstrates the disconnect that existed between the village and the cities in their approaches to the transformation of the Soviet countryside.

Conclusion

In understanding the challenges presented by the social transformation and reorganization of the countryside local officials occupy a central place. The emergence of a discourse of people's leaders, therefore, illustrates the complexity of the transformation of power relations in Soviet Russia during collectivization. Power did not exist as a privilege of a particular social group for, as the case of local officials demonstrates, the power of local officials was contested, questioned, and challenged from above and from below. Moreover, the challenges to local authorities were put in the same language as that of the representatives who were trying to use it in the reorganization of the village.

A discourse of charismatic leaders that chairmen of collective farms created about themselves reveals that the language of people's leaders served as the dominant means for channeling their authority in the countryside. This discourse suggests that local officials, while internalizing the dominant revolutionary rhetoric, significantly re-defined it and matched the state's representation with its own utopia. Peasants, in their turn, re-defined the meaning of the narrative of charismatic leaders. The rural population matched the utopia of the rural officials with the set of values it expected them to have. In many ways the peasants had a utopian vision too, and they did not hesitate to let everybody know of it. It was reorganization of the countryside that local officials, according to peasants, hindered by their abuses of power. The emergence of a discourse of "landlords" about local officials, therefore, served as an indication of peasants' dissatisfaction with the results of the reorganization of the countryside.

The vision of local officials served as a barometer of changes that the political elite

was undergoing in elaborating its policy of modernization of the countryside. Taking the implementation of planned quotas as a criterion of the success of building socialism in the countryside, the political elite refused to be engaged in negotiation with local officials and, therefore, did not invest local officials with the function of a link between the state and society. This failure to use local officials as a channel between the center and periphery demonstrated serious disconnect between the state and society. Local officials, peasants, and the state each developed their own representation and discourse about the reorganization of the countryside. The creation of a discourse about rural officials as backward and unsuitable for implementation of changes in the countryside indicated an important turn in the understanding of collectivization elaborated by the state: now it emphasized the mechanization of the countryside brought from the city.

Therefore, although both local officials and Soviet peasants spoke in the same language, born in the tribulations of the Russian Revolution, they applied it against each other. Such a situation, I believe, was among the main reasons for the political elite in Moscow to reconsider the politics of reorganization of the countryside. This in turn resulted in the development of a new language of collectivization, which was based on strict hierarchical controls and the mechanization of the countryside.

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