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Stalinist Repression, Modernity, and the Social Engineering Argument

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Throughout history, rulers have attempted to create pure communities, or remake subjects or citizens in some preconceived vision of a perfect, or at least a better, society. Some have argued that this is a peculiarly modern phenomenon, originating in the ideas of 18th-century European philosophers.[1] Whether this is true or not may be disputed. What is distinctive about 19th- and 20th-century history is the array of social, political, statistical, and administrative technologies that governments have employed to try to remake their populations, and to do so in a scientific way.[2] Whether through policies that offer incentives or through methods of outright coercion, whether through welfare programmes and rehabilitation, or removal and physical extermination, modern states have accelerated the tempo and the scope of social intervention and reconstruction. The organizing effects of the First World War gave impetus to these trends in all European and transatlantic countries, regardless of the ideological orientation of their governments. The power and ability of the state to intervene in and to remake society grew enormously, especially, if not exclusively, in the 20th century.[3]

[1] For three recent and articulate statements of modernity as social improvement and state interventionism, see Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Ithaca, NY, 1991); Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Stanford, 1990); and James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition have Failed* (New Haven, 1998). Giddens takes a more catholic view of modernity than that found in the cautionary tales told by Bauman and Scott. For a definition of modernity as state interventionism in the Soviet context see, especially, David Hoffmann, 'European Modernity and Soviet Socialism', in David Hoffmann and Yanni Kotsonis, *Russian Modernity: Politics, Knowledge, Practices* (New York, 2000), 245–61; Stephan Kotkin, 'Modern Times: The Soviet Union and the Interwar Conjuncture', *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 2, no. 2 (2001), 111–64. For counter-arguments, see Terry Martin, 'Modernization or Neo-Traditionalism? Ascribed Nationality and Soviet Primordialism', in Shiela Fitzpatrick, ed., *Stalinism: New Directions* (London, 2000), 348–67; Jörg Baberowski, ed., *Moderne Zeiten? Krieg, Revolution und Gewalt im 20. Jahrhundert* (Bonn, 2006); Baberowski, 'Zivilisation der Gewalt. Die kulturellen Ursprünge des Stalinismus', *Historische Zeitschrift* 281 (2005), 59–102. For a neutral reading, see my 'Modernity and Backwardness on the Soviet Frontier: Western Siberia during the 1930s', in Donald Raleigh, ed., *Provincial Landscapes: Local Dimensions of Soviet Power, 1917–1953* (Pittsburgh, 2001), 194–216.

[2] Hoffmann emphasizes the systematic, rational origins of modern kinds of social engineering.

[3] In addition to the works cited above, see also Anthony Giddens, *The Nation-State and Violence* (Cambridge, 1985); Bernd Weisbrod, 'Military Violence and Male Fundamentalism: Ernst Juenger's Contribution to the Conservative Revolution', *History Workshop Journal* 49 (Spring 2000), 69–94;

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Nowhere were these trends more pronounced than in the Russian empire and its successor state, the Soviet Union. There, just at the end of the First World War, a government took power whose leaders were inspired by a revolutionary and modernizing ideology of transformation, an anti-liberal and collectivist ideology, which was put into practice in the reconstructed remains of an empire that already had a strong state tradition. From the beginning of the regime, Soviet officials used the full mobilizing power and repressive machinery of the state to try to engineer a perfect socialist society. As Marxist revolutionaries, the new Bolshevik government leaders used social class as the criterion of repression and privilege. In this new communist society, the working classes, and segments of the population close to the working classes, were good. Bourgeois and propertied classes were bad. Political leaders were obsessed with ways of identifying socially 'near' and socially 'alien' populations. They were determined to raise the former and repress or exterminate the latter.[4]

Leaders of the Soviet state employed many means to repress what they regarded as alien or hostile segments of the Soviet population—from policies of social, economic, and political discrimination, to deportation or exile, to repression through incarceration and outright murder. During the 1930s, policies of repression, especially police repression, broadened and reached unprecedented levels during the dictatorial regime of Joseph Stalin, the General Secretary of the ruling Communist Party. Police arrested, imprisoned, deported, killed, expelled, or in some manner coercively discriminated against millions of people in this period. Traditional histories explain this phenomenon as the consequence of Stalin's policies of political repression. There is no doubt that political repression intensified under Stalin's style of personal despotism, but fixation on political forms of repression misses

Michael Geyer, 'The Militarisation of Europe, 1914–1945', in John Gillis, ed., *The Militarization of the Western World* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1989), 68–85; Jane Caplan and John Torpey, eds., *Documenting Individual Identity: The Development of State Practices in the Modern World*, (Princeton, 2001), and the essays collected in Amir Weiner, ed., *Landscaping the Human Garden: Twentieth-Century Population Management in a Comparative Framework* (Stanford, 2003).

[4] Sheila Fitzpatrick was one of the first scholars to analyse early Soviet efforts to ascribe class identities to the Soviet population in order to differentiate between enemies and allies and to implement class-discriminatory policies on that basis. Others, especially Golfo Alexopoulos, Juliette Cadiot, Francine Hirsch, and Terry Martin, have done much to show how the regime attempted to refashion social, ethnic, and national identities, and Elena Osokina has written about the ways in which the regime divided the population according to access to scarce supplies of food, commodities, and living space. Sheila Fitzpatrick, 'Ascribing Class: The Construction of Social Identity in Soviet Russia', *Journal of Modern History* 65 (December 1993), 745–70; Golfo Alexopoulos, *Stalin's Outcasts: Aliens, Citizens, and the Soviet State, 1926–1936* (Ithaca, NY, 2003); Juliette Cadiot, 'Qu' est-ce que la nationalité?', in Herve le Bras, ed., *L'Invention des populations. Biologie, idéologie, et politique* (Paris, 2000), and 'How Diversity was Ordered: Lists and Classifications of Nationalities in the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union, 1897–1939', *Ab Imperio* 4 (December, 2002); Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union* (Ithaca, NY, 2005); Terry Martin, *An Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923–1939* (Ithaca, NY, 2001); Elena Osokina, *Za fasadom stalinskogo izobiliia: Raspredelenie i rynok v snabzhenii naseleniia v gody industrializatsii, 1927–1941* (Moscow, 1998). On taxation policies and census techniques as ways to categorize and sort the Soviet population, see David Kertzer and Dominique Arel, eds., *Census and Identity: The Politics of Race, Ethnicity, and Language in National Censuses* (Cambridge, 2002); Alain Blum and Martine Mespoulet, *L'Anarchie bureaucratique. Statistique et pouvoir sous Staline* (Paris, 2003).

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much about how the Stalinist regime employed state forms of violence against Soviet society. Even a cursory review of policing policies during the Stalinist era leads to the conclusion that mass repression was more than politics by coercive means. Many scholars now argue that the forced removal, redistribution, or elimination of populations by political and civil police reached the level of mass social engineering during the 1930s.

The social engineering argument has gained widespread currency in the last years and, indeed, it is tempting, in hindsight, to impose an ideological or cultural rationality onto the mass police violence that characterized Stalinism of the 1930s. Such interpretations have taken various forms, with differing political implications. In the classic formulations of Soviet totalitarianism, violence is seen as an inherent part of Bolshevik political culture and ideology. Vladimir Lenin and the Bolsheviks employed 'red terror' unapologetically and ruthlessly against the new regime's enemies during the bloody struggle for Soviet power after 1917. Stalin's systematic use of state violence continued and extended this tendency to its logical and radical extreme.[5] Restated formulations of this argument portray Stalinist violence as an essential, a 'visceral', if not an inherent aspect of early Bolshevik mentality and culture. Bolshevik political culture was, at least in its ultimate Stalinist form, 'utterly' destructive.[6]

The use of violence against society was not unique to the Stalinist era or to Soviet history, of course, and many scholars have emphasized similarities between Soviet state violence and the exterminatory policies of Adolph Hitler's National Socialist Germany. [7] More recently, scholars have stressed continuities in the use of state forms of violence on a pan-European scale. These formulations are often couched within discussions of modernity and state intervention in society—the goal being to 'sculpt an idealised image of the politicosocial body'.[8] According to these narratives, 'society' emerged in the 19th century as something to be studied and analysed—mapped in recent parlance—and, as a result, became the object of efforts by authorities and professionals to change and improve. Ultimately, these trends culminated in the ability to conceive of and excise or destroy whole segments of a population in order to purify a certain body politic. Much of this

[5] Of the many such arguments, see especially Walter Laqueur, *The Fate of the Revolution: Interpretations of Soviet History from 1917 to the Present* (New York, 1987); Martin Malia, *The Soviet Tragedy: A History of Socialism in Russia, 1917–1991* (New York, 1994); Richard Pipes, *Communism, the Vanished Specter* (Oxford, 1994). For an older but still serviceable survey of such arguments, see Giuseppe Boffa, *The Stalin Phenomenon* (Ithaca, NY, 1992).

[6] For an English language formulation of this position, see Jörg Baberowski's review of J. Arch Getty and Oleg V. Naumov, *The Road to Terror: Stalin and the Self-destruction of the Bolsheviks, 1932–1939* (New Haven, 1999), *Kritika* 4, no. 3 (Summer, 2003), 756. See also Baberowski's 'Zivilisation der Gewalt', 62, 97–101.

[7] Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York, 1973); Norman Naimark, *Fires of Hatred: Ethnic Cleansing in Twentieth-Century Europe* (Cambridge, Mass., 2001); Naimark, *Stalin's Genocides* (Princeton, 2010).

[8] Peter Holquist, 'State Violence as Technique: The Logic of Violence in Soviet Totalitarianism', in Weiner, ed., *Landscaping*, 44. See also Baberowski, 'Zivilisation der Gewalt', and Amir Weiner, 'Nature, Nurture, and Memory in a Socialist Utopia: Delineating the Soviet Socio-Ethnic Body in the Age of Socialism', *American Historical Review* 104, no. 4 (October 1999), 1114–55.

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practice was of a prophylactic nature, isolating or destroying populations, not because of specific actions, but because of the potential threat that such populations posed to the purity or perfectibility of the body politic.[9]

This chapter examines the use of mass violence under Stalin, especially the sequence of changing circumstances, the motives behind state violence in each circumstance, and the categories of the population that the regime targeted. By reading the historical evidence forward, rather than from hindsight, this paper questions the utility of the social engineering argument, especially as part of a culture of modernity. Such formulations, while provocative, even compelling, are ultimately too neat. As an historical argument for understanding Stalinism, such formulations provide necessary, but not sufficient, explanations for the Soviet regime's use of mass violence. Certainly, Stalin used state violence systematically and on a large scale. There was rationality in Stalin's use of mass social violence. His goal, in some sense, was to reshape Soviet society. Yet in applying policies of mass police repression, Stalin and other Soviet leaders were not acting simply or only on ideological impulses to create an idealized body politic. Stalinist leaders used mass forms of violence and repression towards specific revolutionary ends, but also in response to a sequence of unanticipated crises. Each of these crises, in the collective view of Soviet leaders, was either unexpected or led to unexpected consequences, and each required emergency, martial-law responses. Each of these crises unfolded into the next in ways that the regime's officials may have caused, but did not anticipate. Ideology, culture, and personality shaped Stalin's perception of these crises, and predisposed the leader to apply policies of police repression in the manner he did. At the same time, a social engineering argument does not explain why Stalin used violence when he did, as opposed to when he did not. Moreover, to argue that Stalin believed in social engineering, even of a violent sort, does not explain the uniqueness of Stalinist state violence. Neither in the 1920s, nor after Stalin's death, did the Soviet regime engage in the kind of militarized and violent social repression that characterized Stalin's kind of socialism.[10] This chapter emphasizes traditional arguments about the peculiarities of time, place, and sequence. When one reads the record of Soviet policies forward, rather than from hindsight, what emerges is more a story of contingency and reaction than one of conscious shaping or sculpting. It is the story of a complicated and unforeseen set of scenarios—of a regime lurching from crisis to crisis during a period of interrelated and mounting dangers, both domestic and international. It was the convergence of those circumstances, combined with Stalin's personality and background, which explains the peculiar virulence of Stalin's brand of socialism.

[9] For the most explicit argument of social engineering, see Mark Iunge and Rol'f Binner, *Kak terror stal 'bol'shim': Sekretnyi prikaz No. 00447 i tekhnologiia ego ispolneniia* (Moscow, 2003).

[10] Lenin employed mass repression during the struggle for power, but he drew back from the use of mass terror during the phase of 'peaceful construction', making the famous argument, in Bukharin's encapsulation, that there should be no third revolution. Among the many works on Lenin, see especially, Moshe Lewin, *Lenin's Last Struggle* (New York, 1968), 106–16. See also the astute reading by Lars T. Lih, 'Political Testament of Lenin and Bukharin and the Meaning of NEP', *Slavic Review* 50, no. 2. (Summer 1991), 241–52.

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COLLECTIVIZATION AND DEKULAKIZATION

Stalin first used mass violence against Soviet citizens during the collectivization drives of the early 1930s. These campaigns were designed to end private farming, and to bring arable farmlands under state control. Farms and villages were gathered together into large administrative units under party and police control in collective or state farm arrangements. Official propaganda described this process as one of socialist reconstruction of rural life, and resistance was attributed to capitalist class hostility. Peasants who resisted were called kulaks and, as part of the process of collectivization, they were dekulakized. Peasants' property was confiscated, and those identified as kulaks were arrested and deported, or shot. As Lynne Viola and others have described, resistance was widespread, and state violence brutal in response. Official propaganda described the violence of the collectivization campaigns in terms of class war, but collectivization, in fact, amounted to a broad social war to bring the countryside under the regime's control. During that war, the political police, the OGPU, engaged in large-scale operations of mass suppression, arrest, and deportation, aimed against the country's rural inhabitants. These campaigns of mass repression were part of a process designed to extend state power into the countryside, and to eradicate, either by shooting or deportation, social opposition to Soviet power among the country's peasantry.[11]

During the so-called dekulakization campaigns, then, the OGPU functioned as a political-revolutionary arm of the state. The purpose of repression was, literally, revolutionary—to break and remake class (or more broadly, social) and economic relations, and to extend state power. The OGPU, and even certain bodies of local authority, were authorized to use non-judicial, or administrative forms of sentencing to enforce repressive measures. As we know, administrative sentencing boards—the infamous troiki—were set up to expedite political repression of large numbers of individuals. These troiki dispensed sentences of dispossession, deportation, and even death outside the process of judicial review and evidence. Mass repression in this form was a way to expedite what was regarded as revolutionary justice in defending and extending socialism.

SOCIAL DEFENCE CAMPAIGNS

Beginning in late 1932, the regime began to scale down mass arrests in rural areas, but they reduced levels of mass repression in rural areas only to intensify operations of mass repression in urban and other areas. Throughout the middle years of the 1930s,

[11] OGPU (Ob"edinennoe gosudarstvennoe politicheskoe upravlenie) was the political police until late 1934, when it was incorporated into the Commissariat of the Interior, the NKVD. The most comprehensive and current account of collectivization is in Lynne Viola, *Peasant Rebels under Stalin: Collectivization and the Culture of Resistance* (New York, 1996). For the role of the OGPU during collectivization, see also Lynne Viola, 'The Role of the OGPU in Dekulakisation, Mass Deportations, and Special Settlements in 1930', *The Carl Beck Papers* no. 1406 (Pittsburgh, 2000).

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the combined political and civil police carried out what were called 'social defence' campaigns, or operations (*operatsii sotsial'noi zashchiti*). These campaigns were designed to 'cleanse' cities, railroads, border zones, and other strategic areas, including elite party and state resort spas, of what were described as 'socially alien' (*sotsial'nye chuzhdie*) and 'socially dangerous' (*sotsial'nye vrednye or opasnye*) elements. Many hundreds of thousands of people were caught up in campaign-style sweeps of criminals, ex-convicts, itinerants and beggars, orphan and unsupervised children, undocumented socially marginal populations, potentially disloyal national minorities, and other undesirable or suspect categories of the population. Supposedly dangerous populations were identified and then isolated, mainly through deportation and exile, or by expelling them from cities, but at times through imprisonment and even execution.

A lot of this social cleansing was done through enforcement of, and mass policing campaigns associated with, passport and residency laws put into effect in 1933. So, while the regime reduced mass forms of repression in the countryside, it did not end mass repression overall. Neither did it end the use of troiki. According to the 1934 decrees that established the Commissariat of the Interior (NKVD), administrative kinds of sentencing boards were forbidden and repression was supposed to be carried out only by judicial organs, except for the NKVD's one administrative political sentencing board, the *Osoboe soveshchanie*. However, this restriction on the use of troiki lasted only a few months. In spring 1935, non-judicial police sentencing boards were once again established to process the overwhelming numbers of supposedly dangerous elements being swept up in policing campaigns in cities, border regions, and other areas. These police troiki could not pass death sentences, but they could and often did pass the maximum sentences of five years' exile or imprisonment. The executive body of the ruling Communist Party, the Political Bureau (Politburo), extended the work of these troiki in 1936 and again in March 1937. And while Stalin recommended that the NKVD not conduct social cleansing of cities in campaign-style operations, mass operations seems to have been, nonetheless, the way that these policies were carried out.

There were several reasons why police continued to use campaign style methods of repression, despite official censure of such methods. The main reason was because mass sweep operations (*iz"iatie* campaigns) were the most effective way that police could utilize scarce resources. Numbers of civil police were still low in the early and mid-1930s. Low police numbers and lack of professional qualification resulted in the near complete absence of civil police presence in many areas of cities, as well as in rural and outlying areas.[12] Civil policing was, likewise, plagued by ineffective agent and investigative networks, and by the ineffective use of citizen informant systems.[13] As a result, campaign-style sweeps of cities, regions, market

[12] Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Novosibirskoi oblasti (hereafter GANO), 47/6/25. Nicholas Voinov, *The Waif* (New York, 1955); David Hoffmann, *Peasant Metropolis: Social Identities in Moscow, 1929–1941* (Ithaca, NY, 1994); David R. Shearer, *Policing Stalin's Socialism: Repression and Social Order in the Soviet Union, 1924–1953* (New Haven, 2009), especially ch. 2.

[13] See the report by N. I. Ezhov, for example, from 1936 in Rossisskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsial'no-politicheskoi istorii (RGASPI), 671/1/118/1–33.

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places, and other areas compensated for the absence or ineffectiveness of traditional policing methods to prevent or to react to criminal activities.

Campaign-style operations were also deeply ingrained in the culture of political policing. Mass repression had been the methods used by the OGPU and NKVD during the dekulakization and border cleansing campaigns. These operations had institutionalized mass forms of repression as standard operational practice in the political police in a way not seen since the civil war and in a way that continued to influence operational practice. Once inculcated, the habits of that collective experience were hard to break.[14]

Finally, the categorical ways in which passport laws described the population contributed to the continuing use of mass policing methods. Passport laws organized the populace by ascribing social, occupational, and ethnic-national identities directly to all who received an internal passport and indirectly to those who were not issued passports. Categorization of the populace in this way created a uniquely Soviet system of social taxonomy, and reinforced, in turn, a collective or group approach to social policing. Using passport categories of identity, police divided the Soviet population into socially near and socially alien groups. Police referred to socially alien groups as 'elements' (*elementy*), which were to be arrested and administered in 'contingents' (*kontingenty*). Organization of the population within the passport system thus lent itself to mass types of policing methods—a categorical imperative in which repression was directed not against individuals, but against whole contingents or categories. Although officially discouraged, those further up the chain of command turned a blind eye to this kind of policing. Stalin's chief of political and civil police, Genrykh Iagoda, occasionally admonished locals for campaign-style policing methods, but he did not seem particular disturbed by their continued use. Official campaigns in the mid-1930s against, alternatively, speculators, hooligans, underage street waifs, and other groups seemed, in fact, to encourage categorical forms of policing.

A NEW KIND OF CLASS WAR

Histories of repression or of political police under Stalin usually overlook the social order campaigns of the mid-1930s. This seems to be so because these campaigns were not overtly political. Yet, throughout most of the 1930s, Stalin and other political leaders regarded criminality and social disorder as the most serious problem threatening the policies and security of the Soviet state. Stalin made this clear in a January 1933 speech to the plenary session of the party's Central Committee. That speech is mostly remembered for Stalin's first declaration of victory in the collectivization campaign, and for his call to halt mass repression in the countryside. This speech is also remembered for Stalin's related justification for the

[14] On the 1920s, see especially Stuart Finkel, 'An Intensification of Vigilance: Recent Perspectives on the Institutional History of the Soviet Security Apparatus in the 1920s', *Kritika* 5, no. 2 (Spring 2004), 299–320. See also Viola, 'The Role of the OGPU'.

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strengthening rather than the withering of state power. That justification, as we know, was based on the idea that, as the country moved closer to the full victory of socialism, its enemies would fight all the harder against it.[15]

We have always associated this argument for a strong state with foreign policy considerations and Stalin's fear of capitalist encirclement. Yet in his speech, Stalin made only one reference to hostile external enemies. The main point of Stalin's comments focused on what Stalin called a new phase of class war—a war against criminals and social deviants—petty criminals, thieves, hooligans, itinerants, and other socially marginal populations. After the defeat of organized class opposition, Stalin declared, the enemies of the Revolution no longer operated through open organized class resistance~~, but now~~ in alliance with socially marginal or 'alien elements' to sabotage and undermine the construction of socialism, that is, the economic policies of the regime and the social stability of the country.

The alien elements Stalin referred to in this speech were, in large part, the millions of people who had been dispossessed and displaced by the social and economic catastrophe of the regime's industrial and agrarian policies. Driven off the land and disenfranchised, millions of impoverished peasants, as well as those in former professional classes, drained economic resources and threatened to overwhelm the fragile infrastructure of the cities and the social stability of the country. So did large numbers of indigents and itinerants, criminals, unemployed youth, gypsies, the disenfranchised, and a range of other groups. For much of the decade, political and police leaders regarded these so-called 'alien elements' as more of a danger to the state and its policies than political oppositionists, the more so because of the underdeveloped nature of the country's civil government and social welfare institutions. The latter were weak and unprepared to cope with the breakdown in social order caused by the regime's policies. As a result, political leaders turned increasingly to the political police as the only institution that could restore social order to the country. Under Iagoda's leadership and with Stalin's backing, the political police expanded operational and administrative authority to take over institutions and problems of social governance, one after another: illegal migration and trade, indigence, the unemployed, civil registration and census taking, orphan children and related problems of juvenile delinquency, and a massive wave of petty criminality.

Thus, for much of the 1930s, protecting state property and economic interests defined the main goal of state security and drove most of the operational policies of the combined forces of the civil and political police. After 1933, social order campaigns of repression became one of the main operational priorities for both the OGPU and *militsiia*. This conflation of state security and social order led to the purposeful merging of civil and political police administrations. This process began in late 1930 and was formalized in 1932, with the creation of an all-union passport system. The merging of political and civil police, and the conflation of state security with social order, was unique to the Stalinist era, although encroach-

[15] RGASPI, 17/2/514/14–17.

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ment of political police into areas of civil governance was not entirely new in the 1930s. Political police involvement with certain types of criminality had roots in the 1920s, and even before the Revolution. The scale of police intervention during the 1930s, however, was unprecedented for a peacetime period.[16]

The reason for such an escalation was, in part, the reality of increased social disorder, due to the regime's disruptive policies. The social war against the rural population during policies of dekulakization and collectivization set in motion a second crisis. As we know, that second crisis, of millions of displaced people, resulted in an upsurge of homeless migrants, increased crime rates, and ~~economic~~ strain on an economic and distribution system already stretched to the limit. Yet, the deepening crisis of social disorder does not, alone, explain the escalation of state violence against society. Ideology also played a key role. In early 1933, Stalin declared that the socialist offensive had succeeded, that the remnants of capitalism had been routed, and that the victory of socialism had been assured. With that pronouncement, definitions of deviancy, criminality, or other unacceptable forms of behaviour changed. If crime and deviancy could be accepted and even tolerated as part of the compromise with capitalism of the 1920s, such tolerance was no longer possible after Stalin's announcement of socialist victory. Social disorder could be explained as nothing else but class hostility towards the new Soviet order, as sabotage of Stalin's grand project to build socialism.[17] As a result, beggars, the unemployed, petty criminals became not only a threat to social order, but, literally, enemies of the state. As a category, marginal social groups now came under the jurisdiction of the political as well as the civil police.[18]

It is tempting to call what Iagoda created a police state, although this is not an entirely accurate characterization. Although powerful, police and policing policies remained under the control of Stalin and the ruling elite of the Communist Party. What Stalin and Iagoda created might be more appropriately called martial-law socialism, or, literally, militarized socialism. 'Militarization' (*voennizatsiia*) was the term that Iagoda and others used to describe the integration of the police, and it is an appropriate description. The merging of political and civil police did, indeed, 'militarize' the civil police, as well as bring the political police into the arena of social governance.[19] This militarization of the civil sphere reflected the sense among Soviet leaders that they existed in an ongoing state of crises, each of which required the imposition of extraordinary methods and of martial law.[20] Such was Molotov's

[16] On the 1920s and the pre-revolutionary period, see Paul Hagenloh, *Stalin's Police: Public Order and Mass Repression in the Soviet Union, 1926–1941* (Washington, DC, 2009).

[17] On the role of ideology and the change in views of deviance from the 1920s to the 1930s, see, especially, David L. Hoffmann, *Stalinist Values: The Cultural Norms of Stalinist Modernity, 1917–1941* (Ithaca, NY, 2003), 177–8. For an overview of Stalin's socialist offensive, see, especially, R. W. Davies, *The Socialist Offensive: The Collectivisation of Soviet Agriculture, 1929–1930* (Cambridge, 1980), and Davies, *Soviet Economic Development from Lenin to Khrushchev* (Cambridge, 1998).

[18] Hagenloh, *Stalin's Police*; Shearer, *Policing Stalin's Socialism*.

[19] On militarization of police forces in general in European states after the First World War, see Gerald Blaney Jr, ed., *Policing Interwar Europe: Continuity, Changing, and Crisis, 1918–1940* (Basingstoke, 2007), 3–7.

[20] G. A. Bordiugov, *Chrezvychatel'nyi vek rossisskoi istorii: chetyre fragmenta* (St Petersburg, 2004).

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oft-quoted justification, made in the early 1970s, that the repressions of the 1930s were an emergency response in a life and death struggle, a continuation of the Revolution in the increasingly dangerous and threatening international conditions of war. This view was, I believe, sincere, if chilling; it was not simply an attempt to rationalize in hindsight.[21] As such, Stalinist leaders employed mass violence not so much to shape and sculpt as to react to unforeseen threats and to react in the ways in which they had been conditioned by their ideology and their collective experience of war, revolution, and then again war. This kind of crisis response was most evident in the attempt in the late 1930s to deal with the ultimate crisis of invasion and possible extermination.

THE GREAT PURGES

Mass social and ethnic purging by category drove the defence campaigns of the mid-1930s and that is the mechanism that was utilized in the great purges of the late 1930s, as well. The policing methods of the great purges differed from those of mid-decade by being more widespread, much more intensive, and far more deadly, but the campaign style of operations of the great purges grew out of and extended the kinds of mass operations used during the mid-1930s. The targeted populations were also the same: former kulaks, illegal migrants, criminal elements, sectarians, and other marginals, as well as an increasing number of ethnic populations.

Explaining the mass purges of the late 1930s is a problem, of course, since there is little documentation about their origins, and they directly contradicted the line put forward by Stalin's new head of police, Nikolai Ezhov, beginning in late 1936 to move the NKVD away from social policing functions.[22] There are a lot of explanations that have recently been put forward, but the one that makes the most sense, still, is the explanation put forward by Oleg Khlevniuk. Khlevniuk believes that Stalin was increasingly convinced of a coming invasion. In that context, the Soviet leader feared an insurgency uprising among disaffected populations in the Soviet Union, sparked by military conflict, which would repeat the success of insurgency movements in Spain that helped bring about the military defeat of the loyalist forces. This is the infamous fifth-column argument, and it is the only argument that makes sense of both the timing and the level of violence of the mass purges.[23]

In fact, several political and operational trends merged in 1937 to give the great purges their particular character. The dekulakization and then the social order campaigns of the early and mid part of the decade formed an important background

[21] Feliks Chuev, *Sto sorok besed s Molotovym* (Moscow, 1991), 390–3.

[22] David Shearer, 'Social Disorder, Mass Repression, and the NKVD during the 1930s', *Cahiers du Monde russe* 42, nos. 2–4 (avril–décembre 2001), 505–34. See also Hiroaki Kuromiya, 'Accounting for the "Great Terror"', *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 53, no. 1 (January 2005), 86–101, and J. Arch Getty, '"Excesses are not permitted": Mass Terror and Stalinist Governance in the Late 1930s', *The Russian Review* 61, no. 1 (January 2002), 113–38.

[23] Oleg Khlevniuk, 'Prichiny "Bol'shogo Terrora": Vneshnepoliticheskii aspekt', unpublished manuscript and 'The Reasons for the "Great Terror": The Foreign-Political Aspect', in S. Pons and A. Romano, eds., *Russia in the Age of Wars, 1914–1945* (Milan, 2000), 159–69.

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to the mass repressions of the late 1930s. The conflation of social disorder with counter-revolution, especially, influenced state and NKVD policies and methods. Yet it was not just the threat of class opposition or social disorder that generated the mass repressions of the late 1930s. Several other crises came into play. One of those was the fear of opposition political organizations—Trotskyists, Zinovievists, and others—that haunted leaders after the murder of the Leningrad party head, Sergei Kirov, in late 1934. Gearing up the state security machinery to battle against suspected opposition groups became an increasingly important priority for Stalin in 1935 and 1936, even as police pursued ongoing policies of social defence to control marginal and other undesirable populations. Indeed, Iagoda's focus on social policing and his supposed failure to deal with political oppositionists was the main reason for his ousting in late 1936.[24]

Fear of national contamination also influenced leaders' thinking in the late 1930s, that is, the fear of what Terry Martin has called enemy nations within Soviet borders. Enemy nations included ethnic groups whose loyalty was suspect because of cross-border ties.[25] Each of these supposed threats—class opposition, social disorder, underground political subversion, and national contamination—had generated separate political responses and operational policies throughout the 1930s. These concerns and policy lines converged in the great purges. By 1937, leaders were convinced that oppositionists, working with foreign agents, were actively organizing socially disaffected populations into an insurgency movement. Leaders worried that invasion, which seemed increasingly likely in the late 1930s, would be the signal for armed uprisings by these groups, as well as by purportedly disaffected ethnic minorities. Indeed, the threat of war was the final and key element. Soviet leaders took the threat of war and invasion seriously as early as 1937 and this is confirmed by the increasing attention they gave to svodki (reports, or summaries) about invasion by Japan through Siberia. Beginning in summer of 1936 and into 1937, NKVD reports of peasant dissatisfaction with the collective farm system focused increasingly on the hoped-for dismantling of that system by Japanese occupying forces.[26]

One of the clues to understanding the mass social purges can be found in the changing language of NKVD circulars and reports. One of the key documents in this chain was a report dated 17 June 1937 to Robert Eikhe, party head in Western Siberia, by Sergei Mironov, head of the Western Siberian UNKVD. In the report, Mironov described operations to root out 'kadet-monarchist and SR organizations' in Western Siberia. These underground organizations, according to Mironov, had united under orders from the Japanese intelligence service into an overall organizational front called the 'Russian General Military Union' (ROVS). The organizations in this union were preparing a 'revolt and a seizure of power' in Siberia to coincide with an invasion by the Japanese army. Mironov described the various

[24] Oleg Khlevniuk, *Politburo: Mekhanizmy politicheskoi vlasti v 30-e gody* (Moscow, 1996), 144–6.
[25] Martin, *Affirmative Action Empire.*
[26] GANO, 3/2/643.

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branches of this union, which the NKVD had uncovered through its agent and operational work. Mironov described the locations of these organizations, named various officials involved in them under cover as local state functionaries, and he estimated the numbers involved in the various conspiracies.

However dubious were the substantive conclusions of Mironov's report, his writing reflected, in part, Ezhov's new policy emphasis on the struggle against underground political organizations. His report fell fully in line with the new policy directives, as laid out by Ezhov, in operational meetings and in the February–March party plenum. At the same time, Mironov made a connection that had not been made previously, between the work of these underground groups and the problem of marginal and other suspect populations. 'Consider', wrote Mironov, 'that in the Narym and Kuzbass areas there are 208,400 exiled kulaks; another 5,350 live under administrative exile and include white officers, active bandits and convicts, and former [tsarist] police officials . . . This is the social base for their organising work [i.e. organizing work of the ROV]—kulaks and penal settlers (*spetspereselentsy*) scattered across the Narym and in the cities of the Kuzbass . . . It is clear then the kind of a broad base that exists on which to build an insurgent rebellion.'[27]

This language of political conspiracy (*zagovor*) and social rebellion differed from the language of the mass operations to clear cities of harmful elements during the mid-1930s. Social defence campaigns directed against socially marginal populations had been separate from operational activities directed against political opponents of the regime and against opposition political organizations. The two operational lines involved different goals and different methods, the one line distinguished by methods of mass social policing, and the other by agent operational work. In 1937, NKVD and party leaders connected these two threats and merged operational lines that had previously been distinct. Leaders had come to believe that political enemies were manipulating the criminal and marginal population of the country to unite and to engage, not only in the kind of secret sabotage of which Stalin had first spoken in 1933, but to rise up in organized rebellion. Mironov's warning, therefore, was not just about the threat of social contamination or economic disruption caused by socially harmful populations, and it was not just a repetition of the same rhetoric about quiet sabotage. Mironov warned about the formation of organized, conspiratorial, and mass insurgent opposition to the regime. His was a language that tied socially suspect populations to active political organization and to military uprisings. And, of course, the escalation of language could only take place against the background of a feared invasion. The threat of war, made imminent, gave to the state's policies of repression a sense of urgency and a level of violence not seen in earlier kinds of social policing.

[27] GANO, 4/34/26/2; V. Danilov, R. Manning, and L. Viola, eds., *Tragediia sovetskoi derevni. Kollektivizatsiia i razkulachivanie. Dokumenty i materially v 5 tomakh, 1927–1939* (Moscow, 1999–2004), vol. v, book 1 (Moscow, 2004), 256–8.

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POST-WAR TRENDS

Mass repression did not end with the great purges, of course, but continued, and even intensified during and after the war. However, the function and character of mass repression changed yet again after the war. Categorical and mass forms of repression continued, but these campaigns targeted different populations than before the war. Categorical forms of mass deportations, for example, hit ethnic communities hard inside the 1939 borders of the country, as they did in the new territories annexed in 1939 and reoccupied after 1945. Mass administrative repression of 'socially dangerous populations' also continued in the new territories. In the occupied Baltic republics and in the western border regions of Ukraine and Belorussia, political and civil police carried out the same kinds of mass social and political repression that had been characteristic of the 1930s. Inside the country's 1939 borders, however, the nature of social policing changed from administrative repression based on categories of identity to judicial convictions for breach of law. This change did not mean that levels of repression decreased. On the contrary, millions of people found themselves under arrest and then convicted for infractions of labour discipline, anti-theft, and other harsh laws associated with Stalin's extractive policies of economic reconstruction. But these people were convicted by judicial courts rather than by police administrative boards. They were convicted for specific violations of laws rather than for potential disloyalty based on a suspect social or ethnic background. In the realm of social politics, people were repressed for what they did rather than who they were.

After the war, Stalin and other leaders employed political police methods—the kind of secret, extrajudicial policing that dominated the 1930s—primarily in the country's new territories, as well as in some regions of the Caucasus. In these areas, leaders perceived that the security of the state was at risk, as local authorities faced serious insurgency movements against Soviet rule all along the country's new borders. Inside the pre-1939 territories, in contrast, leaders de-politicized social order policing and the fight against criminality, even as they increased the role of civil police and courts in the effort to exert a kind of social and economic discipline over the population.

This shift in policies of repression reflected reforms to separate civil from political policing. In the post-war years, a series of bureaucratic reorganizations hived off the *militsiia* from the state security organs and placed the former under the Ministry of the Interior, the MVD. To those sentenced to prisons, camps, colonies, or penal settlements, the difference maybe mattered little whether they were arrested by political or civil police. But there was a difference, and a significant one. Social policing during the post-war years was not nearly as deadly as it was in the 1930s, and this change reflected a general de-militarization of the social sphere, if not a reduction in the numbers of people who experienced the coercive power of the state. So, the goal, and therefore the methods, of policing changed from the 1930s to the post-war years. No longer was social policing aimed at isolating or eliminating enemies of the state. In the post-war era, leaders employed mass coercion to discipline a society in service to the goals of state economic reconstruction.

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These changes in goals and methods of mass repression lead to a final point about changes in notions of citizenship and the relation of citizens to the state. During the 1930s, the contexts of class war, domestic disorder, and imminent invasion affected how regime officials categorized the Soviet population. Identity, as represented by passport and residency laws, became associated primarily and directly with mechanisms of police repression, and with perceptions of threat and state security. Social repression and social identity were bound up in a constant relationship of state crisis. As Amir Weiner has pointed out, however, the victory of the war gave Soviet leaders a new sense of legitimacy. In that new sense of legitimacy, processes of identity formation, and also criteria of privilege and repression, became disassociated from issues of state security, at least inside the country's 1939 borders. Identity, privilege, and repression became associated with more traditional understandings of citizens' rights, violations of law, and service to the state. These criteria, and especially the last—state service—supplanted class and even nationality as the key criteria that defined a citizen's relation to the state.

The importance of service is striking when examining the many debates about amnesties and passport reforms in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Discussions internal to the MVD about passport reforms in 1949 and 1950, in particular, raised issues of continuing exile restrictions that had been placed on various social and national groups during the 1930s and the war. These discussions generated much argument, but all who were party to these debates agreed that one criterion, in particular—extraordinary service to the state—could, in individual and even in collective cases, mitigate a person's or group's pejorative social or national background. After 1940, especially, service came to mean military service, and especially war veteran status, which became the major criterion of reinstatement and privilege. War veteran service overrode both class status and national origins. In discussing the categories of the population forbidden to live in regime areas, the draft passport regulations from 1949 specifically exempted from the bans 'families of convicts, or those released from exile or prison who have been awarded Orders of the Union SSR, or who are veterans of war, or others who have performed special service to the Motherland'. Similarly, proposals for amnesties of different groups also appealed to wartime service as a justification for lifting restrictions. [28]

The most important criterion, then, that the regime's officials employed to consider rehabilitation of repressed groups after the war turned not on nationality or class, but on service to the state, and primarily military service and sacrifice. Sacrifice and service overrode everything, regardless of ethnicity or social background. The criterion of service became applied more broadly, and was more suited, to the era of state economic reconstruction that characterized post-war Stalinism. Stalin may have remained tied to older notions of state security and martial-law socialism,

[28] Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossisskoi Federatsii (GARF), 5446/51a/5020/10. While military status was important for rehabilitation, this did not mean that war veterans, as a whole, received the benefits of privilege accorded them by their status. See the documents collected in Ye. Iu. Zubkova et al., eds., *Sovetskaia zhizn', 1945–1953* (Moscow, 2003), 308–31. See also Ye. Iu. Zubkova, *Poslevoennoe Sovetskoe obshchestvo: Politika i povsednevnost', 1945–1953* (Moscow, 2000), 28–36.

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but by the late 1940s, the Great Leader was being left behind by the history and the state that he had done so much to create. Scholars such as Moshe Lewin and Robert Tucker come closest to the mark in arguing that the Soviet state evolved, over the course of, and after, Stalin's rule, into a service state more than a class or a police state.[29]

CONCLUSION

And what of the argument of social engineering? The history of mass repression under Stalin was characterized by both its pervasiveness and its contingency. And indeed, once the threat of war had passed, a number of Soviet officials, if not Stalin himself, began to rethink the idea of a militarized war state. Twenty years of Stalin's militarized socialism had resulted in social chaos, not in a carefully engineered society. The carceral and passport system that Stalin put in place had created an arcane and complicated hierarchy of privilege and repression that involved geographic as well as social and ethnic restrictions. If the tendency of the modern state was to 'level' civic distinctions, and to make society 'transparent' to intervention and administration, then the Stalinist state did not fit this model at all.[30] In contrast, Stalin's martial-law socialism reproduced a feudalized corporate state in which different laws, privileges, and restrictions applied to different groups in different geographic spaces. It was an unwieldy, complex system. Few officials understood this system, even those who were charged to administer it and it was increasingly costly, as well as inhumane.[31] In his 1953 criticisms of the carceral and restrictive passport systems, Beriia articulated a new set of standards on which to build the Soviet state and Soviet socialism. His arguments against the labour camps and restrictive passport system were made not on the basis of state security, but mainly on the basis of cost to the state's economy and the loss of productive labour. Stalin's martial-law socialism was giving way quickly to a new kind of socialism and a new kind of state, an authoritarian service state more than a class state, and more than a nationality state or a simple police state. This transition did not occur whole cloth or quickly. Many aspects of Stalinism remained to shape social and state development. Still, Stalin's death in March 1953 hastened the evolution to a new era in the Soviet Union and to a new phase of Soviet socialism.

[29] Moshe Lewin, *The Making of the Soviet System: Essays in the Social History of Interwar Russia* (New York, 1985), 307–8; Robert C. Tucker, 'Stalinism as Revolution from Above', in Robert C. Tucker, *Stalinism: Essays in Historical Interpretation* (New York, 1977), 99–100.

[30] On civil levelling, see Jane Caplan and John Torpey, eds., *Documenting Individual Identity: The Development of State Practices in the Modern World* (Princeton, 2001), 5. On transparency, see Scott, *Seeing Like a State*, especially, 2–3, 183–4.

[31] Nathalie Moine, 'Le Système des passeports à l'époque stalinienne. De la purge des grande villes au morcellement du territoire, 1932–1953', *Revue d'Histoire Moderne et Contemporaine* 50, no. 1 (janvier–mars 2003), 145–69; Shearer, *Policing Stalin's Socialism*, especially 260–85. On pre-modern aspects of Stalinism in the sphere of ethnic definitions, see Martin, 'Modernization or Neo-Traditionalism?'

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