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POPULAR OPINION IN
STALIN'S RUSSIA

Terror, propaganda and dissent, 1934-1941

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The leader cult in official discourse

The adulation accorded to Stalin, many of his colleagues, and indeed outstanding individuals at all levels of Soviet society was one of the most striking aspects of Stalinist propaganda. This 'cult of the *individual*' emerged powerfully in the period 1933-4, contrasting dramatically with an earlier emphasis on the anonymous masses, classes, and party. At the apex of all these cults was that of Stalin. This chapter will provide an overview of the evolution of the leader cult in the propaganda of this period and explore the chief characteristics of the cult as 'official culture'. It will concentrate on the cult of Stalin, since those of other leaders developed according to a pattern which was similar, but less intense.¹

THE EVOLUTION OF THE CULT

The propaganda of the Stalin cult was never static. It developed from modest beginnings in 1929 to its gigantic proportions at the end of the 1940s. However, it was in the period 1934-41 when many of the fundamental characteristics of the cult were established. During this period, the intensity and emphasis of the cult changed quite markedly in accordance with the needs of the regime.

Although the genesis of the public cult of Stalin is generally dated to the occasion of his fiftieth birthday in December 1929, when effusive praise was heaped upon the leader by his colleagues, this was an exception to the rule. In this period, the emphasis was usually upon anonymous collective leadership. Few pictures of the leaders appeared in the press. As Heizer points out, in 1929 Stalin was portrayed as 'iron-willed, cold, distant, and ruthless'.² His personality was secondary to his function. Kol'tsov's article 'The Enigma - Stalin', expresses this clearly: 'Stalin cannot be understood without his milieu, without the class and the party who promoted him,

without the combination of tasks and goals for which they struggled together.³ From about 1930, adulation of the leader did increase noticeably; however, it was still modest in comparison with later developments. Posters of this period tended not to accord much prominence to the *vozhdi*, but when they did feature, it was usually as a Politburo group. Until 1933, Stalin was always referred to as the unambiguous leader of the party, but without any special appellations. He was merely *primus inter pares*, as in the designation 'under the leadership of the Bolshevik Party headed by its *vozhd'* comrade Stalin'.⁴ Nevertheless, the groundwork had been laid in 1929–33 for the further extension of the cult.⁵

The full-blown cult began to emerge in the middle of 1933, by which time Stalin was occasionally referred to as the 'beloved [*liubimy*] Stalin'. Gerasimov's famous portrait of Stalin at the Sixteenth Party Congress was executed in this year. Thereafter an entire industry was devoted to producing portraits of Stalin and the other *vozhdi*. The Seventeenth Party Congress in January 1934 saw the real explosion of the cult. At the beginning of 1934, just before the congress, a sense of Stalin's historic role and mission started to emerge amongst party members. Radek's eulogistic article 'The Architect of Socialist Society' played a seminal role. At the Moscow party conference, Kaganovich stated that the 'the role of comrade Stalin still awaits a broad and profound evaluation. We not only know this role of comrade Stalin, but we feel it, it is in our heart and our soul.' Likewise in Georgia, Beria told the local party that a Stalin Institute would be set up to give a 'true picture of Comrade Stalin's gigantic role in our revolutionary movement'. The actual congress, which was marked by sycophantic speeches even by his opponents, marked a turning point in attitudes to Stalin. The emigre newspaper *Sotsialisticheskii vestnik* noted in February that 'lately there has undoubtedly been a breakthrough [*perelom*] in attitudes to Stalin'.⁶

After the congress, the chief characteristics of the cult began to emerge clearly. Gill categorises these as, firstly, his link with Lenin; secondly, his role in the achievement of success; thirdly, his writings; and, fourthly, his relationship with the people.⁷ Citations from Stalin began to flood the newspapers. Previously a reclusive figure, Stalin now appeared more frequently in public. For example, huge publicity was given to his meeting with the team from the icebreaker *Cheliuskin* and the pilots who had dramatically rescued them when the *Cheliuskin* sank in the spring of 1934. The popularisation of

Stalin's image was accompanied by the publication of often falsified biographical/hagiographical material, designed to illustrate his rise to greatness from a humble background.⁸ However, in 1934, his image was still usually that of leader of the party and proletariat.

Kirov's death marked another turning point in the treatment of Stalin's image. This involved both a prohibition of negative portrayals of the *vozhd'* and a greater popularisation of his image and that of his colleagues as *vozhdi naroda* (leaders of the people). An example of the former practice was the expulsion from the party of a regional party committee member on 5 February 1935 after he had given a speech in which he recalled the negative characterisation of Stalin in Lenin's 'testament'. As one other member of the committee said, 'Why did he have to speak about Lenin's testament at a Komsomol meeting? ... It is clear to us all that Stalin is the brilliant pupil of Lenin, and because of his work deserves the immeasurable love of the proletariat and toilers of all the world.'⁹ From 1935 onwards, it became mandatory to speak of Stalin only in the most glowing terms. The young writer, A. Avdeenko, has described this deliberate policy. He came into contact with Mekhlis, one of the chief architects of Stalin's cult, shortly after making a speech to the intelligentsia in Sverdlovsk. Avdeenko had ended his speech, 'I thank you, Soviet power.' Mekhlis praised the speech, but suggested that it would have been better if he had not divorced Soviet power from Stalin, explaining that 'Soviet power is, above all, Stalin. We should thank him in particular for everything good that has been and is being achieved in the country.'¹⁰

The media set the tone for the veneration, with a new stress on the genius of Stalin, his wisdom, and prophetic powers. However, this type of image always carried with it the danger of alienating the people. Likewise in Germany, the manufacturers of the Hitler cult recognised that the 'emphasis on Hitler's many-sided "genius" ... had the danger of playing down the "human qualities" of the "People's Chancellor"'. So Goebbels simultaneously tried to promote the image of a simple leader in touch with his people.¹¹ Similarly, in the Soviet Union, a more popular image of Stalin was deliberately cultivated. The image extended not only to Stalin, but to all the *vozhdi*, who were now to be represented as close to the people. The change in tone is evident from the remarks of Ugarov (the second secretary of the Leningrad *obkom*) in connection with the preparation for the Day of the Constitution on 6 July 1935:

This affair has to be organised in an essentially different way from in previous years. The political explanation should be organised so that people feel that *Soviet leaders are coming to them* [emphasis added] and telling them about the achievements of Soviet democracy.¹²

This approach found ample expression in the media. A new genre emerged in the form of Stalin's Kremlin meetings with 'the people' to celebrate various occasions. Stakhanovites, delegations from the non-Russian republics, and wives of Red Army commanders came from all over the USSR to participate in these rituals. They were theatrical events, at which Stalin's appearance and words were greeted by an outpouring of emotion and endless applause. The meetings were widely reported in the press, often from the vantage point of a participant, who was required to relay his or her own feelings of awe and wonder at being in the presence of the *vozhdi*.

The year 1935 also inaugurated the practice of displaying visual images of Stalin physically close to the people. The most famous photographs of this period are those in which he hugs a twelve-year-old Tadjik girl and talks to Stakhanovite Maria Demchenko.¹³ These were part of the strategy of representing the *vozhdi* as defenders of the weak (it is probably not coincidental that both these pictures portrayed women). The paternalist, caring imagery of the cult reflected the fact that Stalin's overtures towards the 'small people' had begun this year, with his speech on 4 May, demanding that cadres be protected, and that leaders pay attention to all workers, both big and small.¹⁴ This theme would become increasingly important in the following years, although the 'family' imagery, with its essentially human scale, would also have to compete with 'superhuman', charismatic traits.

In 1936–7, the cult reached its apogee. A local party report from August 1936 on the propaganda of the cult conveys very vividly the new extremism:

During agitation and propaganda in the press there must be more popularisation of the *vozhdi*, and love for them must be fostered and inculcated in the masses, and unlimited loyalty, especially by cultivating the utmost love for comrade Stalin and the other leaders amongst children and young people, inculcating Soviet patriotism, *bringing them to fanaticism in love and defence of comrade Stalin and our socialist motherland* [emphasis added].¹⁵

In order to inculcate this 'fanaticism', the media was saturated with Stalin, who was habitually referred to as 'the great leader', 'father of the people', 'the wise helmsman', 'the genius of our epoch', 'the titan

of the world revolution', and so on. The symbolic and mythic character of the cult became ever more apparent. Poems and folklore in the national languages of the USSR exalted him at any opportunity, while historical paintings were used to manufacture a heroic and largely mythical past for the great leader.

Stalin's role as *creator* was stressed: he was 'creator of the Constitution', and 'creator of our happiness'. As Clark points out, his image had much in common with that of the 'artist-seer'.¹⁶ It is interesting that Pasternak also made this connection, for his most famous cult poem, written for the 1 January 1936 edition of *Izvestiia*, was called 'The Artist', and it drew parallels between the role of the poet and that of Stalin. Stalin was also frequently represented as a source of inspiration for others: 'the care of the *vozhdi*' for every person, and love for all people – that is what lifts people and gives them wings'.¹⁷

A different image of Stalin as hero emerged in the form of idealised accounts of his past, where he was shown fighting for the revolution and surmounting enormous difficulties with unstinting courage. The syncretism of the cult is very evident in the attempts to incorporate into it traditional folk motifs. Stalin was endowed with the qualities of the mythical Russian hero, the *bogatyr*', sometimes in conjunction with his colleagues:

Stalin, Molotov, Kaganovich, Voroshilov, Ordzhonikidze, Kalinin, and others – friends, comrades-in-arms, pupils of the great Lenin, a powerful *druzhina* [army] of *bogatyry* of communism – they constantly stand at the commanding bridge of the great Soviet ship, travelling on a precise course.¹⁸

Although the propaganda never explicitly referred to Stalin as a god, certain god-like qualities were nevertheless attributed to him. In particular, he was often called 'Sun', especially in the cult folklore.¹⁹ His role as 'creator' also had connotations of the divine. It was common practice to give thanks to Stalin for life, as to a god: 'You built our life – / We live happily / ... Oh, thank you, Stalin / For such a life!'²⁰ At other times, he was attributed an almost Christ-like character, as in the words of his biographer Barbusse, reprinted in *Pravda* as part of the election campaign in 1937: 'You do not know him, but he knows you. He has thought about you. Whoever you are, you need this friend.'²¹ The omniscient, all-seeing, and paternalist nature of Stalin is captured in a poem by Lebedev-Kumach also from this period:

And so – everywhere. In the workshops, in the mines
 In the Red Army, the kindergarten
 He is watching . . .
 You look at his portrait and it's as if he knows
 Your work – and weighs it
 You've worked badly – his brows lower
 But when you've worked well, he smiles in his moustache.²²

The sense of a divine, superhuman being was accentuated by the portrayal of Stalin in visual forms of propaganda, where he appeared gigantic, looming over the mass of small people gazing up at him.

In 1937, Stalin's links with Lenin acquired a new prominence in connection with the twentieth anniversary of the revolution, in which Stalin and Lenin were shown to have played major and equal roles. In Molotov's speech to celebrate the twentieth anniversary of the revolution, the main emphasis was upon Stalin as the incarnation of the 'moral-political unity of the people'. He was thus transformed into a symbol of the nation.²³ The association of Stalin with patriotic sentiment became an increasingly important feature of the cult in the immediate pre-war years.

During 1938, the rewriting of history was concluded with the publication and propaganda of the *Short Course*, the canonical party history edited by Stalin which laid down the orthodoxy on his past. However, despite a huge tribute on Stalin's sixtieth birthday in 1939, the momentum of the cult seemed to peter out somewhat in 1939–41. Stalin took a back stage, with Molotov assuming relatively greater prominence.²⁴ The latter was described on the occasion of his birthday in 1940 as a 'great figure [*krupneishii deiatel'*]' of the party.²⁵

THE CULT AS 'OFFICIAL CULTURE'

The whole cult phenomenon exhibits many characteristics typical of the hegemonic culture in an authoritarian society as described by Bakhtin: seriousness, asceticism, hierarchy, a sense of its own permanence.²⁶ Particularly striking is the gravity of the cult, its sanctity. According to Bakhtin, 'seriousness in a class culture is official, authoritarian, associated with violence, prohibitions, limitations. Such seriousness always contains an element of fear and deterrence.'²⁷ The sacred must not be ridiculed, and to laugh at a *vozhd'* was considered counter-revolutionary. According to one party report: 'Anecdotes about the *vozhdi* may gradually blunt revolutionary

vigilance, if they are treated in a conciliatory manner. Behind an anecdote there may lurk a Menshevik, Trotskyist, class enemy.'²⁸

The official satirical journal, *Krokodil*, never made fun of the *vozhdi*. On the rare occasions when they did appear in its pages, it was often to laugh at someone else. For example, in December 1934, a laughing Kaganovich was shown with a semi-humorous caption 'the most active foreman of Moscow's construction . . . Has glanced into the pages of *Krokodil* to ridicule those who don't believe in the transformation of Moscow into an exemplary socialist capital.'²⁹ Satire of the leaders was prohibited, and when it emerged that P. Kornilov had used caricatures of Lenin from 1917 as illustrative material for a lecture at the Academy of Arts in January 1935, the matter was given the highest priority by the NKVD and *obkom*.³⁰ Problems were also caused by ambiguous and potentially comic newspaper headings, such as 'They managed without comrade Stalin.' It was perceived as particularly damaging when a *vozhd'* had a fairly common name which gave rise to headings including 'Trotskyite Khrushchev excluded from the party'; 'Bring Voroshilov to order and teach him to work.'³¹

An important aspect of the cult was its deliberate neglect of the leaders' private lives, what Bakhtin calls the 'material-bodily root of life [*material'no-telesnoe nachalo*]'.³² For the charismatic magic to work, the *vozhdi* had to be portrayed as extraordinary and above the everyday world of eating, drinking, and family life. Devoted to the party and the Soviet state, their private 'human' dimension was relegated to a minimum. Occasional pictures of Stalin on holiday with his daughter Svetlana were published, but these were immediately conspicuous by their rarity.³³ By contrast, the public 'human' dimension was played up, with Stalin constantly represented as the 'father' of his people.³⁴

The cult was based on a sense of an immutable spatial-temporal order. Strict hierarchical principles prevailed. Stalin stood at the apex of the feudal-like pyramid. But the period 1934–41 witnessed a cult not only of his personality, but of individuals at all levels of society – from Stakhanovites to writers and aviators. Stalin's cult was merely one aspect of this more general focus on exceptionality and the heroic.³⁵ Below his cult were the mini-cults of other party leaders, only some of which were officially sponsored. Stalin's colleagues, particularly Voroshilov, appeared regularly in the media,

and also received poetic tributes and cultic appellations. Cities, mountains, boats, indeed anything that could be named, bore the names of members of the Politburo. Particular regions tended to highlight their own boss: Kirov or Zhdanov in Leningrad, Kaganovich in Moscow.³⁶ The language of these lesser cults followed the pattern of that of Stalin; so, Kirov began to be called 'beloved' in 1933, at the same time as Stalin.

This order was portrayed as eternal, static, permanent. It was retrospective, conservative, oriented towards its own history and tradition. It was the antithesis of revolution.³⁷ Unexpected death was a severe interruption to this order, for death is an equaliser, a leveller, and an indication of change. The only way death could be overcome was by its rapid ritualisation, and the elevation of the leader to the concomitant hierarchical pantheon of god-like former leaders. So, Kirov, who had been a competent but not outstanding leader, was given heroic status as martyr. On the first anniversary of his death, Stalin sent telegrams to the local party organisations on the need 'to show comrade Kirov as one of the greatest leaders of our party, the tribune of the party, beloved by all the toilers in the USSR'.³⁸ Every year after this, the 'Kirov anniversary' became part of the ritual of the official culture. Thus his death paradoxically served to reinforce the spatial-temporal order of the official culture.

To what extent did these official images accord with popular representations of the leader(s)? The next two chapters focus on the reception of this propaganda. Chapter 10 examines representations in which the leader was portrayed in a positive light, while chapter 11 considers representations which were more negative (from the regime's point of view). The official cult discourse was employed in a far from passive way. People selected certain elements of it, and rejected or ignored others; they appropriated those aspects of it which served their own purposes; they familiarised it so that it harmonised with their own preconceptions; they distorted its messages, criticised it directly, and subverted it in a more indirect manner.

Affirmative representations of the leader and leader cult

The official cult discourse fluctuated and transmitted heterogeneous messages. Not surprisingly, then, when the people themselves used this discourse, they chose to emphasise different facets in accordance with their own situation, needs, and ideas about leadership. The following analysis is based predominantly on positive representations of the leader in letters. The latter are used because they are usually more individual and less imitative of the propaganda than the comments reproduced in opinion reports and newspapers. Three different types of discourse can be identified: firstly, the leader as benefactor; secondly, the leader as 'traditional' defender of the people; and, finally, the charismatic leader. In many cases these different discourses overlapped, but they will be examined here separately.

THE LEADER AS BENEFACTOR

This type of representation was rarely employed by the social groups with whom this study is mainly concerned. It was mainly used by those who improved themselves in this period, and identified with the regime and its policies. These beneficiaries included many Stakhanovites, some soldiers, the new young intelligentsia, and the *vydvizhentsy* (upwardly mobile), who moved into responsible positions in the hierarchy.¹ Often from humble origins, they had acquired power and status, and were eager to express gratitude to Stalin, and endorsed the progress the USSR had made under his leadership. They were also well versed in the official language. Soldiers in particular had a good command of the phraseology, thanks to intensive indoctrination in the Red Army. Soldiers' letters intercepted by the censor contain expressions of gratitude and loyalty to the *vozhdi*. These letters were written by the soldiers to their families,

and it seems unlikely that the propaganda was intoned with the censor in mind. If this had been so, then presumably all of the soldiers would have reproduced the obligatory phrases, which was not the case.

One soldier wrote to his brother, a fellow soldier, enjoining him to study and work hard: 'study the rules consciously and be able to apply the rules precisely in everyday life, be impeccably disciplined, be a hero. Fight for the great work of Lenin-Stalin.'² Another letter expressed wonder at the changes that had happened in the last few years, remarking that:

Even from the depths of our village how many people have gone up the hill, not counting myself, and with every new step, you begin to comprehend the essence of Soviet power, the profundity of the complex mechanics of the leadership of the party of Lenin and the *vozhd'* comrade Stalin, without whom we might today have been bowing down in an alien land, while now we must be proud of our position.³

This letter also demonstrates the use of an image of society as a 'hill' to be climbed, a consensual, hierarchical image (unlike those discussed in chapter 8) which was probably typical of the representations of this mobile group. For many of these, the progress that had been achieved in a very short time under Stalin was astounding. Industrialisation and collectivisation had produced tangible results, which were easy to admire. As one soldier wrote, 'I was recently in our *kolkhoz* and saw how things are moving forward, in both economic and political life. I say from the heart that we must keep to this, use all our strength to fulfil with honour that created by Vladimir Il'ich and his follower I. V. Stalin.'⁴

Not only those who had actually moved up the hierarchy, such as soldiers, were grateful to Stalin; their relatives, who benefited indirectly, also were. As has already been mentioned, education was highly valued by ordinary people,⁵ and in 1939 a 65-year-old illiterate woman wrote to Kalinin (through her son), expressing her gratitude for the fact that all her sons had been educated and had embarked upon careers:

I want to share my feelings: I live very well and think that I will live even better. Why? Because I live in the Stalin epoch. May Stalin live longer than me! ... All my children had and are having education thanks to the state and, I would say, thanks to the party, and especially comrade Stalin, for he, along with Lenin, opened the way for us simple people ... I myself, an old woman, am ready to die for Stalin and the Bolshevik cause.⁶

While this study is concerned primarily with the attitudes of ordinary workers and peasants, it is worth noting that large numbers of the intelligentsia, including the creative intelligentsia, admired Stalin.⁷ Especially after 1934, he was regarded as a conciliatory figure. Many benefited directly from his policies. Writers and artists were lauded, awarded Stalin prizes, and provided with dachas and other material rewards. Others regarded the industrial progress initiated by Stalin as necessary and beneficial for the USSR or supported the USSR's anti-fascist stance (until 1939). Konstantin Simonov was one of these. His memories of Stalin from the 1930s are entirely positive. He asks:

What good things were associated in those years with the name of Stalin for us, and for me in particular? Very much, practically everything, if only because at that time in our imagination almost everything came from him and was shrouded in his name. The general line of the industrialisation of the country which he carried out explained everything that was happening in that sphere. And of course, many wonderful things happened. The country changed before my eyes ... Sweeping everything from the path to industrialisation, Stalin carried it out with an iron hand. He spoke little, did a lot, met people on business a lot, rarely gave interviews, rarely made speeches, and managed to get his every word considered and valued not only here, but in the whole world.⁸

M. Gor'kii, I. Erenburg, A. Tvardovskii, A. Avdeenko, I. Babel', L. Seifullina, and a host of other writers all professed their support for Stalin.⁹ Even Pasternak, Bulgakov, and Mandel'shtam seem to have had an admiration for some aspects of Stalin's leadership.¹⁰

THE TRADITIONAL DEFENDER OF THE PEOPLE

Unlike the latter relatively privileged groups, many ordinary workers and peasants emphasised other aspects of the official cult discourse, and in particular, its traditional paternalist features. The representation of the leader as father had long been a part of popular political discourse in Russia. The tsar was *batiushka* ('little father'), and peasants were accustomed to petitioning him for help.¹¹ This tendency continued in the Soviet period, when ordinary people turned to Lenin, Stalin, Kalinin, and other leaders for defence using paternalist language.¹²

The evidence suggests that they adopted this vocabulary spontaneously. Even before the 'father of the people' imagery had begun

to be exploited in the official cult discourse, people referred to Kirov as a father. For example, some workers described feeling as though they had been 'orphaned' by his death. Others recalled Kirov's care for them. In one case, workers had been settled in new homes without light or water. They wrote to him, and in two days he came in person, went round all the families 'like a father', and expressed interest in their life, and within three days all was put right.¹³ Once this language had become an integral part of the propaganda in the mid-1930s, some spontaneity seems to have continued. People referred to Stalin and other leaders as *diadia* ('uncle') or *batiushka*, terms which were never used officially. Thus, when a church was being closed in 1940, a group of women assembled and cried out: 'Let them shoot us, or hang us, but we have always prayed and will pray. We will go to *batiushka* Stalin, who allows us to keep our church, while all this is being done by local soviet power [*mestnaia sovetskaia vlast'*].'¹⁴

This example reveals how ordinary people justified their appeals to the highest authority not only in terms of the father-child relationship, but also with reference to the incompetences and abuses of local power. Both these formulae emerge clearly in letters and petitions, which played such an important role in Russian and Soviet culture. As Freeze points out in relation to the tsarist period: 'supplication and petition was an endemic feature of Russian political culture, providing a partial substitute for popular representation and a vital bond between tsar and people from medieval times'.¹⁵ In the Soviet period, too, petitioning was one of the few means by which ordinary people were able to communicate directly with the *vozhdi*, and their petitions therefore provide plentiful insights into popular representations of the leaders.

The *vozhdi* received millions of petitions and dealing with them was considered a crucial part of their work. The quantity of letters Zhdanov received seems to have progressively risen. While in 1935 he received an average of over 1,000 every month, by 1938-40, the average had risen to from 5,000 to 7,000. Some months he received over 10,000 (e.g. December 1937, March 1938).¹⁶ The letters were classified into about fifty categories, such as 'on restoration to the VKP(b)', 'on providing housing', 'on material help'. The secretariat forwarded them to the relevant bodies concerned, who were supposed to examine the complaint or request in the letter and report back to the *obkom*. Intercession by the *vozhd'*, or his secretariat at

least, was thus supposed to galvanise other recalcitrant branches of the bureaucracy into action.

It is worthwhile comparing the representations of authority in Soviet petitions with their tsarist equivalents. The latter tended to follow a common pattern, since the form of a petition to the tsar followed strict rules laid down by government decree.¹⁷ Volkov's study of the lexicon of seventeenth-century *chelobitnye* (petitions) highlights the formulaic aspects of the petition. In particular, he analyses what he calls the 'emotional-expressive' parts of the *chelobitnye*. These included an address setting out the dependent (vassal) nature of the relationship between supplicant and tsar, in which the tsar was attributed flattering and sympathetic characteristics such as 'noble' and 'merciful', and the supplicant was described as 'poor, impoverished', 'orphaned', and his situation as 'helpless', 'without refuge'. The actual request was often accompanied by a narrative of the dire consequences which would ensue if the request was left unheeded; for example, the possibility of death was sometimes mentioned.¹⁸ Later petitions do not appear to have departed markedly from this model. Nineteenth-century petitions also flattered the tsar, stressed the petitioners' dependence on him, their suffering, and the tsar's unique capacity for positive intervention. The following are just two representative examples of language dating from 1859-60:

we, in our general lack of fortune, experience so much grief that it is impossible to bear, and it forces us peasants ... personally to submit a request to the most august monarch, on whom our fate depends.

Velikii gosudar' [Your great majesty], our sufferings and complaints arouse grief in no one, as they do in you ... everything which is written [in the petition] we can tell no one: neither the local leadership, nor the church.¹⁹

It is significant that supplicants always directed their criticisms at local administrators, while showering extravagant praise upon the monarch, thereby perpetuating the good tsar/wicked ministers notion.²⁰

The language of Soviet letters and petitions is reminiscent of that of its pre-revolutionary equivalent, although there are also clear differences between them. While tsarist petitions were very formulaic, appeals to the *vozhdi* were not required to conform to a set pattern. As a result, the latter were far less standardised and mechanical. Nevertheless, certain formulae did recur in many Soviet

letters and petitions, and these often echoed their tsarist predecessors, while incorporating simultaneously the new 'Soviet' language.

The form of address to the leader was usually the first stereotypical element of the letter. It defined the relationship between supplicant and addressee. Although some letters simply began 'Dear comrade Zhdanov/Stalin', or even 'comrade Zhdanov!', many others used the address as a way of emphasising the exalted and powerful position of the recipient. Sometimes petitioners recalled the recipient's status in straightforward language 'I am turning to you as my own *vozhd'*',²¹ while on other occasions, particularly with the increasing extravagance of the propaganda, they employed the more effusive official cult epithets 'Greetings, dear comrade Stalin! Our beloved *vozhd'*, teacher, and friend of the whole happy Soviet country'; 'Dear, glorious and good Mikhail Ivanovich [Kalinin]!'; 'Our highly respected *zemliach* [fellow countryman] and ruler of all the USSR, comrade M. I. Kalinin'; 'Greetings friend and best leader of our country, M. I. Kalinin!'; 'dear world leader' (to Stalin); 'our great *vozhd'* and teacher and my own dear father I. V. Stalin'.²² These addresses, and especially the latter appeal to the leader as 'father',²³ not only highlighted the powerful position of the addressee, and his concomitant responsibility for the welfare of his 'children', but were also designed to elicit a strong emotional response.

This quite calculated playing on the emotions of the recipient was one of the most striking features of the petitions. It can be discerned in attempts to flatter the *vozhd'*, not only through the use of the elaborate addresses mentioned above, but also by underlining the special abilities and authority of the leader: 'You are the cleverest leaders of our government and the policies of Soviet power'; 'You are a highly cultured person'; 'I turn to you as leader of the political life of our Union and as a person whose authority may be able to help clear up my case'.²⁴ Likewise the moral qualities of the leader were frequently played up in the initial address, particularly his humanity, sensitivity, and concern for the welfare of his people.²⁵

The address was often accompanied by some sort of apology or justification for the letter. This tended to be couched in terms of the *vozhd'* being the only person capable of dealing with the supplicant's appeal: 'I am turning to you about matters of principle, as leader of the Leningrad party organisation, and about personal matters, as the only person who can help'; 'only you alone, dear and respected comrade Zhdanov, can help me in this matter'; 'Only you, and no

one else in Leningrad can help me find the truth'.²⁶ The writer would often emphasise that she or he had explored other avenues first before turning to the leader: 'We are obliged to turn to you for help, because nowhere do we find any support for our struggle'; 'Only after trying all ways and means that exist did I decide to bother you with my request';²⁷ and that she or he was aware of the fact that the *vozhd'* was very busy: 'I know that you have a huge workload, but ...'; 'I understand that you have a terrible lot of work and that you cannot be generous with your attention to individuals, but ...'.²⁸

Having established why it was incumbent upon the *vozhd'* to take heed of the appeal by referring to his own unique, powerful position, the writer would frequently give this greater impact by revealing his or her own relative impotence and helplessness. Often the language bordered on the hysterical, with intimations of death and sickness: 'You are being addressed by a completely persecuted person, who stands on the edge of the total catastrophe of his life'; 'I beg you please as the most sensitive comrade to help me in hopeless situation, which makes me think about death';

I never thought that I would bother you with personal questions, but it's turned out that as I'm at a dead-end as they say, I've decided to turn to you for help all the more because at the moment I don't have any support anywhere and find myself in a difficult state both morally, and also physically unwell.²⁹

It may indeed have been the case that petitioners were close to sickness and death, but it is also possible that this type of language was a discursive convention used deliberately in order to elicit the recipient's sympathy.

The similarities between these elements of Soviet letters and petitions and their pre-revolutionary antecedents are obvious. However, a discourse is not automatically passed down from generation to generation. It tends only to be perpetuated if it is still relevant to a new situation. Why did this type of discourse continue in the Soviet period? Evidently, certain structural features of the tsarist political system continued and were even exacerbated in the Soviet period – notably a centre-periphery divide, a lack of effective representative institutions, and a new and even more inflated and beleaguered bureaucratic ruling stratum. An appeal to the *vozhd'* was often the only way of cutting through the red tape, and it made sense to adopt the

tactics likely to elicit a sympathetic response: employing the cult language, flattering the leader, and stressing the helplessness of the 'little people'. This, after all, was the message put out by Stalin himself from about 1935 – that officialdom was riddled with corruption and abuse, and that the great father Stalin was on the people's side.

Numerous petitioners therefore explicitly affirmed their loyalty to the *vozhd*, while criticising individual bureaucrats and local distortions, as had been the practice under the tsar. The following examples all refer to the situation in the *kolkhozy*; however, similar comments were made about all aspects of Soviet life:

Dear *vozhd*, you see very blindly, you only hear at various congresses and meetings a number of completely satisfied delegates, and also all our press pulls the wool over your eyes about what's going on in the countryside.

We think that you and com. Stalin don't know that the *kolkhozniki* live so badly. We think that our village communists are deceiving you, perhaps they write to you that the *kolkhozy* are doing very well, there are still many communists who . . . have a card, but in fact are wrecking.

The *kolkhoz* leadership is such that we cannot be wealthy. Our administration often does not do what is written to us by dear com. Stalin, who really cares about us, thank you.³⁰

What does the use of this language reveal about the reception of the leader cult? It indicates that the populist, paternalist aspects of the cult resonated with ideas at the grassroots, and that the 'traditional' conceptions inherent in the cult were readily accepted and employed. However, this type of language does not in itself illuminate the extent to which Soviet citizens venerated Stalin and his colleagues, just as petitions from the tsarist period cannot explain whether the Russian peasant was a monarchist or not, as Field has convincingly argued.³¹ The rather formulaic nature of the language suggests that some people may have regarded it above all as a device necessary for attaining certain rational goals without appearing to threaten the status quo.³²

Likewise, people may have considered the citation of the leaders' own words a way of furthering their own aims in their battles with local power. This reappropriation of the official discourse did not necessarily imply a 'cultic' attitude, a sense of reverence for the words of the *vozhd*'. Rather it was a reasoned and effective means of protest, often just what was required to galvanise the officials in

question. Thus, shortly after Stalin's 'Cadres' speech in May 1935, policemen complained to Zhdanov that they were having to work sixteen to eighteen hours a day with no time off, and little pay. They ended the letter with the hope that 'after comrade Stalin's brilliant speech on cadres, you will take measures to help us'. As a result of the letter, Zhdanov initiated an investigation.³³ Similarly, there was a case of the pay of ITR being held up at the Krasnogvardeets factory, during which one worker announced that 'Comrade Stalin speaks of the need to protect cadres, but our pay is being held up every month.' The protest was effective, for in this instance Zhdanov, the 'benevolent father', stepped in and those responsible for the abuses were called to account.³⁴

THE CHARISMATIC LEADER

Unlike the 'traditional' image of the leader, the charismatic facets of the leader cultivated in the propaganda seem to have had less of a resonance amongst the broad mass of the population, in this period at least. Gordon and Klopov assert that Stalin was perceived as a 'charismatic *vozhd*', a demi-god, possessing superhuman abilities and superhuman wisdom. For tens of millions of people . . . he was the symbol of the motherland, Soviet power, socialism.³⁵ In fact, this notion of Stalin as a demi-god is comparatively rare in letters: there are few fanatical outpourings of love for him and other leaders.³⁶ However, the need to create icons or symbols out of the *vozhd*, which Gordon and Klopov mention, appears to have been shared rather more widely.

This grassroots input into the iconisation of the leader can be discerned in the popular treatment of pictures of the *vozhd*. Although the regime itself encouraged the practice of carrying icon-like pictures of leaders during demonstrations and displaying them in prominent places, the way people treated this practice reveals a process of negotiation between official and popular values. Some people hung pictures of the *vozhd* in icon frames, placed these next to icons of saints, and even prayed and crossed themselves in front of the them.³⁷ This treatment of the picture of a *vozhd*' as a saint in the Christian tradition, as in itself the embodiment of spiritual power, was clearly a spontaneous movement from below, rather than a policy promoted from above. The reports of party agitators tended to represent such popular practices in a negative light, implying that they were

perceived as an undesirable distortion of the official message. There was one incident in particular when a *bezbozhnik* visited a *kolkhoznik* fisher, and was shown the barn where he kept his fishing equipment, and where a portrait of Gamarnik also hung. The *bezbozhnik* asked why the portrait was hanging there, to which he replied 'You see, before St Nicholas hung there, he really helped, and now that portrait has been hanging there, it's been difficult catching fish.'³⁸ It is possible that the fisher regarded the portrait as the potential locus of supernatural powers. Its actual failure to help may thus have diminished the authority of the *vozhd'* in the eyes of the fisher.

The iconisation of the leaders was actively promoted by the regime, but does not seem to have been considered unnatural by at least some of the people, who volunteered their own suggestions about how to exalt the *vozhd'i*. Many ideas about popularising the *vozhd'i*, putting up statues to them, renaming places after them, or awarding them honours emanated from the people themselves. After Kirov's death, there were apparently spontaneous proposals that places, children, and so on be named after Kirov, and statues erected to him. It was claimed that Kirov was Lenin's equal, and many questioned, 'Why are they taking our dear Kirov to Moscow?', asking that he should be buried instead in a mausoleum in Leningrad.³⁹ There was a widespread desire to see his body lying in state, even amongst 'backward' workers and intellectuals, who had never previously appeared at demonstrations and meetings. Even the Hermitage – a nest of reactionaries and 'former people' – found 270 people keen to bid farewell to the body, more than twice as many as had ever attended political events previously.⁴⁰ According to a confidential report prepared for the chief of the Leningrad militia, one and a half million people (more than half the population of Leningrad) passed through the Uritskii Palace, where the body lay in state, on 2–3 December, and many others who wanted to participate were refused permission to join the columns because of overcrowding. Those who did get the chance to take part often had to wait for four to five hours on the same spot in temperatures of -4°C , but this did not deter them.⁴¹ Like the reaction to the deaths of Lenin and Stalin, but on a smaller scale, this interest in Kirov's dead body suggests a mystical, religious attitude to authority. It is significant that only in the 1960s were secular funerals introduced for ordinary Soviet citizens.⁴² In this period their limitation to the *vozhd'i* must have reinforced the impression of the latter's elevation high above normal mortals.

In August 1935, Zhdanov received a letter complaining about the fact that in Leningrad there were streets named after the populist terrorists Zheliabov and Perovskaia, but none named after revolutionaries, and no 'Lenin Street'. The letter also complained that the statue of Lenin outside the Finland station did not compare favourably with those of Peter I and Catherine II. Clearly Zhdanov sympathised with this view, for at the bottom of the letter was his resolution 'For the agenda of the buro'.⁴³ Kalinin received a letter in 1936 proposing the creation of museums of Stalin and Voroshilov and a Lenin house in Red Square.⁴⁴ One man who knew Zhdanov as a child wrote to him in 1935 to inform him that he had commenced a 'tale for children, the hero of which will be little Andrei, and the theme: his adventures'.⁴⁵

In 1939, the Eighteenth Party Congress received a letter arguing that the party should adopt the names of Lenin and Stalin and become 'The Lenin–Stalin All-Union Communist Party'.⁴⁶ At the time of the discussion of the new Constitution, there were suggestions that the Soviet flag should be decorated with pictures of (a) Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Stalin, (b) Lenin, Stalin, Kalinin, and Voroshilov, or (c) Lenin and Stalin, and that Moscow should be renamed in honour of Stalin.⁴⁷ A few letters at the end of 1937 and the beginning of 1938 also requested that Moscow be renamed Stalinodar or Stalingrad.⁴⁸ One was from a pensioner, E. M. Chulkova, who confessed that her dream was 'to live in Stalinodar'. She reported that: 'As for myself, I have been living there for ages, and would probably have carried on living there quietly', but she had been inspired by Stalin's speech of 11 December 1937, and the triumphal cries of the voters, to imagine how popular a decision to rename Moscow would be. She explained that Leningrad was associated with the heroic past, but that the epoch of victorious socialism was the Stalinist epoch:

In the beautiful capital are concentrated the flowering of scientific thought, the flowering of art, of world achievements, the powerful sweep of the plan for its reconstruction, its metro, the Volga–Moscow canal, the grandiose construction of the Palace of Soviets – all this and much more besides is the gift [*dar*] of the great genius Stalin – Stalinodar.

The letter ended with a poem expressing these thoughts in an even more florid manner. Another letter in the same file also proposed that Moscow should become 'Stalindar':

The genius of Stalin is a historic gift to mankind, its guiding star on the paths of development and ascent to the highest level. Therefore I am deeply convinced that all the workers of mankind on earth of our epoch and all mankind of many ages in the future will welcome the renaming of Moscow to Stalindar with joy and satisfaction.⁴⁹

As well as this desire to employ the icons of the *vozhdi* more widely, there was also pressure to honour the chief symbol, Stalin himself. This was expressed in a letter of 1935 to Kalinin which questioned why Ordzhonikidze, Voroshilov, and Kalinin had received the Order of Lenin, while Stalin had not. Since Stalin, 'The Great Genius, Mind and Heart', was responsible for most of the country's good fortune, it was appropriate that he should be similarly honoured.⁵⁰ By 1939, the cult had reached such proportions that the issue was no longer the Order of Lenin, but the establishment of a special Order of Lenin-Stalin, reflecting one writer's gratitude to Stalin.⁵¹ Another called for Stalin's sixtieth birthday in December 1939 to be celebrated as a national holiday, remarking that Stalin would probably refuse from modesty, but that the party and state should insist, since it was the wish of all the people.⁵² Also in connection with this event, Kalinin received a request to call an extraordinary session of the Supreme Soviet in order that this institution might confer upon Stalin the title 'the Great'.⁵³

Most of these suggestions were left unfulfilled, considered too extravagant even for the extremes of the cult. For example, Zhdanov insisted that the story about his childhood should not be written, saying 'that theme is not at all topical',⁵⁴ while Stalin was apparently opposed to the renaming of Moscow.⁵⁵

In ordinary letters, the idea of the leader embodying special spiritual and emotional power was far less common than the representation of the leader as a father-like defender of the people. Nevertheless, there were a few overtly charismatic representations, including those contained in the letters on renaming Moscow. There was also one particular case of a correspondent of Kalinin, who had allegedly been writing to him for ten years, describing these letters as his 'only joy'. He called Stalin 'Sunshine-Happiness', and told Kalinin that 'you are for me like a man-god, and I. V. Stalin is god'. He declared that his one desire was to touch Kalinin. He clearly spent ages poring over the pictures of the *vozhdi* in the newspapers, evaluating them in adoring terms:

And take the last issue of *Pravda* from 28 February, the photo where the

border troops are given awards. What an unforgettable face you have on that photo, it's impossible to forget and stands before my eyes all the time, with what pure love our Sunshine-Happiness looks at you here and what an inspired face of the Greatest Genius he has here, and for his smile, for just one smile, a thousand lives could be given up.

And in *Pravda* of 1 March. Your face is only shown in profile, but in it there is so much good, warm, and attractive, which is the very essence of you Dear Mikhail Ivanovich, that it is difficult to convey in words. And the face of our Sunshine-Happiness, on the same photo has a totally special, just marvellous expression. In particular the eyes, the eyes of the Greatest Genius, the Greatest sage and thinker, which seem to see and decide the fates of whole worlds, and before which there are no secrets. How much power, how much greatness, how much sunshine, and how much supernatural reason there is in those dear and beloved eyes.⁵⁶

The cult phenomenon is frequently represented as a mass hypnosis, as something completely irrational, as part of the general 'psychosis' of this period.⁵⁷ Evidently, as the last letter in particular illustrates, it did have irrational aspects. Yet some of these more 'charismatic' representations, like those of the traditional leader, may have been employed for quite rational goals. Obviously it is difficult to uncover the complex motivation behind any individual pronouncement. However, by making an apparently innocent and unself-interested suggestion about honouring a *vozhda'*, or by writing 'fan letters', an individual may have hoped to store up a capital of good will to be exploited in the future.

The idea of 'mass hypnosis' is an over-simplification which does no justice to the variety of messages within the official cult discourse itself, and within popular representations of the phenomenon. By disentangling the latter, it is clear that reception of the myth(s) of the leader cult was far from uniform. Ordinary people selected those aspects of the official cult language which conformed with their own ideas about leadership and modified or rejected others. They also reappropriated the official language for their own quite rational ends. Although the charismatic, god-like image of the leader had adherents, it was not the only nor even the main image favoured by ordinary people, in this period at least. In the post-war period, the experience of war, the elevation of the 'Generalissimus', and generational change may all have combined to alter perceptions, to instil the charismatic image more firmly.

CHAPTER II

Negative representations of the leader and leader cult

Although the official cult discourse was employed on certain occasions, it was also ignored, misinterpreted, rejected, criticised, and subverted in various ways. Its messages did not always get through, or did so in a distorted form, either because of the inefficacy of the agitprop, or because people deliberately chose to ignore or misinterpret it. However, there were individuals who were only too well aware of the cult's omnipresence, and criticised it directly, or attacked it in other ways, which included subverting its gravity and sense of hierarchy and permanence. Some people also proposed alternative leaders, although it is significant that the language in which these proposals were couched was very reminiscent of that of the official cult, which suggests that the propaganda of the cult itself probably conformed with popular ideas about the nature of leadership; as in the cases cited elsewhere in this study, it was often simply the failure of the reality to live up to the claims of the propaganda which generated hostility.

INDIFFERENCE TO AND MISUNDERSTANDING OF THE CULT

Until the mid-1930s, a number of people were still unaware of the existence or roles of the *vozhdi*. In 1933, even party members were expelled from the party for ignorance about the biographies of the leaders. For example, during a purge at the Leningrad Historical-Linguistic Institute, one party member described Stalin as 'President of the STO [Sovet truda i oborony – Council of Labour and Defence]', and was unable to answer the question 'Who is Kirov?' Another member thought that Molotov 'leads agriculture'.¹ The ignorance even among party members concerning the identity of their leaders was regarded as a failing in propaganda work, and it was partly to rectify this that the party undertook such a concerted

campaign to popularise the *vozhdi* during the next few years. This campaign was not immediately successful. At the time of Kirov's death, it transpired that many peasants and school-children had not even heard of him. In 1935, even party members remained in the dark about their leaders. Some Komsomol members were unable to answer questions such as 'Who is Stalin?', while in the communist university a student described Kalinin as 'the leader of all the *kolkhozy*'. Even some teachers were unaware of what Kalinin and Molotov did at the end of 1936. As late as 1937, a few *kolkhozniki* did not know who Stalin was. When one particular *kolkhoznik* was asked in 1937 'Who is the boss now in Russia?', he replied 'They say its Il'in.' Il'in was in fact the chairman of the village soviet.²

This last remark illustrates another aspect of the problem, namely the way in which the propaganda messages were often transmitted in a distorted form. The idea of the cult of the *vozhd'* was frequently misinterpreted as a cult of authority in any form. Such a practice was quite contrary to the official discourse which carefully regulated the entitlement to cult status. While Kirov, Ezhov, Ordzhonikidze, and others close to Stalin were accorded this right at various times, it was inadmissible for regional party leaders to imitate the practices of the centre. Mini-cults emerged publicly in mid-1933, at the same time as the cult of Stalin. For example, in June 1933 the newspaper of Babaevskii district, *Novyi put'*, published a greeting to the secretary of its regional party committee: 'Long live the *raikom* of the VKP(b) and the dear [*blizkii*] *kolkhoznik*, untiring organiser of the struggle for the strengthening of the *kolkhozy*, comrade Vorontsov.'³ In 1937, it was revealed that the party secretary of Murmansk was being greeted with cries of 'Long live Abramov, the *vozhd'* of the Murmansk Bolsheviks' and 'Long live the steel Abramov', and that during the local May Day demonstration in Poddorsk slogans were heard such as 'Hurrah! To the leader of the Poddorsk Bolsheviks, Sergei Petrovich Krylov'. In some areas party meetings emulated Kremlin receptions, with *paradnost'* (ostentation), *torzhestvennost'* (solemnity), and long applause for the party secretary. Local leaders would lay claim to all successes in their region, much as Stalin was made responsible for the achievements of the Soviet Union, and *podkhalimstvo* (toadying) flourished.⁴

The February–March plenum in 1937 drew attention to these abuses, and exhorted party officials to emulate the 'modesty' of Stalin.⁵ Nevertheless, the practice was difficult to eradicate. In

November 1939 excessive praise of candidates was noted in connection with the local soviet elections in Leningrad. One candidate was described as a '*vozhd*' whom the masses will follow as he leads them to communism'. Another election meeting ended with the words 'Long live the VKP(b) and *vozhd*' comrade Stalin, who has raised such a worthy person as comrade Levchenko [the candidate].⁶ These practices undermined the cult of Stalin (and his *soratniki*), for they relativised it in the eyes of ordinary people. His cult may have been perceived as just one of many manifestations of self-aggrandisement, no better or worse than the local cults, and his authority as a variation on all types of authority, rather than something unique and special. Therefore, as Fitzpatrick suggests, when the attacks on the local bosses began in 1937, some ordinary people probably did not distinguish between the different types of authority, and regarded Stalin and his colleagues just as guilty as the local chiefs.⁷

It is worth noting that the distortion of official cult language extended not only to Soviet political figures. For example, school-children sometimes wrongly applied epithets normally reserved for Stalin and his colleagues to capitalist leaders. Tests conducted by the Commissariat of Enlightenment in 1936 on pupils in Moscow *oblast'* revealed that some children had a quite erroneous understanding of Gladstone's significance. He was described as '*vozhd*' of the working class – a liberal'; 'on the one hand, a liberal, and, on the other, a *vozhd*' of the workers'; '*vozhd*' *naroda* [leader of the people]'.⁸ Thus Stalin and Gladstone were placed in one category – an intriguing example of the 'janus-like' quality of signs.

CRITICISM OF THE CULT

While the wider population only began to criticise the cult directly, to treat it with irony, from about 1937, some of the more informed sections of the population, including intellectuals, experienced workers, and party and Komsomol members, were sensitive to the radical changes in the propaganda in this period, and aware of the absurdities of the cult from its outset. Marx's condemnation of the 'cult of personality', and the Bolsheviks' theoretical rejection of *vozhdizm* were presumably known to some people.⁹ As early as 1934, a worker attending a meeting devoted to Stalin's Seventeenth Party Congress speech openly protested about the fact that 'everyone is praising Stalin, they consider him a god, and no one makes any

criticisms'. It was already obvious that the treatment of Stalin had religious overtones. Likewise, the posthumous deification of Kirov encountered opposition and ridicule. Someone referred ironically to the funeral of Kirov as the funeral of 'the second god' and others compared the portraits of Kirov to icons. A group of students even organised a mock requiem in front of Kirov's picture, accompanied by the performance of anti-religious *chastushki* and the lighting of candles. The widespread desire to honour Kirov was not universal. Some thought that he was being given excessive public acclaim. Others resented the money being spent on the memorialisation.¹⁰

Initially, a few of the more literate workers were suspicious of the amount of attention accorded to Stalin in the media in 1934–5, since previously his public profile had been comparatively low – he had not played a particularly visible role in the revolution or its aftermath compared with luminaries such as Trotsky, Zinoviev, or Kamenev.¹¹ His sudden conspicuousness, the rewriting of history, caused them to complain that the achievements of Trotsky were being ascribed to him. Stalin was a *vyskachka* (an upstart). Protest became more vociferous at the end of 1935 and the beginning of 1936, when the cult reached new proportions. A worker from the Baltiiskii plant (with a twenty-year work record), after complaining about Stakhanovism, remarked ironically 'Life has become good, life has become merry. For whom? Is Stalin happy because there are many fools and they write "the great Stalin" during his lifetime?' Workers objected to the incessant declarations of love for Stalin, the use of the epithets *rodnoi* (dear), 'beloved', 'father', and so on, the transformation of Stalin into what one Komsomol member, employing Marxist terminology, called a 'fetish'. It was felt that Lenin would never have allowed himself to be treated in this way.¹²

In 1936, people also began to draw comparisons between the worship of Hitler and Stalin: both had concentrated enormous power in their hands, both were loved by their people.¹³ An NKVD agent with the code name 'Volgin', working in the Academy of Sciences, reported a revealing conversation on this theme which took place on 1 September 1936. Although academics are not the focus of this study, their elaborate analysis of the Stalin cult deserves a mention. The conversation, between Krachkovskii, Kazakevich, Shcherbatskii, and Struve, centred on the future role of the party. Rumours had been circulating that the party was to be abolished, or to be allowed to die away naturally, that Stalin could no longer trust

it. The dictatorship of the party was to be replaced by presidential rule. Struve attributed these rumours to the 'right Academicians', and to circles around Deborin and Bukharin. That day, however, a new recruitment into the party had been announced which Shcherbatskii interpreted in the following way: 'They've driven out the old party members, now they'll choose new ones, who'll do anything to grovel to Stalin. These ones will only last a year or two, then they'll get bored.' Krachkovskii warned that now it was necessary to be very careful about expressing one's views:

We are living during the final flare-up of terror. This time it's broken out against that section of party members who could prevent Stalin and his assistants from hanging on to power after the introduction of the new Constitution. It is clear that in communist circles there is now a struggle going on for the president's seat. I am almost sure that the president will be Stalin, who will that way be transformed into Joseph the First, the new all-Russian emperor. It's not a question of intentions, but of the general course of history. Communism is becoming the national religion of Russia, just as fascism is becoming the national religion of Germany and Italy, and Kemalism the national religion of Turkey. With all these movements what is characteristic on the one hand is hatred for the pre-existing religions – Orthodoxy, Catholicism, Lutheranism, Islam – and on the other – a cult of the *vozhd'*. For when Stalin is publicly called the father and *vozhd'* of the peoples, then the last line between him and the Führer Hitler is eliminated.

The agent had a similar discussion with another academic, Makarova, who also considered that the new Constitution signalled the 'end of revolution and the transition from the masses to the individual [*perekhod ot mass k lichnosti*]', and that it was likely that Stalin would be made president and 'official dictator'. Professor Zarubin, although confessing not to have thought about these matters for many years, had also heard many opinions recently comparing Russia and Germany, and stating that Stalin was merely copying the behaviour of Hitler.¹⁴

These analyses by the academic old guard are interesting because the cult is considered as part of long-term, broader historical process. Krachkovskii (an orientalist) explained the phenomenon of the Stalin cult as a continuation of the Russian imperial tradition. However, he was also aware of the parallels with the cults in Germany, Italy, and Turkey. Why the perpetuation of a Russian tradition should take the form of a more universal quasi-religious leader cult was not made clear. However, Zarubin suggested that Stalin was consciously emulating Hitler. In general, those comparing the Hitler and Stalin

cults tended to be the more informed. For example, an anonymous writer to Zhdanov had read Feuchtwanger's description of the fascist system which terrorised people into shouting 'Heil Hitler'. He immediately noted the similarities between this and what was happening in the Soviet Union, where ordinary people joined in the chorus of praise, while really thinking 'May they go to the devil, they do not make our lives any better.'¹⁵

By 1936, official demonstrations had turned into occasions for glorifying the leaders. More and more portraits of the *vozhdi* were displayed and carried. In his diary entry following the November 1936 demonstration, Arzhilovskii explicitly made the connection between the carrying of these portraits and the bearing of icons in religious processions:

By the way, the portraits of party leaders are now displayed the same way icons used to be: a round portrait framed and attached to a pole. Very convenient, hoist it onto your shoulder and you're on your way. And all these preparations are just like what people used to do before church holidays . . . They had their own activists then, we have ours now. Different paths, the same old folderol.¹⁶

The portraits were rather heavy, and the NKVD reported that during the May Day demonstrations in 1936 and 1937, several people refused to carry them, or deliberately dropped them. A few objected specifically to the fact that they were supposed to bear them aloft 'like icons'. By 1937, some people, especially party members, were tired of the cult, which had assumed alarming proportions. Towards the end of the year, the terror and the leader cults were both reaching their apogee. The electoral campaign was a huge publicity stunt for the *vozhdi*, who became candidates in several regions simultaneously, to the chagrin of some voters, who thought this farcical. The propaganda alienated some, including a *sluzhashchii* from Borovicheskii district, who had had enough of the elections: 'The radio only reports eulogistic speeches about the rulers, and the rulers themselves eulogise. I'm sick of it. Even illiterates are taught to read using phrases like "dear comrade Stalin".' A Leningrad worker also complained that 'All the party and government leaders are idealised' and objected to the excessive praise of candidates, such as Tevosian, who, it was claimed at one meeting, had been a leader of the liberation of Georgia at the age of fifteen. An engineer from Elektrosila protested against the flattering speeches and the professions of love and loyalty to Stalin, reminiscent of the exaltation of the

batiushka-tsar'. Stalin's role was being exaggerated at the expense of that of Lenin, his authority was being created since 'the uncultured masses cannot live without authorities'.¹⁷

Criticism of the cult continued in 1938, especially around the time of the elections to the RSFSR Supreme Soviet. A leaflet ridiculed the impotence of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR where, 'the "people's elect" were allowed to shout out "Hurray" a thousand times in honour of the "vozhd"' and his stooges'. After the elections, a celebratory demonstration was held, which caused one worker to comment, 'Now the time has come when *vozhd*i have become gods and are carried like icons.' Ironic remarks were heard – at one school, when pupils asked their teacher for books, she would tell them to ask Stalin for them, or say 'Stalin has taught you everything, but not how to clean the blackboard.' At another school, a pupil drew a picture of Stalin in epaulettes and spread a song in which Stalin was called the 'General of our unhappy life'.¹⁸ The counter-productive effect of the excessive propaganda was pointed out in an anonymous letter from July 1938, which is worth quoting in full. It was written by a communist supporter of the regime:

Dear comrade Zhdanov!

Do you not think that comrade Stalin's name has begun to be very much abused? For example:

Stalin's people's commissar
 Stalin's falcon
 Stalin's pupil
 Stalin's canal
 Stalin's route
 Stalin's pole
 Stalin's harvest
 Stalin's stint
 Stalin's five-year plan
 Stalin's constitution
 Stalin's block of communists and non-party members
 Stalin's Komsomol (it's already being called this)

I could give a hundred other examples, even of little meaning. Everything is Stalin, Stalin, Stalin.

You only have to listen to a radio programme about our achievements, and every fifth or tenth word will be the name of comrade Stalin.

In the end this sacred and beloved name – Stalin – may make so much noise in people's heads that it is very possible that it will have the opposite effect.

It would be interesting to know how Stalin himself reacts to this?

With communist greetings: V. K. 1/VII-38 Leningrad.¹⁹

It may have been evident to the leadership that the cult was becoming counterproductive. Certainly, from 1939, there was a marked decline in its prominence (apart from the massive sixtieth birthday celebrations at the end of the year). Stalin seemed to be trying to disassociate himself from the unpopular policies of the period. Nevertheless, people still continued to hold him responsible, and after the 1940 labour decrees, the cultic refrain 'Thank you, comrade Stalin, for X' was constantly parodied.²⁰

SUBVERSIVE DISCOURSE

While the majority did not criticise the 'cult of personality' as such, they nevertheless found other indirect ways of subverting the official image of leadership. All the characteristics of the cult were overturned. Where the official cult was serious, the unofficial images were comic; where the official cult denied the existence of a private life to the leaders, the unofficial images concentrated on their personal, human details; where the official cult portrayed the cult as permanent, the unofficial images stressed the transitory nature of the leadership, the imminent deaths of the *vozhd*i. This process of subversion or 'carnivalisation' is particularly evident in the oral popular culture of the period, including jokes, songs, and *chastushki*. When popular culture touched on political questions, it usually featured top party leaders, such as Stalin, Kirov, or Lenin. This was partly because of the prominence accorded to these leaders in the official discourse. However, this is also a typical feature of oral cultures, according to Ong. What he calls 'heavy characters' are crucial to the oral transmission of popular culture, since colourless individuals are simply not memorable.²¹

The gravity of the cult was undermined by practices such as the naming of horses after the *vozhd*i or hanging of their pictures in the toilet. Leaders were portrayed in a comic light, as in the *chastushka*, 'Ekhal Lenin na barane / U barana odin rog / Kuda edesh' ty pleshivyi / Zagoniat' nas vsekh v kolkhoz' ('Lenin was riding on a ram / The ram had one horn / Where are you going, baldy, / Driving us all into the *kolkhoz*'). This focus on the body (Lenin's baldness, his ungraceful pose) contrasted markedly with the

deliberate avoidance of any mention of the physicality of the leader in the official cult, as did the emphasis on the leaders' drinking in *chastushki* and rumours. According to one rumour, 'Kirov was killed by a drunken gang. All the *vozhdi* are always getting drunk', while a *chastushka* made a similar allegation: 'Kogda Kirova ubili, / Stalin vyshel na kryltso, / My s tov. Kirovym / liubili pit' vintso' ('When Kirov was killed, / Stalin came onto the porch, / Comrade Kirov and I / Used to like drinking vodka').²²

Likewise, the official neglect of the leaders' private lives was overturned by ordinary people, who gossiped and joked about the wives and families of their leaders. After Kirov's murder, workers were curious for information about his family, whether he was married even, or if he had any children.²³ A joke was made about the wives of Lenin and Stalin, who were both called Nadezhda (Hope): 'Lenin had a hope – and it remains, but Stalin has no hope. Lenin had the hope of building socialism, but Stalin does not have that hope' (this was a reference to the fact that Lenin's wife was still alive, while Stalin's had killed herself in 1932). Rumours also spread widely about the sex lives of the leaders, exploding the official taboo on this subject. Kirov's murder and Allilueva's suicide were attributed to sex scandals. Stalin's name was linked with a variety of women, and Lenin was purported to have died of syphilis.²⁴

Maureen Perrie has shown how Russian folkloric tales often consisted of two main protagonists: one drawn from the elite, and the other from the *narod*. The cunning peasant getting his own back against a cruel master was often a feature of these tales. Likewise, official hierarchies implicit within the Stalin cult were also reversed. Thus in one joke a peasant went up to Stalin and asked him when socialism would be built. Stalin replied that it would be soon, in two years' time. And the peasant asked, 'So then there will be no GPU or other guard?' Stalin said that there would not be. Then the peasant said 'Then we will shoot you all.'²⁵

The permanence of the cult, its sense of immobility, was countered by much conversation about the actual and potential deaths of leaders, especially that of Stalin. For ordinary people, the death of a leader was the most usual way of imagining the overturning of the status quo. In 1934, amongst young people it was popular to decipher SSSR as 'Smert' Stalina spaset Rossiui' (Stalin's death will save Russia). To some people, the actual death of a leader, Kirov, must have seemed like the fulfilment of all their wishes. It evoked a whole

range of *chastushki*, many of which linked his death with the impending death of other leaders, especially Stalin: 'Kirova ubili / Stalina ub'it' / Vse krest'iane rady budut / Kommunisty zarevut' ('Kirov's been killed / Stalin will be killed / All the peasants will rejoice / And the communists will cry'). His death was also related to other events, such as the sinking of the *Cheliuskin* in 1934. Both were regarded as presaging the overthrow of Stalin: 'Nemnogo vremeni proshlo, kak Cheliuskin potopili ... Segodnia Kirova ubili, zavtra Stalina ub'it' ('It's not long, since the *Cheliuskin* was sunk ... Today Kirov was killed, tomorrow Stalin will be killed'). The deaths of Stalin and Kirov were represented as merely the beginning of more sweeping changes, including the end of the *kolkhoz* system: 'Kirova ubili / Skoro Stalina ub'it' / Vse kolkhozy razbegutsia / Nam svobodnei budet zhit' ('Kirov's been killed / Soon Stalin will be killed / All the *kolkhozy* will collapse / We will live more freely'),²⁶ and better food: 'Kirova ubili / po kotletke podarili / Stalina ub'it' / po kuritse dadut' ('Kirov died / We had cutlets / Stalin'll die / We'll have chicken').²⁷ In general, the deaths of leaders represented the realisation of the carnival idea of holiday and rest from the drudgery of work: 'Lenin died – there was a holiday; Kirov died, there was also a holiday; and if they get all the leaders there'll be an eternal holiday'; 'Lenin died and we had a rest; if another good chap dies, we'd rest even more.'²⁸

How should this 'subversion' be interpreted? Was it indicative of hostility towards the leaders, or was it simply a way of letting off steam, a safety-valve? This is obviously impossible to tell without more contextual information. The regime tended to view all such expressions as politically subversive. Their interpretations cannot be taken too seriously but nor should they be rejected entirely. Evidently there were many cases when jokes and *chastushki* in particular circulated purely for the purposes of entertainment. However, the dangers of relating them in this period were so great that for some people they may have assumed greater political significance.

ALTERNATIVE MODELS OF LEADERSHIP

In contrast to these essentially negative and destructive attitudes towards leaders, there were also suggestions of alternative leadership models, based on a range of symbolic figures, including Lenin, the tsar, Trotsky, Kirov, Bukharin, and other 'enemies', even Hitler.

People exalted these figures partly because their leadership style was deemed more attractive. The official 'cult' language was often employed in relation to them – they were ascribed characteristics usually attributed to Stalin in the official discourse. These leaders also seemed to represent policies which ensured a better standard of living, although the policies for which they actually stood tended to be distorted; for example, the 'enemies of the people' were sometimes perceived as being non-communist, while Trotsky was thought to hold 'rightist' views. This was partly because of genuine ignorance about the real nature of their policies, but also because as symbols, people may have projected on to them whatever they understood to be a better alternative to Stalin.

The posthumous cult of Kirov, although officially sanctioned, could acquire subversive overtones, particularly when Kirov was juxtaposed with Stalin and other leaders. Whether or not it is true that Kirov was favoured by the TsK as an alternative to Stalin as general secretary in 1934, it is clear that amongst some Leningraders he was rated more highly. He was represented as a conciliatory leader, able to get on with the intelligentsia and the people alike. His populist style won the favour of workers, who noted that he was democratic and travelled by tram and that he 'was brave, he went everywhere alone, did not hide himself behind thick walls, we have seen other *vozhdi* little, except at congresses'. Zhdanov, by contrast, was regarded as too distant, as was shown in chapter 8. Kirov was perceived as being more humane than Stalin: 'much more soft-hearted than Stalin'; caring for the poor and the workers: 'Voroshilov stood for the Red Army, Stalin for construction, and Kirov for the people – that they should live better.'²⁹ It is significant that one of the most popular poems during the siege of Leningrad was Tikhonov's 'Kirov Is with Us.' Published at the end of 1942, it was written in cultic language, and included a refrain evoking the populist image of Kirov: 'Po gorodu Kirov idet' ('Kirov is walking round the city'). It also contained the couplet "'Za rodinu" – nadpis' na bashne, / I "Kirov" – na bashne drugoi' ("For the Motherland" – the inscription on one tower, / And "Kirov" – on the other tower'). This close parallel between Kirov and the motherland contrasted markedly with the usual identification, 'For the Motherland, for Stalin', and reinforces the idea that some Leningraders felt greater allegiance to Kirov than to Stalin.

The Lenin cult was assimilated to the cult of Stalin in the

propaganda, but it could also be used to undermine the Stalin cult, as *Sotsialisticheskii vestnik* recognised in 1934: 'the romantic cult of Lenin is becoming dangerous for the sober reality of the Stalinist regime'.³⁰ While party members had traditionally used the ideas of Lenin to oppose the regime (notably Riutin, with his 'Union of Marxist-Leninists'),³¹ some ordinary people, especially workers, also recalled Lenin in a positive way. An inscription on the wall of a lavatory in one factory in 1934 read 'Lenin is dead but his spirit lives on.' In theory, there was nothing particularly subversive about such a statement, which was an official slogan, but it may have contained an implicit critique of the current regime, and the party's Information Department certainly interpreted it in this light.³² Sometimes, the subversion was more overt, as in a letter to Zhdanov of 1937 from the 'TsK' of the 'Legion of Revolutionary Democracy', which praised Lenin and called for the capital to be moved to Leningrad where Lenin, 'the leader of revolutionary democracy, had established the first people's power and introduced democratic freedoms'.³³

The refrain 'If Lenin had been alive ...' was common in this period. It was suggested that if Lenin were still in power, there would be freedom of speech, no party struggles, no collectivisation, no price rises, and especially no harsh labour laws like those of 1940.³⁴ Lenin represented a more peaceful, moderate path to socialism, which Stalin had deviated from: 'Stalin must be removed, he has left Lenin's path, our country is regressing.' One worker encapsulated the difference thus: 'Lenin led the country upwards, but today's *vozhdi* are leading it down.'³⁵ NEP was also perceived as a relatively golden age when:

there was everything, and now there is no food, and when Lenin was alive – everything was peaceful and good, everyone lived in a friendly collective, but when Lenin died, then the squabbles and splits started and the party became impure – there are many cheats and enemies of the people.³⁶

This remark betrays a tendency to idealise Lenin, to portray him as a hero and Stalin as the villain responsible for all the country's woes. This black-and-white picture was particularly evident in jokes. One joke ran, 'Why did Lenin wear over-shoes [*botinki*] and Stalin boots [*sapogi*]? Because under Lenin it was possible to wear over-shoes (it was dry, clean, and nice), but now that Stalin's at the top, there is such a marsh that wherever you go, you get stuck. That's why he wears boots.'³⁷

The Lenin–Stalin linkage in the official cult may have to some extent inhibited a subversive discourse based on the cult of Lenin. Trotsky, by contrast, was regarded as unequivocally opposed to Stalin. Like Lenin, he had also enjoyed a cult, and the same type of language was applied to his leadership.³⁸ His military prowess, oratorical ability, flamboyant style, and intelligence were emphasised by dissenting workers. He was habitually referred to as a genius, and it was asserted that victory in the civil war was due entirely to him.³⁹ Despite the attempt to rewrite history, people continued to trust their own memories. One impassioned supporter of Trotsky was adamant:

The newspapers lie, the accused are not guilty, they did not make any assassination attempts. Trotsky was a good man, a great military leader, leader of the Red Army, defender of the motherland, dedicated to the revolution with all his heart. The army loved him. Were it not for Trotsky, Kazan would not have been taken in 1918 by the Red Army, Moscow would have been left without bread and the Revolution would have perished. Trotsky used to put himself under fire. Were it not for Trotsky, we would not have seen Kronstadt. The fight is going on from soft chairs, they did not want to give in to Trotsky, they blackened him and expelled him.⁴⁰

Trotsky's role in the civil war was contrasted with that of Stalin: 'Thanks to him and only to him was victory over our enemies achieved, for Stalin at that time was at a resort stuffing himself with apples.'⁴¹ His capacity to lead the 'masses' was often remarked upon 'all the masses are behind Trotsky'; 'It's good that Trotsky is alive, he can still organise the masses'; 'Trotsky enjoyed the masses' great love. He was a very strong personality. When the masses listen to him ... everyone is rooted to the spot.' One worker recalled Trotsky's ability to galvanise soldiers into action: 'there were units which did not want to go into battle, and Trotsky came along and everyone rushed into fight'.⁴²

Although this charismatic, cultic language was a feature of the discourse on Trotsky in particular, other leaders were also occasionally its recipients. Zinoviev, Kamenev, Bukharin, Tukhachevskii, and Rykov were all praised for their revolutionary services, described as 'historical figures' and idealists.⁴³ In Leningrad, Zinoviev still enjoyed some support. A leaflet appeared which read 'Long live the tribune of the revolution Zinoviev!'⁴⁴ Peasants regarded Bukharin

and Rykov as having the peasant interest at heart, and there appears to have been some support for them during the 1937 elections.⁴⁵

The cult language was also applied to the tsar, with the conventional symbols being replaced by those of the *ancien régime*, as in leaflets 'Down with Stalin. Long live Tsar Nicholas II', and 'Down with Soviet power. We need landowners and capitalists. Before it was better. Down with Lenin, down with Stalin! Long live the old days under the Tsar! Comrades! Pay attention to this piece of paper.'⁴⁶ Paradoxically, the use of slogans and words such as 'comrades' endowed the symbol of the tsar with revolutionary potential. This most conservative of institutions was thus represented as a means of mobilising the people to overthrow the regime. The tsar was sometimes associated with a better standard of living, and portrayed as a defender of the people's interests. Peasants in particular praised the tsar, for 'Land was given to the peasants not by Soviet power but by the Tsar ... When we prayed to God we lived better.'⁴⁷ Workers also contrasted their standard of living unfavourably with that before the revolution, and some remembered how strikes were allowed under the tsar, how then 'the workers were the bosses'.⁴⁸

Popular understanding of the policies espoused by these leaders was not always very clear. Hitler's leadership and policies also came to symbolise an alternative to that of Stalin, and similar cult language was used in relation to him, as chapter 6 illustrated. However, some people placed Hitler and the 'enemies of the people' in one camp and identified their policies. In the words of a priest, 'The fascists will win under Hitler's leadership, because he is for the people. Trotsky and Zinoviev also had the right policy. They are for the people and against *kolkhozy*, and for that they were shot.' One worker said 'I am for Hitler and Trotsky', evidently not knowing what either of them represented but simply regarding both as strong leaders and as symbols of opposition to Stalin.⁴⁹ The confusion over leaders' policies was especially evident in the case of Trotsky, who was identified with both a 'leftist' and a 'rightist' stance. Thus he was sometimes represented as having been on the side of Stalin against Lenin. He was also perceived as standing for an anti-*kolkhoz*, pro-private property line, and for being a Bukharinist. Some thought that Trotsky, Bukharin, and Zinoviev were all in favour of the peasantry. Similarly, Zinoviev and the tsar were linked as symbols of better policies, as in the words of a *kolkhoznik*: 'We lived better under the tsar than now, when Zinoviev was in charge, we cut the hay and

divided it equally, some for the kolkhoz, some for personal use.⁵⁰ Probably this confusion was partly due to the peasants associating these figures with periods when they were better off, such as NEP. This was the conclusion of one anonymous writer to Zhdanov, who suggested in 1935 that the majority of peasants were on the side of Trotsky, since 'under Trotsky from 1919 to 1930', they had had their own property, free trade, and cheaper prices.⁵¹ Clearly this conclusion was somewhat exaggerated, in order to frighten Zhdanov with the spectre of 'Trotskyism', and it seems unlikely that the 'majority' of peasants shared such a view of Trotsky.

As well as confusion over policies, there was also a tendency to distinguish incorrectly between the favoured leaders and the communists. This reflected ideas which dated back to the civil war period, when people had expressed support for the 'Bolsheviks' against the 'communists', or for 'Soviet power' but against the 'communists'.⁵² As was shown in chapter 8, the word 'communist' had acquired negative overtones. So one carpenter contrasted Trotsky with the communists, portraying him as a pro-worker force. Speaking openly at an election meeting in 1937 he declared 'You communists are the rotten intelligentsia: I want to vote for Trotsky.' Bukharin, Rykov, and Zinoviev were also regarded as being enemies of the communists, and therefore worthy of support.⁵³

Although a few criticised the whole idea of the 'cult of personality', the majority of ordinary people do not seem to have had a clear vision of an alternative type of leadership. The most common line of attack on the cult was a simple reversal of its attributes. In many ways this type of inversion merely bolstered the status quo, because it implied a recognition that there was a fundamental order to be reversed. Even those people who were capable of imagining different models of leadership often simply chose those which were essentially authoritarian and which they represented in the language of the cult itself. The idea of collective leadership was singularly absent. After the death of Kirov, one suggestion was made that he be replaced by a collective, as Lenin had been, but this proposal was conspicuous by its rarity.⁵⁴ The power of the hegemonic discourse to constrain opinion was therefore considerable. However, this discourse was not solely a product of the ruling elite. As the previous chapter illustrated, the traffic of ideas was not only unidirectional – propaganda was also shaped by popular opinion.

Conclusion

Conclusions imply finality, but this one can only be provisional, summarising as it does the results of a preliminary investigation, which has perhaps raised more questions than it has been able to answer. Until now, it has been impossible to address the issue of popular opinion in Stalin's Russia in a systematic way. Now, for the first time, we have access to voices from the past. Often these voices come to us through the mediation of secret police and party officials. Despite the obvious problems with these sources, they do appear to correspond with a genuine *vox populi*, and, in the absence of any superior evidence on the popular mood, historians should use them, albeit with caution and in conjunction with other types of sources.

The new sources indicate that the Stalinist propaganda machine failed to extinguish an autonomous current of popular opinion. The machine itself was far from omnipotent, lacking sufficient resources and personnel to make it fully effective. Whole regions and social groups remained excluded from its influence at various times, and the propaganda that it did manage to transmit was sometimes communicated in a distorted form. The propaganda had to compete with a remarkably efficient unofficial parallel network of information and ideas. The importance of rumour, anecdotes, anonymous letters, and other aesopian strategies in Soviet society has perhaps not been fully appreciated. Likewise, the tenacity of alternative discourses has been underestimated. Religious and nationalist discourse continued to be employed, and gender stereotypes persisted. Alternative political ideas, including those associated with the populists, Lenin, the Workers' Opposition, fascism, and tsarism also remained in circulation.

Yet it is also true that many people were receptive to some or all of the official propaganda messages. Even so, the cultural hegemony of the regime was far from all-embracing. The communication of