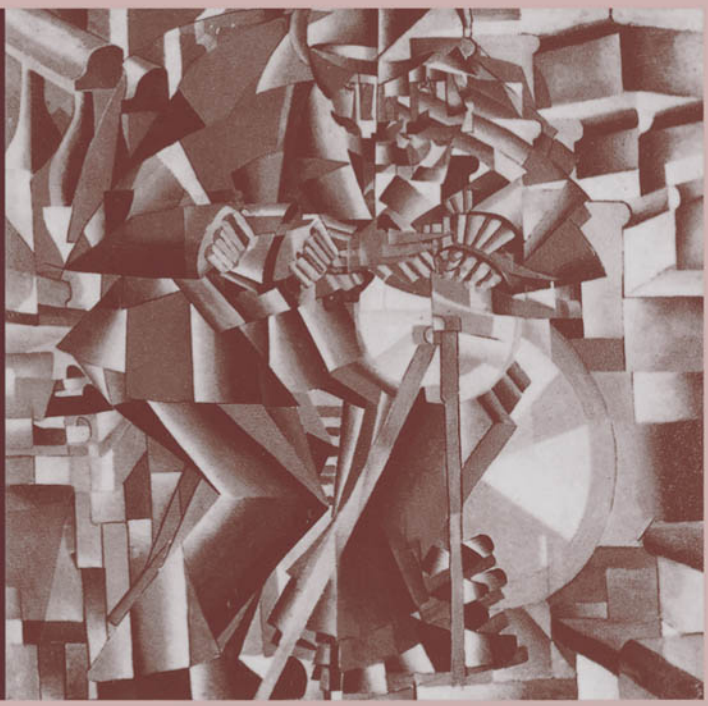
Lynne Viola

PEASANT REBELS UNDER STALIN



Collectivization and the Culture of Peasant Resistance

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OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS
New York Oxford

Oxford University Press

Oxford New York
Athens Auckland Bangkok Bogotá Buenos Aires Calcutta
Cape Town Chennai Dar es Salaam Delhi Florence Hong Kong Istanbul
Karachi Kuala Lumpur Madrid Melbourne Mexico City Mumbai
Nairobi Paris São Paulo Singapore Taipei Tokyo Toronto Warsaw

and associated companies in
Berlin Ibadan

First published in 1996 by Oxford University Press, Inc.
198 Madison Avenue, New York, New York 10016
First issued as an Oxford University Press paperback, 1999

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Viola, Lynne.
Peasant rebels under Stalin : collectivization and the culture of
peasant resistance / Lynne Viola.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 0-19-510197-9 ISBN 0-19-513104-5 (pbk.)
1. Collectivization of agriculture—Soviet Union—History.
2. Peasant uprisings—Soviet Union—History. 3. Government,
Resistance to—Soviet Union—History. 4. Soviet Union—Economic
policy—1928–1932. 5. Soviet Union—Rural conditions. I. Title.
HD1492.5.S65V56 1996
338.7'63'0947—dc20 95-49340

1 3 5 7 9 8 6 4 2
Printed in the United States of America
on acid-free paper

You have shot many people
You have driven many to jail
You have sent many into exile
To certain death in the taiga.

To you millions of curses
From old women, cripples, and mothers,
Who you have taken from the warm embraces
Of fathers and unhappy children.

A wife is on the verge of dying
With curses for you on her tongue.
Around her, her family is crying.
In tears are her four little ones.

The family closes her eyes.
Mother will not return from the grave.
We will never know Father's tenderness.
He is dying in the North Urals taiga.

Poor Father, our provider,
Was taken during grain collections.
They took all the grain from our family
And in her grief Mother passed on.

They took all the animals to the kolkhoz.
They sold off our family home.
Now our fate is to wander the earth
With our Grandmother, there are five . . .

Now the old woman wanders through villages
Gathering crumbs in her sack.
Through the storms of the winter she ventures
Cursing the regime of Stalin . . .

You have shot more people than the Tsar.
You have driven more to jail.
You have sent more into exile.
To certain death in the taiga.

—anonymous poem,
translated by Jane Ormrod

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Preface

The collectivization of agriculture was a watershed event in the history of the Soviet Union. It was the Communist party's premier effort at social engineering on a mass scale and marked the first of a series of bloody landmarks that would come to characterize and define Stalinism. Collectivization destroyed the peasant commune and left in its place a coercive enterprise, socialist in name only, that the Communist party would use to try to transform the peasantry into a cultural and economic colony. The collective farm was to be an instrument of control: it would enable the state to exact a tribute from the peasantry in the form of grain and other produce and extend political and administrative domination to the countryside. To accomplish its goal of colonization, the party aimed at nothing less than the eradication of peasant culture and independence. It launched a wholesale campaign against such peasant institutions as the *dvor* (household), *skhod* (peasant council), land society, mill (a gathering place for informal politics), market, and even church and traditional holidays in an effort to destroy sources of peasant cultural strength and autonomy. It ordered the closing of village churches and a campaign against religion. Village elites were silenced, priests were arrested, and members of the village intelligentsia who chose not to serve as agents of the state were hounded and harassed. And, under the label of "kulak," prosperous, outspoken, or simply able peasant farmers were subject to arrest and deportation in one of the twentieth century's most horrific episodes of mass repression. Peasants lost control of their means of production and economic destiny. Collectivization was an all-out attack against the peasantry, its culture, and way of life.

This book is, in many ways, a continuation of my earlier work on the mobilization and use of Soviet factory workers—the "25,000ers"—in collectivization (*The Best Sons of the Fatherland: Workers in the Vanguard of Soviet Collectivization*, New York, 1987). That book was a study in the urban social base of Stalinism, a case study, as it were, in Stalinist populism and working-class support for the regime. It was also a study in collectivization and the revolution, broadly defined. The 25,000ers left for the countryside confident in the viability of socialism transplanted to the village. Their confidence quickly evaporated as they became immersed in

a hostile and largely alien world resistant to the workers, city, and socialism in its Stalinist guise. In a sense, the study captured the tremendous irony of the Russian Revolution as these workers—dubbed the cream of the "vanguard class"—became mired in the backwoods of peasant Russia. Their story can be read as a metaphor for an intellectually constructed working-class revolution, fueled by urban instability, power-hungry men, and dreamers, which ran aground, inevitably was bound to run aground, by the realities of Russia's socioeconomic structure—that of an agrarian nation similar in most ways to what would later be called by the "first world," "developing" countries—and its politico-cultural traditions.

This book continues the story by exploring the peasant reality that blocked the revolution, perhaps doomed the revolution from the start. My aim ultimately is to understand something of the politics of the revolution by exploring the politics of the peasantry during the climax of the revolutionary experience as it pertained to the countryside, for the main field of contention in revolutionary Russia was never limited to classes (which hardly existed in the Western European sense) but ultimately was a struggle between town and countryside, state and peasantry, one in which the outcome was always less clear than apparent. During collectivization, peasant politics were expressed through resistance. This book is a study of peasant resistance, broadly defined, that seeks to document not only the vast struggle waged by the peasantry during collectivization, but also the manifestation in the USSR of universal strategies of peasant resistance in what amounted to a virtual civil war between state and peasantry. In the end and when power and politics are the main criteria, the state surely emerged victorious from its confrontation with the peasantry, an inevitable outcome given the enormous repressive powers of the state and the localism of peasant revolt. But it was a Pyrrhic victory, for collectivization had the ultimate effect of unifying the overwhelming majority of the peasantry against the state and its policies. Long after the collectivization campaigns of the Stalin revolution, a peasantry, in some sense of the word, would remain, sometimes embittered and most of the time engaged in a continuing and undeclared war based on the constant and manifold employment of the devices of passive and everyday forms of resistance on the collective farm. The revolution would founder in the very countryside it sought to transform, reminding us once again that the October Revolution and the Stalinist industrial and military infrastructure of the USSR were, from the start, built on a peasant foundation inadequate to sustain a proletarian revolution and too weak to maintain its country's superpower status into the late twentieth century.

Peasant Rebels under Stalin seeks to retrieve a lost chapter from the history of the USSR. This chapter is of immense significance because the peasant revolt against collectivization was the most violent and sustained resistance to the Soviet state after the Russian Civil War. This study presents the history of a peasantry on the brink of destruction. It is a study in peasant culture, politics, and community seen through the prism of

resistance. The history of this revolt is also a story of intrinsic human interest. This book is about the women and men who tried to preserve their families, communities, and beliefs from the depredations of Stalinism. Like my first book, this book is concerned with presenting voices from below, allowing, to the extent that it is ever possible, the actors to speak their parts. Not all peasants resisted, but many did and in countless ways. Although their acts were often heroic, this book is not about heroes, but rather about ordinary people driven to acts of heroic desperation by brutal state policies. If in the process of recording their stories we remember the deeds of the people of Nachalova or the women of Butovska, then we will have restored some of the lost voices of Soviet history.

Research for this book began in the mid-1980s, and was completed under the auspices of the Stalin-Era Research and Archive Project of the University of Toronto, funded by an MCRI grant from the Canadian Social Science and Humanities Research Council. Grants from the NEH, the ACLS, the American Philosophical Society, the Social Science Research Council, the Bernadotte E. Schmitt Foundation, IREX, SSHRC, and the Connaught Foundation have made work on this project possible. An earlier version of chapter 6 was first published in *The Russian Review*, vol. 45, no. 1 (January 1985). The *Journal of Modern History* granted permission for publication of segments of a previously published article that appeared in 1990.

I would like to thank Barbara Clements, Sheila Fitzpatrick, Stephen Frank, William Husband, Tracy McDonald, and Christine Worobec for reading the manuscript and providing excellent criticism. I am grateful to Kari Bronaugh, Jeffrey Burds, Colleen Craig, V. P. Danilov, Todd Foglesong, Thomas Greene, Nena Hardie, James Harris, Dan Healey, Nancy Lane, Eileen Consey Maniichuk, Jane Ormrod, and Pamela Thomson Verrico for criticism, advice, and support. Tatiana Mironova provided invaluable research assistance, and the director of the Russian State Archive of the Economy, E. A. Tiurina, and her fine staff made my work in Moscow a pleasure. Perhaps most of all, I would like to thank my friend and colleague, Roberta T. Manning, who has generously shared with me her own work on the Soviet countryside in the 1930s and has been a constant source of support. Zoia Viktorovna and Mariia Fedorovna have been a family for me in Moscow, and it is to them that I owe my inspiration. Finally, I mention Sharik, who has made this work possible.

Toronto, Ontario L. V.
January 1996

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Introduction

To all the rules of peasanthood Muravia stays true.
—Alexander Tvardovsky, "Land of Muravia"

Collectivization was a violent and bloody clash between two cultures at fatal variance with one another. It was a campaign of domination and destruction, which aimed at nothing less than the internal colonization of the peasantry. Stalinist state building required a "tribute" (grain and other agricultural produce) from the peasantry in order to fill the state's granaries for export and to feed the cities and the Red army—in short, to fulfill the endless demands of primitive socialist accumulation.[1] Collectivization would allow for the extraction of vital resources (grain, soldiers, labor), as well as enable the state to subjugate the peasantry through the imposition of vast and coercive administrative and political controls. To achieve its goals, the state sought the eradication of peasant culture and autonomy, the forced acculturation of the peasantry into the dominant culture. "Depeasantization," a Communist[2] corollary of industrialization, socialism, and the advent of the classless society, would be accelerated as the self-proclaimed forces of "modernity" battled the "darkness" and "backwardness" of the village. Although the Communist party publicly proclaimed collectivization to be the "socialist transformation" of the countryside, it was in reality a war of cultures, a virtual civil war between state and peasantry, town and countryside.

Peasants viewed collectivization as the end of the world and fiercely resisted the onslaught of repression. Weaving a dense web of rumor through the countryside, peasants created a counter-ideology that delegitimized and turned the Communist world upside down by labeling Soviet power the Antichrist and the collective farm his lair. They rebelled against what many called a second serfdom with a vast wave of peasant Luddism, destroying property and leveling wealth that could single out a peasant as a "kulak" or be swallowed up by the rapacious collective farm. Millions fled, taking the traditional route of outmigration to the towns or, in other cases, to the desolate steppe, where families sought refuge and young men joined the ranks of what the state labeled "kulak bandits." Many others looked for justice locally, speaking out boldly at collectivization meetings

and writing letters to the central authorities in the vain hope that Stalin, Kalinin, and the Central Committee of the Communist party might defend the peasant against the depredations of a local officialdom implementing central policy. When peaceful means failed, peasants turned to violence. Arson, assault, lynching, and murders of local officials and peasant activists dotted the rural terrain. Rebellion engulfed the countryside, resulting in some 13,000 riots with over two million participants in 1930. Peasant resistance was threatening and pervasive enough for a Commissariat of Agriculture instructor to believe "dark forces" to be at work in the countryside, and for I. M. Vareikis, first secretary of the Central Black Earth regional committee of the Communist party, to conclude that there "probably exists a defined counterrevolutionary SR [Socialist-Revolutionary party] center which is directing this business."[3]

The peasant revolt against collectivization was the most serious episode in popular resistance experienced by the Soviet state after the Russian Civil War. The story of this revolt constitutes one of the many "blank spots"[4] in the history of the former Soviet Union. For decades, Soviet scholars carefully sidestepped the topic, using a fabricated and pseudo-Marxist class language to discuss what became in the truncated historical vision of the Soviet period "class struggle," "kulak insurrection," and "counterrevolutionary terror." Western scholars also avoided the subject, generally focusing on state policies and preferring to leave in place the traditional image of the passive and inert Russian peasant objectified and rendered historically motionless by the totalitarian monolith.[5] More recently, Sheila Fitzpatrick has explored peasant resistance after collectivization, but dismisses peasant resistance during collectivization, concluding that peasants "bore it [collectivization] fatalistically."[6] *Peasant Rebels under Stalin* is mainly, though not exclusively, the story of what happened in 1930, the key year in collectivization. It seeks to demonstrate that the scope and significance of the peasant revolt against collectivization was far greater and more varied than scholars have previously assumed, and that its content and forms grew out of a cultural context specific to peasantries as well as a national context specific to the USSR under Stalin. The book tells only a part of the story of the peasantry during collectivization, but a part that I believe conveys something of the experiences, values, and ways of the peasantry, presenting it as a distinct and meaningful cultural community. The study begins with an analysis of state-peasant relations from the 1917 Revolution to collectivization and then turns to the multilayered dimensions of peasant politics, examining the intricate network of attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, and actions that constitute a peasant culture of resistance.

When peasants engage in acts of resistance, they "speak out loud." That is, this normally silent historical constituency is heard and its actions are recorded, providing the historian with a glimpse of an otherwise often

inaccessible sector of society. Resistance serves as a prism, distilling aspects of peasant culture, politics, and community to the historian. The components of resistance—discourse, behavior, and action expressed through rumor, folklore, symbolic inversion, popular culture, passive resistance, violence, and rebellion—form bridges of understanding into the peasant world. As historians of other times and places have suggested, peasant consciousness reveals itself through these components of resistance, thereby allowing values, beliefs, and attitudes rooted in peasant culture to become visible.[7]

In the collectivization era, we see most clearly what might be described as a *culture* of resistance—that is, a specific style of peasant communication, demeanor, and interaction with elites that runs across time and nations and seeks alternately to manipulate, protest, and adapt itself to the prevailing order through subterfuge, rebellion, and other popular forms of resistance, passive and active, as peasants struggle to maintain their identities and lives within and against the dominant culture. The subordinate culture draws upon its own institutions, traditions, values, rituals, and ways to articulate and enunciate its resistance.

Through resistance, the peasantry revealed itself to be separate and distinct, and antithetical to Soviet power during collectivization. The cohesion and solidarity demonstrated by peasant communities at this time was less the result of minimal socioeconomic differentiation, a notion posited in the Western literature,[8] than the result of the state's violation of peasant interests as a whole. Peasants banded together in self-defense as a cultural community struggling for survival in the face of the state's frontal assault on the household economy, peasant customs, and ways of living. Peasant women emerged as natural leaders of revolt, an outcome both predictable and logical given that collectivization impacted most seriously on women's sphere of interest: the domestic economy of private plot and livestock, the care of children, and matters of family subsistence. Peasant political unity during collectivization derived from the violation of the very interests that held the peasantry together as an economic, social, and cultural entity based on small-scale agricultural production, family economies, and community living.[9] The solidarity arising from the assault on peasant interests formed the foundations for the culture of resistance.

The unity exhibited by the Soviet peasantry during collectivization was neither an innate function of socioeconomics nor, indeed, even a necessarily typical feature of peasant communities. Collectivism and community were village ideals or norms, paramount in the value system of the peasantry, but not always or perhaps even generally reflective of reality. In ordinary times, peasant society was characterized by a high degree of segmentation and internal stratification. Within villages, peasants could be divided according to wealth, family networks, gender, generation, factions based on defined interests, and insider-outsider status. Norms of

collectivism, unity, and egalitarianism were important values and standards of judgment in the village ethos, as well as, and perhaps more significantly, cudgels of enforcement to be used by the village's patriarchal authority structure on disobedient, dissident, or sometimes simply *different* voices in the community.[10]

Peasant cohesion was situational and contextual. It was most often sustained in confrontations with "outsiders," signifying here agents of the town, officialdom, and dominant classes or groups.[11] An ordinarily conflict-ridden society divided by myriad cleavages was capable of unity and solidarity in action in the face of crisis. In such an instance, the interest of the peasantry as a single entity superseded the usual divisions and ruptures of the community.[12] And here again, the "politics" of collectivism and unity could be turned against those villagers who acted as agents of the state or who sided with the contested practices and policies of the "outsiders." During collectivization, the peasantry engaged in a virtual civil war with the state, yet within this civil war there was another, no less brutal civil war that pitted the village community against a minority of peasant officials and activists who went over to the side of Soviet power.[13]

The 1917 Revolution had the unintended consequence of reinforcing many aspects of peasant culture and, specifically, a number of important features underlying and strengthening community cohesion. Although human and material losses from years of war and the famine that followed in the wake of civil war took a tremendous toll on the peasantry, the revolution, in combination with this time of troubles, had the effect of revitalizing the peasant community. Peasants engaged in massive social leveling. The percentages of poor peasants fell from some 65% to around 25% by the mid-1920s, while the proportion of wealthy peasants declined from roughly 15% (depending upon calculation) to about 3% in the same time span.[14] The middle peasant became the dominant figure in Soviet agriculture as a result of wartime losses, social revolution and redivision of wealth, and the return, often forced, of large numbers of peasants who had quit the commune to establish individual farmsteads in the prewar Stolypin agrarian reforms. Socioeconomic differentiation remained fairly stable through the 1920s, showing only very slight increases at the extremes. Leveling reinforced village homogeneity and cohesion while strengthening the position of the middle peasant who, according to Eric Wolf, represented the most "culturally conservative stratum" of the peasantry and the village force most resistant to change.[15] The commune itself was bolstered as most of the Stolypin peasants returned to communal land tenure, which constituted approximately 95% of all forms of land tenure in the mid-1920s, thereby standardizing the peasant economy.[16] And although peasant households splintered as the liberating effects of the revolution encouraged and enabled peasant sons to free themselves from the authority of the patriarchal household, most peasants, especially women and the weaker members of the community, clung all the more tena-

ciously to customary and conservative notions of household, family, marriage, and belief in order to survive the crises of the times. While the revolution no doubt dislodged and altered significant aspects of peasant lives, historians increasingly believe that the basic structures and institutions of the village demonstrated considerable continuity over the revolutionary divide, in many cases becoming stronger as a defensive bulwark against economic hardship and the destructive incursions of warring governments and armies, Red and White.[17]

The strengthening of homogeneity and the endurance of peasant culture should not imply that the peasantry was a static, unchanging rustic fixture. Profound processes of change had long been at work in the countryside, accelerating in particular in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Alternative patterns of socialization appeared as peasant-workers and soldiers returned on visits or permanently to their home villages. Urban patterns of taste and, to a lesser extent, consumption also began to make an appearance in rural Russia as personal contacts between town and countryside became more common. A market economy made inroads into the countryside, altering the economy of the peasant household as well as the internal social dynamics of the commune. Family size declined as extended families slowly began to give way to nuclear families, and marriages began to be based less exclusively on parents' choice. Peasant culture did not stagnate, but evolved over time, absorbing change and pragmatically adapting what was of use.[18] Fundamental structures and institutions of peasant community persisted, demonstrating the durability and adaptability of the peasantry as a culture.

Similar patterns of change persisted into the Soviet period, coexisting, sometimes peacefully, sometimes not, with the prevailing patterns of peasant and community relations and dynamics. Although many interactions between village and town were seriously disrupted during the revolution and civil war,[19] the town and state continued to have an enormous impact on the countryside. Tens of thousands of peasant-workers returned to the village during the civil war, bringing with them new ways and practices not always in line with those of the community. A vast number of peasants served in the army during the world war and civil war, and they, too, returned with new ideas, sometimes at odds with their neighbors. From some of these groups emerged the village's first Communists and Komsomols; the early collective farms and the splintering of households often derived from the aspirations and needs of these prodigal sons. The Communist party, in the meantime, although in practice generally neglectful of the countryside through most of the 1920s and preoccupied with industry and internal party politics, was, in theory, committed to remaking the peasantry, to eliminating it as an antiquated socioeconomic category in an accelerated depeasantization that would transform peasant into proletarian. The party, the Komsomol, peasant-workers home on leave, groups of poor peasants and Red army veterans, and rural correspondents (*sel'kory*) all became dimly lit beacons of Communist sensibil-

ity in the village. Efforts at socialization and indoctrination occurred in periodic antireligious campaigns, literacy campaigns, election campaigns, campaigns to recruit party and Komsomol members, campaigns to organize poor peasants or women, and so on, as the state attempted to build bridges into the countryside to bolster the *smychka* (worker-peasant alliance) of the 1920s. The state succeeded in establishing pockets of support in the village, which would serve not only as agents of change but also as new sources of cleavage and village disjunction as new political identities emerged and interacted, sometimes uncomfortably, within the peasant community.

Collectivization was to destroy most of these "cultural bridges," leaving what remained of the state's small contingent of supporters entrenched against a hostile community. Most of the natural cleavages and fault lines that criss-crossed the village in ordinary times receded into latency during collectivization as the community found itself united against a common, and, by this time, deadly foe. During collectivization, the peasantry acted as a class in much the way Teodor Shanin has defined class for peasantry: "that is, as a social entity with a community of economic interests, its identity shaped by conflict with other classes and expressed in typical patterns of cognition and political consciousness, however rudimentary, which made it capable of collective action reflecting its interests."[20] Whether it is described as a class or as a culture in Clifford Geertz's sense of a totality of experience and behavior, the "socially established structures of meaning" or "webs of significance" by which people act,[21] the peasantry clearly demonstrated the extent to which it was distinct and separate from much of the rest of Soviet society.

Implicit in this view of the peasantry as a class or culture is some echo of Robert Redfield's notion of peasant society and culture as "a type or class loosely defined" with "something generic about it."[22] In form and in content as well as in common cause and interest, a great deal about the peasantry's resistance to collectivization was "generic," demonstrating the durability and solidarity of the peasantry as a social and cultural category and its similarities to other peasants engaged in resistance at other times and in other places. The generic nature of the peasantry and its resistance, however, only goes so far in explicating peasant behavior in these years, for collectivization was largely unprecedented in intent, form, and scope, setting up at times a unique context to which peasant culture was forced to respond, challenge, and adapt. And, of course, the specifications of region, ethnicity, gender, class, and generation could also provide variations on a general theme while still showing loyalty to that theme. This work attempts to make general sense of regional differences in the content, forms, and dimensions of peasant resistance. It is, for example, clear what the general dynamics of various forms of protest were according to region in the Russian Republic and at times in other republics, and it is possible to make certain generalizations about resistance on the basis of a region's strength in grain production, but the possibility for more specific assess-

ments awaits the further opening of archives in the former Soviet Union, especially those associated with the secret police. Likewise, only the most cursory assessments of the impact of ethnicity on peasant protest appears in this study, partly because the focus tends to be mainly Russian and partly because ethnicity likely played a significant, sometimes key, role in peasant resistance, therefore requiring and meriting a specialized study of the topic. And although I endeavor to draw the reader's attention to the very significant gender dimensions of peasant protest, I am unable to delve very far into issues of class and generation. I take the risk of generalization because I believe that there are certain common features to peasant resistance during collectivization that warrant a general study and that, by and large, the peasantry's experience of collectivization overrode regional and other differences if only for a historically short, but significant, period of time. Not all peasants resisted—indeed, as I will make clear, a determined minority sided with the state—but most peasants did, and they were unified by a shared politics, set of grievances, and course of action.

During collectivization, peasant resistance became a form of peasant politics—the only genuinely oppositional politics available to peasants then—that reflected a collective consciousness of intent, action, and hoped-for resolution, as well as a clear and sometimes even prophetic sense of national politics and goals. The peasant cohesion and solidarity of the collectivization era were direct manifestations of peasant agency and political consciousness. The base determinants of peasant resistance derived from reasoned concerns centered largely on issues of justice and subsistence, and supplemented by the primary elemental responses of anger, desperation, and rage. Peasant ideas of justice were integral to popular protest.[23] Collectivization was a violation—a direct assault on—customary norms of village authority and government, ideals of collectivism and neighborhood, and, often, simple standards of human decency. Support for collectivization *within* the community was equally a violation of the village ideals of collectivism, thereby making retribution a key derivative of justice in motivating acts of peasant resistance. Collectivization was also, as importantly, a threat to peasant household and community survival. Subsistence was a primary determinant of the shape of peasant politics and relations to the state.[24] It surely was a chief concern and responsibility of the peasant women, who dominated so much of the peasantry's responses to collectivization, as was common elsewhere when peasant survival was at stake. The contents and causes of peasant resistance to collectivization then were, to a great extent, "generic," while still manifesting specificity in derivation, context, and response.

The forms of peasant resistance constituted an additional component of the popular culture of resistance. Like content and causation, peasant forms of resistance were shaped by a set of customary concerns and ways of being and acting that, although frequently appearing irrational and chaotic to outsiders, had their own logic and, in most cases, a long-established

history as approaches to challenging authority. Tradition itself became a resource for legitimacy and mobilization, as peasants sought justification for their interpretations of and responses to state policy.[25] Peasants made use of a customary array of resistance tactics: rumor, flight, dissimulation, and a variety of passive and active forms of resistance. Their choices were clearly and logically guided by the actions of the state and the issue of their resistance. Peasant forms of resistance were informed by pragmatism, flexibility, and adaptation, each a vital resource in opposing a powerful and repressive state. Peasants only turned to violence as a last resort, when desperation and retribution reached such a level as to provoke the peasantry into direct challenge. Often, violence came out of ordinarily nonviolent settings, such as meetings, demonstrations, and other interactions with Soviet power, when the violent actions of the authorities pushed peasants to answer with violence.[26] The forms of peasant resistance transpired, in large part, in ritualized, customary scenarios, acted out over and over again for their organizational merit and tactical utility in responding to power.

The antithetical nature of peasant culture and resistance most clearly expressed itself through metaphor and symbolic inversion, which constituted a form within a form or a vehicle for many specific types of protest. The discourse of peasant rebellion surfaced in the world of rumor, in which symbols of apocalypse and serfdom provided dominant motifs used to categorize the politics and behavior of the state and its agents. Apocalypse turned the Communist world on its head by associating the state with the Antichrist, while serfdom signified the ultimate Communist betrayal of revolutionary ideals. The massive destruction and sale of peasant property (*razbazarivanie*) served as another form of inversion, as the peasantry seemingly engaged in a wholesale attempt to overturn "class" in the village through social and economic leveling. Terror aimed at officials and activists and the chasing out of state authority was a literal inversion of political power. Dissimulation, another basic tool of resistance, constantly juggled power and weakness in attempts to hoodwink, disguise, and evade. Perhaps most important of all, the central role of women in peasant resistance demonstrated an inversion not only of power relations between the state and peasantry, but also a subversion of the traditional patriarchal order, indicating a complete denial of norms of obedience and submission. Reversals of power, inversions of image and role, and counter-ideology served up the justification, legitimation, and mobilization required to bolster peasant resistance in a stark symbolism of binary oppositions between state and peasantry, revealing once again a peasant culture of resistance.[27]

The peasant culture of resistance neither evolved nor functioned in a vacuum. Peasant resistance may be viewed as a reactive form of protest to the state-building and cultural domination of the collectivization era, as it was largely, although not exclusively, an attempt to preserve the status quo.[28] However, peasant politics did more than *react*. Peasant resis-

tance was closely connected to national events and central policies. As a culture or class, the peasantry defined itself in opposition to and in conflict with other classes and, in this case, the state. Peasant resistance operated in concert with state repression. The study of peasant resistance is therefore as much a study of the peasant as it is a study of the state in its interactions with the peasantry. Peasant resistance alternately affected the radicalization or modification of state policy in the collectivization era. The dynamics of *razbazarivanie* and self-dekulakization, for example, were important features in the escalation of the tempos of collectivization and dekulakization as local authorities struggled to contain the mass destruction of livestock and to stem the tide of peasant flight by extending and increasing the levels of repression. Yet when peasant violence began to threaten both state stability and spring sowing in the early March of 1930, Stalin called a temporary retreat from the collectivization campaign. Passive resistance no doubt had the greatest, most sustained effect on state policy, forcing the state again and again to modify some of its more radical designs of transformation, especially after the 1932–33 famine. Throughout our period of study, peasant actions occurred not in isolation and not solely in reaction, but *in combination* with state policy, in a circularity of response and effect.[29] Peasant resistance, moreover, was a highly creative force, evolving and adapting its basic forms into ritualized scenarios and tactical tools in conjunction with day-to-day relations with authority.

The state is never absent from this study. The very nature of the sources, largely of official provenance, as well as the reality of Stalinism as a state-dominated sociopolitical structure, mean that the historian must view peasant politics through the filter of the state. However, as David Warren Sabean has pointed out in another context, "what is a fact about sources is not necessarily a weakness. Documents which perceive peasants through the eyes of rulers or their spokesmen begin with relationships of domination. . . . The issue is to examine the constitution of peasant notions within the dynamics of power and hierarchical relations."[30] The study of peasant resistance is therefore minutely concerned with official discourse, the language and mentality of Stalinism that transformed peasants into enemies and distorted the reality of peasant politics. Words like kulak, counterrevolution, sabotage, treason, *razbazarivanie*, self-dekulakization, incorrect excesses, mass disturbances, *bab'i bunty*, and myriad other terms—all, in due course, discussed—complicate our work by partly obscuring peasant voices and by sometimes opening the way for charges of attributing merit and actuality where neither may exist, or at least not in their most obvious form, when we have no choice but to adopt them ourselves. Yet a semiotic approach to the use of this terminology can yield valuable understandings of dominant voices and the state. If the state then casts an encompassing shadow over the peasantry in this study, that is because the peasant culture of resistance depended upon the state for its existence, evolving within and against the grain of Stalinism, and

feeding on the dynamics of a civil war unleashed upon the peasantry by the state.

The degree and universality of peasant resistance—that is, the very existence of what I have chosen to call a peasant culture of resistance—demonstrates the relative autonomy of the peasantry within the "leviathan state" of Stalinism, revealing the endurance of defining characteristics of peasant culture, politics, and community during and even after the collectivization of Soviet agriculture. The tenacity and staying power of the peasantry, this view of collectivization as civil war, as a clash of cultures, challenges both the totalitarian model's stress on the atomization of society and the more recent school of thought, pioneered by Moshe Lewin, that posits the existence of a "quicksand society" incapable of generating cohesive classes able to defend their interests and resist the state.[31] This study does not intend to resurrect the old historiographical notion of a "we-they" split in Russian (and later Soviet) society by positing the existence of a peasant culture of resistance, but rather to suggest that the dichotomy of state and society (or at least of peasant society) was firmly fixed from below, representing a semantic weapon of resistance and a subaltern view of dominant powers rather than a sociopolitical reality. Soviet society therefore becomes something less of the aberration it is usually painted if the angle of vision is shifted to the peasantry's place in society, its relation to the state, and the content and forms of its resistance. At the same time, the specificity of the collective and individual experiences of collectivization remain on a grander historical scheme of things, and it becomes clear that the overall impact of the great peasant revolt and its bloody repression played directly into the dialectics and the savagery of Stalinism, forming a major part of the background of 1937.

1

The Last and Most Decisive Battle: Collectivization as Civil War

> Never before had the breath of destruction hung so directly above the territory of the October revolution as in the years of complete collectivization. Discontent, distrust, bitterness, were corroding the country. The disturbance of the currency, the mounting up of stable, "conventional," and free market prices, the transition from a simulacrum of *trade* between the state and the peasants to a grain, meat and milk *levy*, the life-and-death struggle with mass plunderings of the collective property and mass concealment of these plunderings, the purely military mobilization of the party for the struggle against kulak sabotage (after the "liquidation" of the kulaks as a class) together with this a return to food cards and hunger rations, and finally a restoration of the passport system—all these measures revived throughout the country the atmosphere of the seemingly so long ended civil war.
>
> —Leon Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed*

> Like the Jews that Moses led out of Egyptian slavery, the half-savage, stupid, ponderous people of the Russian villages . . . will die out, and a new tribe will take their place—literate, sensible, hearty people.
>
> —Maxim Gorky, "On the Russian Peasantry"

When the Communist party formally introduced the policy of wholesale collectivization, it claimed that the nation was on the eve of a great transformation. With the aid of urban Communists and workers, the state would "construct" socialism in the countryside. Through collectivization, "victory on the grain front" (and therefore "industrialization front") would be achieved. The "socialist transformation of the peasantry" would "eliminate differences between town and countryside" and rural illiteracy would be eradicated. The propaganda of the day told only half the story. It said nothing of the assault on peasant culture and autonomy or the brutal means by which the great transformation would be accomplished. Public traces of that side of the story could be discerned in the widespread calls "to overcome rural backwardness" and "to defeat peasant darkness" and in the less common but chilling refrain, "Bolsheviks are not vegetari-

ans."[1] Much of what collectivization stood for and portended remained hidden from public discourse.

The official enunciations on collectivization represented what James Scott has labeled the "public transcript" of the dominant.[2] The public transcript on collectivization was a facade covering another, hidden transcript that revealed the great transformation to be a struggle over economic resources (chiefly grain) and culture. This is not to say that Communists necessarily distinguished between the two agendas, although some doubtless did. Nor is it to say that the Communist party did not often believe its own rhetoric: hypocrisy and delusion may be conveniently and mutually reinforcing. Stalinist official discourse (indeed, most state-enshrined ideologies) was in part a means of constructing logical and politically acceptable concepts for explaining and justifying often cruel realities. Ideology was handmaiden to the state. Disguised theoretical revisions, policy changes celebrated for their continuity, and a pseudo-dogma of excesses, mistakes, and deviations were brought in to maintain the balance between truth, belief (feigned or otherwise), and practice if reality clashed with ideology. When the curtain of the public transcript is opened to expose the party's hidden transcript, representing, according to Scott, "the practices and claims of their rule that cannot be openly avowed,"[3] a different side of collectivization is revealed.

Most peasants were neither convinced nor deceived by the state's public transcript. For them, collectivization was apocalypse, a war between the forces of evil and the forces of good. Soviet power, incarnate in the state, the town, and the urban cadres of collectivization, was Antichrist, with the collective farm as his lair. To peasants, collectivization was vastly more than a struggle for grain or the construction of that amorphous abstraction, socialism. They understood it as a battle over their culture and way of life, as pillage, injustice, and wrong. It was a struggle for power and control, an attempt to subjugate and colonize what through the course of Soviet history came increasingly to resemble an occupied people. Removed from the distorting lens of official propaganda, belief, and perception, collectivization was a clash of cultures, a civil war.

Primordial *muzhik* darkness

The history of state-peasant relations from the Russian Revolution of 1917 is the history of a continuing battle between two cultures. The Communists represented an urban, working-class (in the abstract),[4] atheistic, technological, deterministic, and, in their minds, modern culture, while the peasantry represented (to Communists) the antithesis of themselves, the negation of all that was considered modern. Before they were Communists, even before they were Bolsheviks, Russian Marxists were implicitly antipeasant. In glorifying a god of progress which, it was thought, doomed the peasantry to social and economic extinction, they rejected the very idea of the peasantry as a separate culture, as more than a spawning

ground for workers.[5] The elements of determinism and will,[6] which featured so prominently in Russian Marxist and especially Bolshevik thinking and personality and that led to victory in October 1917, were projected onto the party, transforming it into a prime mover of history. History would be forged by the party, the self-proclaimed vanguard of politics, progress, and revolutionary truth. The brutalizing effects of years of war, revolution, and civil war, added to the starkly intolerant and utilitarian mentality characteristic of much of the prerevolutionary Russian intelligentsia which hatched the Bolsheviks, wrought a party prepared and determined to wage what Lenin called "the last and most decisive battle."[7] Narrowly, that battle concerned only the kulak—the capitalist farmer and official oppressor of poor and middle peasants, the allies of the working class. In reality, the battle was against all peasants and it would be waged in order to hurry history along its predetermined course, which would lead to the disappearance of this supposedly primitive, premodern social form.

Soviet power was based upon a "dictatorship of the proletariat and poor peasantry."[8] In 1917, when the Bolsheviks championed peasant revolutionary goals as their own, Lenin claimed that "there is *no* radical divergence of interests between the wage-workers and the working and exploited peasantry. Socialism is *fully* able to meet the interests of both."[9] In fact, the dictatorship, and the "alliance" it derived from, combined mutually irreconcilable aims and would quickly break apart in conflict. It could not have been otherwise given the contradictory nature of the October Revolution, a "working-class" revolution in an agrarian nation in which the industrial proletariat accounted for little more than 3% of the population, while the peasantry constituted no less than 85%. The Bolsheviks' revolution was a working-class affair, town business orchestrated by the most extreme of the radical intelligentsia. Lev Kritsman, a leading Marxist scholar of the peasantry in the postrevolutionary years, asserted that there were actually two revolutions in 1917—an urban, socialist revolution and a rural, bourgeois or antifeudal revolution.[10] The two revolutions represented different and ultimately antithetical goals. Following the forced expropriations and partitions of the nobility's lands, the peasantry desired no more than the right to be left alone: to prosper as farmers and to dispose of their produce as they saw fit.[11] Although some peasants may have shared the socialist aims of the towns, most were averse to principles of socialist collectivism. Communist class constructs could not easily be translated into terms that applied to the culture of peasants.

The validity of Kritsman's assessment was vividly apparent in the Russian Civil War, in which the town turned against the countryside, making violent forays into the villages to take grain and peasant sons for the Red army. The Communist party fought the war with the aid of the newly created revolutionary army and a powerful set of domestic policies sometimes subsumed under the heading of "war communism." The coun-

try had experienced a breakdown in the grain trade from the time of the First World War, as inflation skyrocketed and networks of supply and distribution disintegrated. By the time the Bolsheviks took power, the entire system of trade and supply was in shambles. The party would soon resort to the forced requisitioning of grain in order to feed the cities and the army.[12] In the initial phases of the civil war, the Communists sought to collect grain through the formation of committees of the village poor (*kombedy*). In theory, the *kombedy* were to unite the poor against the rich, to stir class war in the village. The poor peasants would aid the urban requisitioning detachments to find grain and, in return, receive a portion of the grain. In fact, the *kombedy* were a dismal failure. The peasantry resented the intervention of outsiders in their affairs. Most poor peasants saw the label of "poor" as an insult rather than as class enhancement. All peasants were united in their efforts to retain (at the very least) a fair share of the grain they had toiled to produce. As a consequence, most villages stubbornly defied the party's attempts at social division and resisted as a cohesive entity.[13]

Grain was the central and most divisive issue in the alliance of workers and poor peasants. Lenin recognized this fact as early as May 1918, when he declared that any "owners of grain who possess surplus grain" and do not turn it in, regardless of social status, "will be declared *enemies of the people.*"[14] Here, there was no mention of the traditional Leninist breakdown of peasantry into poor, middle, and kulak. It was not simply the kulak, that theoretically determined class enemy and counterrevolutionary, who was at fault. Instead, actions determined political status. In consequence, Lenin declared a "ruthless and terrorist struggle and war against peasant or other bourgeois elements who retain surplus grain for themselves."[15] *All* peasants could be *enemies of the people* if they acted contrary to the policies of the party. Lenin was able to account for this seeming contradiction of class by reference to a "kulak mood [that] prevails among the peasants."[16] Kulaks were demonic, subhuman. Lenin referred to them as "avaricious, bloated, and bestial," "the most brutal, callous and savage exploiters," "spiders," "leeches," and "vampires"; he declared a "ruthless war on the kulaks," and called for "death to them!"[17]

The *kombedy* were abandoned before the end of 1918 in most parts of the country. The failure of this class-based policy forced Lenin, at least formally, to shift his emphasis from the poor to the middle peasant, while he continued to view the kulak as the party's basic foe and to endorse forced grain requisitioning. In a speech made in March 1919, Lenin said, "The kulak is our implacable enemy. And here we can hope for nothing unless we crush him. The middle peasant is a different case, he is not our enemy." At the same time as he drew social distinctions among the peasantry, Lenin continued to view peasant political activity that was contrary to Soviet interests as *kulak*. He denied, for instance, that there had been *peasant* revolts against grain requisitioning, insisting instead that these were *kulak* revolts.[18]

The middle peasant, the largest group among the peasantry after the

revolution, was defined as a "wavering" stratum of the peasantry.[19] It was, as a social being, part petty producer, part laborer. Its socioeconomic interests therefore did not easily fit into Communist class analysis. This problem was resolved by grafting onto the middle peasant a dual political nature to fit its dual socioeconomic nature. The middle peasant, depending on circumstance and interest, could join forces with the kulak and counterrevolution or take the side of the poor peasantry and the revolution. It was the task, therefore, of the party to help the middle peasantry recognize its own best interests. Peasants, like workers who were also unable to arrive at consciousness unaided, must be "developed": "Any peasant who is a little bit developed and has emerged from his primordial muzhik darkness," said Lenin, "will agree that there is no other way [but to turn over his grain to the Soviet state]."[20] According to Lenin, "all class-conscious and sensible peasants . . . will agree that *all surplus grain without exception* must be turned over to the workers' state."[21] The implications of these statements were that the peasant who was not class-conscious might not hand over his grain. In that case, the peasant's political actions redounded to his socioeconomic status once again: consciousness determined being.

Through his subjective definition of class and the concept of the middle peasant as waverer, Lenin created a route by which Bolshevik class categories could in fact bridge culture. This sense of class was an abstraction, a party construction, but it allowed Communists to behave, on a theoretical level, in conformance with their ideas. This theoretical contortion was a seeping of the hidden into the public transcript. It enabled the party to attempt, at a public level and when possible, to win the middle peasant to its side, while providing it with a ready rationalization to treat the middle peasant—that is, the majority of the peasantry—as an enemy if it opposed the party's policies. Here was one of the theoretical underpinnings of Stalin's later war with the peasantry. In the meantime, for Lenin, the ultimate way out of these dilemmas, the final solution to the peasant problem, lay in the peasantry's extinction: "In order to abolish classes it is necessary . . . to abolish the difference between factory worker and peasant, to make *workers of them all.*" Unlike Stalin, however, even the Lenin of the civil war era was compelled to add that this remaking of the peasantry would take "a long time."[22]

The full implications of the cultural rift with the peasantry and the disastrous policies of the civil war became clear in late 1920 and early 1921, when the party found itself isolated from peasants *and* workers, and the Soviet state seemed to totter on the brink of destruction. In the cities, there was widespread working class unrest. In the countryside, peasant revolts were reaching ominous dimensions in Tambov, Siberia, and Ukraine. The final, symbolic blow to the regime came in early 1921, when the sailors of the Kronstadt naval base, long a stronghold of Bolshevik support, rose up against the Communists. Lenin was forced to call a retreat and abandon the policies of the civil war era.

At the Tenth Congress of the Communist party in March 1921, Lenin

introduced the New Economic Policy (NEP). NEP was a retreat, and above all a concession to the peasantry. It eliminated the hated grain requisitions, replacing them first with a tax in kind and later a money tax; it legalized private trade and traders, and denationalized all but the most important industries, banks, and foreign trade. NEP eventually took the form of a kind of mixed economy, a market socialism. At the Tenth Congress, Lenin admitted that "the interests of these two classes [workers and peasants] differ."[23] He also warned that "so long as there is no revolution in other countries, only agreement with the peasantry can save the socialist revolution in Russia."[24] Lenin had learned an important lesson from the civil war. The party required the support of the peasantry—the majority of the population—to stay in power. The failure of "international revolution" to come to the aid of what even Lenin admitted to be "backward" Russia meant that some other theoretical prop was necessary to support the reality of a proletarian revolution in a peasant country. This prop was the *smychka*, or worker-peasant alliance. Soviet power would be able to hold out until the outbreak of international revolution, according to Lenin, only under the condition that the *smychka* be preserved while socialism was "constructed" in Russia, that is, while the country industrialized. To the end of his life, Lenin would insist that the maintenance of the *smychka* was imperative to the survival of the Soviet state.

In 1922, Lenin told the Eleventh Congress of the Comunist party that "we must prove that we can help him [the peasant], and that in this period, when the small peasant is in a state of appalling ruin, impoverishment, and starvation, the Communists are really helping him. Either we prove that, or he will send us to the devil. That is absolutely inevitable."[25] Lenin assumed a moderate stance on the peasantry after the civil war not for the sake of the peasantry, but in order to ensure the survival of Soviet power. He remained committed to socialism, in both town and countryside, and to the transformation of peasant Russia. He had become convinced, however, that the only way to change the peasant was gradually and through persuasion: "it will take generations to remold the small farmer and recast his mentality and habits."[26] In his last articles, Lenin argued that a cultural revolution—above all, universal literacy—was prerequisite to the peasants' transformation. Further, he maintained that the agricultural cooperative, which would cater to the material interests of the peasant while teaching collectivism, would provide a base for the development of socialism in the countryside.[27]

Lenin wrote in 1923 that NEP was intended to last for an entire historical epoch: one to two decades at best.[28] He left the party an ambiguous legacy. On the one hand, he advocated a gradual evolution toward socialism in the countryside. On the other hand, he maintained that the countryside, left to it own devices, would not spontaneously enter the path of socialism; that the conscious agents of history, in the form of the party and the working class, would have to take the initiative in building socialism in the countryside. Similarly to the ambiguities of Lenin's "What Is

to Be Done?", Lenin's NEP legacy provided no answer to the problem of what to do if the peasant resisted change, resisted socialism. Further, there was a basic fault line in Lenin's class logic about the peasantry. In insisting that peasant activity contrary to Communist policies could be defined as kulak while at the same time maintaining that his approach to the peasantry was based on scientific Marxist class analysis, Lenin provided his successors with the conceptualizations that would be used in collectivization when Stalin launched a war against *all* peasants. This combination of the subjectivity of Bolshevik class categories and the iron determinism of theory, however willful in fact, created a potent and deadly mix that would allow the party to cast itself in the role of agent of historical destiny, empowered by a pseudo–science that could transform any opposition into the socioeconomically determined voice of class enemies, kulaks, and counterrevolutionaries slated for destruction by the "advanced forces" of history. Although Lenin's last writings urged the party to approach the peasantry with caution—and there is no reason not to take his words seriously—his legacy was fraught with contradictions and would provide the basic theoretical underpinnings for collectivization.

Planting socialism

Most Communists viewed NEP as a retreat. Although often portrayed as a "golden age" of the peasantry, NEP was destined to be no more than at most a retrospective golden age, visible only from the ramparts of the collective farms of the 1930s. During the 1920s, peasants continued to suffer the depredations of the centralizing, modernizing, and only temporarily and partially restrained state. Although peasants lived with relatively less interference from the state than ever before in their history, the state continued to exact tribute from peasants, making frequent and sometimes violent forays into the countryside to take taxes, grain, and, according to peasant complaints, the morals and faith of peasant youth. Rural officials, especially in the early 1920s, often maintained their civil war–style of hostile interaction with the peasantry despite the reigning spirit of class harmony. Lenin's cooperative plan was posthumously enshrined as the solution to the peasant problem. Little was done, however, to support peasants who became interested in forming cooperatives. Moreover, cooperative ventures faced the threat of the kulak label if they became too successful. The party's ally, the poor peasant, was also left with little more than ideological sustenance during these years. NEP was, most of all, according to Moshe Lewin, a policy of "drift."[29] The party was too consumed with factional fighting and the struggle for power after Lenin's death to pay serious practical attention to agriculture. The peasantry only entered the party's field of vision as each of the successive left oppositions raised the specter of the kulak bogey, claiming that rural capitalism was on the rise thanks to the overextension of NEP. Since rural social stratification was so slight in the 1920s, following the ex-

tensive social leveling of the revolution and civil war, it is safe to assume that the real issues were power and the continued existence of peasant Russia.

The party's chief economic priority during NEP was the industrialization of the nation, something that to many Communists was tantamount to the *construction* of socialism. In 1920, Lenin said that *"Communism is Soviet power plus the electrification of the whole country."*[30] Over the course of the 1920s, Communism would be equated with the rapid and large-scale industrialization of the country: the concept of building socialism would come to mean simply building, and the bigger and more modern the better. Industrialization, however, had to wait until the war-shattered economy was reconstructed. During NEP, the expansion of the grain trade was intended to provide the necessary revenues to finance the state's industrial development while at the same time granting a level of peasant prosperity requisite to the creation of an internal market of consumers of goods from the industrial sector. To ensure a net profit for industry, it was necessary to turn the terms of trade against the peasantry, charging higher prices for industrial goods and lower prices for agricultural produce. In 1923–24, this "scissors" in pricing led to a crisis of overproduction in industry and peasant unwillingness to sell grain. Consequently, the party was forced to lower industrial prices by inaugurating a series of reforms in industry. The consequent closing of the scissors was thought to hinder industrial growth, and, in fact, by 1927, the country entered into a manufactured goods shortage that would seriously impede trade between town and countryside.

The dilemma the party confronted was not new to Russian economic development. The alternatives appeared completely dichotomous: either the party could allow the peasantry to enrich itself, create a prosperous agriculture, and through balanced growth and social stability the needed revenues for industrialization would gradually accrue, or it could "squeeze" the peasantry through heavy taxation, maintain low agricultural prices and expand grain exports, and through a rapid accumulation of capital industrialization would be quickly achieved, after which revenues could be redirected to agriculture. In either case, the peasantry was perceived mainly as an economic resource, a troublesome one at that, and in effect, little more than an internal colony. In the mid-1920s, E. A. Preobrazhensky, a spokesman for the Left Opposition, urged that the terms of trade be turned against the peasantry, that a "tribute" be exacted in order to speed up capital accumulation and industrialization. With neither irony nor shame, he dubbed this process "primitive socialist accumulation," echoing and subverting Marx's detested "primitive capitalist accumulation" in the interest of Soviet power. Nikolai Bukharin, the party's leading theoretician and, in many ways, Lenin's heir to a moderate peasant policy, warned that primitive socialist accumulation would threaten the *smychka*, leading to massive peasant discontent and withdrawal from the market, as had occurred during the civil war. Bukharin worried that