The Stalin Years
1929–1953

The four volumes in this series are edited as an integral set. Each contains a subject index in which Russian abbreviations and acronymic names are translated. Tables summarizing the personnel of the main party executive bodies since 1917 are also provided. At the same time each of the volumes is built around a coherent period in the development of Russian Communism, and each reflects the special features of its time.

Volume 3 treats the Stalin era, the early phase of which witnessed a new degree of party intervention in agriculture, industry, and cultural affairs. The ambivalent relation between the party and Stalin's great purge emerges in party decisions of the later thirties, including an archival document never published in the Soviet Union and some little known material on the Central Committee plenum of February–March 1937. The Zhdanov campaign in the arts following the World War is also represented by the party resolutions translated in this volume.

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Resolutions and decisions of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union

Volume 3
The Stalin Years: 1929–1953

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Editor's Preface

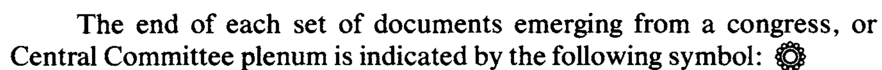
Russian terms are translated if a generally accepted English form exists, but are transliterated otherwise. In the latter case the term (e.g., oblast) is treated as an anglicized expression, without hard and soft signs (except in titles), to simplify the appearance of the text. The index of the volume provides parenthetical translations of transliterated terms. Translations of periodical titles appear with the first occurrence of a given title.

Document numbers (e.g., 3.18) are supplied by the editor of the volume; the prefix "3." indicates the volume number in the present series. Throughout the book such a decimal number implies reference to a document number.

Square brackets [] enclose material added by the editor of this volume, while parentheses appearing in documents are in the original Russian text. Brackets are used in titles of documents if the original version of a given resolution lacked any definite title. Ellipses (...) indicate omissions of part of the original document by the editor, unless otherwise specified.

To assist the reader in identifying changes in successive versions of the party Rules, bracketed notes are inserted with each article, indicating whether it is a new, revised, or unchanged article with respect to the previous version of the Rules. Since this volume contains three successive versions of the Rules (1934, 1939, 1952), and there is considerable repetition of articles from one version to another, the full text of all articles is provided only in the first (1934) version. Thereafter articles of the Rules that repeat an article from the previous version are covered with a cross-reference to the previous version.

At the end of each document or group of documents adopted at a given meeting source attributions are provided. On the left the earliest published source that was accessible to the editor is cited. On the right the location of the material in the standard Soviet reference work is cited: *Kommunisticheskaia Partiia Sovetskogo Soiuza v rezoliutsiiakh i resheniiakh s''ezdov, konferentsii i plenumov TsK* (Communist Party of the Soviet Union in Resolutions and Decisions of Congresses, Conferences and Plenums of the Central Committee), 8th edition, Moscow, 1970–72 (hereafter abbreviated *KPSS v resoliutsiiakh*). Not all documents published in the present work appear in *KPSS v rezoliutsiiakh*, so citations of this source do not appear in every case.



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The Stalin Years
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Introduction

Viewed from a certain distance, the years of Stalin's ascendancy in the Soviet Union appear to have a notably consistent character, despite the cataclysmic interruption of the Second World War. Massive economic campaigns, unflinching vigilance against 'enemies of the people,' glorification of Soviet patriotism with its core of Great Russian nationalism, and above all the omnipresent, benignly petrified countenance of the vozhd (leader) – these are the images of the Stalin era. On a sufficiently large scale they are valid enough, but even moderately close inspection of the period reveals a major discontinuity in the history of the central institution of the Soviet Union, the Communist Party. Until about the time of the German invasion of the USSR in June 1941 the Communist Party not only appeared to retain its established position in the formulation and execution of all manner of public policy, it even extended its direct involvement in the life of the country, especially in the supervision of the economy, both by setting goals of its own and involving the party apparatus more directly than before in the attempt to attain these goals. Congresses, conferences, and plenums of the Central Committee were held with tolerable regularity, giving at least some formal semblance to the practice of the idea of 'democratic centralism.' If the standing executive of the party, especially the Secretariat and Politburo, took some immensely weighty decisions without the approval of the Central Committee, conference, or congress, this merely served to enhance the authority of the party as a total institution – its leading organs possessed arbitrary authority and spoke in the name of the party. All this is evident in the published record of party decisions from 1930 to 1941, and especially in the very first years of the decade, when the party apparatus was exceedingly active in commanding the transformation of the agricultural and industrial economy. About half of all the documents in this volume come from the first half of the thirties, and this is roughly representative of the intensity of the party's activity over the entire period 1930–53.

The decline in the importance of the party as the centre of top-level decision making seems to have started even before the German invasion of June 1941. The purges of the late thirties constituted, in Leonard Schapiro's words, 'Stalin's victory over the party,' and he seems to have

decided to reduce the role of the Central Committee that was elected at the XVIII Party Congress in 1939, succeeding a committee membership which had been less than wholly cooperative. Although a party conference met in 1941, its extraordinarily dull proceedings suggested that further exercises in the forms of democratic centralism might be superfluous. This shift away from party bodies became decisive with the outbreak of war, and it was only with the death of Stalin that the party recovered its vitality as the leading institution in the Soviet Union.

True, it did not wither physically. On the contrary, its membership nearly doubled (almost 3.9 million members and candidates in 1941 and almost 6.9 million in 1953), and this despite terrible wartime losses. More than ever before, primary party organizations, party agitators, party newspapers, and of course the visage of the party leader, were present in the daily life of workers, peasants, soldiers, and others. At the same time, however, there was a curious recession in the activity of the leading party organs. No congress or conference met between early 1941 and late 1952, and the Central Committee held only four plenums, two of which were connected with the party congress of 1952. According to Khrushchev, even the Politburo was rarely convened as a whole, although membership in it did reflect some degree of participation in Stalin's personal entourage, which was the focus of authority. As for the leader, by 1945 he was generally represented in the military regalia of the 'generalissimo' rather than the simple tunic he had usually worn in the days when his main role was general secretary of the party. As general secretary he had mastered the party as a political instrument. He had played a notable role in creating this system of social and economic control, and he appreciated its utility far too keenly to want to dismantle it. But having taken on the leading offices in the Soviet state (chairman of the Council of People's Commissars, later renamed Council of Ministers; chairman of the State Committee of Defence; People's Commissar (Minister) of Defence, and the title of Generalissimo), Stalin seems to have decided to shift the centre of decision making to the Soviet state apparatus. Not only did leading party bodies cease to meet with any degree of regularity, but decisions in the name of the party declined markedly in number, even as fiats of the party Secretariat or as a rubber stamp imparting the prestige of the Central Committee to what was essentially a decree of the Council of Ministers. Thus it is that the documents selected for this volume reflect the realities of the history of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in their paucity between the end of the thirties and the end of the Stalin era.

Because of the fundamental contrast in the incidence and the context of party decisions in these two large portions of the Stalin era, it is useful to consider the main thematic problems involved in these documents in two groups: first, problems of the thirties, when the party high command was

actively issuing decisions, and second, the subsequent period of limited party activity in decision making.

THE THIRTIES: ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION

Although the image of a planned economy was never more intensively propagated in the Soviet Union than during the First Five-Year Plan (1928–32), there was never any peacetime period in which the label 'command economy' was more appropriately a description of Soviet reality. With scant regard for the more or less balanced plan for economic growth produced by the economic specialists in Gosplan, the party leadership, acting in the name of the Central Committee, repeatedly took the most crucial possible decisions to attempt enormous economic transformations. For this reason the Five-Year Plan itself, so often discussed in studies of the period, seems far less relevant than a series of party decisions in understanding the character of Soviet history.

Probably no government enactment since the peasant emancipation of 1861 had a more immediate effect on the Russian peasant masses, and hence the whole country, than did the party decision of 5 January 1930 concerning the tempo of the collectivization of agriculture (3.4). In place of a relatively gradual rate of collectivization projected in the Five-Year Plan, this edict, couched in vague language concerning the regions and the target dates that it had in mind, seems to have created the impression that something approaching total collectivization should be achieved in 1930. That is, almost all peasant family farms should be reorganized as some kind of agricultural collective which was not at this time at all clearly defined. Although the label 'artel' was approved as the standard one for the Soviet collective farm, it was only in 1935 that a final version of the model rules for this institution was adopted. But the character of the great transformation under party pressure was not at all planned social change but one of social crisis, based on Stalin's announcement of 27 December 1929, that the regime would attempt to 'liquidate the kulaks [richer peasants, whatever that might mean] as a class.' Deliberately intensifying the atmosphere of emergency among party officials in the field, the Politburo on 30 January 1930 approved a resolution that has not yet been published (and perhaps did not claim the specific authority of the Central Committee) 'On Measures for Eliminating Kulak Farms in Areas of Total Collectivization.'[1] This was the basis for the most violent phase of collectivization, the expropriation and deportation or execution of as yet unknown numbers of peasants who for one reason or another were classified as kulaks. More precisely, they

1 Merle Fainsod, *Smolensk under Soviet Rule* (Cambridge, 1958), 242–3, provides reflections of this decision on the oblast level. Soviet verification appears in *Istoriia SSSR c drevneishikh vremen do nashikh dnei*, seriia 2, VIII (1967), 550–1.

were to be placed in one of three categories of kulaks, roughly the most evil, somewhat less evil, and still less evil – a kind of classification that could lead to almost anything in the minds of overzealous or frightened lower officials.

Signs of havoc resulting from these decisions of the party high command were evidently recognized fairly quickly. On 2 March Stalin published his famous article 'Dizzy with Success,' which called for a less frantic interpretation of the command to collectivize and was embodied in a resolution in the name of the Central Committee on 14 March 1930 (3.7). Without further emergency orders from the party executive, the collectivization campaign at first receded, then swelled at a somewhat more gradual pace for the next few years, though not without grave hardships, including famine. By 1934 almost 75 per cent of the peasants were collectivized, and by 1938 most of the remainder as well.

After its initial cataclysmic intervention in agricultural transformation, the party turned its attention in this area to the problem of building a network of strong points in the vastness of rural Russia, partly to press forward the all-round modernization of this backward zone, partly to counteract the major legacy of hostility that collectivization by command had engendered. To a large extent the party sought to base its rural strength in the newly established MTSs, that is, rural centres that maintained and rented mechanical equipment to kolkhozes. After urging the optimum use of the opportunities for rural influence that the MTSs supposedly possessed (3.13), the party experimented in 1933–34 with a reorganization of the rural party hierarchy. A separate hierarchy of party bodies was introduced, based on the production principle, in contrast to the usual territorial hierarchy. In this it resembled the special hierarchy of the political commissars in the Red Army, another highly sensitive sphere. The basic level of this special system of party agricultural representation consisted of the 'politodels' of the MTSs and sovkhozes (3.18). These party organizations as integral parts of each MTS or sovkhoz, were not subordinated to the raion committee of the party, as laid down in the Rules, and thus the whole plan might be considered 'illegal' in the sense that no party congress ever approved this amendment of the Rules. Although nobody thought of questioning the innovation on these grounds, it appears that many raion committee secretaries did in practice resist this challenge to their authority. After a protracted struggle in the higher party bodies, it was in effect determined that this attempt to reinforce party authority in the countryside was causing more difficulties than it was worth, and on 28 November 1934 it was disbanded (3.23). During the emergency of World War II the agricultural politotdels were revived (17 November 1941), but again did not prove durable and were disbanded on 31 May 1943.[2]

2 *KPSS v rezoliutsiiakh* VI, 36–8, 57–9.

What appears to have been a more stable attempt to provide an organizational norm for party work on the kolkhozes was the 'Regulation on the VKP(b) Cell in Kolkhozes' (3.12), dated 26 August 1930. At the time of its adoption, the overwhelming majority of kolkhozes lacked party cells, and would continue to for another generation, but no general replacement for this regulation of 1930 has yet appeared; it seems to represent the basis of party thinking in this area even if the particular document has been out of circulation for a long time. It forms an important complement to the better-known model charter of the kolkhoz itself, which were adopted in 1935 and replaced only in 1969.[3]

While agricultural collectivization had the broadest and most drastic impact on Soviet society as part of the great transformation of 1930, it was the intensive drive for industrial growth that was the party's top priority target. Indeed, the mission of the party at all levels, as the demiurge of industrialization, implicitly became the chief legitimizing principle of the party, as it is to this day. While economists outside the Soviet Union may argue about the short-term or long-term efficacy of the party as an agent of rapid industrialization, it is clear that Soviet party officials have not on the whole doubted that this institution has been essential to fix the primacy of industrialization as a national goal, to select the main targets for industrial development much of the time (especially the primacy of developing the *means* of production), and to participate in the management of industry in exhortation, inspection, and expedition. The slogans 'Face to Production' and 'The Five-Year Plan in Four Years,' adopted at the XVI Party Congress, symbolized this espousal of a new justification for the existence of the party, and at the same time challenged the concept of economic planning as a programme for the achievement of reasonable and harmonious targets. Instead, the style later known in Soviet usage as 'campaignism' ('kampaneishchina'), with its zeal to make nonsense of the planned figures by outstripping them as much as possible, became the normal party attitude at the XVI Congress (3.10). The element of arbitrary party command in the selection of areas for offensives was especially strong in these first years of the thirties, as illustrated by the decision to undertake a crash program for the completion of the Magnitogorsk metallurgy complex, an enormous undertaking which had been planned for gradual development (3.14). There were in fact a series of such abrupt commands in the early years of the thirties, of which Magnitogorsk is but one famous example.

While these specific campaigns were far from fruitless, it appears that by the mid-thirties the Soviet leadership had concluded that it was more productive after all to rely mainly on the state planning apparatus when it came to the selection of specific industrial projects. Although such a major campaign project as the building of the Volga-Don Canal after the Second

3 *Current Digest of the Soviet Press* XXI, no. 50, 9–15

World War does indeed recall the spirit of the fiat on building Magnitogorsk, it was not sprung on the economic planners by the party Secretariat, judging by available documents. (There was no party decision on the canal, it seems.)

Another striking example of the approach to a command economy – at the opening of the 1930s – was the decision to use the organs of party–state to prod production forward, especially in industry. The Central Control Commission of the party and the Soviet body called Rabkrin, which had been more or less merged under party control in 1923, were authorized by the party congress of 1930 to take a leading role in forcing the economic pace (3.9). This was a notable extension of the purpose of this agency, which had been mainly an inspectorial body. It was not a police force, but it had major responsibility for the detection of wrong-doing, as well as incompetence. For Soviet industrial management this was an ominous portent, linking short-comings in production to political misconduct, the prospect of a command economy becoming a 'police economy.'

In its drive to increase industrial production the party devoted a major share of its attention to the task of mobilizing the workers for this task. As the historic 'vanguard of the proletariat' the Communist Party was already much involved with building its strength among the workers and encouraging their productivity. But the inherited pattern of party industrial activity was not enough. The trade unions had to be reoriented as extensions of the party's drive for industrialization (3.11). This coincided with the removal of the union leadership associated with M.P. Tomsky, a supporter of Bukharin (3.3) in the Politburo, and thus a 'right deviationist' in the sense that he had reservations about the precipitate character of stalinist economic transformations. He had been removed from his post as head of the All-Union Council of Trade Unions and his membership in the Politburo in 1929.

The party's own organizations in factories, primary party organizations, required a basic restructuring to accommodate the new stress on its role as a corps of 'shock workers' (inspirational exemplars) and its greatly expanded membership. As in the case of the transformation of the trade unions' role as production campaign organizers, there was an inherent tension between the desire to preserve one-man management, to which responsibility for failures could be fixed, and the desire to give the party-dominated unions and factory party organizations a real share in the management of production.

On the highest level the party attempted to adapt to its expanded economic functions, both agricultural and industrial, by introducing the production-branch principle, as it had in 1933 with respect to the lower levels of its agricultural operations. The new party Rules adopted by the XVII Party Congress in 1934 established sections of the Secretariat of the Central Committee (i.e., the chief executive office of the party) for agricul-

ture, industry, transport, and planning-finance-trade (3.21, 3.22). However, experience proved the production-branch principle had not been all that was hoped for, and the Rules adopted at the XVIII Party Congress in 1939 abolished all of these sections of the Secretariat except the one concerned with agriculture (3.32, 3.33).

THE THIRTIES: PARTY MEMBERSHIP

Between 1930 and 1940 membership in the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) approximately doubled (from almost 1.7 million members and candidates to almost 3.4 million), which might have been expected in view of the extension of party involvement in the economic transformation of the country. What is more surprising is that the decade high point of 3.5 million was achieved as early as 1933 while as late as 1938 membership was down to 1.9 members and candidates. To a considerable extent these fluctuations reflect the tension between elitism and mass support which has always been present in the party, but was especially acute during the decade of most drastic economic transformation. With the drive for collectivization and industrialization, the party leadership sought more members, especially those with technical or managerial skills that would enable them to contribute most effectively to production (3.5). This was an implicit admission that the toilers' social virtue was now less important than talent for economic leadership.

Even at this time of intense demand for new party activists it was noted that zeal for growth could create qualitative weakness as, for example, in cases when new members were inducted in groups. This was condemned in 1930 and explicitly forbidden in the new Rules in 1934 (3.22, art. 3). To correct excesses on the side of massiveness in recruitment, the party traditionally had recourse to the purge (chistka), a systematic reevaluation of members and the exclusion of those found wanting. As membership reached its decade high point in 1933, it was determined to institute such a purge (3.19). While the relevant decision was stern enough in its condemnation of 'careerists' and 'double-dealers,' it also warned against arbitrary or capricious examination of members. It seemed that party leaders intended to prevent a rational reassessment from becoming a witch hunt. Such a moderate spirit was still evident in the decision of December 1935 which reviewed the sifting of party membership, with special attention to the technique of replacing party membership cards, a reasonable way of getting a look at every member (3.25). Even though party membership had fallen by over a million since the institution of the purge, and the assassination of S.M. Kirov had added an ominous element to the atmosphere, the key point seemed to be that the whole exercise in quality control had been pretty well completed without a serious loss of rationality.

This soon proved to be far from the case. The combination of wide-

spread expulsions from the party and the mood of political terror associated with the search for the anti-Soviet, anti-Stalin conspiracy that had been 'revealed' in the Kirov affair soon brought about a complete change in the meaning of the purge, indelibly associating this word with arbitrary police terror. The mood was now set by the public trials of alleged conspirators in 1936, 1937, and 1938. All were deemed tools of 'Judas' Trotsky and diverse 'imperialists,' and most were formerly high-ranking members of the party, such as Kamenev, Zinoviev, Radek, and Bukharin. Stress should be placed on the qualifier 'formerly' in this usage, for the accused were not members of the party at the time of their trials and were dealt with by a military court on criminal charges, not by the kind of party purge commission that had traditionally dealt with backsliders who deserved merely to be expelled from the party. Although Soviet law made no provision on the matter, it was understood that the police and courts would punish political criminals who were Communists *only* after they had been expelled from the party. Procedures for expulsion had existed in the party Rules since the beginning of the Soviet era, and they always implied some kind of check on the exercise of the power to expel. In the atmosphere of the later thirties, however, large numbers of party members, of high and low degree alike, were expelled from the party merely as a preliminary to arrest by the police, followed by interrogation, pseudo-trial, and often execution or long-term sentences to hard labour that usually had the same affect. Often the victim learned of his expulsion from the party only during his police interrogation. In most cases, it seems, the initiative for such expulsions came largely from the police, and party organizations, terrorized, merely went through the motions of expelling those whom the police selected.

In full swing the Stalin purge of 1936–38 affected many persons who were never Communists as well as party members who were loyal stalinists or former oppositionists, and its complexities run far beyond available party or other documents. One point that has emerged from the revelations of the Khrushchev era is that the Central Committee plenum of 23 February – 5 March 1937 represented a crisis for the Stalin purge. Although this body had been selected at the party congress of 1934 from persons who were presumed to be loyal stalinists, there was a challenge to Stalin from a group of undetermined size, probably led by a candidate member of the Politburo, P. Postyshev. While not calling for the replacement of Stalin, Postyshev expressed disbelief concerning the charges of treason that were being levelled at many senior party members. Stalin met this last known explicit opposition to his personal authority in a long speech, in which he said essentially that increased vigilance was still necessary because even the most seemingly loyal Communists could be cunning enemies. In some manner Stalin won his struggle with the opposition within the Central

Committee, but the documentary evidence of published party decisions is curiously ambiguous. No decision on the purge or his speech at the crucial plenary session of the Central Committee has ever been fully published. There are short excerpts, but these are contradictory (3.27).

Further signs of party resistance to Stalin's purge may be found in a resolution of a Central Committee plenum of January 1938 (3.29). This statement does give somewhat brief approval to the sense of Stalin's warning against 'trotskyites and other double-dealers,' as presented in early 1937, but its title and main stress suggest an attempt by party officialdom to *resist* police efforts to decimate party ranks at will. It seems safe to assume in this context that 'expulsion from the party' is an indirect way of saying 'arrest as an enemy of the people,' that somebody was trying to check the tide of terror that threatened to cripple the effectiveness of this institution as a whole. Did Stalin himself support this moderation, as his 'Dizzy with Success' article of 1930 had sought to dampen the zeal of some of the officials in the field? This may be. At least the document suggests that its authors were attempting to appeal to Stalin's own policy for support. On the other hand, the January 1938 decision predates the culminating purge trial of Bukharin and others by about two months, and the fall of N.I. Ezhov, the head of the police during the most violent phase of the purge, by at least six months (the date of Ezhov's actual loss of authority is hard to determine). Perhaps there is room here for some added credence to the interpretation of the party in the purge that Khrushchev and his historians propagated, that the party, and especially its career officials, attempted to preserve some kind of integrity throughout this period by opposing the massacre of party members as best they could.

The same attitude toward excesses in purging the party was manifest in a major resolution of the XVIII Party Congress, which met in 1939, after the public trials and police terror had subsided. This was a resolution based on a report by A.A. Zhdanov, one of Stalin's newly risen lieutenants, and it purported to be on the new party Rules. It did, however, contain a substantial section attacking abuses of the purge and defending the rights of party members to some kind of 'due process' within the organization (3.32). Actually, the revised party Rules (3.33) adopted at this time showed little concern for safeguards in this area, although they did modify the procedure for confirming expulsions and dropped an article that had been added in 1934, calling for vigilance against diverse categories of traitors (3.22, art. 58). In contrast (oddly, considering the usually supposed subservience of Zhdanov to Stalin), the leader himself, in the secretarial report approved by the congress, continued to justify the recent purge, with only passing mention of overzealous vigilance.

Another incongruity between despotic terror and the idea of law and order in party life in this period concerns the election within the party of

its own hierarchy. At the crucial Central Committee plenum of February–March 1937, Zhdanov had already appeared as the advocate of constitutionalism in elections. His speech and the resolution supporting it (3.28) approached the issue in an oblique way. Instead of simply pointing out that there was a long-established, non-statutory practice of appointing party officials (such as raion or city secretaries) from above, then going through a ritual of election from below, Zhdanov began by speaking of the Soviet constitution, the 'Stalin Constitution,' the apple of the leader's eye. It is true that this new state constitution removed various deliberate inequities in the system of voting that had been introduced in 1919 with a view to penalizing mistrusted social elements. For this reason it is superficially plausible to ask, as did Zhdanov, that the party take extra care to see that the non-party mass of the populace did not produce any embarrassing Soviet election returns. Actually this seems to have been an unreal problem, considering that Soviet elections were already carefully controlled and conducted on the basis of a single, approved list of non-competing candidates.

But Zhdanov used this rather imaginary problem *outside* the party to open the issue of elections *within* the party, even though it is not at all clear why democratic centralism in practice would have made the party better able to keep control of the voting behaviour of the masses. For almost twenty years the party had proven adept at this kind of control, and one might think that the existence of similar controls of intra-party elections were good experience, if anything.

Yet Zhdanov argued (and the Central Committee approved) a resolution favouring the restoration of truly meaningful elections within the party. Shortly after the plenum this point was spelled out in technical detail concerning voting procedures within the party, even though there is good reason to think that little was changed in practice.[4] As so often, Stalin's role was enigmatic. He ignored the question of party elections in his own speeches. On the contrary, his secretarial report to the XVIII Party Congress in 1939 spoke of 'promoting' new party cadres through the authority of the 'Cadres Administration of the Central Committee' 'and a corresponding cadres department in each of the republic, krai, and oblast party organizations.' This was explicit support for the traditional system of 'elections' by command, and contradicted the Zhdanov resolution and the Central Committee. Against this, one may note that Zhdanov continued to enjoy Stalin's favour for some years to come, that some observers might regard the whole campaign for intra-party democracy as cynical window-dressing to accompany the enormous propaganda campaign on behalf of

4 The pertinent party decisions appear in *Partiinoe Stroitel'stva*, 20 March 1937, 15 April 1938, 1 February 1939, and 15 August 1939.

the 'democratic' Stalin Constitution, or that the main targets of Zhdanov's speech were the middle-level party officials whom the rank and file are often asked to criticize.

The most that can be said with complete confidence is that the latter half of the 1930s was an exceedingly difficult period for members of the Soviet Communist Party and that the available documents surely contain some 'esoteric communication' and should therefore be read with all possible critical imagination.

THE THIRTIES: PROPAGANDA AND CULTURE

The dual expansion of the party and of party control of society in the 1930s required a dual effort by the party leadership to improve the orthodox zeal of party members *and* their impact on the non-party population. The enlistment of large numbers of relatively uneducated industrial workers in the early stages of the industrialization campaign had to be faced with a crash programme for elementary political indoctination that matched the spirit of all-out industrialization (3.6). In only ten days, beginning on 3 March 1930 (a revealing symptom of the kind of 'planning' that the whole campaign involved), the Propaganda and Culture Section of the Central Committee was supposed to prepare a programme that would include all the new candidate members of the party. In this state it was clear that major reliance would have to be placed on 'short-term political circles' – informal study groups which for the time being often (or usually) would lack qualified instructors or the kind of primers that this sort of mass, elementary programme would require. It was another admission of unpreparedness that the Programme – the outdated, barely relevant one of 1919 – and Rules, were cited as mainstays for want of more suitable material.

But despite the primitiveness and confusion in this campaign, there is considerable reason to think that a lot of simple enthusiasm was inspired in the early stages. It is questionable to what extent the same could be said of the more systematized and elaborate plan that was established after the initial surge of industrialization had been assimilated. The new propaganda program of 1938 was certainly better prepared and financed. Under Stalin's personal direction a basic primer had been written, of which thirty-five million copies were printed in its first ten years alone. This was the *History of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks). Short Course,* a classic in the didactic uses of history and also in utter boredom. It was meant to serve as the basic text for propaganda at all levels, which were now restructured to provide a hierarchy of modes of political instruction for party members, from the barely literate (politically and otherwise) to those taking a three-year full-time course in a new 'higher school of marxism-leninism' (3.30).

Culture, in the form of the arts and education, has always been closely linked to propaganda in the party outlook, but in the twenties party

organs had to some extent limited their direct role in setting policy in this area. Literary organizations that were somewhat autonomous had existed, and the People's Commissariat of Enlightenment had been pretty much on its own in the matter of introducing a system of education suitable to a socialist society. This changed in the early thirties. Parallel to the direct intervention of the party executive in economic administration, there were fundamentally important decisions that changed the direction of cultural life in many respects. The trend to educational modernism, in many ways similar to American reforms of the same period, was reversed by a series of decisions beginning with one on primary and secondary schools in 1938 (3.16). The 'cultural revolution,' which according to Soviet texts was in full swing at this time, therefore came to mean a return to traditional subjects of instruction, methods of teaching, and discipline in education. In this the party executive directly countermanded the work of the Commissariat of Enlightenment since its formation in 1917.

Although the decision of 23 April 1932 did not make its cultural values as explicit as did the several decisions on education, the impact was much the same (3.17). By replacing previous, partly autonomous artistic organizations with new, centralized 'unions' under the guidance of the party Orgburo, the way was paved for the suppression of modernist artistic trends and the establishment of traditional forms for disciplined, didactic material under the rubric 'socialist realism.' Again, a conservative revolution, culturally speaking.

THE FORTIES AND AFTER: PUNCTUATED SILENCE

As noted at the beginning of this essay, the Soviet Communist Party seems to have issued remarkably few decisions from 1941 until the death of Stalin in 1953. For an institution which grew rapidly in membership in those years and certainly filled some important functions in both military and civilian life, this silence raises some major questions. These questions are the more interesting because the silence was punctuated at irregular intervals by the appearance of some important decisions. Many published 'party' decisions, however, were signed by both party and state authorities and seem to have had little direct connection with the party. How to explain this departure from normal practice in the history of the party before and after this period?

First, the war altered the character of government in the Soviet Union, as elsewhere. The State Committee of Defence, established on 30 June 1941, shortly after the German attack, and authorized by both party and state bodies, assumed absolute civil and military authority under Stalin, its chairman.[5] All other political bodies were subordinated to this

5 *KPSS v rezoliutsiiakh* VI, 20

war cabinet, including the standing executive organs of the party, whose leading personalities were for the duration of the war preoccupied by service in the State Committee of Defence (e.g., G.M. Malenkov) or as political representatives with military forces in the field (e.g., Zhdanov, the overall director the defence of beseiged Leningrad). As for the representative organs of the party, principally the congress and central committee, there was really no time to convene them, with both leading and humble party members wholly absorbed in the war. In such circumstances it is not surprising that the central organs of the party receded to a kind of secondary service function.

In the first year of the war party decisions ordered local organizations to detach members for work in the Red Army or to form partisan units in occupied territory (3.34, 3.35), but thereafter party decisions apparently did not deal with military affairs. What has been published concerns various home-front activities: propaganda and trouble-shooting in agriculture, industry, and transport.[6]

With the end of fighting, it is not surprising that some of the administrative habits of wartime should persist, as they did in other countries. The State Committee of Defence was disbanded, but its structure survived in essence in the inner circle that Stalin depended on to the point of almost ignoring the party congress, Central Committee, or Politburo. Even the party Secretariat may have been less his centre of operations than one of his subordinate instrumentalities, although in theory he was still its head. This peacetime situation was at once a natural extension of wartime habits by an old man who relished his martial success and a continuation of Stalin's earlier dissatisfaction with the Central Committee during the purges. If Stalin's experience led him to think as early as the end of the purge that the Central Committee was a potential source of trouble, it was easy enough to use the practices established during the war to avoid the revival of this difficulty.

Another dimension of this shift was the increasing informalization and personalization in Stalin's decision-making practice. Even before the war his private secretariat had assumed increasing importance as an authority above both party and state, and this continued through the rest of his life. During and after the war formal meetings of the Politburo or Sovnarkom/Council of Ministers tended to be replaced by private dinners of Stalin and selected lieutenants, not always including the entire Politburo. This all fit in with the rise of Stalin's personal authority beyond any specific office or combination of offices. As his public cult continually bore witness, he ruled by virtue of being Stalin, the genius, the vozhd. While useful to his personal political position, this evolution posed grave dangers

6 *Ibid.*, 36–137

to the Soviet political system: excessive centralization and the prospect of a succession crisis.

For Stalin, then, the party machinery had become primarily a technical-service organization, especially responsible for propaganda, rather than a key to political decision making. This seems to be borne out by the fact that no party body was asked, even as a formality, to approve the adoption of the Fourth Five-Year Plan of 1946–50, in contrast to earlier practices. Instead, the Central Committee (presumably the Secretariat) ordered the mobilization of the entire party propaganda machine to exhort the populace on behalf of the plan (3.37). A similar service function that needed no special decision was, incidentally, the continual trumpeting of Stalin's name throughout the land.

Propaganda being the principle field of party activity in this period, it is natural that the few important, exclusively party decisions in the early post-war years concerned this field. A.A. Zhdanov had the main responsibility here, and as a member of the Secretariat made major use of decisions in the name of the Central Committee to establish ideological rectitude and his own prestige. Temporarily he succeeded in both aims, for the period 1946–48 came to be called the 'Zhdanovshchina' ('the reign of Zhdanovism'). His first major step was to decree a renovation of ideological education, which he did with repeated reminders of the primacy of the *party* in this work (3.38). Indeed, his repeated stress on the need of both party and *soviet* officials to submit to new indoctrination in party schools seems to relate to the political struggle that Zhdanov was waging against another first-line lieutenant, Malenkov, who generally seems to have been trying to build his strength on the Soviet state machine. The campaign was in any case easy to justify because, since the reform of the indoctrination system in 1938, many scarcely trained wartime recruits had joined the party.

In the same spirit Zhdanov reminded anyone who needed it (perhaps Beria, another rival, who specialized in police work) that the party had a claim to primacy in determining Communist orthodoxy (and by implication that the security branch had permitted some laxity). Zhdanov started by scrutinizing his own special territory, Leningrad, excoriating two prominent literary publications of the city (3.39). This, like subsequent pronouncements of the Zhdanovshchina, went into considerable artistic critical detail, the first time that decisions of the Central Committee had been used in such a way. Shortly before Zhdanov's death in 1948 one of the final party decisions in the series, and one of the most important, tackled the minority nationalities of the Soviet Union (3.41). In general the campaign stressed the fusion of Communist orthodoxy and Russian nationalism, while condemning alien great-power cultures or Soviet minority nationalism. From what we know of Stalin, especially in his later years, it is safe to say that

such themes were agreeable to him and, therefore, probably helpful to Zhdanov's status. While the leader himself may have participated directly in some of these decisions, he seems to have preferred to express himself through public letters or essays over his own name when he wanted to comment on such topics as military science, linguistics, or economic theory in his last years.

Zhdanov died, apparently of heart disease, in 1948 and the ideological campaign associated with his name declined in prominence in party decisions. There was, however, one further attempt by another party secretary to use the authority of the party alone to support a major policy. This was N.S. Khrushchev and the subject was agriculture. No fundamental change in the organization of Soviet agriculture had occurred since the early 1930s, but Khrushchev was determined that the continued backwardness of this sector of the economy could be remedied by drastically consolidating the 252,000 kolkhozes into a much smaller number (3.43). Within a year, two-thirds of all kolkhozes had been regrouped to form larger units. Like the decision of 5 January 1930, this order of the Central Committee (not in plenary session), dated 30 May 1950, ignored the existing Five-Year Plan and looked to the party apparatus as the supreme authority in this transformation. It certainly implied an attempt to restore the status of the leading party organs in the making and execution of major decisions.

A stronger attempt in this direction, apparently based on a coalition of Stalin's lieutenants, was the convocation of the XIX Party Congress in October 1952, ten years after its statutory due date. There are numerous signs that this event was part of a growing rift between Stalin and his Politburo. The Congress could not avert the danger of a new purge, but it did serve to symbolize the party's claim to be the legitimate representative of the masses, and when Stalin died five months later it was possible for the leading party bodies to assume pre-eminence in the country and provide continuity of governance in the Soviet Union following a generation of Stalin's dictatorship: no small service.

R.H.M.

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Documents